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Critical Journal for *Theatre in England*

December 30th: Portobello Market, *Love Song*, and *Spice Drum Beat*.

I went to Portobello Market today with a few other students before heading to the West End for our first play. Having never been to the Market before, I was not entirely certain what to expect. I was shoulder to shoulder with other shoppers for much of the morning, but had a grand time looking at antiques, finding a toast holder for Leah, and observing the everyday drama of a Saturday marketplace (which can get quite interesting with price hagglers, and very energetic merchants wanting to sell their goods).

1. Love Song

This play, performed at the New Ambassadors theatre, addresses the complexities and vexations found in different kinds of love relationships. Romantic love is seen in the relationship between Joan and Harry, and between Beane and Molly. Familial love is evident in the relationship between brother and sister in the play, and Joan's strong sense of duty to and protection of her brother coupled with her frustrations and disgust at his behavior and manner of living. Finally, and perhaps most importantly in this play, is the emphasis on self-love and love of the world through determining where one should exist within it. The playwright addresses these latter two kinds of love through Beane most directly, whose symptoms of schizophrenia symbolically reference his utter disconnect from the world in which he lives.

In the first scene of the play, Bean sits in a chair in his apartment and watches the light flicker on and off and the ceiling slowly creep down towards him. While it seems to be a hallucination, it stands as a visual cue to his relationship with the world; he even describes it later as a place of decay, where he smells nothing but filth and where he feels

among schizophrenic patients, is used to emphasize this disconnect. Nothing gratifies him, can make him find any sense of appreciation for a place that is so mutable and filled with decomposition, and thus he decides to live with as little as possible.

He makes emotional progress when Molly appears, a mysterious figure who robs him, in her first moments on stage, of the few possessions he has. They fall in love and have sex, only for Beane to find out that she was a figment of his imagination — in effect, a hallucination. Again, the playwright utilizes a common symptom of schizophrenia to address Beane's need for awakening and acceptance of the world. A clue this symbolic aspect lies in *Beane's* control over his hallucination – *he* can call her into being or command her to leave, and hallucinations are usually uncontrollable by the one who experiences them. In creating Molly, he has rendered a character who asks the questions he is afraid to ask himself, and who criticizes the things he does not have the courage to critique. The first clue to Molly being an imagined woman is her near perfect and wonderfully derisive description of an apartment she robbed, one whose description matches that of the apartment of Beane's sister. To put it in Jungian terms, Molly is Beane's shadow and Anima combined and manifest in the guise of a lover. Through encountering her, he acquires a new appreciation for life, and begins to openly articulate and express himself in a way that he was never able to prior to her appearance. He is becoming, in other words, an integrated and self-aware being.

The play, as a result, centers around Beane's increasing self-awareness and love of himself and the world. He sees the world as beautiful for the first time after he has sex with Molly (effective masturbation). Sex with himself, emblematic of his acceptance of his shadow and anima, opens his senses to the beauty in the world, in addition to the

decay. He senses and experiences both from this point forward. It is crucial that *he* summons Molly after this point – she does not simply appear at will, emblematizing his increasing control over all aspects of his psyche.

Their dialogue on fusion can also be read in Jungian terms. Beane is effectively talking to himself, to those courageous parts of himself that he has refused to tap into. By effectively absorbing Molly into himself through words and through sex he not only *directs* their dialogue (or scene), but also attempts to become a self-realized individual. Once again, the schizophrenic hallucination emblematizes Beane's need to connect with all parts of himself.

This Jungian reading of *Love Song* seems initially vexed by the ending, where he breaks up with Molly and sends her away to become part of the world. It is obviously meant to be a satisfactory ending due to the staging involved – the light shining brightly through the now open door, etc. It would seem at first that he backpedals in his progress throughout the play and divorces himself from his inner feminine and his shadow in order to attempt a realization of himself as opposed to accepting its existence within him. The ending becomes less vexing if taken in the context of the other masturbatory moment mentioned by the sister. Her awakening began in a desperate act of self-love as well – as a young girl hysterical over the breakup with a boyfriend. While simultaneously sobbing and playing with herself, she suddenly realizes, in an almost out of body experience, the lack of control she has over her emotions and over her reaction to this stupid, "paper bag" of a boy. She decides to harden herself and face the world without being controlled by

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sustained throughout the play would have possessed more conviction and power.

December 31st: Westminster Abbey and *Peter Pan*

Mass at Westminster Abbey

I have been to the Abbey several times before but never for a mass, much less sitting directly beside the choir! It was an excellent experience to precede the Medieval Drama course this Spring semester, as it illustrated the performative elements to the mass. Whether religious or not, seeing a Mass helps an individual understand the complexities of performed ritual as well as the theatrical elements of the play.

Sitting next to the choir was wonderful. The mass that they sang was gorgeous (I had never heard it before), and their voices were impressively blended. The acoustics in a gothic cathedral are hard to surpass, and the last time I heard a choir with acoustics that did it justice was at Canterbury Cathedral in 2003 at High Mass.

3. *Peter Pan*:

sets of Neverland itself.

The music was more than a bit bemusing, frequently taking me by surprise throughout the production. Many of the songs were familiar to me from the traditional theatrical production of

of the pantomime in and of themselves.

I have chosen to focus in this entry on the experience of the pantomime itself, mainly

Harriet brings the Turkish rug and Max the TV/DVD set, and both items will dramatically affect the events of the play. While both of them attempt to complete the space, they are equally ineffective. As Harriet herself said to the rug seller, she sees the rug as her "anchor" and needs it to be in her home as a result; perhaps she thought it would give her hope given the accident with her son, reminding her of life and of the world outside. Her husband purchases the TV to distract himself from all that is not in his home (love, his children), and yet it is that very machine and rug that will wrench his feelings of loss to the surface. The rug in a sense, does the same thing to Harriet. It is, after all, depicting the Tree of Life and, as the audience learns later in the play, the lightning that killed their son by passing through a tree. The rug and TV, as catalysts of the couple's feelings of absence, are important characters in and of themselves, reminding the protagonists of what has been lost to them.

The relationships in this play evoke absence as well. Max and Harriet buy items to compensate for their losses, throwing themselves into any other kind of activity save communication with each other. They refuse to talk about what happened to their son, or what has happened to their daughter because of that tragedy and instead create a yawning void between them where they throw all that they cannot say to each other. These missing conversations will, eventually, will actually occur in the second act in the volcanic dialogue that ensues between the couple. Absence of communication, according to this play, cannot endure indefinitely, but that does not mean that the resolution will be a happy one. Max is ultimately left with no one but his friend Eddie at the end — his wife having decided to find their daughter who wants nothing to do with her parents (Max in particular).

Eddie is an interesting character in the context of absence because he is *never* away from Max or Harriet's lives. He remembers vividly everything that has happened to them (including their son's death) and eventually describes it in detail, forcing the unspoken into the light. He is a quiet, steady man and is a friend rarely recognized for his loyalty (particularly by Harriet). Nevertheless he is there even at the end of the play, when he and Max revisit the site of the tragedy.

The play is as much about mistaken absence as absence itself as a result, and its tragic elements lie in the characters forcing the memories of individuals into the darkness when those individuals are not dead (like Harriet and Max's daughter). The children *are* there in some form (whether ghostly or in mere remembrance), friends *are* present, and relationships are still at least superficially surviving. The protagonists, however, are so desirous for the absence of all of these things — even their own absence from the world, that they forget, or neglect, the things, people, or recollections of people that are still

January 2nd: *Alice in Wonderland* and *Caroline or Change*

5. *Alice in Wonderland*

I went to Covent Garden today and was fortunately able to purchase a grand circle ticket to the Alice in Wonderland ballet. The production was set entirely to the music of Tchaikovsky, and I was impressed again and again by how well-suited each piece was for the scene. Tchaikovsky, as the creators of the ballet point out, was a contemporary of Carroll's, and they felt the "story and the score had to be conceived in the context of a classical ballet that could fit comfortably alongside Tchaikovsky's other full-length ballets: *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*" (Program). They culled fifteen pieces out of the twenty-four found in Tchaikovsky's *Album for the Young* — a collection of pieces meant for children. Thus the creators of this ballet succeeded in creating a ballet with the same emphasis and audience of Carroll's fiction, while in the process effectively creating Tchaikovsky's fourth ballet, as one critic suggested.

The sets were spectacular, with various types of lighting and innovative props uses to create the desired effects (from reams of cloth held by dancers and shaken to simulate the sea of Alice's tears to the dynamic use of color and lighting effects in the corridor of doors sequence). The transformations from one lavish scene to the next were practically seamless, a feat that maintained the dream-like quality of the narrative and of the ballet. The dancers each strove for a different "style" in their respective pieces: the dancers playing the Cheshire Cat and the Caterpillar, for instance, emulated the movements of their respective animals to great effect. The Queen of Hearts was by far one of the strongest dancers of the troupe, nearly besting the young dancer who played Alice in

some places.

The costumes, according to the costume director, were designed to show off the dancer's movements while also being faithful to Sir John Tenniell's original drawings. There were, as a result, many pleasantly familiar faces and figures on the stage throughout the entire production, and I have to say I was amazed by what the dancers could do despite the seemingly burdensome (though gorgeous) costumes. The Mad Hatter, for instance, pulled off a magnificent dance with an elaborate costume, either a prosthetic nose and chin or an entire mask, an enormous hat and props in both hands. The female dancers portraying the Queen's deck of cards had square, rathher ridged looking, tutus and from above you could tell that they were decorated to look like actual playing cards.

The entire production managed to capture the tangential and fantastic nature of dreamscapes as it moved from one vivid scene to another, conjuring up stranger sights and activities at every turn. This was very much a ballet for adults as well as children, and the audience was definitely expected to know the story in advance! I have to confess I was at a bit lost in a few places until I picked up the program at the interval, it having been years since I read the story. While there were no virtuosic performances, the dancing was decidedly solid throughout and the entire production was outstanding.

6. *Caroline or Change*

This has become one of my favorite musicals, and I tend to be incredibly picky about musicals given the frequent hackneyed lyrics that seem to creep into even the best of them. While *Spice Drum Beat* did not give me much hope for the fate of lyrics in

future does, perhaps, hold something for her children, and her fierceness and hatred is in many ways fueled by her desire to see her children surpass her and have a better life.

In perhaps the most powerful moment of the play — the song entitled “Lot’s Wife” —

New York City. She tenaciously debates with him over civil rights and is harshly rebuked by her mother for her behavior. Caroline, it would seem, is angered by her daughter's debate with the old man because of her inability to stand up to an adult herself. Her daughter, however, is more than capable of doing so and, as we find out towards the end of the play, more than capable of daring and dangerous acts of protest (she was the one responsible for the destruction of the confederate soldier statue).

The musical closely examines how an individual reacts to a lack of agency or control over one's life and how one tends to look to a younger generation with hope instead. More specifically, it poignantly — and without melodrama — reflects upon those in the African-American communities of the 1960's who did not engage the civil rights movement in any active way. They were not brave in the visible and external sense that is often remembered. Rather, Caroline comes to represent those in this time who had children in need of care and financial support and who were trapped in jobs or economic brackets they could not escape. The possibility that Caroline's children might be saved from all that she had endured was worth more than her own ability to change her life, worth even more than her own dignity. As the musical suggests, she (and those whom she represents) is, for that very sacrifice, one of the bravest of individuals.

January 3rd: *Coram Boy*, National Theatre Tour, and *The Waves*

7. Coram Boy

This play was billed as the #1 Family Production of the Year, by a certain reviewer whose name eludes me. I have to say that I had no idea as to why the play would be billed in such a way after the first act. Few scenes in plays that I have seen throughout my life have disturbed me as much as the infanticide scene in the first act of this play. Replete with horrific squeals coming out of the actress who plays the mother of the soon-to-be murdered child, the tortured and mentally disabled Meshak is commanded by his father to bury the baby alive; the knowledge that this *actually* happened to children, much less that anyone could actually do that to a child made the scene almost too much to take for me – and I usually have a strong disposition towards such things. Dr. Peck observed that the play could easily be viewed as a ki

awe in the viewer; we are meant to feel like a child does while watching the play, overwhelmed by the largeness of the world around us. According to our guide on the National Theatre tour, the set was crafted with intentionally oversized components (like the beams) to make the audience feel child-like again due to the sheer proportion of the set in front of them.

In many aspects a successful Märchen and romance, *Coram Boy* imaginatively illustrates a darker period in British history and captures several different facets and attitudes towards various societal issues with effectiveness.

National Theatre Tour:

The tour was very informative. Our tour-guide was lovely and happy to answer any or all questions. We were allowed to meander on the set for Thérèse *Racquin*, got to go into the paint room where we saw the soon to be opened Becket play's set being constructed, and figured out what fake (but deceptively real-looking) food feels like. Out of the vignettes she told us throughout the tour, I was most captivated by the one about Olivier who apparently had designed a particular niche overlooking the main lobby where one could look over all of the levels of the National theatre complex. He apparently loved to stand their before a play began to see "the theatre of life" as all the latecomers ran all over the complex trying to get to their productions on time.

8. *The Waves*:

By far one of the most peculiar productions I have ever experienced; it was more a

My mother arrived today and, since we only had the one play to attend, we journeyed over to the Tate Britain once she got settled. The Tate is one of my favorite museums in London – I have had a fondness for the PreRaphaelites since I was a freshman in high school and they have yet to loose their ability to delight me. I saw a few that I had not remembered being there – such as the Rossetti's Annunciation — and got to spend plenty of time scrutinizing Waterhouse's *Lady of Shallot*. I am glad they finally moved her back to eye level!

9. *Much Ado About Nothing*:

This is a comedy fixated on appearances, an observation supported by its continual

several references throughout the play to the ephemeral nature of female purity — a fixation heightened by the inability to rely on external appearance to determine the woman's virtue.

The fear of cuckoldry so frequently referenced in this play (most frequently by referring to horns) reflects this fixation on feminine purity. While couched in humorous terms in certain instances, Claudio's quickness to believe Don John and his story as well as his violent and public shaming of Hero has long problematized the play. The entire succession of events begs the question as to how good men, trusted by the women surrounding them, could slander a completely innocent woman so convincingly that even her father would believe their words over hers. The answer lies both in the stubborn willingness to believe in that which you see instantly (despite intrinsic or prior knowledge to the contrary) and in the fear that men have over their ability or inability to control a woman's sexuality. Hero's fainting and quickly believed death is not, then, so much a melodramatic or tragicomic moment as it is a reflection of the strength of their shaming of her; rather, it indicates the power that men in this play have over women and the resulting ease with which they can ruin them.

As the entire sequence with Hero — from her shaming, to her "death", to her final "marriage" and reconciliation with Claudio — indicates, appearances and even one's own sight can belie the reality underneath the surface of things, and characters —the men most of all —are quick to believe that which is immediately placed before them. They are, in effect, all poor readers. This partially explains the problematic idea of Claudio and the Prince believing the unknowingly deceitful Don John so easily where Hero's virtue is concerned. In their defense, they do "see" her committing an act of infidelity,

two actors conveyed a believable and vital chemistry which greatly compensated for the weaker performances (i.e. Hero and Leonato in particular). Weakest of all was Dogberry, who is such a fabulously humorous character with all of his malapropisms and general absurdities that it was a shame to see him so flatly played here.

10. *Twelfth Night*:

I was excited to see this play as it was the first all-male production of Shakespeare that I have ever seen. I was mesmerized by their evocative, yet minimalist set design: the predominance of grey in the background and on the furniture, the sparse foliage or other props. The chorus was also intriguing, made up of ensemble members dressed in black and wearing white masks as they slunk around the stage to observe the action or played various musical instruments. They act as both audience members and displaced contributors to the scene, as if to emphasize at every turn the issue of false or misleading appearance in the narrative.

The sets were also comprised of several mirrors which, in addition to emphasizing the matter of appearance, also emphasize the fact that sight is the least stable of the sensations. Like this production, the RSC production of *Much Ado* used masks in much the same way — to emphasize that the truth is so often underneath that which we can actually see on the surface; and yet the use of mirrors in this production raises the issue of sight to a different level, pinpointing the idea of optical illusion in a way that is not present in *Much Ado*. This interpretative emphasis is likely due to the illusory physical appearance of Viola as Caesareo– a female character pretending to be a male and played by a male. The mirrors, coupled with the masks and the hauntingly dissonant music serve to evoke a carnivalesque sense of illusion consistently throughout the performance. This consistent peripheral emphasis on guise reflects the tantalizing nature of Viola's hidden identity, for the audience is constantly reminded of her true identity and the inability of anyone around her to see her for who she truly is.

The one character who consistently subverts this sense of illusion throughout the play is Feste the clown, who both begins and ends the play in a whimsical and haunting song,

destroys his family in his rage over his wife's alleged infidelity — by the end of the dramatic first act, his son and his wife have apparently died, and he casts his own daughter (whom he believes a love child) into the woods to be eaten by wild animals. The man sent to do the job cannot and merely leaves her to die after seeing a bear approach, enabling Perdita to be rescued by the peasant folk. This is, in many ways, a romance version of the same kind of fears of cuckoldry present in *Much Ado,* except with a greater emphasis on the tragic than in the lighter comedy. The play will, however, go on to assert that even someone like Leontes can be redeemed through time.

This is, after all, a romance very much in the fairy-tale mode – a mode that requires a degree of grave moroseness before a satisfactory conclusion may be reached. Unlike *Much Ado,* where the audience is made readily aware of Hero being alive, the audience must wait in this play until the very end when presented with the "statue" of the mother. Her resurrection and reconciliation with her family and daughter affects a technically happy ending and yet it is an uneasy one all the same. Similar to *Much Ado,* where the audience tends to wonder why Hero bothers to take Claudio back, so too do we wonder why the mother so willingly went back into the arms of the man who accused, abused and effectively killed her. In each case, the women do so as much out of obligation to the men in question but to other loved ones as well. Their return to the domestic scene is equally out of love/respect for their husband a

left with the suggestion that they are destined to be a couple instead – and that is, in fact exactly what happens as they have married by the time that *Henry V* commences. She overcomes her feelings for Falstaff and her feelings of rejection in this scene and takes an even more active role in Falstaff's "downfall" by playing the fairy queen in the forest fabliaux in which he is made the ultimate fool.

The matter of the horns put on Falstaff in this final, lavish sequence is of particular interest, given the degree of feminine power at work in this play. Horns are attributed, in Renaissance terminology, to the cuckold, and the entire town, under the auspices of the women who Falstaff tried to seduce, ultimately places the cuckold's horns on the would-be adulterer himself. In doing so, the town simply reaffirms its values in the face of a raucous outsider. As Anne Barton notes, Shakespearean comedy usually ends with a sense of societal change, but in this instance "all that has happened is that a pre-existing society whose values Falstaff tried and failed to subvert has triumphed, without losing its vitality of gaiety of heart" (Riverside Chaucer p. 322). While the entire town takes part in the plot to shame Falstaff, Mistress Ford and Mistress Page and Mistress Quickly are most responsible for its success and for the preservation of their town's values, a fact that the men do seem to note by the end of the play

Within the forest fabliaux is another final subversion: for while the women in a fabliaux are instrumental in putting the horns on their husband while feigning fidelity to him, here the women are faithful to their spouses but feign infidelity in order to put the cuckhold's horns on the would-be adulterer, all in an attempt to preserve their community through humorous spectacle.

January 7th: Meandering around London with my mother, and *Swan Lake*

13. *Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake*

I had heard of Matthew Bourne's production prior to signing up for this course and was eager to see it performed live, given the acclaim which it has received. Bourne chose to use only male dancers for the swans, and his daring reinterpretation of the story grapples with, among others, the issues of homosexuality, breaks from societal convention or obligation, and a man's relationship to his mother. The story, as a result unfolded in rather thrilling and unexpected ways.

Bourne's decision to use an all male troupe of dancers for the swans was an intriguing one, delicate ballerinas in luminescent tutus are usually used instead. Bourne defends his choice in the following statement: "The idea of a male swan makes perfect sense to me … the strength, the beauty, the enormous wingspan of these creatures suggests to the musculature of a male dancer more readily than a ballerina in her white tutu" (Program). While I would argue that a female dancer can easily exude the same degree of gravitas and power, I do understand the principle behind his statement, and it does inevitably allow for an examination of homoerotic motifs.

As the program aptly states, much of the psychological drama that belonged to Odette (the Swan Queen) in the original telling is here transferred to the tormented and isolated prince. It is he who seeks escape from his

retelling focuses on the restrictions and ensnarements of the human world. In the world of this ballet, the only escape or release from these restrictions is death.

The swans can apparently be read either as actual characters with whom the prince interacts *or* figments in his tormented mind. I will mainly focus on the reading of the Swans as actual creatures, since that was how I interpreted the ballet when viewing it. The other option is fascinating though, and I look forward to watching the recorded version with that in mind sometime soon. Regardless of how one reads the swans, the narrative powerfully examines the nature of attraction and the effects of disconnection on the tormented psyche. The prince only finds affection and solace in the embrace of the powerful and, as alluded to in the initial aggression of the first swan sequence, potentially dangerous swan. The Swan, whether it is an actual otherworldly lover or an aspect of the Prince which he finally accepts, is also the only one who can release him from his earthly torment. To emphasize the Swan's singular importance to the Prince, the ballet both opens and ends with the Prince interacting with him, and both the scenes evoke a kind of tenderness between the two (in the first act, the prince clutches a swan stuffed animal, and in the end the Swan and Prince are seen embracing above the bed).

Knowing implicitly that the Swan and he share a vital connection, the prince lusts

this ballet as rather heavy commentary on the perils of the heteronormative worldview. Given Bourne's emphasis of the male body and in male interactions on the stage, as well as his wonderful subversion and reinterpretation of this much-loved story, it seems quite clear that he fashioned the vaguely fascist kingdom of the Prince and Queen as a more absolutist version of our own: a world in which breaks from convention will lead not only to ostracism but to (depending on your reading) psychotic breaks and death. Bourne's narrative decisions are a commentary on

given their frequent delight and amazement at this spectacle of a play. They were positively adorable, and worlds better behaved than the miscreants sitting in front of us during *Much Ado*!

We talked briefly in class about their daring decision to perform an opera for children and I have to say I was equally impressed by that difficult-to-achieve accomplishment and by the children's acceptance and enjoyment of it. The singing was decidedly strong and well-developed throughout, with each singer adopting or emphasizing a different vocal tone for the sake of character discernment. Added to this were the expressive and captivating sets — complete with deftly managed wire-work, fabulous costumes, and innovative scene changes.

The plot itself was a variant on one of my favorite fairytales: "East O the Sun, and West O the Moon." Closely related to the Cupid and Psyche myth, the tale traces a woman's unfolding love for her beast-husband (who turns into a beautiful man each night), her subsequent loss of her husband as a result of her attempt to rid him of the curse that causes the nightly metamorphosis, her journey around the world to find him, and her daring and successful rescue of her love right before he is to marry the Troll princess (here a spoiled fashionista). While a much more sanitized fairytale compared to the original Märchen of the Grimm Brothers or the fairytales of Perrault, the first few songs introduce the audience to an entire "culture of fairytale" (Dr. Peck). In the first song, for instance, three women with bee-hive hairdos emerge from backstage doing needlework, invoking the topos of the three fates (the weavers of destiny) while also establishing a sense of gender roles (men are later given lines such as "that war was fun"

song sung to his daughters before his departure evokes an entire range of fairytales, from Cinderella to the Frog Prince, from Rumpelstiltskin to Sleeping Beauty.

Certain motifs found frequently in fairytale were also put to use and emphasized in this initial scene. For instance, mothers are frequently dead or absent and sisters often come in threes, both of which are details found in this opera. The sisters in this play are far from malevolent, though they are clearly much sillier and simpler than the heroine Flora. They also lack the deep empathy and emotion of their younger sister, aspects of her character that will take her farther than her siblings could have ever gone — a message, perhaps, to strive for that kind of depth. The allusions to sexual awakening, also common in fairytale are also referenced here to great effect, with the beastly figure of the husband indicating as much about Flora's initial concerns about sexual love as it does about the nature of Pig/Husband. Flora is at first disconcerted and disgusted by the dirt and grime of her new life but then comes to realize, particularly when she sees her husband in his true form, that her life is far from miserable. She even comes to prefer it to her previous existence, so much so that she is willing to go through years of trials and ordeals to get it back.

It is ultimately that same emotional and empathetic depth that gives her access to the cosmic powers of the world. She visits Mr. and Mrs. North Wind and learns an endearing lesson about long-lasting companionate marriage. She then visits the Moon who encourages her on her way and provides

Way. In every phase of this journey, she wears the three pairs of iron shoes down into nothingness, gains valuable clues as to her husband's whereabouts, and also gains considerable wisdom about love and marriage. She also receives several jewels that will serves as useful lures for the "troll" princess who wants to marry Flora's husband.

The success of Flora's quest depends on her steadfastness and her attention to the details of certain circumstances. These are two qualities which she did not demonstrate at the outset of their marriage, mainly in the events surrounding her haste to get rid of her husband's spell: she did not follow his instructions to the letter (she makes amends by wearing the iron shoes exactly as she was told), and did not consider the dangers of taking a stranger's advice, lacking an attention to detail that cost her her husband (she makes amends through carefully following the guidance of the cosmic forces and discerning how to free her husband). Once these are demonstrated she is able to save her husband and return to the realm of companionate marriage.

15. *The Seafarer*

He knows not
who lives most easily on land, how I
Have spent my winter on the ice-cold sea
Wretched and anxious, in the paths of exile,
Lacking dear friends, hung round by icicles
While hail flew past in showers …
- From the Seafarer (Program)

This passage, found in the Old English poem *The Seafarer*, is the first text one encounters upon reading the program for this play. Upon viewing the production, it most immediately links to Lockhart's claustrophobic description of hell when talking to Sharkey in Act II – it being a cold place where all are locked off from contact with any

other person, and from where there is no escape. More generally it refers to the isolated state of all of the members of this unusual "comitatus." While they are friends, their companionship cannot be celebrated without copious amounts of alcohol, and they are far from being beneficial influences upon each other. They seem, rather, to encourage one another's vices. Sharkey is the exception to the group and tends to spend much of Act I playing mother hen to the rest of them; he has quit drinking, and has devoted all of his spare time into caring, albeit loudly and reluctantly for his blind brother Richard. What becomes clear, as the play progresses, is Sharkey's feeble attempts to make amends for his past transgressions and attempt to reclaim his soul from the Devil.

Integral to the plot of this play are the allusions to the world outside of the house. References to angry wives, neglected children, deep-seated and dangerous alcoholism, the winos, as well as the acts of violence perpetrated by Sharkey and Ivan are kept to a minimum, and yet they are impossible to forget. They remind the characters within the play, but even more so the audience, of how much lies under the surface of these men's lives. While we might laugh throughout the play at the genuinely comical moments, these

down the stairs to fix it. Later in the play, Lockhart will explain that he cannot hear music and that it simply sounds as unpleasant noise to him. The fact that the music is only made of static in this beginning of the play indicates Sharkey's graceless status. As he moves closer and closer to the final moments of the play, he is able to hear music again — particularly Mozart's Miserere ("have mercy on us") over the radio. Not too

into a depressed mentality. Much like Beane in *Love Story*, Thérèse does not interact or communicate in a manner that is acceptable or understandable to the people around her — in part because she does not find anything in her immediate environment satisfactory or pleasurable. She has been forced into this environment since her father nonchalantly dropped her at her aunt's door as an infant and was effectively forced into marrying her insufferable, sickly cousin (Camille) for whom she feels little more than pity (an emotional response that soon turns to resentment and then hatred once she enters into a passionate and illicit relationship with her husband's friend Laurent). She and Beane are also similar in that they are characters filled with a wealth of passion that most people do not see because it lies so far beneath the surface of their everyday appearance, or (more in Beane's case) is never expressed in a way that is understandable to others. Her husband and aunt read her silence and stillness in the first several moments of the play as ev(y)Tmdnte a]TT*0Tc.0Tw[

they had hoped to experience through murdering him: Thérèse has violent dreams and seems to hear him in the apartment, and Laurent can paint only Camille's face after the murder. Added to which, the aunt knows that they killed her son due to a violent conversation between the newlyweds which

Instead, Thérèse lacks the courage to do anything aside from what her aunt wants her to do and refuses to make those options available to her. She is, in effect, willingly infantilized. Choosing either of these options would also have meant public derision and scorn, and neither Thérèse nor Laurent are strong enough to withstand that burden. Even at the end, they lack the courage to publicly face what they have done and decide to commit suicide to avoid having to account for their crime. Therese cannot even make that final decision by herself and has to see some kind of instruction in her Aunt's paralyzed face. These are, in the end, the most pathetic of characters whose crime and unaccountability make it difficult to forge any kind of sympathy for them.

That kind of detachment allows the audience to observe the psycho-drama with a bit more objectivity. By being unable to fully empathize with the characters, the

is at once a family play, a reflection on reconciliation, as well as a commentary on the fate of the theatre. The strongest moments in this play involve Esme and Dominic's conflicting attitudes about the theatre: Esme passionately defends its importance while Dominic rails against its irrelevance in modern culture. They are both doing this as a way of staking their claim on Amy, whom they both love and whom they both feel a need to possess apart from the other. This entire conflict emblematizes the struggle between film and theatre. Both seek a sympathetic, loyal and attentive audience (i.e. Amy) but the two are rarely interested in learning from the other. According to the play, the theater, like Esme, isolates itself too much from contemporary culture, while the film industry, like Dominic, focuses too much on the whimsical desires of popular culture and, as a result, lacks substance. In the end, Amy leaves both of them because of their inability, perhaps, to understand her, and she eventually dies. Esme returns to the theatre and Dominic actually branches into directing, which is what he always wanted to do. Both find a kind of fulfillment in their work and yet, without Amy (who has since died), their work does not fulfill them in the same way. Interestingly, they are both galvanizing their industries by putting on exciting and popular productions/films. This observation, however, is problematized by the fact that Esme's play is incredibly avant-garde and Dominic's film cashes into the popularity of violence. They have, in effect, simply polarized even more than previously and it seems unlikely that they have found solutions to their unhappiness or to the problems over which they argued years ago. There is a palpable emptiness and solitude in both of them now, a sober realization perhaps that they have forever lost Amy — their greatest audience member and constructive critic.

In terms of this specific production, I was not particularly impressed with Felicity

Kendall's performance. She had moments of strong acting, but tended to act out towards the audience too much, an irony considering her character Esme is known for her inward style of acting. She also overacted several of the more emotional moments of the play (such as her final conversation with Amy). In a play that was (despite the lapses in time) meant to be naturalistic, I found her performance a little stylized and overwrought. The actor playing Dominic, however, did a convincing job of conveying the character's transformation across the four acts of the play.

January 10th: Bash and Billy Elliot The Musical

18. *Bash*: *Latterday Plays*

It had been years since I had seen one acts performed, and I had been looking forward to these plays with some anticipation. I found them simultaneously mesmerizing and utterly repulsive, a sensation very much akin to watching a natural disaster on live TV—that same, simultaneous horror and inability to walk away or turn the screen off. Each one act was based on a particular Greek tragedy, with the themes from each placed in a modern context. The first, called "Orem" was based on the story of Iphigenia, who was, according to legend, sacrificed for the safe transport of her father's (Agamemnon's) army. Here, an infant daughter is "sacrificed" to save her father's job: he lets her suffocate under the covers because (being in the midst of a job crisis) he knows that a personal tragedy will keep the company from firing him. In the second play an effusive couple discuss (to different individuals) a night in Boston where, after a dance, the young man participates in a brutal beating and murder of an older gay man. In the third play ("Medea Redux") a young woman recounts her affair with her teacher, the child that

ensues, and her ultimate killing of that child as a way of getting back at her lover.

The acting, for the most part, was strong, and the way in which the stories develop was particular effective, so effective that I was barely able to keep myself in the theatre I was so shell-shocked by the content of the first act. I have never come so close to walking out of a play in my entire life, and the only reason I did not was because I would not have been leaving due to anything that the actors or playwright had done wrong. If anything, my reaction to the play would suggest that la Bute and the actors did a considerable amount right in the respective writing and performance of the plays.

Nevertheless, these plays reminded me of Dominic's questions to Esme (in *Amy's View*) about the theatre's value and purpose to modern culture. Why perform something like *Bash*, a play that is so relentlessly disturbing and whose only initial purpose seems to be to toy with the audience's emotions? Part of the answer was found recalling my favorite performances when I acted in high school and college. Of all of the roles I played, I enjoyed the dramatization of the Tell-Tale-Heart (where I memorized the entire short story), and the brooding play Howard Brenton play *Bloody-Poetry* the most. These plays, the darkest ones I performed, were a delight because, as an actor, I could embody characters so contrary to myself. In a Jungian sense, I could tap into those darker parts of

same emotional currents that ran through the Greek tragedies run through us today, and that we too are capable of such acts, though they might be dressed in less mythic terms. In choosing the Mormons as a cultural location, la Bute focuses on a religious organization which is highly attuned to the idea of a social and spiritual community. In locating these atrocities in such a religiously devout and tightly knit society, la Bute implies that these acts can occur anywhere, and that no one is fully immune to the emergence of these emotional currents. Denying their existence (i.e. effectively walking out on the play) seems to be the worst thing an individual could do to him or herself. Just as Zola, through *Thérèse Racquin* argues that no murder goes unpunished, these series of one-act plays reflect on the idea that no murder can go *unspoken*. All humans, as the play purports, have a desire and a need to communicate and make connections with others and, in this case, to relay the darkest parts of their being to another person so that they do not have to bear the truth alone. Working through this entry has been beneficial in parsing out my reaction to the plays. I have never felt so emotionally pulverized walking out of a play in my life and having this journal entry to write has helped me to begin sorting out my reactions to it.

19. *Billy Elliot*

This play could not have come at a better point in the program. After a run of powerful, if occasionally maudlin and frequently draining, tragedies, it was wonderfully refreshing to see a play with a life-*affirming* theme to it. What made the experience even better was the fact that the play steered well clear of unnecessary melodrama. In almost every instance in the first act when I braced myself for a stock emotional ballad, we were

given *dialogue* or a brief comment before the next scene began. The musical was not without any sentimentality, but whenever the narrative moved in that direction (as with the letter from Billy's mother) it does so effortlessly to open up Billy's world that so gently drives him through hostile social, political and personal circumstances. It was refreshing to watch a musical where the way in which the story unfolded was freshly unpredictable. The lyrics were nowhere near as

finally an expression for the political tensions exhibited in the play. One of the most powerful dances in the entire musical blends all four of these usages together. Referred to as the "Angry Dance" it begins with Billy angrily tossing around his bedroom and throwing himself and his furniture against the walls (a reaction to his father's and brother's refusal to understand his dancing). As he moves downstairs the personal expression of anger is still there, but it starts to transform into something larger. The dance begins to express the psychological state of anger as each tensed gesture in the dance evokes the same kind of frustrated entrapment which the young boy feels at that time. The dance then shifts to even larger territory and emblematizes the town's social and political tensions. The final part of the dance, when Billy encounters the riot police, simultaneously represents the protest itself, the heated emotions of both Billy and the entire town, and Billy's fight against the familial barriers that are obstructing his drea

This was a powerful production with some of the most impressive dancing I have seen so far in this trip; the acting was also quite solid, with some of the better dialogue I have encountered in a musical in quite a while (no doubt because of Lee Hall's work on the script). The young boy who played Billy was spectacular and charismatic, and I was also impressed with the adult ballet dancer who accompanied him in the Swan Lake segment. In some ways I found their dance more impressive than the pas de deux in Bourne's Swan Lake. I should probably mention that I have yet to see the film, but I cannot wait to see it when I have the chance. I am very glad that we saw this play when we did. It was a much needed moment of levity after the succession of fascinating, but rather heavy dramas that preceded it.

January 11th: *History Boys* and *There Came a Gypsy Riding*

20. *History Boys*:

I took particular interest in the intersections of humorous and dark content in this play. It dealt with issues seen in other plays thus far, such as illicit sexual relationships, inappropriate sexual contact between student and teacher, and homosexuality. But unlike *Bash* which rarely, if ever, broke the tension or its relentlessly bleak mood, *History Boys* incorporates a blend of genuinely humorous moments (such as the French Class scene where the boys act out a scene in a brothel) with instances of the pathetic and disturbing (such as the teacher's frequent groping of his students while on his motorcycle). The play does not moralize or comment upon British culture in the heavy-handed way that *Bash* comments upon the superficiality of American cultural community, but offers certain critiques of the education system in England, or simply the process of education itself (where youth are subject to manipulation long before they have found their own voice). The play as a result examines the acceptable and inevitable influence that a charismatic teacher will wield over his students and how the line between beneficial influence and wounding influence can be dangerously thin. Of the three teachers presented in the play, the woman represents the formidable, somewhat formulated and fact-based history instructor whom the boys admire immensely for the background information with which she provided them. The older instructor they all seem to love dearly, and he grossly transgresses his boundaries by fondling them while on his motorcycle. His teaching methods clash rather vehemently with the young teacher brought in to help the boys pass their A-levels, and he is successfully seduced by a

student (clearly reacting to the groping received by the older instructor).

The delicacy and the humor attached to the older instructor's habit of groping students was a bit baffling, and might (to its credit) have seemed less so had I not seen "Medea Redux" just twenty-four hours prior. What troubled me though was the difficulty in figuring out what to make of that almost flippant attitude towards the sexual infractions in this play. While I applaud the director's attempt to approach the issue of sexual power-relationships, I initially had a difficult time quite making sense of the constant joking about the man's transgressions or the occasionally nonchalant manner in which the boys address the matter — almost as if it is being dismissed as a tremendous problem.

Upon closer examination, the intersection of humor and serious content communicates much of the same concerns about sexual misconduct that *Bash* did, and in a way this play is just as naturalistic in its representation of relationships and the effects of sexual abuse on each of the individuals involved in the pl

Though she appears delusional in this sequence, Margaret is actually the most lucid and open one in the family. Her entire subconscious cracks open in this moment and she finally talks about the loss of her son and her other grief without inhibition. When she collects herself, she cannot remember what she said — evidence, perhaps, of the purging effect that this moment had for her.

The other members of her family react very differently to the loss of their son or brother. They are, for the most part, much quieter than Margaret in expressing (or expelling) their grief. All of their responses indicate the ultimate desire to bury the grieving pieces of themselves so that they can continue to live, and each of them has journeyed back to the boys place of death to try and expunge those parts of themselves. Margaret, by play's end, shows promise of having made peace with her son and his death. The same seems to hold true for the other three members of the family as they make their own peace with the boy's death as well, in part because of the power of Margaret's release towards the end of Act II.

I found this play more moving in retrospect than in the moment, and I feel very strongly that this was primarily due to my state of mind going into the play than anything else. I was prepared for the dark content of this play since I knew in advance that it centered on a young man's suicide, and, I lear

production). However, restraining my reaction going into the play had a noticeable effect on my initial perception of it, and, in retrospect, I found that this play has a much greater capacity to move me than I had initially attributed to it.

January 12th

22. *Don Juan in Soho*

In the opening scene of the play, DJ (played with incredible panache by Rhys Ifans) instructs the audience *not* to be moved by him, and the glittering, nymphomaniac of an anti-hero does his best throughout the play's progression to ensure that those around him (audience included) will not have a chance to feel much at all for him. I was surprised to find out that the same writer behind this work was responsible for *Closer* as the discussion of sex and all its (potentially insidious) complexities were teased out with much more sophistication and originality than in this play. Nevertheless, the play was styled after Moliere and the writer does seem to be attempting something different in this production. Whereas *Closer* is more a study of various characters and their interactions, this play is a satirical romp through 21st century London, with DJ acting as the embodiment of all the vices of modern culture. He is flashy, lazy, smooth-talking, nihilistic, hedonistic, and, ultimately, insatiable. His desires can never be met and, once he has acquired a new woman he is instantly dissatisfied with her once he has been intimate with her for very long. The chase excites DJ far more than the acquisition does — a sentiment that applies directly to his sexual appetites but can also be a reflection on modern consumerism as well (at least in terms of the insatiability of his desire). His lackey even comments on DJ's declaring "jihad against the human spirit," a statement that points as much to the vices of modern consumer-driven culture as it does to DJ

himself.

He is obviously *not* meant to be an empathetic character and almost goes to extremes to ensure that people cannot empathize with him. Whether getting oral sex performed on him while attempting to seduce a woman whose husband he may have inadvertently killed, deliberately destroying his innocent wife without even a glimmer of remorse (the only feeling he has for her is lust when she becomes remotely unattainable), or blatantly lying to his father, DJ affirms his hedonistic attitudes and is in love with his completely repulsive lifestyle and the ironic fact that it makes him, at least to himself, "magnificently fuckable." This statement, taken with another in which he calls himself "uber-human" (i.e. man in his primal or animalistic state), also suggests that the inability to empathize with him perhaps reflects more on the aspects of ourselves, or of culture, that we are not willing to acknowledge.

Despite the inability to empathize with him, he nevertheless commands a certain respect in the last minutes of his life. His wife's brothers tell him that if he apologizes and repents that they will spare him his life and he refuses. When they ask him why, he states (to paraphrase) that he would rather die as himself than live as something that he is not. Thus, while DJ was incapable of virtually any kind of faithfulness in life, he at least, is faithful to the person who truly mattered to him: himself.

January 13th

entertaining, the actors, on occasion, seemed too aware of how well known some of the lines were and simply tossed them out to the audience (the swallow and coconut dialogue in particular succumbed to this); there were a many moments, however, when they did manage to make these famous lines their own, particularly in the scene where they discover Galahad. In summation, the play — in its lightness, enthusiasm, and colorful sets — was well worth seeing and an excellent way to close the official part of the course.

and desire for power, her occasional moments of irrationality, her constant theatricality), Walter's Cleopatra retains her dignity by means of her suicide. Killing herself prevents her reduction to a mere whore by Octavius, who would have paraded her around the streets of Rome as a "puppet."

Antony, played by Patrick Stewart, is in some ways a more problematic figure. Ever torn by his desire to maintain his reputation as a decorated Roman general while fulfilling his desire for Cleopatra and the luxury of the East, he spends most of the play vacillating between the two worlds in a fruitless (though subconscious) quest to find a way to have both. That proves impossible and, when he has been deserted by everyone, including his lover, he decides to kill himself to restore his honor. The language surrounding his death makes it clear that *he* believes he will restore his status as an honorable Roman by doing so, but the audience is left to question how reinstated his heroic status really is. This production emphasized the different motives behind the deaths of the two principle characters to quite a degree. The way Stewart played the death of Antony, and the way in which the other characters reacted to him made his death far more pathetic in nature when compared to Cleopatra's (that she dies after him is also telling). This rendition also left the matter of his honor unresolved and, if anything, leans towards the perspective that he does *not* succeed in reinstating himself as a hero. Contrasted with the regal, unavoidable suicide of Cleopatra, his death seems all the more feeble by comparison, particularly since he does not succeed in killing himself quickly.

The sets, as minimalist as possible, were spectacularly draped in bold colors to designate the various locations of the play. The staging of the play was also impressively done; Cleopatra's death was, in particular, marvelously rendered.

After the play, a small group of us gathered around the stage door to see if we would be able to meet Patrick Stewart. Harriet Walter came out first and chatted with us briefly and, after a little while, Mr. Stewart came out to greet us and sign programs. Both of them were very gracious, and it took a few days for it to actually sink in that I had met and shook hands with Patrick Stewart. I could not have imagined a more perfect way to end this amazing trip.

Conclusion:

I doubt I will ever again have the chance to see this many plays in a single London season, and it was an incredible immersion experience! The course has raised some interesting questions about the purpose of theatre, from the basic question as to why it holds such appeal, to why that appeal seems to be lessening, and also what the utility of the theatre is. Having completed the course, I sense that the theatre's appeal and its utility are rooted in the desire of the audience to be transported — whether to another

change with occasionally distracting rapidity). A play requires much more from the viewer in terms of sustained attention, a factor that may be reflected in the smaller number of attendees and the consequentially shorter runs of certain plays. In the end, I sense that as long as the theatre continues to be a place of innovation and experimentation, there will always be a place and an audience for it, though it will always be in competition with the more accessible TV and Film industries.