

Diary - Feb- March 1992 - *London*

Saturday

- plane late - poor sleeping - long wait at Customs - arrive hotel at noon UK time - wandered Tottenham Court Rd, Charring Cross - esp. bookstores - late afternoon nap - early evening - Cafe Theatre - **Robin Hood** - a Blackadder satire, juvenile and enjoyable - **Intimacy** - Sartre (?)

Sunday

- in bed till noon - met Peter Bartlett for pub lunch - walk to Southbank - Tate - Westminster Abbey Organ recital - supper in Camden vegetarian restaurant - fringe theatre - **Roman, Mary**, local pub drink with PB - then walk home

Monday

- tour of the Inns of Court - law book stores - long walk to National Gallery - evening with Peter **Play Strinberg** and drink after at Lesbian and Gay Community Centre in Farrington

Tuesday

- sleep in - British Museum Library - Dillons Bookstore - nap - evening theatre - rock Shakespeare name ?

Wednesday

- wander through Kensington to V & A - Cabinet War Rooms - Royal Court name ?

Thursday

- shopping - Liberties

Death and the Maiden

Friday

- Kew Gardens - Covent Gardens - **Beckett**

Saturday

- shop - Gays the Word - afternoon reading - **Recruiting Officer**

Sunday

- early flight

Nov 18/93

Angels in America

Millenium Approaches

Perestroika

- Read Mill on plane to NYC. Saw Per. in preview that evening.

- ~~Both~~ Both extremely funny. Sharp gay wit throughout. Same story continues through both plays. First play has more story & less "theology". It reads & probably plays "light" compared to the second which tries to grapple with "theology" issues. As a six hour cycle the play could probably incorporate a few more characters. There are only five who have any depth. The parallel stories of two separate relationships breaking up is very very good - the strengths & weaknesses of open & gay relationships & and the closeted variety. It is very gay focused. The only straight person is crazy, nevertheless it is a nuanced view of gays. The democratic & republican personalities are brilliantly explored. It's a good picture of gay relationships to show to the world. Overall the play pitches to the straight audience a ~~to~~ warm fuzzy view of gay life & loves that normalizes, sympathizes & is accessible, with a few stereotype ~~to~~ jokes to blow off steam (which work extremely well) - the hairdresser joke)

The "theology" of the plays is concentrated in ~~the~~ Peris. It is less successful though interesting. (I suspect the first play carries well just on its story - maybe it's too slight?)

The author poses grand questions ~~which~~ but not much by way of answers. Life doesn't have many answers, so what you say. But pretension is ~~a~~ failure ~~is~~ of a different order.

Not to be too harsh. After all the "big" messages are correct as much as I know - as far as they go. And if they're not grand insights they are at least worthy thoughts.

What are they.

Democracy in America is dog-eat-dog world
Whose-on-top trumps race & everything else.

Roy Cohen says "I'm not a homosexual, I'm a straight ^{man} who feels around with guys".

This is the "republican" philosophy that allows/impisons its believers to participate in the system even though it - the system - causes great harm and they know it.

Reject prophecy. The world stumbles forward without it, better without it. The old Bdsby is set up in Peris as a protagonist demanding new theory before we move forward. And the theological substance of ~~the~~ Peris shows one of the characters refusing to be a prophet & surviving. Angels in America are rejected.

The dying Jag has a vision but he denies it.

Change is painful. Sometimes loss is better.

Harper Pitt shown to suffer greatly as her husband comes out & leaves. We're suppose to struggle on.

But, ..

For all the heart-wrenching change the characters are put through ~~nobody~~ is shown to be better at the end - just surviving dully.

The vision denied. The character saw it with special glasses, masturbated, had sex with the angel, then never tells us what it was. Then later in the play he returns the book saying he doesn't want to be a ~~prophet~~ prophet. What? Why?

Was the prophecy of future life? A clearer present meaning? Was the pt just to wrestle with the angel?

What did rejecting the burden of prophecy have to do with the characters new contentment?

What's the connection between the challenge of prophecy & the desertion of his lover.

~~Is~~ America is a dog-eat-dog republican world? ~~why do all the republicans just~~

~~dis~~ The republican characters who believe that die or evaporate at the end of the play, tendy to deny that proposition. But no alternate vision of the greater whole is advanced. Do the democratic personalities who survive & change just piddle ~~in the~~ along without politics?

Maybe.

But it is disappointing at the end of the play that all we get is reminiscences at the fountain of healing. If the "meaning" is painful change / ~~pragmatism~~ / reject theory it seems like a copout of political responsibility at odds with the fundamental beliefs of the democrats

What about Ethal Rosenberg forgiving Roy Cohn. What mush. Those democrats should be nice people but come on. Is the message that they should have no politics?

- Russell comments that maybe the prophecy is bureaucratic power. The angels after all are described as bureaucrats. The Book of Prophecy is returned to them. If so this further adds to the confusion. Why would the earlier peek so excite x who's a queen totally uninterested in power?

The ultimate message in Angels is that we should eschew prophecy + politics + stick to the personal. The democrats cannot act - they can be nice people. Lincoln points us in a different direction.

Abe Lincoln in Illinois

A near wonderful portrait of the young Lincoln before he goes to Washington. The premise is a man filled with doubts, reluctance, brawling, unsure with women, no power mad politician here.

Sam Waterston is too handsome to be Lincoln as written. Lincoln is bashful with women though totally assured with men because we know he was a strange looking dude in deed. He's praised in the script in the patronizing way the ugly are consoled. Not credible with Waterston.

Waterston does a beautiful job with the Illinois dialect & the great speeches - too bad he's so beautiful.

Lincoln is shown to hate death & war & he doesn't want to be in the position when he has to make the hard decisions. ~~The play~~ He breaks off ~~his~~ engagement with Todd because he can't cope with her ambitions & he doesn't want to ~~be~~ pushed into politics. Then he comes to grips with the destiny in a scene with Seth? & the desperately ill little boy. The family asks him to pray because there is no preacher. He does - in the imperative mood and ~~then~~ thereafter accepts his burden of leadership. He's shown as depressive caught in bad marriage made for the wrong reasons. A great portrait of modesty & greatness

Spectacular production - 33 actors

- The play seems to get closer to the mix of personal & political. Much more inspiring than Angels

Play Idea

- ~~1~~ variations on a theme
- The break-up a Canada as seen as breakup of a family
- once did a canoe trip analogy of federal leaders
- (A) Family break-up
 - gay brother = Quebec
 - can he get out of the family without violence
 - Family business reasons why he can't leave

New York 1994

I'm in the midst of one of my weekends in New York. It's Saturday morning. I'm in bed with my laptop. I'm writing this little memo to no one except me.

This place does it to me. I'm not sure how to describe it. Inspiration I suppose is closest. Intellectual inspiration at the opposite pole from the spiritual achieved ocean kayaking.

To be on the streets here, in the bookstores, reading the papers, at the theatre, is to get a bracing blast of the possibilities of urban culture. Maybe it just wakes me up to the cutting edge of trends and gives me a jump on folks back home, or the illusion I have it. It's hardly bohemia these days, but it certainly is a culture on the fringe that give me courage. There is much in NYC that I reject and don't like. And while I might like to live here again it would only be a sojourn to get a jag, sort and write.

Write. More than anything NYC represents literate culture and renews in me the desire to articulate to myself. I think of the plays that I wrote when I was living here and even though they when no where I have immense satisfaction that I did it.

So this trip costs me about \$200 a day in basic expenses (airfare and cheap studio) and I'm feeling quite satisfied to sitting in bed writing up nothing of great consequence. But I'm getting my head back into doing it.

So what are my thoughts.

The s/m sex culture boggles the mind. Just as I thought Toronto was getting loose and open I discover the extent of a sexual subset that is at least obscur back home and technically illegal.

Friday I started writing up my impressions of the Egan intervention. I hope I can finish it over the weekend.

First play - Three Tall Women. Albee won the the Pulitzer for this. It's good, as good as a play about a fabulously rich old woman and her servants can be. The audience was rich wasps as you might expect. The writing and plotting was disciplined and sophisticated with the three characters shifting from servant to the old woman at different ages. The themes were weighty - what we remember and forget - what constitutes happiness in the final moment - who can you trust. It was also facinating to see Ablee, a gay man, handle a woman's view point, apparently successfully.

Second play - You Can't Win. This was an unreviewed adventure. It was a play about Jack Black, who wrote an autobiography of his life in the 1880's to ?1910 as a hobo and burglar. New York garage (heavily subsidized) garage theatre. Pretty good, certainly well staged and performed, not badly written. Seven actors played many roles as they told the story of his life. The moralizing of the mature Jack at the end of the play repenting his life of crime didn't seem to follow as it should. The body of the play presented as a colourful adventure and his thievery as a logical progression. I'm not convinced he regretted it, only that he didn't like being in jail once he got older. I don't think it would dissuade any young hellions. It would reassure aging liberals.

The new City Lights gay book store is beautiful and

impressive. Same with the new Barnes and Noble. I had come to believe Toronto had "world class" bookstore. Now I'll have to reassess. I still have to go browsing. The proof is in the tasting. What obscure goodies will I find.

I think I have decided to make a play back home for a much bigger and focused libel practice. The recent rush of great cases, Katsiapis, Farah and Minors has felt good politically. Also pays. Also serves my purposes to create a more focused legal practice that is easier to do.

I can get inspired by the politics of this at a theoretical level. The tabloid press has a "line" and there is a need to fight it. Thematically they promote anti-immigrant, welfare cheats, cop worship, anti-black. There may have been a point when the tabloids were supportable as anti-elite, when scandal-mongering against the ruling class served working class interests, but especially looking at the Sun there is no such rationale. To the extent the odd muckracking reporter stirs up some shit they should be protected - and they can be, so the legitimate opposing interest to a fierce attack on the major media does not deter me. I see we need a real deterrent to the tabloid agenda. At root it is a ruling class strategy of playing on the natural fears of the working class as they lose status in a shifting and restructuring economy by finding "outsiders" to blame. It is a distraction from what should be the real concerns. This strategy is a cornerstone of controlling public opinion. I need to study the subtleties of public opinion molding. Headlines, it seems to me, are far more important than text. Only intellectuals read the stories. We should attack the test of what is defamatory - loosen it - to allow for the negative nuances and the cumulative effects of asides and snide condescending remarks. The task is to neutralize this instrument of mass manipulation. Lots of fun.

Coming back from the theatre on Thursday night the radio in the taxi was playing a religious phone-in show. The caller wanted to know what the bible said about tattoos. I love New York. The host of course had an answer. The body is temple and it should not be desecrated. But, asked the caller, what about my tattoo of Jesus on the cross. Interference from outer space blocked the answer.

It was nice to see Kito. He's opened a studio and office for his therapy. We went to You Can't Win. And talked a lot. He always seems to interviewing me. Is he really that interested? The subtext is often the same - I'm not sufficiently interested in personal affairs. This time he was teasing me about the rafting trip and the intimacy of the campfire. He's fascinated about going on trips with strangers. I can't figure out how to tell him of my struggles for more personal content. I see no sign he is willing or able to talk about gay life. Still I value him dearly.

Rode from the airport on Thursday with John Sewell. Interesting talk. He will be shocked - me too - if Barb wins.

Saw this quoted twice - That which doesn't kill me makes me strong. Nietzsche.

Sunday afternoon I went to a wonderful women's play, Why we Have A Body. A lesbian private detective with a schizophrenic sister falls in love with a paleontologist. Sis works as a crossing guard, shooting at disobedient motorists; mom gets lost in the jungle

after a sky-diving adventure, and the paleontologist struggles whether to leave her husband. Warm and witty. With a little more plot development it could be a great play. As it is there is an excellent play. Some wonderful lines, and riffs, and monologues. But, why do we have a body?

"Sailed through a whole armada of therapists and emerged unscathed and untouched by a single one."

Sunday night I saw Simpatico, Sam Shepard's newest play, opening night, no less, although I didn't plan that. His usual crew of desparate and crazed losers, this time with a well worked out gothic plot of failed revenge. Very enjoyable, but it did seem aomewhat old hat.

No Man's Land

Pinter '74

The voices of old men, confused, forgetful, failed, powerful, reminiscent of Eliot. They try to speak to one another but it is chaos. Drunkenness \rightarrow rambling stupor; they make up histories, relationships ^{to assert & win}, rivalries. The aging poet is pathetic but has the most coherence of any of the characters. Superb acting. Gives meaning no mere ready script would catch.

Story line is confused beyond what seems appropriate for the pt of the drama.

An Inspector Calls

JB Priestley - National

A most meticulous production, elaborate set, perfect acting, blocky, staging. The best that money can buy - a lot of money. Fascinating stage craft.

I suspect Priestley's play from the 20's (?) was originally a small format piece for a drawing room set, and probably a intriguing little twist on murder mystery. The National's staging is elaborate and dramatic. ~~A~~ A miniature beach house on stilts, big enough only for five actors to stand, is dwarfed on a huge set, the coast with vast horizon. The effect? The upper class are seen as miniatures, toys, specimens, not so threatening, easier to examine, criticize, but perhaps not so ~~immediate~~ immediate, not us, not our ~~era~~ era. The open scene has a few street urchins crawl out of the sewers - on the beach - never mind, observe the grandes carrying on, find + turn on an old radio, producing old music, 20's, ~~which~~ which sets a mood - Dickensian, music from another era. The rest of the piece is scored ~~with~~ for ~~drum~~ percussion +, ominous mood music. If the set were any less spectacular I would be foolish. The whole mood is ultra mellow dramatic, near comical, yet not, because the play is good enough.

The director has also created a crowd who come on stage at the appropriate moment to watch to judge. The text invites a moment of judgement, of conscience, from the audience.

The whole effect is to render palatable by its distancing, the intensely moralistic play. Brecht wrote the distance into the text + added minor staging devices of placards etc, to create this. This director has achieved the same thing by ~~surrounding~~ the play with ~~artificial~~ artifices.

Does all this help or hurt the agitprop purpose of the author.

The play itself is good class comment on the sanctimonious hypocrisy of the rich. Without the artifices we wouldn't watch it. Excuses would be legion - dated etc. So the director's scheming has at least some good effect.

The play's radical premise in the 20's is now commonplace - ruthless capitalism is unacceptable. Supposedly neutral acts - terminating an employee, an affair with an impoverished young woman, have moral consequences if examined further, deeper honestly.

Perhaps the significance of this play at National in that its morality is not at all controversial in the 1990's.

Prisoners of War

A ~~is~~ not unworthy 20's melodrama of gay prisoners of war in a Swiss mountain hotel waiting repatriation. Were it not for sex preference it would be properly forgotten as a relic. But it has been revived as the first play of the 20th C to deal openly with the subject.

The view is mostly tortured. One nasty - one vicious - terrible-tempered - prick; another cynical tease; two jolly blocks, who plan to migrate to the far ~~is~~ climes of Canada. They are in part caring. But the protagonist is so tortured. If it was realistic thank god for the distance travelled.

Hamlet

- Royal Shakespeare

Feb 93

- starring Kenneth Branagh

Branagh spoke it brilliantly. I understood so much more. Slow, crisp, impassioned, ~~languid~~ with all the verbal pyrotechniques of a great. A thrill to listen to.

Not such a thrill to watch. The sets were bare, and if not bare bizarre. A Christmas tree sitting on stage for most of ~~Part I~~ Part I. Part II had an inexplicable set, the stage littered with piles of wreaths or donuts, never explained, and entirely off put in final sword fight scene. Part II had a clever set for "the play" but it was inappropriate for all the other parts of the Part - eg Hamlet + Gertrude in her bedroom. The "concept" was Edwardian with players, armies, ships to England, arriving + departing to the sound of railroad train.

Some parts of Hamlet are great poetry and carry the show, but not enough. It needs the proper props + sets of a castle. I don't think the story plays in modern dress. Who cares so much about adultery + revenge, + kings and ...

Themes

1) Claudius the usurper

- typical Shakespearean moral
that regicide doesn't pay - Hamlet fails to act
as a king must - Hamlet has no proof - needs to get a
confession - articulated poorly

2) Hamlet & his mother

- his overwrought reaction to her
2nd marriage - anger should have
been directed at Claudius for the
murder - Was this just displacement -
if so what clews - looks like
oedipal excess - I don't relate to this - typical
reaction of step-parent

3) Hamlet & Ophelia - does she really love her father
the old fool

- did they fuck? - ~~she~~ I don't
understand her mad scene - I don't
understand his outburst in the middle of "To be...
get them to a nursery seems to be say they"
never love - this is like fantasizing...

4) Blot revenge - revenge is shown as necessary
to "honor" - ghost demands it - but no other proof
~~she~~ it is the frustration of the sense of honor because
of want of proof that taunts Hamlet

5) inability to act as generalized existential angst
- Hamlet the indecisive intellectual -

- Hamlet has no emotional reaction
- Oh what a rogue...
- subsequently he is very emotional

- Hamlet's feigned madness doesn't fool Claudius
- Hamlet must be very young - a student - does not come to throne when Father dies
- why does Hamlet feign "madness"?
to cover his rage? grief?
while he seeks proof?

Travels With My Aunt

Three male ~~three~~ actors play all the speaky parts (assisted by a fourth). Each takes a turn at the dullard Ex-banker, and then do various other parts. One does Aunt quite well. The whole effect is very camp. It bears an additional dimension of humor that perhaps dishonors Graham Greene's serious purpose.

I have not read the book, and would not have thought to do so, thinking it at best an entertainment, travels with yet another eccentric Englishwoman.

And indeed it tells of travels with an eccentric Englishwoman, a very eccentric English woman.

And alas now I will never read it, for now I know the ending.

So it is much more - a tale of freedom & responsibility, escape, responsibility, love & conformity.

No doubt Greene's novel is far more serious in effect. Perhaps the play is slightly frivolous for its theme.

I knew one third of the way what would be the surprise ending - who was the lost son of whom - basic plot number one, and not an unworthy rendering, but already after one third. Intermission at least.

The play pulls its punches at the end on the morality issues. Things get a little vague when hard moral choices are made, and they are.

I suspect Greene was not so light in the final chapter.

It was a very entertaining evening, very polished. Would Greene have wanted it so easy to walk away from?

Richard III

RSC

- Nobody in this cast was so outstanding as Branagh - but then ~~it~~ was then the opportunity.

- The script is pure propaganda. Richard is clownishly evil, self-proclaimed so & unbelievably ~~evil~~ evil, ~~it~~ The production dramatizes this greatly. The curse on Richard & his sons, and the House of York is articulate & very heavy. Henry Tudor, Duke of Richmond, is grotesquely noble & heroic.

It is like to allied vs Nazi propaganda, or US vs USSR.

The ~~the~~ goodness or badness of Richard & kingly predecessors seems to be measured only in their murders, or no. Primogeniture is everything.

Overall the play doesn't grab me. Who care which noble murders which. Even without knowing another version of this famous story I distrust what I see & hear on stage - as ~~self-serving~~ propaganda for a cause.

The production was very martial. Appropriate, smooth.

A Few Good Men

Problems

- 1) What was role of woman lawyer? - Internal security?
Supervision? How & why did she get on as active counsel?
- 2) Why no charge of manslaughter?

Strong Points

- 1) The strategy of CX
Well played out - The audience followed the twists & traps, the chances taken. Script was good in illustrating the risks & calculations in mid-CX
- 2) Behind scenes prep as ~~background~~ is more NB than what happens during trial
- 3) Moral/legal issue of obeying commands well & with played.
- 4) Case would turn on exactly what was the command for Code Red. Was gagging included? What was supposed to happen after gagging? What did happen? Did they just leave him there tied?
- 5) Tom Cruise ~~cutie-pie~~ cutie-pie stuff on extension of the lazy lawyer character. It fits the character sometimes overdone to point of vanity.

Deep Blue Sea

How satisfying it is to see a perfectly wrought drawing room drama - not without emotion + depth - well played, completely * naturalistic in style.

The message of course is old hat, the wasted lives of women expected to be dutiful + lovely wives, and the equally hopeless task of mad devotion to a ~~handsome~~ sexy male. How much deeper would the play have been if the sex could have been spoken of openly? Perhaps none - the point was - is the suppression of * overt sexuality. If it were overt the ^{social} problem in the play addressed perhaps would not be so severe. *

Interestingly to observe the male as portrayed by Rattigan, a gay man. He is not unfeeling - just not as in love with her as she with he. He has the insight to break it off realizing he can never satisfy her. He is thoughtless about "the birthday", + nasty leaving the shilly, but straight about things - he has another life, at least he's trying. She doesn't.

* On the other hand if the husband/Judge could have been shown to be impotent, sexually boring etc it might have given a different twist.

The female character is familiar - Hedda Babble
She doesn't add much to the feminist agenda.
Both make the respectable & the sexy ultimately
offer her nothing & she's on her own.
"Dr" Miller gives the lesson of the play -
give up hope and with it goes despair.

The Last Yankee

- Arthur Miller

This is latest play at the Young Vic is much discussed and largely praised by the English commentators. They seem to see in it some insight into America, ~~not Yankee-ism~~
~~not today~~ The man who wrote Death of a Salesman must have something else to say.

I was not impressed. There was half of a satisfactory second-tier drama, but not more. Not much of a plot, certainly no crisis + resolution. Domestic observations are worthy, + here were a few, about a wife depressed for a tangle of reasons. But the ~~other~~ characters were remained ordinary. No grand generalizations seemed ~~worthy~~ warranted.

The young man, the last Yankee, is honoured for his contentment with his life, his reconcile to modest means + pleasures, simple spirituality, lowly employment loyalty to his wife. He has the dignity + self respect that Willy Loman lacked, when the wife goes crazy in ~~her~~ her frustration over his lack of ambition, her failure to achieve.

I guess this is worthy. It is indeed interesting that Miller would now write this. It is also satisfying to see a man ~~of~~ ~~dignity~~ portrayed with ~~residual~~ dignity instead of as a ~~not~~ vain, incongruously selfish, + oppressive to women.

^{lead}
The ^{lead} female character lacks the signs of archetype, she is just one woman, not modern American woman.

If anything the other female character, (Jewish wife) is more instructive of the American tragedy - the doting wife with nothing to do, ~~nothing~~ but tap dance, and the ~~was~~ successful husband who wants nothing to do with her, driving her to deep depression

Our lead female has particular reasons for her unhappiness - is it ^{really} depression. She has not succeeded, and her husband, in whom she put such faith, has no ambition, perhaps no ruthlessness.

American women are a decade ahead of this state of mind. They've left such husbands & headed off the academe & law school & made up for their husbands' failures. How much more telling if the wounds were probed after that female success.

The Ideal Husband, O. Wylde

This production was - with one glaring mistake - impeccable. Wylde's text lends itself to grand ~~entertaining~~ delivery & the cast never failed. The set and costumes were appropriately glittery. The blocking faultless. There was one unfortunate miscued entrance that might throw off Act II if you didn't realize the ~~time~~ error.

The play has a very contemporary theme - that men in public life are not perfect and ought not be held to ~~too~~ high a standard - not put on a pedestal - by their wives. And that newspapers are dreadful. It would also teach forgiveness between spouses.

However it is in the last analysis too forgiving. The protagonist succeeds in covering up a fairly serious ^{early} crime by his friend so that he can progress up the political ladder to high office.

The protagonist is played campy ~~far~~ & this was a gross error. It was probably intended to give voice to Wylde. But it made the character unbelievable. He would never have married

Wit

NYC - Feb 99

A powerful play very effective & affecting with the audience. Half stayed afterwards to talk about it with the cast. Beautifully acted. Audience saw themselves. Doctors were a bit stereotyped as insensitive but several commentators said there was enough truth.

The play's success seemed to come from resonant alienating experiences with medical world at time of death. ~~and~~ The play seemed less successful as a meditation on the meaning of death and as a comment on judgement in the final days. One message was clear enough - personal kindness was everything to the dying protagonist - she was lonely.

- and her harshness with students was recalled with regret - well possible regret.

But so much was unclear, unsaid, unexplored. While one doesn't want to overburden and thus destroy a simple & therefore effective presentation more could be said. Vilifying the doctors was a cheap ~~ticket~~ to ~~give~~ dramatic tension.

The red villa was the protagonist who led a life too lonely, accomplished & cruel to others no one came to visit. Of course the doctor's indifference to her as a person then became a focus - there were no other people to talk to. More could be said about the ^{final} cruelty of professional success. Some chat about her "friends" - where are they. She doesn't them to see her "like this" - etc other patients with swarming families, for comparison.

Her reflections on this consequence of a life lead, does she call out to people, reject that as undignified etc. Perhaps she gets into being a great research topic as a way being "accomplished" in her final days - this might be a way she tries to hold to her standards to the very end - it would have proved something interesting to talk about with the young doctor - a way in which her values do survive ~~perhaps~~ & get passed on to him - a counterpoint to the loneliness

The redemption at the end as she steps into the glowing spot light was incomprehensible to me. Why was she redeemed. What did she do feel or learn that made it better? The

Scene with her old teacher was
touchy - but she was unconscious when
her only visitor showed her the only affection
There was little foundation for that scene
The old professor had been tough on her
once but the meaning & effect of that
was not explored. Was this a parent
substitute? ~~Was~~ Was the simple story she
read an abandonment of their mutual
commitment to high strung scholarship? ~~and~~
and more poignantly, the values of Dunne, sophisticated
~~irony~~
irony in response to the alternate questions?
Here was ^{profound} judgment of life & the life least
that slipped from view in ~~the~~ emotions
of the moment. It may be that the dying
person wanted simply love but as the
living need to learn from this event

Indeed the ~~whole~~ question of Dunne
→ his approach to the ultimate questions
is well explored. Irony & wit in response
to final judgment. Twisting the questions
to say wittily ~~ge~~ I don't know the
answer. To dazzle as a way to avoid
the ~~question~~ answers. - that don't exist. Several
characters comment on this. This is
~~not~~ a good entry to the profound
questions about the meaning of life.

~~What~~ is the professor ~~obviously~~ intends
to go done wittily - like her literary
hero, though I would have made
this more articulate. When the

end comes she ~~she~~ does have values
& she holds to them. ~~She'll~~ She'll
be witty & ironic to the end. ~~she~~ ~~she~~ The
question is - do those values ~~survive~~ ~~the~~ serve
her well at the end. It would seem they
do not but the message could have been more
clear. Indeed the question is pregnant with
dramatic possibilities. Ironic possibilities - she
dies lonely, but witty!? I don't know the
right answer. But neither do I have clear
sense of what the playwright thinks is the answer -
existential courage + wit to the very end or cuddling
with mom.

2009

Thursday Dec 3

Yes, there *was* a bad moment today, one. At Newark Airport, after an hour in the Immigration line behind two groups from Columbia and Bangladesh, being cx-ed, photoed, finger printed - when my new cell phone could get 'no network connection' and the pay phone ate my last dollar in change before it told me this was not long distance and I could apply in Canada for refund and then, when the stupid little fucker started to work, don't ask me why, then the contact number for the apartment rental was 'What! Wrong number ... fuck off guy' and I thought I would have no place to stay - yes, that was a bad moment, but then by chance, I found the other email with the right phone number and found good old Obaid, the Bollywood TV host and part time rental agent who was still waiting in his /my 41st floor Penthouse on 42nd, waiting, I sincerely believe for my money and not me, but waiting nevertheless, waiting by the most amazing unobstructed south vista of Manhattan, sitting right on top of Playrights Horizons and other west Broadway legit theatres at street level and I paid him his lucre and got my emails open and could write to my PEI client to assure him he won and not write to my PEI opponents who did not write to congratulate or sent me \$250,000 but never mind the details because my auction bids were successful and so now I'm a noted collector of Canadian cubism, an even more rarified speciality than 'real workers' and a guy with a whole new look to his living room. It all proves, it is never to late to redecorate. Yes, there was a bad moment. We have to cling to those small and precious moments, lest we lose perspective.

And then there is matter of the best sex in many years. See other notes.
Yes, it was quite a day.

Friday December 4

The sun is doing extraordinary things out my window. I watch the play of light on the east side of the buildings on the Jersey shore. I have never wanted high rise living before. Buying a view. I've seen too many sunsets that such interest me anymore. But this! In the dark the lights of downtown are magical. And looking straight down to the spaghetti messy of highways feeding the Lincoln Tunnel. In daytime the mess of busses on the roads. Why do I like this? On the ground, walking around and under this, it is butt ugly. It is the illusion of having mastered this town. Transformed the bad to the good. How long would it be fun to live in the clouds like this.

The New York Public Library

What a glorious building. It's years since I've been in here. The main room are grand and yet they are set up for scholarly work. The librarians are helpful. Never mind the tourists everywhere. I'm getting to the serious digging on the Roosevelt project. I'm feeling like I'm back at Grad School. Here is another luxury of my 'semi-retirement. I am obsessed and inspired. It is interesting that the Roosevelt reading has evolved to the subject of the history of human rights. I did a paper in Law School on the original passage of the US Bill of Rights. And my other current subject for research - Secondary Plans - another research paper from Law School.

And I found the obscure Eleanor Roosevelt book - *The Moral Basis of Democracy*, (1940), but not the *Women's Democratic News*, which is being ordered from off-site. My notes on the former are elsewhere. It neither proves nor disproves my theory.

But never mind the facts. In my telling, never mind what it says, will prove to be the true roots of FDR's 'four freedoms' in his famous Jan 41 speech which is root of the Atlantic Charter and eventually the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (which ER more or less wrote anyhow and stuffed sown the throat of the State Department in 1948. The question is, was she fucking her boy toy Joe Lash, the cunning little ex-Commie when she wrote this book and inveigled FDR into asserting the right to the four freedoms? And when she set these goals for the world in the Universal Declaration? Which proves conclusively - in Act Two - that she is more important than FDR - and sex is everything. . (I've found more FBI docs on the Lash /ER toss in Chicago and the FBI and FDR reaction. A packet of lies but truth is boring when you need a spectacular Act III!!!! I can hardly breath!!!!)

I walk south on Fifth. It's a beautiful sunny afternoon. Lord and Taylor has their traditional Christmas windows functioning with little mousey pouring tea and badgers opening presents. In the store window due south three busty strippers entertain a much larger crowd!

My next stop is the Strand Bookstore. Another NYC spot which I had been in for years. It's full of customers. A staff guy finds me the section I want. I culled the Roosevelt books and ordered a bunch sent to Toronto. A delightful hour. I'm still missing some key pieces, particularly Lash's memoir of ER.

I stroll through Greenwich Village around the New School, restoring my roots, blah, blah, blah.

I am professional success. I have sex. I have purpose. I have NYC under control. It is a beautiful day. I am happy. So happy, it's too soon to die. I'm also exhausted so I head home to sleep.

And then see *Loaded*. This was a lazy pick, it's right downstairs on 42nd St. Close. No hassle getting a ticket. I sleep and see *Loaded*.

No two guys having sex could ever have such an intelligent argument. I can hear the whispers – 'it's unrealistic!' Never mind realism. It's boring. It is such an intelligent and insightful argument no audience could stand it if it were not situated in its sexual context. The sex matches the arc of the argument. The topic is worthy and the writing captures the issues and deserves serious analysis. Lots of food for thought – for faggots, definitely, for others, perhaps boring. The play doesn't pull it's punches. Middle aged, embittered but admirably sexy guv vs young intellectual sort. They are attracted and repelled. A split decision, on points, victory to the young. What a delight to stumble into.

Saturday

Dramatic Book Store was packed and well stocked.

The Understudy at 2 at the Roundhouse was fabulous. Three great comic actors were three reasons. They could all do the writer's jerky, stumbling anx-ridden speeches. The sets were flashy. The story worked at many overlapping and interlocking levels. The rehearsal. Actors' personal lives. The play they are performing. Perhaps the interlock could have been tighter. Tragedy at one level was transcended at another. The classical roots in Kafka's *The Trial* were not light and were well done. I'm a sucker for the anxiety of actors struggling with their roles. Very adept at changing scenes by having one actor go off to do something while continuing the show. 90 minutes solid was never tiring. It makes me think of my Hamlet. Great verbal dexterity helps a lot.

Funny and moving in places. This will tour the world. An easy three hander, with crowd appeal.

I think I could do a better scene when they teach Hamlet to make a speech. He should stumble over the parts that aren't right and be bullied into believing the PR value of the lie. I could do a better job on Hamlet's performance of the big speech.

Evening - *Under The Gaslight*

This 1867 melodrama was produced straight up with comic irony for our more cynical view of things. A story of beautiful woman thrown over by her society beau because of the disclosure of her true origin – gasp – as an orphan and a six year old pickpocket! After endless twists and turns, chase and rescue, it is revealed she really is high born and can be married after all. To her beau. The production was earnest, the actors trying although some terribly miscast and production values so cheap that the effect of discovering and producing a period piece for historical interest was lost. But it was only \$20, on the far side of Ave A.

After I had surprising good supper with Gene in Angelica on Ave A and a chat. He is still totally full of himself, proud of being a 'character' and entertaining you, still interesting to listen to, but thank god e isn't a daily diet. Not so much as a question about my life.

Sunday

A midtown walk Sunday am. Tourists were out in force even before ten. Hunting for Luis Vuillton 'hobo' bags and Fifth. Got to shop early!

Met Gene in Fort Green, had a short drive around this well preserved Brooklyn neighbourhood and then to Pratt Institute. Which has a great collection of outdoor sculpture and art pieces. Strange, I don't want to call it 'public art'. Mostly from the 60 – 70s. See my pics. Very impressive.

Then to Greenpoint – or was it the other way round to the Sewage Treatment Plant. Park and Design!!!

A cheap Polish supper.

What a great tour of Brooklyn! In this respect, Gene never fails.

Monday

Monday am in Library, 10 to 1. Did reasonably well with Roosevelt books. See other notes for an analysis of the developing argument.

Then went for a long walk south to the HiLine Park, walked its length, then back through the village shopping, browsing. So many restaurants, dress shops in the West Village – it's not the same place.

In the evening went to *Biography*, a play by S.N. Behrman at The Mint but by a theatre company named 808. It was a Mint style revival of a 30s play. An independent woman artist charms and juggles a gaggle of male admirers. She loves everybody, finds good in all, is tolerant, avoid confrontation to a fault, very witty. It was indeed charming, often insightful, extremely well acted and very tightly written. On the other hand, all the men were fools. Of the angry young man she loves, she says 'hope your revolution never succeeds or you'll be a tyrant'. He says of her – you're the reason we suffer injustice – people get old and tolerant'. He is ambitious to publish her biography so the stuffed shirts can be made fun of and ruined. She doesn't want publish because she doesn't want to hurt anyone. At the end she spurns all the men and then gets a telegram !!! offering her a commission to paint in Hollywood. This play would be perfect for Shaw.

Certain ideas spill over into my thought on ER and FDR – his charm, deviousness and tolerance and avoidance of confrontation. ER's adventurousness.

Tuesday

First to the Library to see the old copies of the Women's Democratic News. See other notes.

Then back to the apartment to deal with Joe McLeod problem.

Then took a cab cross town and walked back shopping all the way. Midtown looked richer than ever. The prices were as foolish as ever. The serving class were more servile than ever. More over-sized black SUVs than ever. No sign of any banking crisis here. More lavish Christmas decos than ever. The B-G windows were stunning. I was tired when I got back. I ate too much. I fell asleep at 6:45 and woke at 7:30 and missed my play. Into each life a little rain must fall. I went back to bed and slept for another two hours.

Started reading the Clurman memoirs of the Group Theatre. I feel a new history project coming on.

Wednesday

In the am I went to the City Museum of NYC. Not so hot although an excellent show, a photo and map montage of the history of NYC.

I walked back cross town and readied myself for another visit with Steve. Gene bought tickets for Finian's Rainbow. This is a 1947 Broadway song and dance show, with a foolish plot, feel-good anti-racism and a fab cast of dancers and singers. Fun to watch. A very old-fashioned remount and charming for it. I suspect that if the cast had not been so talented it would have been shlockey and unbearable. We had dinner after. He told me the same stuff about bicycles in NYC, the same speech, intonation, emphasis etc. He seemed eager to get together. I think he is lonely.

Everyday

The view from the windows here is awesome, everyday. It's like watching sunrise and sunset in the mountains, the lake, whatever. People pay for the wilderness vistas, I understand. But never have I seen a NYC view of the same grandeur – worth a good buck just to enjoy the vision of Manhattan.

Book Club - *Getting Near the End* –

One thing I like is insight why older folk are less and less interested in fiction – we don't need the escape.

But mostly the book annoys me.

It is the rationalization of a life, especially her role as the other woman – not her fault her lover left his wife. What about his support to his wife?

There seem to be no failures. No regrets. It's been an easy life.

It dodges the difficult questions about death – because it's all about someone well cushioned.

She can write – why hasn't she written more.

There is nothing outstanding about an 88 year old writing. Why publish her book? She's an insider.

New York – Jan 2011

Random Thoughts

I still get a jag from New York. It moves me to discard the useless and move on to more important stuff. There is so much here that I would like to be part of. And being a total outsider I can be content just to study it. In Toronto, where the vast bulk of this is accessible, albeit it remotely, I resent being excluded. New York drives me. I sense it again this trip as my mind reshapes and fuels my ambitions, even as get too old to be effective.

I come to New York to sniff the rich. I like to get into the audiences and listen to them chatter, what they like, or not. Rightly or wrongly, in due course we in the hinterland will be directed there.

**

This rented apartment has a skyline view from mid-town north which is spectacular. Obaid's other place which I rented last year had a better view to the south but an unfortunate window configuration so that when you sat down the window frame blocked the view. Here he has a wonderfully comfortable leather arm chair and ottoman in which I sit and see it all – except maybe down to the street. It must the same for sun worshippers who find the perfect spot on the beach or the cliff where they came see for miles and contemplate - awesomeness. Sitting here, as I have for hours, is one of life's great places of contentment. Good that my over stuffed living room living room is just as good or would die now of envy.

Is it the height and view or what I see and what it represents? There are two other NYC sky view apartments I have been in over the years that make me drool. I doubt anything in Toronto that would have such a view just because there aren't so many buildings but even then I think it would quickly lose its allure because what see represents nothing so captivating.

**

Theatre

You might think literate drama is all the rage in NYC but my small sampling of current New York theatre should not be writ large. *Spiderman, Dracula, The Adams Family Cage aux Folles, American Idiot* etc. are still the rule. All that is true is that there is lots of serious fare available, and I could chose such things and not come close to seeing all that looked intriguing. There is evidently a large audience for serious stuff - astonishing in the Twitter era. It is an interesting accident that three of the shows that I saw were domestic dramas, the most traditional of modern fare.

A Small Fire by Adam Bock at Playwrights Horizon was raved – after I saw a preview – in the Village Voice, mainly for the great acting. The audience applauded loudly although they remained seated, What I thought - before I was told this was great acting – is set out below.

A Small Fire has some bite, but so contrived to make you wonder what was cut. Our protagonist is a tough talking, ballsy contractor who swears like a trooper. If she were a guy we would be highly critical of his rough talk. She's not, and so we admire her frankness and her liberation from class values. She's married to a wimpy HR guy who probably chose the chintz in their tony Connecticut ranch style. She is gloriously earthy and driven, let's face it – redneck – successful, caring and popular with her blue collar construction workers, represented on stage by, of course a black gay man who lost his partner to AIDS and she was so good. Our protagonist loses, as the play progresses her sense of smell, then taste, then sight then hearing. She has CAT scan that apparently shows nothing. So her decay is cruel fate and don't ask any further questions. While it would wreck the narrative as it was presented to us one is left to wonder whether it might not have been more revelatory of the family dynamic had she lost her voice first. The play is about the effect of her decay, 'death' without dying if you will, on her husband, daughter and Billy, her worshipping employee. Who her princess daughter who's getting married, resents, blah blah. A little class content. Note the upper class are good to the lower and beloved by them.

In the last scene the indomitable protagonist, who should be lost and helpless without sight, sound taste or smell, is still indomitable. She can communicate yes and no by hand squeeze signals and her intuition guides her like heat seeking missile to the things she wants to know and control. She and the husband do some bare assed fucking, pretty explicit for the stage, she, blind, deaf and senseless, but still lusty. She says 'I'm still in here'! The writer meant, I think, as an expression of her indomitable, her spirit still here, in her body, not, what I took by it, an expression of dismay for the audience as the play winds down to its death, as in why am I still here!'

Now that's my negative reaction to a play that uncritically worships the indomitable spirit. I was untouched by the admittedly superb performance of the protagonist in her blindness. Well, not moved enough to forget my concern for her underlying character. Great acting has been allowed to sweep aside critical thinking. I wish there were there some better attention paid to the sources, and ill effect of her vulgar, bossy, hyper critical behavior. Forget vulgar, focus on bossy. This person gets what she wants. It's not good enough to observe, as the husband cries out – 'I can't live without you'. I can't help thinking that she has take advantage. In her reduced condition, now totally dependent on her husband, she says 'I didn't love you but I do now.' Here's the deeper issue of greater interest - is this the true nature of 'love'? Love is a meal – there are those who eat and those who are eaten? This play admires the great heart and spirit

of the female protagonist. This is reversal of the usual sex roles is good stuff and tests our sexual stereotypes.

I remain suspicious the play as originally – which runs short at 70 minutes – had more to say than we say on stage. The questions are too large and obvious that this is all the playwright had to say. What I saw was an acting tour de force that seems to have trampled a good play.

If the badge of success is to get the people discussing after the show, to refine their sensibilities, blah, blah, it turned my crank a bit. But there are better examples of the genre.

I may not have loved this play but Playwrights Horizon is a great organization with a sterling record of developing prize winning plays, 40 years old, with its own building, an acting school, surround sound in the theatre auditorium, which seats 200? if they're lucky, but with a list of donors two pages long, all to support 'new writing' in America. This is probably the most important theatrical institution generating new plays in America. That said you have to ask what billionaire got conned into financing perfect surround sound acoustics for a small theatre specializing in the spoken word while the schools go underfunded? It's too precious for words, I mean that literally.

**

Other Desert Cities by Jon Robin Baitz had not opened when I saw it, but subsequently got raves. It was in the Mitzi Newhouse Theatre at Lincoln Centre. If Playwrights Horizon is best established source of new drama, and rich, the Vivian Baumount Theatre at Lincoln Centre, of which the Mitzi is the studio theatre, is uber rich and a steady source of an excellent productions, drama and musicals.

In this play we have an rich Republican Hollywood family – Regan stand-ins – battling it out with an east coast pinko daughter who has written a family exposé of a long lost brother who was violently anti-war and committed suicide and who has been written out of the family history. Getting together for Christmas. She brings proofs of the book which Mom and Dad do NOT want to see published. There's a California dude little brother and a drunken aunt. Once again mother is THE tough bitch. She is a former TV script writer and a very together and an acid wit and pro-war all the way and a dear friend of Nancy, who taught her 'control the image'. Republican politics take it on the chin, from the personal to the political, all tied together. There are lots of funny lines, a glamorous set, great acting and a great ending. Extremely enjoyable. Here the family drama vessel is perfect to dissect the core of Republican values of 'show no

mercy or they'll be back for more'. But the story comes across as political not a so much a family drama, it rises above it's genre. Is republicanism really all about selfishness and patriotism that trump even family loyalty? The question is worthy and well put.

The Baumont has the money to promote this show. It will no doubt move to Broadway and on to the hinterland.

**

Blood From A Stone by Tom Nohilly is a new play from the New Group. Again, not planned, I saw this before it opened. (Playwrights Horizon and the New Group were within the block where I was staying.)

Here the family drama was totally gritty – a painful battle of each against all, mom, dad, both loud angry and bitter, and two sons and a daughter. The daughter is the only one with a shred of a decent life. The two sons are losers, one a cheat and other a drug addled war ghost who wants to split for the coast. The fighting never ends. The set is hyper-realistic. The house leaks when it rains – really. Smashed windows. Bloody fights. The acting was fabulous and the overall effect very powerful. There was no deeper meaning to this family feud than the misery of all the people involved, except perhaps that one son, wants 'to get away, start fresh'.

The audience loved it – standing ovation. The Times review hated it for its pointless gloom, with kudos for the acting. A blue collar tourist sitting beside me with a bag pretzels was totally smitten. I was impressed with the skillful overall presentation and uniformly good acting. I'm quick to jump to the act for acting that is nothing but loud, fast talk. This was loud and fast punctuated with some softer sentiment, especially from Ethan Hawke and very effective for the material. I have some thoughts about the lack of deeper logic etc. and I have to ask – was I swept away by great acting at the expense of critical thinking?

The mother, this time was wildly angry and powerful. this time not so much the bitch to her boys, just to her husband. The emotional resolution at the end was weak. The son who would 'get away' gives that up to stay home and look after this mess. Perhaps that's a message that strikes deep enough with me that I don't care so much it whether 'rings' out the ending of the play.

I don't know much about the New Group. It has a fancy list of backers and an impressive playbill of classic modern plays, e.g. Albee, not stressing development of new plays.

**

Domestic Drama

The link between accessibility and domestic drama is obvious. I am suspicious that those who don't like the genre come from happy families. And should be compelled to attend Christmas at my house. Perhaps the world ought not be in the thrall of Manhattan and its theatre but this taste for articulate domestic pain is worthy. The English don't take themselves so seriously on the stage. But it has been thus in New York since Eugene O'Neil strew the guts of his sick family upon the stage upon which all might gorge. In due course we will eat the rich, but let's keep their theatre.

In the 80s I often saw new plays at the Seventh Avenue theatre, then a hot playhouse. They presented plenty of domestic potboilers, specialized in regional variations, Lanford Wilson's Missouri variant, their famous success. That earlier experience and other stuff like it lead me to write *Loon Lake Lodge* in which I contrived a 'Canadian' variant, the rich in their palatial 'wilderness' home, tortured sex and family secrets, etc. etc. It was fun to write, and easy, once I had determined who would die in the end. Answer, the mother. If I dared conceive another, the mother would be the only one who survives and all around her die miserable deaths.

Will the taste for family gore on stage ever exhausted its run? What is left to learn from 'the family'? Is it really an inexhaustible metaphor for life? Or is it a reflection of the limited audience demographic – intelligent women and those who admire them. ? The core thing to like about these plays is the accessibility. Whether they are therapy plays or vessels for higher politics they have an entrance ticket. It's family drama ... about which everybody is an expert. Or thinks it so.

**

Thursday evening Gene and I went to *Three Pianos* in the East Village, a set of sketches by three talented pianists riffing on Shubert's Wintereise, musical history, depression, Shubert and his gay circle and who knows what, playing and singing bits of Shubert, sometimes on the pianos as they rolled them around the stage, having a regular lark. Forget linear logic and all that stuff, this was skit nite at music camp and lots of fun. As much wine as you could drink from the bottles passed round the theatre during the show.

**

Friday night I went to the Mint Theatre to see *What The Public Wants*, by Arnold Bennett. This was the first night of performance and the actors had a few rough spots but not to worry about that. The play was written in 1909 and fits the Mint's mandate to produce 'forgotten gems'.

G.B. Shaw is the epitome of the era but he was hardly the only excellent writer of Edwardian era and the 20s and 30s. If the Mint has show on when I'm in NYC I always make a point of seeing it. Always interesting. This play about 'yellow journalism' and the rise of a press baron was also good, although others have been better.

It goes without saying these early 20th century plays are plotted more clearly, the heroes and villains are unambiguous. This play had too little wit. And perhaps for that reason the play seemed slow. Maybe it will sped up as they get on top of the mechanics.

**

Saturday afternoon I followed my nose and the crowds in and out of various Chelsea galleries. I saw nothing impressive and stopped when I realized I was in an high end auto dealership.

Saturday nite I went to a concert at the World Financial Centre Wintergarden – which is the atrium of a downtown office complex which serves as an event menu occasionally. This one was a concert by the Kickerbocker Orchestra and in particular a 'song' of praise to Robert Moses the master builder. I can rise above my objections to him as a neighborhood smashing tyrant and admire his earlier parks and bridges. But this music and song awful, zero relation of the words and music. And the words, coming out of the mouth of Moses, were embarrassing. I hear he was vain, but this vain.

We had dinner at Zuto, a Japanese restaurant in TriBecca. Quiet, pretty, so-so food.

**

Sunday afternoon Gene and I went to the Transit Museum – in an abandoned subway station. Excellent. Then to PS#1 in outer Brooklyn where MOMA runs a branch plant filled with ??? conceptual art. One exhibit was an empty glass case with a label saying "Missing". Another was a set of pages with traces of footprints and an extended label explaining that this proved anyone could make art and the collector/artist wished to remain anonymous. Here I stopped.

The place was filled with young folk seriously studying this rubbish. I am definitely out of it.

**

Sunday evening I saw *Grusome Playground Injuries* by Rajiv Joseph, another preview. As a piece of writing this was slight but extremely good as a vehicle for some great acting especially by Pablo Schreiber. Normally I disapprove when the acting is more 'important' than the writing which often means the original meaning is redone by the director or actor. Here the playwright wrote for the actor – and why not. Very compelling performance. A string of scenes, in particular order, of two disturbed young people, who don't find each other. He is testosterone driven, accident prone, most would think crazy – riding his bike off the roof pretending to be Evil Knevil etc. The last scene has him confined to a wheelchair, half blind, a (convincingly) beaten man who rejects to 'love' of his life-long friend finally recovered from her mental illness. It's sad. But I'll bet half the women in the audience would have married the broken hunk in a flash. Perhaps with a less charismatic actor this would not have been so. The female part didn't work so well, I think because there no clear notion of her problem. It seemed to be bad treatment by her family. He's more appealing, because his wounds seem more those of natural exuberance although obviously he was beyond the natural and into neurotic. None of this matters much. The acting carried everything.

**

Random Thoughts

London Theatre 2012

- Turnham Common - first garden suburb -- local theatre production of *Jumpers* - what a script - first act too long - and convoluted but just a bit - a thorough review of philosophic arguments for god two hours total - a better actor might have done better -
- generally inspiring about great scripts - one comment - comedy played straight - sound right - another comment - message of play is that cleverness is exhausted - it was a smart audience - there was coherence of message to the end although the last speech was rushed - makes me stick to my guns about short plays
- Such a meaty script. Not quite enough action in Act I but Act II was fine. Worth reading.

- Sunday afternoon - *The Revenger's Tragedy* - Thomas Middleton I'll see anything by Middleton and Ben Johnson and Marlowe, just for the history of it and because they are so rarely performed. This was one I'd never heard of. The ads claimed the production was excellent. It is a hideously complicated revenge play with disguises, murder and in which everybody dies. Some of Shakespeare is as as absurd. I would never recommend this to anyone except for historical research. I am not unhappy. I am quoted as saying you can learn a lot from a bad play. There were several exceptional good actors on stage and all were pretty good. They could have slowed down a shade. The lead, Mark Field, is very capable but was too loud.

The Director gets a very mixed review. The casting was awful in parts. Actors were doubling up but in the different roles they were not clearly distinct. At times this made it impossible to follow the plot. In a very small theatre you can tell the actors and the slight change in costume is not enough. Nor were their change in voice. The ingenue daughter was played by a boy - fair enough for theatre of the era - but there were other women in the cast. The 'girl' was not the least attractive. There was was a lot of 'same sex' innuendo in the staging which I'm sure was not part of the plot and it distracted. Setting the plot in modern times is fine and the revenging brothers as East End hoodies also ok and the 70's music and strobe lights also ok for such a bare bones production.

The Old Red Lion Inn and Theatre was neat. Rebuilt in 1890s but otherwise going way back. Supposed Thom Payne wrote in there.

Not the best theatre - but it was worth it. Besides it was Sunday afternoon and after my walking tour cancelled it was the best I could do.

Jumpers by Tom Stoppard

- Such a meaty script. Not quite enough action in Act I but Act II was fine. Worth reading.

get notes from Sept 20

Monday nite I saw *Shrek The Musical*. Not much on and this was the best half price option. The sound was awful -so loud in my first (fifth row) seat that I couldn't understand the lyrics. But it was fun to watch - colorful - good stage effects - quickly changing - forests - castles etc. Perhaps there were too many nursery characters in silly costumes all at once but overall very visually satisfying. The story - from the movie - is tried and true. The score is poor - not just because it's loud blaring rock style. It's all the same - anthem stuff. It's an event - little kids on parents' knees, candy

and drinks in the seats, people chatting, taking pictures of themselves in the theatre etc. Reminded me of War Horse - simple good but maudlin story and lots to look at.

Tuesday

Bully Boys - excellent meticulous production with projected backdrops - fancy new theatre -

Wed

- Timon at the National

- great seat - glad to see this obscure play - the ending about Alcibades has faint roots in the text of the earlier part but the director inserted lots of visuals about a pending revolution to try and fix this - continuity problem at the end is still glaring - obviously it was unfinished and then an ending tacked on - a valiant effort by the director to make it hang together - but then continuity isn't everything - further - the core idea of a generous man going broke and then abandoned by his friends and turning misanthrope is not bad but not convincing - generosity too extreme - another continuity problem - what happens to Timon in the end - basically a bad play - making the steward into a woman was interesting - came off like a half wife but then would the loyalty of a male servant be comprehensible
- lovely to watch - staging and backdrops a great effort to put in the modern context - made things much easier to follow - first class staging and performance - strangely the weakness was in the performance of the great Simon Beale - wonderful voice but at times he was rushing through the speeches of curse and bitterness when a little more care in punctuating would have been very helpful - still impressive
Overall a failure in its attempt to recover the play - it's still a toss-out that should be forgotten - vanity by the director and Beale to think they could resurrect -

Oh the Humanity ... at the Soho Rep - I was late and missed the first two monologues - this show was much hyped - only slightly funny - Soho Rep playbill is most sketch comedy - this American import was a picture of nervous angst - filled with very human hesitation and apology - this performance mood was too downbeat - closer to story-telling - sometimes affecting - and the writing was not that interesting - the nervous PR lady talking to the families of a air crash was not bad - probably a 'hit' in the comedy club circuit for being different - in a real theatre it would be inferior.

Thursday

Aft - Love and Information - Royal Court - Cheryl Churchill
One newspaper come-on called her England's greatest living play write. What I saw was fifty unrelated - well performed - short scenes. I mean unrelated! Love and Information? The best I can make of it is that a mishmash collection of vignettes involving people in all sorts of relationships, few of which seem like 'love' to me, perhaps exchange information. One sketch says that, sort of, that the purpose of sex is to cross-pollinate and exchange information so we don't simply recreate ourselves. A very few were funny. They were mostly about people failing, sort of, to communicate about something or other. In the last scene somebody says to someone else 'I love you'. I could detect no pattern to the scenes. No theme deeper than the above. Did I say 'well-performed'. I'm searching for something nice. Why do the critics like this? Why did the audience like it? Probably, mostly because the critics like it? Churchill is trying to say something. Whatever it is is hardly worthy of play. She has this world bamboozled. This si third play in

row where the linear logic was/is deficient but London loves it. They like fine speaking, big words and have a longer attention span but this seemingly literate culture is demanding of narrative consistency.

Eve. This House

Fake Parliament set in Studio theatre was lots of fun. I was / am a sucker for such a set up. And a front bench seat not less. This show will be a roaring success - the setting is too small for the crowds to come. How can they re-mount it for a standard theatre? A cast of 16 for a studio production! Such extravagance!

But aside from that the play was very good - supposedly accurate - very informative to me - especially regarding the actual working of the House - clever to focus on the Whips and not the politicians - there was nothing particularly 'moving' - the depiction of the Labour members being worn down was good 0 did 17 really die in the process - Great theatre -

New York Theatre – 2112

Tuesday

The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess

Let me ignore the music for a moment, heresy perhaps. The main point of interest was the story.

I never knew the story, let alone the novel and play that proceeded it or the controversy about its racism and sexism. Stupid me. I'd heard that Steven Sondheim had objected publicly to the changes being made in this new production, something about abandoning the tragic for a happy ending. I read that the revisers want to humanize Bess, I would guess so that she isn't so much a worthless, drug addled slut – is that too harsh – and more a woman in an abusive relationship, struggling with a serious drug problem. The revisers? Black women. Sounded delicious. However, never having seen the original, I had , and have, no basis to compare.

But let me make a couple of comments.

The grammar of the lyrics seems mocking – 'Bess, you *is* my woman' of the black illiterates. Why accentuate it. This hasn't changed. But I read that it comes right from the original novel written by a rich white anthropologist deliberately writing about and in the patois of cannery row folks he was studying. And Gershwin loved it and wrote for it.

The ending? Porgy's exit anthem did ring triumphant. He was 'on his way' ... to New York to get Bess back ... and good goddam ... he would get her! Tone was everything. I could easily image a more dirgeful rendering conveying a resigned Porgy soldiering on bravely to a lonely death. Is this what Sondheim meant? Anyhow, if this is supposedly a happy ending, it flashed right by.

Was Bess made over as a 'victim' instead of a sex crazed treacherous slut? Again, I never saw the original but I can see both readings. In what I saw I couldn't tell whether Bess was totally brutalized by Crown or bullied and then seduced. They were after all lovers of sort. And he does have a very sexy bass voice. Gotta watch it when the music fucks with the meaning. There is no hint whether she liked sex with Porgy or just feels safe with him and in the embrace of the good folks of the signing, dancing, laughing, loving cannery row community. Is the message feeling safe is not enough? Was the original message feeling safe is not enough if there are good times – sex or drugs – around the corner? I didn't feel sorry for Bess at the end but also thought her weak and worthy for leaving. She had a new home and friends etc. Crown was dead. Was the perceived jailing of Porgy really so severe to throw her back into addiction? The beautiful soprano wants to move to New York and get away from the plain folk? If Bess was ugly ... or didn't sing like a star ... would we give a moral second thought as she takes off for the bright

lights? Gotta watch it when the music fucks with the meaning. I wonder how the book and the play would seem. And Porgy? He seems a man of dignity at the end even if stupid optimistic. Is this a feminist revival that doesn't go far enough? Or an ill-conceived and failed attempt to change the meaning of something that is too entrenched in the story? Without studying the original texts, I do not know.

Most folks would say I'm thinking too hard. It's the music, stupid!

It was interesting to hear the whole show with all songs and choruses that didn't make it into the cast album. And there is a reason for that ... there is a lot of filler. The famous tunes from the sound track are so familiar in my head that I noted any change in phrasing or pitch. Sometimes the performance was as good, for a few moments better re some are better bits but the aggressive mike-ing detracted, often too loud, producing tininess and faint echo and sometimes muddling the voices and chorus. The urge to amplify is understandable but The Richard Rogers Theatre isn't that big to require the risks taken. Despite my pickiness it was good listening.

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Wednesday

Seminar by Theresa Rebeck

Here's a satisfying entertainment – a play about a writers' seminar gone very, very bad and then of course very, very good. It is play that has everything I like – except a little serious content. Four young would-be famous writers hire one (Alan Rickman) supposedly a great teacher, who turns out to be quite vicious to his students – to teach them to be successful writers, which of course means honesty ... searing truth, fresh voices, blah, blah, etc. It's all very accessible and funny. The five characters are cliché-enough to support the humour and their put downs are arch and endless. There is enough of a plot to carry the play to a conclusion - a hard won reconciliation / redemption. Finally ... the young frightened writer with thousands of pages of great novel in his bottom drawer that no one has seen , finally he discovers that the cynical old nasty has an even better buried masterpiece in his bottom drawer disproving the theory he's a no talent plagiarist and the young talent opens his heart to the tutelage and editorship of the old master - 'it'll be rough' and off they sail into the literary firmament over a bottle of scotch. Truly great talent will out, hopefully, maybe. Is it maudlin that sincere and talented young people find success, happiness and probably greatness? Or just unrealistic? Fuck realism – this is Broadway.

The text has lots of local references to the NYC writing scene and culture and so seem rooted. It's all good, very good. I enjoyed every minute. And yes, maybe I'm a sucker for this story.

What was missing? We learn very little about what the actual stories are *about*. So the message is ... it doesn't matter what you write about, it's the earnestness and truthfulness that matters. This is the writer's credo a la Hemmingway et al. But I think it is often a smokescreen for self-indulgence. I wanted to hear more content. One of the young writers ends up with a ghost writing gig. She's embarrassed but 'it's a start'. For her being a writer – whatever she's writing – was enough, almost.

Perhaps I shouldn't ask too much of an entertainment which does after all succeeds in many ways.

I left feeling great admiration for an excellent piece of writing which I would happily recommend to just about anyone. It is not *Amadeus* or *Salesman* or *Cat* or *Zasrotzzi* or *Poor Murderer*. But ... so what.

Richard III – Kevin Spacey

I'd never been to Brooklyn Academy of Music - BAM. The Harvey Theatre where this was produced, was neat – a ruined old vaudeville place, barely cleaned up, yet still crumbling. That was the best part.

Kevin Spacey can act, in the sense of emoting loudly, *a lot* of lines and carry on with enough pizzazz left over to have some fun with the part. In fact I would never have known it was the famous guy from the movies who is usually confiding regretfully, even sadly, quietly, into the camera and on some audio-perfect sound stage ... never would have known ... had I not been there precisely to see the famous guy from the movies. Good on Kevin, he has Shakespearean chops! As much I could tell the performance was not mike-ed and I could hear most of what most of actors said, sometimes not clearly, and everything Spacey said. Good for them, and him, in that barn of a theatre.

But ... it's about the fun he had, alas! His Richard was an exhibitionist vaudeville joker. He got the laughs he sought. . I left at half time. They stayed.

There are twenty-one lords of the realm in this text. I do not believe ten people in audience – the English history profs – followed the plot, other than ... bad Richard kills a lot of people including the innocent princes. Really, for the modern audience all there is ... ambitious Richard, bloody, bloody twisted Richard. This inability to follow the story was presumably not a problem for Shakespeare's audience. The meaninglessness of the story for the modern audience drives directors to turn Richard into some kind of cartoon villain. The more exaggerated the better.

I believe that Shakespeare's antique and difficult to follow language can be rendered (almost) completely intelligible by great diction and performance. When you experience this ... wow. It is

rare. And what a shame that Spacey who seems to have that rare talent, wasted the opportunity in this piece of shit.

Let me speculate. I think Spacey was attracted to the part of Richard for the same reason he chooses his usual stock characters, playing 'flat', sad, sympathetic, covert, depressives guys still trying to get somewhere, playing a bad hand, guys who give in and regret it. I think he plays ... Kevin Spacey. Never mind. Many great stars are great stars because they play themselves. And think this was the Richard that Kevin was attracted to. Richard resented being twisted and deformed and used and sadly gave in to his ambition and then revels in his fateful commitment. And tells us about it. Just like Spacey often does in his movies – talk to the audience about his regrets.

Ours is era which does not take to sad and serious villains. Give us irony or give me death. We can love a bloody killer as long as he makes us laugh. Alas ... and again I speculate ... after they signed him, somebody (bad) persuaded Kevin they needed to juice up the production. And Kevin gave into the vanity he could play exactly opposite to his normal shiht and the bad advice he should do this as Richard III. I think he has the voice and range and intelligence and disposition to perform a different and a more true Richard. It is a challenge devotedly to be wished. Alas poor Richard.

I have to believe the success of this production is based on the New York perversion of star power driving the big shows. If it weren't for Spacey's name this would not have an audience.

Yes, I am a sucker, much wiser now than then.

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Freud's Last Session

This is a seriously wonderful little play, 85 minutes, no intermission. The set is a delightful an intimate replication of Freud's famous office / library with a large selection from his collection of god-figurines and other ancient 'objets'. The studio sized theatre was a treat for an important show. My half price seat was front row. The actors were not mike-ed or shouting and never raced. The text is smart and insightful. Never felt so close to Freud in my life! When I went in he was interesting theory, when I came out he was real, interesting, courageous, edgy. I chatted briefly after with the actor who played Freud. I wanted then and there to tell him all my secret problems!

Freud, dying of lung cancer in London in 1939 (16 months after fleeing Vienna) invites Prof C.S. Lewis in for a visit to discuss ... God. Lewis was indeed an Oxford Professor at the time, literary criticism but had not yet written his famous *Narnia Chronicles* and had recently converted to

Christianity. The play is based on the supposition that these two famous scholars - with polar opposite views on God – met and this is what they said. The meeting might have actually happened. The conversation is imagined but based on Freud and Lewis' real work and beliefs. It is punctuated by listening to Chamberlain on the radio regretting Hitler's invasion of Poland – 'Gentlemen could have come to an honourable agreement' - then lamenting that war is now inevitable. A air raid siren goes and the characters panic – death is near. Freud coughs and almost chokes on the prosthesis in his mouth. Lewis 'saves' him

This is play that has the nerve not to be laugh-a-minute with a few in-character witticisms, nothing more.

Freud and Lewis talk and spar and argue with force, for and against the existence of God but always with dignity and considerable compassion for one another. Freud is an unrepentant atheist who chides Lewis for believing in fairy tales and creating a God to be the father he wished he had had. Freud's desk and office, famously, is filled with figurines of every ancient god going. He obviously loves god - as an object! Lewis scored on Freud for his denial of joy. Lewis argues that all the good in the world – and our rejection 'bad' – must come from somewhere and that must be God.

Freud is right but Lewis finishes ahead on points. No one is persuaded. And we go home.

The script and fine acting put these difficult ideas in the mouths and bodies of real people. Freud loves fart jokes. Lewis has forest fantasies. They pick at each other's sexual peculiarities. They are real people, who happen to be very smart. It was intense and thoroughly enjoyable.

The theatre was one of the five – count 'em – small theatres under the courtyard plaza of the massive office tower and condo complex call World Stages. Oh, New York.

Diego Rivera Murals at MOMA or How To Launder a Trotskyist

Rivera was brought to New York City in 1931 by MOMA to do some fresco murals on movable frames and John David Rockefeller to do a large mural for the Rockefeller Centre then under construction. Rivera did versions of five pieces previously produced in Mexico and the three more created in New York.

This small show has these five Mexican pieces and the three pieces done for MOMA and a lot of small support sketches and then a tiny bit about the large Rockefeller Centre mural that was eventually jack hammered off the wall. This is by far the more interesting story.

If you read the fine print on the wall you'll learn JDR Jr. didn't like it and had it covered over and later chiseled off. The exhibition catalogue is better on this. Rivera got to replicate – who knows how accurately – the mural on a wall in Mexico City. In the picture of that Lenin is plain. Is that

Trotsky in the background. Looks like! The supposed real problem was in the mural for the main lobby of Rockefeller's bank not only was Lenin prominent but there was the depiction of Rockefeller out drinking, during prohibition, which he disapproved. The picture in the Catalogue of the Mexican mural with Lenin in place but if that's J.D.R Jr. boozing in a brothel in the shaded background - I can't confirm. The Official title of the commission – and the piece – was "MAN AT THE CROSSROADS looking with uncertainty but hope and high vision to the choosing of a course leading to a new a better future". Who says the commies were the most clumsy propagandists in history! The show has no picture of the Rockefeller mural because, I gather, there are none. There is very tame preliminary sketch

At this point Rivera had set off the social realist mural craze around the world – except the US. He had been a celeb in Communist Russia in 1928 but then was kicked out of the Mexican Party for supporting Trotsky over Stalin. Hosting Trotsky in his home in Mexico and his assassination there was yet to come. Rivera was a major shit disturber.

The five, what they call 'murals', would not even be large paintings. They are in fact moveable frescos. Don't ask. The five from Mexico are described as "... a series of historical snapshots of Mexican power relations" pictures like soldiers slaughtering peasants and sugar plantation boss with whip supervise cane cutting. Rivera had a similar sense of irony. He called the picture of peasants wrapping the bound and whipped body of a co-worker, "The Liberation of the Peon".

The wall blurb goes on to describe Rivera in New York. "...the advanced industrialization ... exciting modern subjects And economic inequity ... an opportunity to scrutinize class and power." Yes, he scrutinized construction workers toiling with their pneumatic drills, electric power workers. The latter are seen ... where "[he] peeled back the façade [of the plant] to bring the workers – deep in the inner working – into the space of the viewer ... trailing cords and metal masks emphasizing the bonds between the machines and the workers who used them." The 'bonds'?

I liked Frozen Assets the best. New skyscrapers above reaching to the heavens, next level down, an underground shelter for the homeless with hundreds asleep and deeper still, the heavily guarded money vaults of the rich with – they say – John David Jr. counting his money. This one is hard to sanitize. The small print on the wall reads in part ..."the dispossessed labour that made such extraordinary growth possible ..."

Blessed be the lives of the rich – that their pillage and exploitation are now safe pictures at an exhibition and the rage of poor "historical snapshots of power relations."

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Russian Transport

Families are ... for playwrights to pick apart. The bad one are done on stage. The good one in T.V. sitcoms. It is the defining genre of talk theatre, from Electra and hers, to Hamlet and his, and core of the American theatre - O'Neil, Miller, Tennessee Williams Albee, Landford Wilson, August XXX and so many more. Our appetite for emotional gore is insatiable, to watch pop or sis ... or bro... go to pieces in two acts – and then dine out on it. What could possibly be new? How about a family of Russian immigrants in Sheepshead trying to climb out of, but sliding back into, the crime culture of the old country as the dream of the better middle class America ... goes down the sewer. Why not! Anything to get the folks stabbing each other in the back.

So ... in this new play sad dad runs a failing limo service from home. Driven mom does something unspecified, holds the family purse strings, tight and bosses the family. Fourteen year old Mira wants to go to Florence on a summer art course and big brother, Misha, who is actually little, holds down three jobs plus school. Nobody on stage has a mouth that couldn't use spoon full of soap. But they hang together. They care. Then mom's little brother Boris arrives from Russia for an extended visit. The one she raised as a baby. A hunk in a china shop. Before Act I is over Boris has Misha delivering teenage sex slave from the airport to the brothel, models they think, 'product' to Boris, prostitute sex slaves – surprise, surprise. By the end of Act II the family is in ruins. Great stuff. What's not to like.

Overall the performances were good, it felt like a family, the characters has life and purpose, maybe misguided, but never mind. I like the basic idea of the evil interloper from the old country bringing the family to emotional ruin, the family with the inescapable seeds of its own destruction. The stuff of great tragedy. But then, if it isn't one thing it's another.

But there are casting problems. Dad looks 55- 60. Mom has to be 45 to have these two almost adult children. But she looks thirty, some T.V. star I don't recognize. She gets almost all the smart ass lines, as the over – over protective mother. You sort of like the character, for being the glue in this immigrant family, until you don't like her. Kapow ... right in the kisser! ... when you learn in the penultimate scene that she's – or in on - in the sex trade with little brother. (How is never explained.)

The character, Boris, has to be thirty five plus, given his supposed time in jail and gangster experience in Russia but the actor, Morgan Spector, looks like a 25 year six-pack, old gym bunny, a body beautiful from the fitness mag. Boris changes his clothes on stage so often you might be tempted to slip a twenty into underwear. The New York Times story on Spector's star power advices 'don't miss him in his underwear'. I'm pretty sure the next time you see Morgan it will be in a Marvel movie. Sex appeal and muscle is a legit part of this story but enough already. I'll blame the director but who really knows. By the way, incidentally, and because you may not notice, Morgan can act and his Russian accent had me going. There was a lot of Russian spoken which I couldn't understand but it did not detract but rather gave authenticity,

alas probably based on the subconscious bigotry that all Russians are corrupt. No surprise, the children speak idiomatic American slang and they are the ones we feel sorry for.

Some muscle menace on son Misha works well. The kid caves ... because dad is a wuss, one suspects. And ... turns out ... dad is a wuss. And Boris' big guy sex appeal is presumably useful in the sex trade. He deploys same on 14 year old Mira with cynical intent. Spector rings true as the bully who quietly threatens and cajoles the teenagers. He is excellent at the covert verbal menace, scaring the shit out of the kids in quiet sessions of big brother 'advice'. He handles his gun with delightful understated menace. It's all very natural for Boris and, it seems actor Spector. But it's all too easy and that's a problem for the drama. He speaks harshly only once. There is no fire. The director and writer probably thought this was restrained, understated and eloquent. I thought they were slip-sliding toward boring ... thankfully though not quite there.

The problem is the performances are better than the writing. I don't know to blame the first time writer for this. Who knows if she had any power vis-à-vis the director? The moments of wreckage are dramatically slight, too quick and too quiet. When the evil uncle, the sexual slaver, rapes, sort of, Mira the naïve - no, not naïve ... innocent - fourteen year old, it a not much more than unwelcome tumble on the bed. In the film version of *Cat Stanley's* rape of XX is similarly toned down visually but there is nothing toned down about Brando. Somebody struggle, shout, anything, please. You got a high mountain to climb here! Where is Stanley Kawolski when we really need him! Here I am - complaining that the sex assault was tepid! The play they've presented is for high school matinees.

Or, the big moment, when mother is exposes as an accomplice in Boris' sex ring and her overprotective bitchiness to her daughter is caught in the headlights ... and daughter Mira is Finally free of ... and free to hate her mother. This is good but gone too quickly. The only character for whom the tragedy was played out in slow nuanced and grandly tragic way was the son, striving to make good in America and getting sucked into the criminal world his parent tried to leave behind. Betrayed by them. But, again, the dénouement ... father and son reconciled by a touch as the lights fade but trapped in their failed lives ... was all to brief. And flat.

There were a number problems with the narrative, events, things that happened off stage, that were explained poorly, for example, dad getting beat up, did that have something to do with Boris, and exactly what was mom doing in the sex slave trade, or is just that she knew what Boris was up to. And when? Did she know from the start or did she give in to his sex appeal or bullying? A rich vein un-mined. On a superficial viewing the show seems to escape these linear

logic problems. But only seems. They bespeak the real violence, which the script needs, and which has moved off stage and garbled.

This was an attempt at grand tragedy set in an immigrant family. The opportunity was rich. One is tempted to say Spector had too much sexual charisma for this script and they should have hired an actor not so gorgeous and so we got something better than soap opera but not a lot. But no. That's cop out answer. They should have beefed up the script and let it roar. The raw material is there. Nobody ever complained that Brando was too good looking to play Stanley.

Saturday

Matinee - How I Learned To Drive

I chose this remount of the 1998 Pulitzer prize-winner because ... it was a big prize winner that I have never seen. No surprise the subject matter is sex abuse – the most popular subject matter of the era, one I usually hate hearing about it – enough already - but this was good.

It is nuanced portrait of the burning issue of the age. Uncle Peck obsession for his nubile 13 year olds niece, Lit'l Bit, is sad and right out of Playboy. There is no violence, indeed an excessive gentlemanly respect for the 'young lady'. Nothing you don't want, little lady'. There is no penetration ... he comes in pants once with Lit'l Bit on lap in a driving lesson. Lit'l Bit is a girl who matures early, she is beautiful but extremely self-conscious about her big boobs. She is not above playing the vixen on occasion. Uncle is indeed the only male in her world who treats her as an adult. If it weren't for the sex we would probably think he was great to her. The part is played with skill and for sympathy. Good for the director for allowing that. He's just a guy who really, really likes beautiful young girls with big boobs, a common enough male thing. Unfortunately the ones closest are on his niece who is thirteen. Lit'l bit's redneck family is played for laughs but there is no missing how they have failed her. There is no dad and given her pig granddad that is probably a good thing. And there are indeed times it seems she is in control – despite the feminist claim that is not possible. And in the end she dumps him, he goes back to drink and dies.

The scenes do jump around chronologically from the earliest pubescent anxiety and come on and grooming to the later sex escapades at college. Sex and sexual feelings at these two different ages is different although I'm sure there are those who think – especially for uncle – there is no difference. Is there manipulation by equating the one with the other? I didn't think so.

Lit'l survives and looking back, with lyric understanding. It is grist – it is how she learned to drive.

I suspect it had a lot more punch 15 years ago. Back then I wonder if it came across so even handed? Now I admire the acting and the production of a somewhat dated period piece beautifully performed by 2econd Stage.

Evening

Sleep No More – Punchdrunk Theatre Co at The McKittrick Hotel

They call 'emersive' theatre. If you need one word, that'll do. A bit of 'happening', an art installation, modern dance, a haunted house for the hip, a 20s speakeasy, and supposedly a deeper reading of Macbeth.

The space is very dark. You can't talk. There are no words. There are three floors - maybe four – I got lost - of rooms, halls, performance spaces, stairs, filled with stuff, old filing cabinets, 19th century detective offices, candy stores, orphanage, mental asylum, books, notes, bathtubs, forest labyrinths, stuffed birds ... you name it. You wear a carnival mask. You come upon characters here and there, fighting, washing off the blood, banqueting in the stage smoke, getting barbered – no rhyme or reason where or when. They tell you to wander and explore, or follow a performer. I was never bored for three hours. The only hint ... hint ... of Macbeth that I recognized was the (nude) guy in the bathtub getting washed by the nude chick who then went nuts in a box. Apparently it evolves later to a dance party. We didn't stay. I was hungry. As a hipster – I'm pathetic.

This not a place for those who crave or need linear logic or who prefer order over chaos. It is unforgettable and great fun. Get in there if you have a chance.

What more can I say? Dinner was excellent.