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Portrait of An Artist Part 3: With Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon

“The sonnet is not being very complimentary is it?” asked Paul Edmondson as we worked through sonnet 127 together. But this is not a one-on-one session. No, that would be much less intimidating. Instead, I find myself at the center of a circle outlined by fourteen other pairs of eyes fixed on me, all of them just as concentrated on me as mine are on the page before me. These eyes lock me into a situation where there is literally no escape. Wherever I turn, at least one pair of eyes creep behind my back while multiple other pairs hold me still with their overwhelming interest and desire to provide support. Even when this is a group of students who I know best, a company with whom I have created work since this past September, they seem like strangers all of a sudden. I have never felt so exposed before, not even on stage when I have a large audience before me. This intimate environment where you see everyone vis-à-vis and everyone sees you in that regard as well. With an audience, a majority of the “seeing” gets done by the audience, and the actors are often placed into a situation that they have to focus on. The explanation of the situation by the actors, and that done well, in my experience as an audience, is a majority of what is required of the actors to draw me in. But reciting fourteen concise lines of poetry capturing an essence of life, producing those meaningful sounds in that silenced air of intimacy, requires a lot more courage than performing “As an imperfect actor on the stage” (sonnet 23, line 1).

The focused channel of energy my company members send my way intimidates me to a point where I become almost speechless. Knowing the open availability of that unconditional support scares me. Partly my fear is also because of the intimacy of not

only the situation, but also of the sonnet itself. In the center of that circle, I am not standing as an actor, I am not participating in a scene with lines I have memorized, but I am standing as myself, giving my own interpretation to a work of art. I cannot be selfish. I must be generous with what I consider important and share part of myself with the group. So, after taking in the room, I accustomed myself to the heightened state of emotions I was placed in, I was able to refocus my attention to the page I have been staring at, the page that I have not processed. Under Paul's guide, the meaning of sonnet 127 jumped out at me. I understood the text, what Shakespeare has to say about *black* and *beauty*. I suddenly thought back to a time my own experience when I found someone beautiful even though he may go against the standards of beauty in the culture and society I live in. Pronouncing the key words in the sonnet: *fair, successive heir, bastard shame, fairing the foul, sweet beauty hath no name, disgrace...* makes me see my own anger in that experience to why others do not see the beauty in him, as I do. My frustration that they abide to a standard of beauty that I consider twisted and wrong. After improving my understanding with Paul, I returned to my spot on the perimeter of the circle as someone else in the group got up again to have their personal connection with the sonnets they chose. I found myself returning to the page of sonnet 127 later that day. I started again, "In the old age, black was not counted fair..."

This time, a different picture from my past became visible and clear. So the experience starts again.

After such an intimate experience, we attended an event grander in scale that night: we saw Twelfth Night performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre has rows of seats near the stage, on multiple balconies and multiple

levels. It is a big theatre and it has, to match its grandeur, a big stage. It was one of the largest sets I have ever seen with a tank of water attached to one of the corners of the stage closest to the audience. Upstage was a slanted vertical wooden board, attached on which were a bed, a bathtub and various other items one would find in a home. Having had a background talk that morning about the plot and main themes of *Twelfth Night*, the set screams to me the elements discussed that morning. Spaces were not well-defined, eliciting the concepts of confusion that Viola and Sebastian experience when their identities become hidden, mistaken or changed as the result of the shipwreck. Duke Orsino's abode does not differ from that of Lady Olivia's—in fact, they share the same space. There are no clear lines drawn between different rooms that exist in the play, but are all mixed in on one stage with furniture, cabinets, wine bottles here and there. However, the separation of the twin siblings also get well expressed on the set when there are pieces from which one can only draw one set of associations. For example, the framed portrait, flowers and candles on a cabinet that can only act as a symbol for Olivia's mourning for the death of her brother. But on the other hand, there are set pieces that are looser with their connections. The strongest example of which is the tank of water that is part of the stage. The ocean bears many associations, as it is a place of love and fertility as well as one of destruction and terror. For Viola and Sebastian, the ocean has created a separation in the beginning of the play, while it also has helped them find their loves separately on the shores of Illyria.

The set gave life to many of these links throughout the course of the play as well. In some anxious slumber, the audience awoke with the moment when Viola swims up from the tank of water onto the wooden tiles on stage, gasping for breath. We see the

desperation in her struggle for air, fighting against the ocean's destructive powers, its merciless desire for her mortality. In the ensuing scene, Sebastian rises up and out of the water the same way, and this time left in a slumber on shore as the scene continues with other characters further upstage. Even when Sebastian has entered into the complicated network of connections in Illyria, the tank of water still remains at the forefront of the stage. I could not forget its existence. I was not able to disregard the powerful presence of that clear sea of blue, with all its powerful symbolism. For Olivia, when her full body of black matching that indicates her state of mourning lasted. But when she changed into white garments for her wedding with Sebastian, when she ripped herself from her state of mourning, the portrait for her brother were still there on the cabinet. That reality still exists. Seeing this play makes me think beyond that of the actors' acting, the plot of the play, but even more so the big human bonds that form the roots of this play. The beautiful, lyrical language is grounded in the inevitability of events and the undeniable presence of certain states. That for me is a big realization on this trip. The reason why Shakespeare lasts as long as it does is because he grounds his characters, his situations, his sonnets in emotions and truths that are undeniably human.

I come back to my work in Theatre 3 now with a fresh pair of eyes. I search beyond the musical lines to human truths, because even though I connect to harmonic sounds, I connect most with the essences that help me understand the intricacies of my existence as a human being.

Stratford

J. Toussaint

When I was first told about the Stratford trip, I didn't know what to expect. I had never been to Europe before, let alone England. I heard only good things about this trip, so my expectations couldn't have been higher, and yet this trip went above and beyond in so many different ways. Not only being submersed in an entirely new culture, but also the people I experienced it with really made it one of the best trips of my entire life.

The plane ride over to the UK was one of the longest plane rides I've ever taken; however it felt like the shortest. Much to the dismay of my classmates and plane-mates alike, a couple friends and I stayed up the entire aerial voyage playing games of "would you rather." Needless to say, by the time we all ventured off of the plane, the majority of us were ridiculously tired, yet also excited for what lay ahead of us. In the airport, it could have been anywhere English-speaking country in the world. I have a hard time believing that I am in a new place until I step outside, smell the fresh air, and take in the environment personally. Even when we went outside to wait for our bus, it felt strangely familiar. Not too different from an American airport yet. My first dose of culture shock must have come when we were driving in the bus. The idea of vehicles with steering wheels on the right side traveling on the left side of the road seemed utterly perplexing to me. The amount of disorientation from that alone was enough to last me the entire trip. The small guesthouse where we stayed, The Quilts and Croissants, was not at all what I expected. Rather than a single floor hotel/dorm complex, it was literally a house— A

fairly thin three-floor home. From there we embarked on our first day of adventuring in Stratford Upon-Avon, and it only got better from there.

I didn't know how good the trip was going to be until after I saw my first play put on by the Royal Shakespeare Company. The mere idea of seeing a play produced by the best Shakespearian actors in the entire world was almost too much to handle. Seeing *A Comedy of Errors* changed my whole outlook on life. The hilarity the company was able to muster from the old text was astounding. Even though it was in an old-style of language that should have been very difficult if not nearly impossible at times to understand, I perfectly understood every single word. This remained true for the two plays which followed, *Twelfth Night* and *Richard III*. The Day that followed seeing *A Comedy of Errors* was a game changer in the sense that everything got better from that point on. Now that we had been on the trip two or three days, we had a good hold on the land, knew all the people, and could more easily maneuver the streets of Stratford. But the most important thing that day by far, was getting to talk to Nick Day. He answered all our question in such a cool and relaxed way that I instantly loved him. Most of the other kids wanted characters with bigger roles, like the Dromios, to come in and talk, but the whole time I secretly hoped that it would be the actor who played Aegean. Nick day astounded me with not only his charm, but also his sense of style. Never before had I ever seen someone pull off a thin blue/white striped undershirt with a dark blue sweater, blue red and gray patterned scarf, navy blue shorts, and cross

Of course I had to ask Mr. Day about his scarf, and where I could find one for myself. Somehow, he knew exactly where he got it, and when I could purchase my own. Every Friday morning a market opened up in the center of town that had dozens of tents each selling their own cultured goods. Mr. Day told us that at one of these tents would be the scarf tent, and carry said scarves. We waited around 3 days or so until finally Friday came and we were able to venture into the marketplace. As soon as we reached the scarf shack, I quickly grabbed the last remaining 'Nick Day' style scarf. My roommate was able to sieve through the scarves and find the absolute last Nick Day scarf. The scarf became a legacy and was one of the most rewarding things I take back from the trip. In terms of material items, I also loved going to the Tate modern museum in London. From there I brought back nothing more than a book. A book named Goliath. It sounds simple, and it really is. I was able to read the entire graphic novel before purchasing it, but even then the book astounds me. It writes about the kinds of things I would, in the exact same style I would. Just from reading it, I got visions and ideas for all kinds of artistic works involving the plot and premise of that book. Aside from those, I cherish deeply my autographed program. Let it be known once and forever that it was only through the kindness in Nick Day's heart that all my dreams and hopes and expectations for the trip were met and then blown past. Going backstage with him was more than I could have ever asked for in my entire life. Talking backstage with Solomon Israel and Balthazar turned out to be the best and most memorable night of my life. And I owe it all to Nicolas Day.

Friday Night, while watching Richard III, I felt a weird connection to the character. It's not that I liked him, but every time something in Richard's plan went right, a smile spread across my face. I saw Richard as someone who was so good at what they did; they wouldn't let anyone get in their way. Perhaps killing children is a step or two too far, but I'll admit that it's not something I could not. In no way to I agree or condone the actions of Richard III in Shakespeare's great play Richard III, however I was impressed by how skillful Richard was at what he did. Successfully wooing a woman into bed with you when you just killed her husband? Unlikely? Yes. Fictional? Very Possible. Impressive? No doubt. Richard is a character who did whatever it took to get what he wants. If only for the reason that I am unable to do that, I envied him. The death of Richard didn't make me sad however, and I was frankly surprised. Watching my beloved malevolent king stabbed to death on stage should have made my heart drop. But instead, I got a weird feeling that just one more major player had been taken out.

Because the members of Theater 3 had already grown so close together, I actually didn't feel that I formed stronger friendships with anyone in the group. I kept the same strong bond I had just a week before seeing Twelfth Night and eating at Moo Moo's every day. There's no group of people I would have rather spent a trip to England with.

Stratford Theatre 3 Company Response

My name is Oyinlola O. or better known as Lola among my peers in Concord Academy's Theatre 3 Company. Visiting Stratford was the first time I've ever set foot in Europe, so I was immediately excited. As soon as we got off the plane, we immediately started sightseeing around Stratford going to New House, Hall's Croft, the Holy Trinity Church and Shakespeare's birthplace. The next day, our first class at the Shakespeare Centre, we got a preview of Comedy of Errors. Out of all three plays at the Royal Shakespeare, Comedy of Errors was my favorite. It was my first time watching all three productions of those Shakespeare. Nick Walton started us off with comic strips to get a general idea of the play and showed us how Shakespeare's different themes and idea invite creativity. It was very interesting to see the different reproductions of Shakespeare and what elements of the play people decide to emphasize. As for me, Comedy of Errors was light hearted and funny. The Dromios did such an amazing job. Their small gestures and facial expression project the humor and emotion of the play. The director took a modern and contemporary approach by using a shipyard as the basis of the play, which I really liked. It was a good idea to use the shipyard because there was something mechanical about it especially with the use of the crane. After the play, everyone had a positive consensus of the play. We all agreed that Dr. Pinch didn't sell his evil enough and that the reunion of both sets of twins felt rushed. Having a Q&A Session with Nick Day, the actor who played Egeon, opened my eyes to the regular day-to-day experience for an actor. His advice of staying true to text and not having a need for background was inspiring. Nick Day was such a welcoming person. He showed us around backstage, his

dressing room, introduced us to his actors and showed us his apartment. He gave us all an inside view of what it's like to be an actor as a career.

A class I enjoyed was the RSC Voice Class. We all stood in a circle reading various soliloquies from Comedy of Errors and touching our shoulder on the first word. We learned to find our voice with the text and develop our voices as actors. Touching each other's shoulders allowed us to send the energy and not drop the ball. It also helped us not to ignore the lines the Shakespeare provided us. Stopping at the punctuation helped us to get the feel of the language. I realized the importance of punctuation, especially in soliloquies. Punctuation definitely helped to know where to stop and start, take a moment to think, pause and take a breath, emphasize certain words to trickle into the audiences' minds. One of our exercises was to get hyperactive and repeat some statements with our partners. I loved this part because the repetition made the words stronger and emphasized the punctuation. Our instructor made us aware of our punctuation by walking and stopping at each comma.

Our one-day adventure to London was exquisite. When we arrived, our adventure started with the Globe Theatre. Before our tour, we explored the history of the theatre and its location. The Globe Theatre was an important place in London during Shakespeare time. Everyone from aristocratic people to merchants wanted to catch a glimpse of Shakespeare's work. I was able to watch little movies about the significance of the costumes and dressing the men for plays. I listened to people reciting sonnets and famous lines from various plays. During the tour, I learned about the making of the Globe Theatre, and the seating structure of the aristocrats and merchants. After the tour, we saw the different companies and people who contributed to the making of the new Globe

Theatre. It's nice to know that people are very supportive to the revival of where Shakespeare's career started. After the Globe Theatre, we next door to the Tate Museum. The Tate was unlike any other Museum I've been to. It had so many different and exquisite pieces; everything from simple to complex, cubism, bright flashing words, silent movies and a red staircase that filled up the whole room. The Tate helped me look at art in a different way. What if we took these simple pieces and put them outside instead of in a famous museum? Would the significance or the meaning change? How will non-museum people perceive it? After the Tate, we walked along the bank side of the river watching street performers, seeing the London Eye and stopping to read some UK classics. We visited Westminster Abbey that contains all of England's history and finished the day by having a group dinner.

The trip to Stratford helped me to bond more with the Company as well learning so many new things in that one week. Even though those are the three most memorable things about the trip, I loved staying in our guesthouses forming a bond with Kate, our host. I enjoyed walking around town, visiting the UK version of Claire's, Accessorize, and getting late night Fish 'n' Chips. In the end, my one week Stratford was an educational and fun trip.

Connor M.

3/30/12

My Week With Will

Let me preface this writing by saying that my entire life I had not been able to see why William Shakespeare was as famous and world renowned as he is. I believed that all of his works of poetry and stage shows were inaccessible for the modern audience with all of its complicated old English. Needless to say when I learned that Concord Academy's theatre company would be basing their show off of Shakespearean sonnets, I was not extremely enthusiastic. That was before my trip to Stratford Upon Avon. Being able to learn from some of the top Shakespearean academics and actors in the world has completely opened my mind up to works that I once had written off in my mind. It's crazy how one week of experiences can alter one's mindset completely about a certain topic, but I guess that's just the magic of Shakespeare.

Our first morning at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was weird for me. I had no idea what to expect and was not too amped to be spending a week of my vacation hearing about text that I could not decipher. My groans were only amplified when I learned the first thing we would be talking about for the entire morning would be *The Comedy of Errors*, a Shakespearean comedy and one of his earlier works. Our lecturer Nick passed out a comic strip explaining the confusing plot of two sets of twins separated in a shipwreck and all the ensuing chaos that arises when they enter each others lives.

Looking at this humorous explanation really made me lighten up about the upcoming show, to my shock and awe. I began to realize that with Shakespeare and other older play writers one must educate themselves of the plot, characters, and themes before attending the show in order to be able to appreciate it for what it is, a masterfully written work of performing art. *The Comedy of Errors* turned out to be the most enjoyable Shakespearean play I had seen in my short life, mostly because it was so accessible and I could actually understand what was happening with the background information I had collected the morning before. One day had completely changed my mindset towards the complicated shows of William Shakespeare and my entire work in England altogether.

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
But as the ripper should by time decease,
His tender heir might bear his memory:
But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,
Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.
Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament
And only herald to the gaudy spring,
Within thine own bud buriest thy content
And, tender churl, makest waste in niggarding.
Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

The most memorable experience that I have ever had in my artistic life occurred when I was able to work Sonnet 1 in Shakespeare's collection with the scholar we referred to as "Paul the Priest" one afternoon at the Birthplace. Having barely committed the sonnet to memory, I got the opportunity to go one on one with an extremely experienced and learned scholar. I had never actually thought about what the words in this sonnet meant, the poetry side of performing arts had always seemed so much more complicated than simply acting in character. It didn't really hit me the amazing experience I just had with Paul the Priest until we began working with our new partners in preparation for our show, *Volta*. For our show, we need to find ways to make the text come alive, to show through our physical actions the message of the sonnets at our disposal. I am sure many people feel the same way I do about Shakespearean writings to be challenging and hard to access, which makes us company members job to make the poetry come alive in a way that is comprehensible for all. If that goal can be met, this entire process and experience will be worth it.

While I personally love acting onstage, I have never really been able to get into plays besides a chuckle or two during a comedy. That was before Friday night, when I got the absolute pleasure of seeing Richard III in the Swan Theatre at the RSC. The two previous shows we saw in England were shorter, lighter comedies so when I heard Richard was one of Shakespeare's longest tragedies I didn't know if I would really enjoy it. Earlier in the day our lecturer stated that the shows quality would be only as good as the actor playing Richard, so as soon as he made his entrance I was completely fixated on every word he spoke. For the first time ever, I was truly hinging on every word a character was saying onstage. Being front row for his monologues, literally seeing the

spit fly off of his lips, I was completely overcome and lost all sense of emotional control. I laughed, I cried, I truly experienced a change in my mind all through the brilliant performance of one man. The perfect performance, to top off an amazing week of realization and enlightenment.

Chris McM.

3/26/12

Theatre 3

Chapter III: Reflections on Stratford Trip

The first day in Stratford, fighting jet lag and no sleep, we were able to follow nearly all of Shakespeare's life. We walked from his birth house, including the room in which he was born, to the house he purchased upon his return to Stratford, all the way to his final resting place in Trinity Church. In a few short hours we saw some of the most important landmarks in the life of possibly the greatest writer of all time. This was something that I never expected to be able to do, and taught me so much more about humble beginnings. Shakespeare came from essentially nothing, a two room house in the middle of the English countryside, and became very successful during his life, but he has only become more notable after his death. For example, during our trip to Westminster Abbey, they had a plaque to commemorate Shakespeare, but upon his death he had not gained the notoriety to earn a place in the Abbey.

Another thing that really struck me about the trip, probably the most out of anything was the scale and performances of the productions. From the two light-hearted comedies we saw in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre to the incredibly emotionally draining performance of Richard III in the Swan, we saw a wide variety of scale and performance techniques. The lavish set present in Twelfth Night stuck with me the most. The amount of careful planning and money that went into the water tank astounded me. That was one of the most striking pieces of theatre that I have ever seen. From my

vantage point I was able to see Sebastian shoot out from underneath the stage before he emerged above the water, and that only made my experience that much more powerful.

In contrast to the lavishness of the Twelfth Night and Comedy of Errors' sets, the Richard III appeared extremely simple, but was deceptively complex and elegant. When I walked into Richard II I was remembering Twelfth Night the night before, and my first thought was "Oh, this is it?" in response to the set, but as the play progressed, it made sense to me. Richard was a play deeply about the character not the situation or the surroundings. It truly is a character study; we follow the tragic rise and fall of a tyrant. The Comedy of Errors especially is more about the situations that the characters find themselves in than the characters themselves. A lavish set and complex staging was important to keep the audience engaged, but in Richard, the only thing necessary were the power of the language and the commanding performance of the actor playing Richard.

Although most of the things we did were extremely enlightening to me, the most influential thing was the relationship the group formed with one of the actors, Nicholas Day. He came to talk to us for a talk back about his performance in The Comedy of Errors, and due to mutual interests and ideologies, a strong relationship was formed. He knew that we were seeing Twelfth Night later in the week and he offered to show us around backstage after the performance. I did not expect this to actually happen, but alas, it did. Being able to see the backstage and the dressing rooms for the actors was a very enlightening experience as to how elaborate and complicated professional theatres could be. It was also an unbelievable moment to be able to tour with the man who I had just seen on stage mere moments before.

Another one of the most interesting things for me was the garden of sculptures next to the site of New Place. Each sculpture was based on a different Shakespeare play. They were abstract, yet once you realized the play, they made perfect sense. A few of my friends and I went around to each sculpture and tried to guess what plays the sculptures were based on. We got a couple correct, and a few wrong. The most perplexing one was the *Macbeth* sculpture. It contained several disembodied heads and swords sticking out of several bodies. We spent nearly 20 minutes looking at this sculpture, perplexed by what play it could signify. Out of any Shakespeare, this is the play that I know the best, and also the last statue we saw. I had been waiting for the *Macbeth* sculpture the entire time, but still I didn't believe that this was the *Macbeth* sculpture. However, as I look back on it now, as I remember it, the faces represent the witches, and the sword was actually a dagger. I had never really seen art based on plays before, even something as vivid and emotive as Shakespeare.

The last thing that I would like to focus on was the voice class. This was one of two RSC workshops we had, the other being a wig and makeup demonstration. The voice class was extremely helpful in my thinking about Shakespeare. The emphasis on diction and punctuation in Shakespeare's verse is extremely important, and more important than I had previously realized. The class was spent doing various activities surrounding enunciation and syntax in various monologues. All of the monologues were selections from *The Comedy of Errors*, which was a valuable experience. Being able to see the monologues performed then having an opportunity to perform them ourselves and in our own way. That is one of the greatest things about Shakespeare's plays and poetry, that the beauty truly is in the eye of the beholder.

Jazmin L.

Theatre 3 Company

Portrait of the Artist – Trip to England

When I try to describe the emotions and feelings I get when I think of my time at England there is a whirlwind of myriad responses. There isn't one word, or action that could fully describe my gratification towards the trip to England, and all the memories made there. I don't think I can replicate in words everything that comes to mind about how much I gained from my experience in Stratford, learning about Shakespeare and his life, his work and his art. I became much more appreciative of how much of a genius Shakespeare was through learning about the atmosphere he lived in, the people he worked with, the places he went to, and the plays he wrote. Watching the three plays in the one week that we stayed in Stratford, I was so delighted about how beautiful, how theatrical, and how poetic these plays were. From laughing till I cried in the Comedy of Errors, to deeply analyzing the text as it was performed in Richard III, I truly enjoyed each of the performances we saw. But probably the most exciting part of the trip to Stratford was being able to work with the many Shakespearean professionals, from hearing them talk to us about their personal experiences, to the workshops; I was amazed by their extreme fervor and passion for what they were preaching to us. Whether it was focusing on vocalizing, or sonnet work I was motivated each day to work harder, participate more, and really communicate and share with one another. From hearing Nick Day, a professional Shakespearean actor, talk about his profession and the many things he learns from every new performance was astonishing. He told us what he specifically found important when acting and processing Shakespeare's language; he was very blunt

and honest, which I really appreciated. It was also really nice to see how the actors of the Royal Shakespeare Company were very open to talking to us after their shows, and really give us the laydown on the performances. Back here I don't think I could've gone backstage and into the dress rooms as we did at the RSC. It was such an amazing experience. Seeing how professional theatre was managed, how actors retrieved their props, to understanding how to use the set I was awed when we got to go to Nick Day's dressing room and the costume and makeup rooms. It felt as though we were taking a peek in these actors' fortress or acting domain. I felt as though I understood how this theatre company managed to work with all these things to create a work of art. What also intrigued me were the small techniques these actors took to assimilate a specific emotion or fully execute the portrayal of a specific behavior on stage. For example, in Twelfth Night, Nick Day told us that in order for him to burp on stage during his drunk scenes, he actually had to drink three coca-colas, as he could not fake burp.

Going to London was another unforgettable day for me. I had never been to London, to England for that matter, and I was extremely anxious to know what this place was like. Would it live up to what some of my peers were saying? Yes, it did live up to that. Once I saw the beautiful bridges and walkways, to the Big Ben and Westminster Abbey I was convinced. But that isn't all that brought me to joy in London. When we visited the Tate and the Reconstructed Globe Theatre I became giddy with happiness. Not only do I love art museums, but I was probably at one of the most renowned contemporary art museums in the world. I saw some of the most interesting art works and installations in the Tate that really got my thinking. This might seem kind of nerdy or strange, but as I was with a few of peers, Abby and I wandered off to other exhibitions.

We saw this large piece on the ground, which resembled a large square metal checkerboard, which was black and grey. We decided that it would be fun to both recite our sonnets, out loud, following some type of walking pattern on this metal slab. Not only was this exercise fun, and called the attention of many eyes, but I felt a true connection to Shakespeare's language. After all the hard work analyzing his sonnets and plays, I truly was connecting to Shakespeare's language. His words were now truly engrained in me, and now I could bring him with me everywhere. Making this realization I began to recite my sonnets more often with the members of the theatre company and they would reciprocate with a sonnet of their own. As I remember our trip to Warwick Castle, I remember that every member from the Theatre 3 Company began to recite their sonnet, when we were all the way at the top of the castle, and it was a moment of such serenity and acknowledgment.

Walking inside the Reconstructed Globe Theatre I could not contain my oos and awes. At the moment I felt as though I was star struck. Walking around the theatre and looking at where people sat, trying to imagine how it felt to watch a performance here, I was taken over by the strong emotions I felt being here. We had a tour guide, and at times, guides could be annoying, but how could I be bothered by this small woman lecturing to us about the theatre and how the performances were heard, when she held so much passion in her voice. I felt the pride in her when she spoke about conservation efforts to keep the theatre alive, after so many years. Sitting in the Globe Theatre, looking out in the emptiness, I felt a sort of numbness run through my body. I thought to myself "this is where the old and real Globe theatre stood one day, and it looked almost exactly as this." Not only was the architecture of this space beautiful and enthralling, but it held

an honest intimacy I had not experienced in a theatre before. The one thing I had wished we done was walk on the stage and really explore the intricately painted pillars and back wall of the stage, the exits, and everything in between. I wanted to feel for a moment how it would be like if I had all these 1000 pairs of eyes looking straight at me, as the shape of the theatre made it possible for everyone to see.

I don't think there has a trip where I have felt so in connection with everything around me, from understanding the importance of the Shakespearean culture, to living and breathing his words wherever we went. All I know is that someday I will go back, there is so much more to see!

David H. L.

Setting foot in the same church where Shakespeare was baptized, where Shakespeare was married, and where Shakespeare is buried was startling for me. Being in the place that bookmarked the beginning, middle, and end of the life of the enigmatic man with the quill suddenly struck a chord in me that resonated in the ancient halls of the building. It was there, by the bones of the man who shaped our language and our perceptions of art where something in me clicked and it suddenly hit me that Shakespeare was a real person. I remember numbly mouthing to myself the peculiar verse on the bard's grave beside the baptismal font and before the gorgeous stained glass of the Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. I began to realize that Shakespeare was human just as the rest of us are; he was a man with his own hopes, fears, and personal failures. Yet here I was reading psalm 46 in the Book of Common Prayer in the display case by the grave. Four hundred years later I was yet another pilgrim in awe at the man buried before me.

This year was the second time I have gone with a group on this trip, and it was the second time I went into the Trinity Church. It still felt strange that there was a skeleton a few feet in front of and under me that belonged to Shakespeare. It still fazed me that there once was a human Shakespeare and not the spirit Shakespeare that is omnipresent in today's theater. This is an idea I'm still trying to internalize, and the manner in which Shakespeare and his works are handled today sometimes make it difficult for me to

grapple with the idea of someone sitting down and writing and rewriting these plays which are, like everything else, imperfect in so many small ways.

In contrast to the first time I had gone on this trip, this year I had the great pleasure of going inside the Westminster Abbey during our one day expedition in London. Only a handful of our group opted to pay the six pounds entrance fee, and even then we only got to stay for under an hour, but I could have wandered around in the abbey for days if given the chance. Everything was gorgeous – it was nigh impossible to believe that human beings had built this place with human hands. Everything looked as though it had risen up from the ground with an exultant sigh the day the Earth was born. Furthermore I cannot even begin to imagine being one of the order of monks who actually lived in the original abbey for hundreds of years. I regret strongly not being able to find every altar and plaque, but the chapels and graves I saw were more than enough to take my breath away. The Poet's Corner was a bizarre experience for me. There I was standing over Kipling, Tennyson, Dickens, Byron, Hopkins, Browning, Olivier, and on and on. Just one of these people would have been enough to excite me, but with all of them in one place I was stunned. I felt like I was standing six feet above the greatest possible conversations between dozens of English geniuses. I'd say the crowning moment of the time I spent in the abbey was on the way out when I friend pointed out to me the grave of David Livingstone on the floor. Though probably incredibly far removed from me in terms of blood, I do share his name and clan and I have long celebrated his life and achievements.

Beyond the site seeing and historical monuments, what really makes this trip unreal in its brilliance is the opportunity to see three back to back RSC productions. Both

years I have been delighted and astonished by the professionalism, the relatability, the talent and the finesse of these shows. The two comedies I saw this year were marvels of physical humor and punning, each balancing humor with darkness and light-hearted fare with intense meaning. These two plays, comedy of Errors and Twelfth Night, fit surprisingly well with Richard III, a play rather displaced from that genre. Seeing Richard III made me reconsider everything from my definition of evil to my tastes in stagecraft. And if that night wasn't already marvelous enough, our group was invited to tour the RSC backstage area with Nicholas Day – an RSC actor playing Sir Toby Belch and Aegion. During the tour he allowed us to quietly ask him questions, so as he held a door for us I asked him if it ever blew his mind that he was in the Royal Shakespeare Company, he looked at me and said “I'd rather be here right now, having just done this show and talking to you than anywhere else in the world.”

I would absolutely and beyond a doubt recommend this fantastic opportunity to anyone even remotely interested in Shakespeare or the theater. Both times I've been to Stratford I learned so much more about so many things in a one week span than I thought my brain could handle. And besides that it is an extremely fun place to go with a group of friends.

Abby C.

Westminster Abbey made me cry. After a long day roaming the surprisingly sunny streets of London, a few of my peers had decided to spend some time in one of London's most ancient attractions. As we entered the Abbey and bought our tickets our voices were immediately lulled by the vastness of the room in which we were standing. The ceiling soared seemingly hundreds of feet above us and our whispers echoed off of the gargantuan statues on the walls. While walking through the entry way I graciously accepted a free audio tour and began listening to the descriptions as I wandered through the church. I meandered my way down the long gray halls and through the different alcoves, stopping for a few moments at each different tomb or statue to study the expressions on the faces of the dead.

The tombs fascinated me. Each tomb had a replica of the body of the person who lay within, some three feet below. There was something so creepy yet reassuring about the fact that even five hundred years after their death, the faces and bodies of people were still lying peacefully, protecting their tomb. "The church is over a thousand years old," grumbled a deep British voice into my ear as I walked into a cool dark chapel in the back of Westminster Abbey. Listening to the soothing vocal tones of some British historian and staring at the tombs of long deceased royalty, my eyes began to well up with tears. After a few moments one of my friends came up behind me and gently touched my shoulder. "Are you alright?" he asked. I nodded and took in a deep breath. "It's just so

old!” I replied. So there I was, standing in the middle of a dimly lit room full of beautiful sculptures and graves, crying because of the antiquity of a church.

Later in the week, our director asked us to use a piece of art we had seen in the Tate Modern to inspire a movement composition. After visualizing many different abstract pieces, with bold colors and even bolder imagery, I felt stuck. While much of the modern art had stimulated my senses, none of it had really impacted me emotionally. I decided instead to work with one of the tombs I had seen in Westminster Abbey. It was very confusing, trying to bring to life the cold, dead, gray tomb stone to create an engaging piece of movement, but ultimately very satisfying to use my body to reflect on something that had emotionally impacted me so very much.

When I was very young I was in *The Taming of the Shrew*. I have the vaguest memories of what I did exactly, but I think I was some sort of dream creature that had gray wings and danced in little circles. At my elementary and middle school, the seventh and eighth graders did a Shakespeare play each year. Starting at the age of six I would attentively sit in the audience and watch as the play unfolded around me, understanding very little of the language, relying mostly on the acting to get me through the play. Being exposed to Shakespeare at such a young age has influenced the way I approach his works today. Rather than feeling intimidated by the poetry I try to make sense of the words on a very basic level. So, the phrase “For if I should despair I should grow mad/ And in my madness might speak ill of thee,” simply means “don’t make me mad or I will say bad things about you.” Once I understand what the words mean it is easier to speak them and

memorize them because there is some sort of structure to work from. Though Shakespeare had a way with his language, I adamantly believe that the delivery is more important than the text. If someone stands on stage and recites a whole monologue perfectly, but shows no emotion, half of the audience won't have the slightest idea what is going on. But if someone uses their voice to create and express the emotions, problems and solutions in the monologue, even if the audience can't fully grasp the language, they understand the emotional plot of the play.

In Stratford we had the opportunity to work with the Royal Shakespeare Company voice coaches. This experience really helped me understand how much the actors work with the text. While watching the plays that the RSC put on I was amazed by how easily the actors could speak their lines, while still fully expressing their meaning. But after working with the voice coaches I could understand why they spoke with such eloquence and ease. After just an hour I felt I had a real understanding of three different monologues by just playing around with what words I chose to pressure or focus on. As the workshop was coming to a close the voice coach told us that what we had just done was just a warm up for what the actors would usually go through every day. Hearing this bit of information helped me to gain perspective on how hard the actors work, and how much effort it takes for them to use the language so easily and so freely.

Through out the week I had many realizations about how much commitment people put into the work they do at the RSC and The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, but what stood out the most was the overarching commitment to the language and being true to the text. Many of the professionals we met agreed that in Shakespeare there is no back story or sub text, but rather, everything you need to know about a certain character is on

the page. I hadn't ever really thought about this. But after seeing and reading and talking about so many plays in such a short period of time, and seeing two plays in repertoire, I realized that it would be nearly impossible to be a Shakespearian actor and be worrying about subtext. The plays are so packed with plot and meaning out of necessity.

Self-portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Chapter 3

Scott B.

March 29, 2012

It seems to me that inspiration can come in two channels: the intentional or the unintentional. As a member of the Theatre Company, my creative process has involved, in equal parts, a specific focus on the themes and style of the work while remaining open to previously unknown sources of inspiration. The first channel is a matter of cultivating attention; the second is more unintentional – a process that David Gammons describes as “becoming sticky” to pick up on the random elements of inspiration all around us. My recent trip to Stratford-upon-Avon was a brilliant opportunity for me to be focused but also receptive, intentional in my search for inspiration but also leave room for found wisdom.

Traveling to England with the other thirteen members of the Company, along with our two directors, immediately plunked me amongst an intellectually engaged and high-energy group. From our first meeting at Logan Airport, it was clear to me that each member of the Company was committed to our project, both in the short term as companions and in the long term as artists. Over the course of our week together, I acquired an extraordinary body of knowledge through casual conversation, both about Shakespeare and theatre in general. This fount of knowledge sprung in large part from our two directors, both of whom demonstrated an unparalleled ability to give cogent and thought-provoking monologues on the subject at hand at any moment. The enthusiasm that each member of the Company displayed for the plays that we saw and also for those

that were only mentioned in passing pushed me to think critically, not only during lectures but during casual conversation as well.

Similarly, seeing three of Shakespeare's plays at the Royal Shakespeare Company was a potent experience, especially with regard to my studies of Shakespeare's sonnets. One of the biggest complaints that I have had with productions of Shakespeare that I have seen in the past is that the productions try too hard to insert or intertwine modern motif into the play. I am a firm believer that Shakespeare is timeless, and that a company need not pin down a play in a modern ("fresh") context – or even remove the play from its original context. The RSC productions of "The Comedy of Errors," "Twelfth Night," and "Richard III" felt fresh and enlivened without need for the contrivance of setting a play in a specifically contemporary period. "Comedy" and "Twelfth Night" seemed to suggest contexts for themselves through the use of specific design elements without waylaying or changing Shakespeare's texts. The company members were clearly master rhetoricians well trained in the art and craft of performing Shakespeare, and they delivered their lines almost flawlessly, keeping the text clear throughout. More than that, the actors displayed a mastery of texts that they seemed to have explored fully, in all its possibilities, not just settling on the most obvious reading – a technique that I hope to try with the sonnets. I counted this exploration as one of my favorite elements of the shows, for it allowed the actors to introduce new imaginations of the text that wouldn't be apparent to the casual Shakespeare reader.¹ I was enamored by the efforts of the RSC to make the plays

¹ My favorite example came in "Comedy," when Adriana, in a misguided attempt to seduce Antipholus of Syracuse, entwines him in her arms while she claims that he is the tree to her vine. I was enthralled by this creative, yet somewhat unorthodox, reimagining.

engaging and fresh through text work, rather than extrinsic design elements that would have felt distracting.

In the case of “Richard III,” I was most impressed that the company managed to make a three-hour history play exciting rather than dull. Although the plot was frequently hard to follow, I was held in rapture by the flights of speech that spewed from the characters’ mouths at unexpected moments. Starting with Richard’s opening soliloquy, I looked forward to each successive scene in which an actor would take center stage and evoke a deep humanity through a perfectly poised monologue. Besides Richard’s opening speech, which let the audience know from the beginning who and what Richard is, I was especially taken with the speech that Clarence gives slightly before his death, describing a recent dream. The actor brought the speech out of the overall machinations of the plot and gave it a sense of inherent artistry and beauty. This poignant performance has a lot to teach us in Theatre Company about how one can set off a sonnet from the rest of the piece and make it uniquely beautiful.

By contrast, I was afraid that the classes and lectures that we would attend in England would seem far removed from our work in the Company, but each class provided its own insight into what we are doing. Most memorable are the two sessions that we spent with Paul Edmondson, a scholar of the sonnets. His understanding of the sonnets from both an academic and a performance point of view was enlightening. I felt honored that one of the world’s leading authorities on sonnets would provide his opinions and theories in such a humble way and then invite us to give our own interpretations. Working with Paul made me more aware of a need to connect on a focused level with our sonnets and the emotions they evoke - to think deeply about what one is saying.

However, one of the most important elements of my trip came outside of any of this scheduled programming. On the last night of our stay, some friends and I walked down the Avon River to a lock at the outskirts of Stratford.² The sun was beginning to set and I was struck by the serenity and beauty of the river, unmoved by the bustling town. This scene helped answer one of my enduring questions about Shakespeare's sonnets: where does his sense of natural beauty come from? It's easy to relate to his ideas about love and human connection, because they are so poetically formed, but his comments about nature can seem far removed from anything I have experienced. In a minor way, though, seeing the Avon in full springtime bloom and great fertility answered my confusion about what might have inspired Shakespeare to wax poetic about flowers and trees and grasses.

I also felt like I stumbled into inspiration during our trip to the Tate Modern. Modern art often strikes me as frustratingly enigmatic and vague, yet there were several pieces at the Tate that resonated with me for their specificity of purpose and meaning. One was Max Ernst's painting "The Entire City" in the Poetry and Dream gallery. At first glance, the painting, which shows a deteriorating tiered structure in the foreground below an O-shaped moon, reminded me of a monumental spire or butte of desert sandstone; yet Ernst's intention (or so said the blurb) was to symbolize the moral decay of a city. My surprise that my interpretation of the somewhat abstract piece had been so far from the truth forced me to reconsider my previous skepticism about claims of the "intentionally ambiguous meaning" of modern art. I found that Ernst's painting, which was created by scraping paint over blocks of wood in a technique that he called "grattage," expressed an

² Also known as Bruno's Love Island.

aesthetically singular dread and foreboding regardless of what object the viewer chooses to see in the deteriorating monolith. That the aesthetically representational elements of the painting were clouded ended up being less important than the pointed emotion that it inspired in me. My connection with the artwork was intrinsically important to me, but what I found in “The Entire City” appeared relevant to my work with sonnets as well: though Shakespeare’s language may not be easily interpretable for the modern reader or listener, the emotions that the sonnets evoke tend to be singular.

Coming to Stratford, I was ready to attend class and plays and rehearsal and extract as much value from them as possible. But the knowledge and inspiration that I came upon unintentionally, in offhand moments of conversation, strolls down the riverbank, or witnessing other mediums of art, was just as important as what I learned formally. Traveling to England reinforced the importance of both these methods of learning and thinking as part of my creative process.

Bruno B.

Chapter 3

3/31/12

Chapter 3

Stratford was a life changing experience. I never would have guessed how powerful it was just to be immersed in everything Shakespeare. While there, all the dots just connected. To witness all the places he lived, where he wrote his plays and poetry deepened and authenticated all of the complexity and beauty of his words. Experiences like visiting Anne Hathaway's cottage to watching the RSC's productions are what made my trip so memorable.

I don't know whether it was just because the day was so beautiful or the fact that the entire company was in a happy mood, but visiting Anne Hathaway's cottage was such a pleasant experience. To see explore the building and getting a full image of life back then through the furniture, rooms, and excavated building materials. The surroundings of the house also just created a beautiful environment that filled me with such joy. The atmosphere and weather just created a magnificent experience. It was also fun to leave a sticky note behind to authenticate that I was there and that I could leave my mark behind. Then adventuring into the sculpture gardens and hedge maze was also incredibly fun. I really enjoyed comparing the sculptures from the cottage to the sculpture garden in Nash place. Visiting the historical sites of Stratford was a very memorable part of the trip

Another part of the trip that I enjoyed was talking with the scholars of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and Nick Day, a member of the RSC. In our workshops with Nick Walton, We would learn the plot and major ideas. This was extremely helpful not only to feel caught up so we could then discuss the productions. Also because of these info sessions when I went to watch the plays, I didn't have to worry about following the plot but I could deepen my watching by looking for artistic choices'. After the performances we would have talk backs about the shows and in these lengthy conversations we would discuss our views of the shows. What was extremely helpful was when a member of the RSC came and talked to us and we were given the chance to ask questions. The amount of respect that this actor gave us made the talk back so much more memorable. He was completely honest with us and just his truthfulness and presence made the talk backs such pleasurable experiences. Also the fact that he was a total bro only made me praise him even more as he was so sweet to the entire company. He gave us a backstage tour of the RSC and took us to meet the rest of the company after the show. While there we made more friends within the company. Overall, working with the faculty of the Shakespeare birthplace trust and the friendly members of the RSC created a productive and educational trip.

Although the purpose of the trip was educational, the most enjoyable part for me personally was the freedom of exploring Stratford. The town was so beautiful and just to explore it and be present was amazing. For an entire week I could leave my life and electronics behind just so I could be present in Stratford. Living, breathing, and concentrating all my energy on Shakespeare. My most fond memory will definitely be exploring and walking down the Avon and sitting by the river and just having time to

myself. But while there, I decided to read some of the sonnets, meditate, and just have some reflection time to take in all the beauty around me was an experience I could never forget. And in that hour while reading sonnets, I got so much more out of them than I ever have before. I found new meanings along with better understandings of lines I previously never understood. Through the peaceful surroundings, I had a better understanding of the sonnets and myself.

This trip will be an experience I could never forget. From the childish inside jokes that will never be forgotten to the intellectual discussions and discoveries. Not only did this trip help make our group closer, but it helped me grow my passion for everything Shakespeare and for me to grow as a person.

Miriam P.

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Lady

April, 2012

There are a lot of expectations and assumptions that others project upon us. This past spring break, whenever I told people why I was there, the first question they asked was if I wanted to be an actor, and when I replied with an adamant “no,” they would smile knowingly, and say “oh, director.” This was terribly confusing for me. I don’t particularly think of myself as someone who will be either an actor, or a director. I barely even almost consider myself an artist, let alone an amateur actor, let alone a future performing artist. I also don’t really want to be an actor. This realization of a difference between my own perception of myself and others’ perceptions of me made me think of the Bogart chapter on attitude, or the meaning behind everything we do. Yes, I am in a company with many people who would consider themselves actors, and I like to think I contribute to the company much in the same way and with the same verve and dedication, but at the same time, I do these things because I enjoy doing them—for fun, maybe—while I feel others see Theatre 3 as a way to further their already considerable acting skills. If a person looks like an actor, talks like an actor, acts like an actor, hangs out with actors, and acts, are they an actor?

I had a lot of time to meditate on this very question the whole time we were in Stratford. My experience was amazing. I was met with so much love and hospitality by everyone, and I was treated like a peer by some of the most amazing scholars and actors in the world. I spent the whole week steeping myself in Shakespeare, quoting lines,

memorizing sonnets, watching plays, and walking on the very streets he must have walked. Wherever I was, I would think *I bet Shakespeare stood here* or *I am sitting where Shakespeare sat 450 years ago*. It led for an incredibly intense week, because as well as attempting to contribute to my own experience, I felt myself drink it all in, and came back to the guest house full of so much of Shakespeare's energy, I couldn't fall asleep for the longest time, just reveling in the course of the day. One such night, I was in bed, talking to Abby, when I felt an inexplicable urge to draw a smiley face on the fogged up window. Releasing all my inhibitions, I jumped up and ran to the window to draw it. I was just filled with so much joy that the only way I could let it out was to put it somewhere else, the window providing the perfect canvas.

All we did in Stratford had to do, in some way, with Shakespeare, so when it came time to rehearse for our show, or make new material for it, I found myself inspired by Stratford. I understood all three of my sonnets on a deeper level after working on them where Shakespeare might have written them, or working on them with Paul the Priest. Paul the Priest was one of the funniest, most generous people I had ever met. He workshopped with three people, and even though he was working with them I gained so much new information, and so many different ways to approach understanding a sonnet. He asked rhetorical questions, to make us focus on certain key words and ideas in our sonnet. He made us feel every one of our words, giving us an entirely new interpretation of our sonnet. We also worked with a voice coach, going around in a circle saying different parts of monologues. Hearing each of our approaches to the language gave us so much information on inflection, intention, and, to some extent, physicality.

In addition to doing our own work, we also went to see three plays and were able to see how other actors related to Shakespeare's language. My favorite play we saw was *Twelfth Night*. The director created such an amazing world, and the actors did a great job of imagining themselves within it. I studied *Twelfth Night* last semester in my literature class on comedy. The idea of setting *Twelfth Night* in an old, decrepit hotel really resonated with me because *Twelfth Night* is a play that deals with opposites such as comedy and tragedy, and tradition (Malvolio) and change (Feste). Dealing with the tension between glamour and decay was an interesting way of bringing out the oxymoronic elements of the play. One of the most impressive parts of the play by far was the opening scene in which Viola actually swam out from under the stage. For a moment, I suspended my disbelief, and actually thought she had almost drowned. The actress did an incredible job of holding our attention, even without speaking while she spluttered and heaved, emphasizing the element of danger and the high stakes that were held the whole way throughout the well-done comedy.

Probably the experience that made me grow the most was when I got a chance to work on my own sonnet, 138 from the *Passionate Pilgrim*, with Jennie Israel, our co-director and actress extraordinaire. I volunteered hoping I would be guided towards a deeper understanding of my sonnet in a nice, kind way that fit with the vision I had of Jennie. I was woefully mistaken. Instead of the nice pushing Paul the Priest did, Jennie did not let up even for a moment. I was too in control of my sonnet, and I wasn't listening to the language, so she put me in a place where I had no control. I had to do the workshop while doing a wall sit against two other of my company members and having my back straight. It was very nearly impossible, but I learned a few things through that exercise.

Firstly, I learned that acting is **very hard work** and I also learned that I had to trust Shakespeare.

Nicholas Day came to speak to us the day after he played Aegeon in A Comedy of Errors. He was so incredible, and he also talked about his acting method, which correlated nicely with what I found out by doing my sonnet exercise. He said he doesn't believe in backstory. That he doesn't find it helpful to know where his character just came from, or their intentions. He said everything he needed to know about his character was in the lines that Shakespeare wrote. "It's all there."

Connor R.

Stratford response paper

When I first signed myself up to go on the trip to Stratford, I was nervous about how it might turn out. My first concern was that I had never actually been to England. This quickly faded because I really don't have many issues with traveling to new places. I worried a bit as well because I did not have any experience with acting or the art of the theatre, and that I might not get as much out of the trip as some. Instead I found myself completely immersed in the experience, despite that. What concerns were left became my main focuses over the course of the trip. Concerns may be a bit of an overstatement, as I just made sure to pay extra attention to these factors during my stay. The first of these, the guesthouses were far from something worth worrying about. I was very happy with the accommodations our group had while in Stratford. The next factor, the work we did at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, was equally impressive. The facilities were impressive, and every lecture or discussion we had was poignant and interesting. The final important part of the trip to me was the plays we saw at the Royal Shakespeare Company. These plays; *Twelfth Night*, *Comedy of Errors*, and *King Richard III*, were more up to the individual interpretations. I, however, was amazed and found every decision made by the directors and casts to be very inspired. Overall the trip was an overwhelmingly superb experience, one I would repeat in a heartbeat. Everything, from the plays we saw and the interactions we had with scholars, to the houses we stayed in was wonderful.

The guesthouses were one of the first things the group was able to experience. We landed and got on the road right away. Managing a group of teenagers is difficult, even on a good day, but Sue and Richard (the owners of the boy's guesthouse) welcomed us

warmly into their home and helped us find our rooms. Their explanations of the facilities made the guesthouse much less confusing than it could have been. The family was very happy to interact with us, it seemed, as well. One day early in the trip Richard offered to show us around a church he volunteered at. We were amazed that he would extend himself like that. The experience of visiting the church ended up being really fascinating, especially with the information that was provided to us. Another wonderful thing about staying in the guesthouses is that we had a home cooked meal every day for breakfast and dinner. The food was always very well prepared, and we were always very excited to see what new meal Sue had thought up for the evening. In addition to be a warm and welcoming home, the facilities of our guest house were very well handled. Anything we could have reasonably wanted we had access to, and more. The clearest example of this was the bathroom situation. When we left, we were told that there would likely only be communal bathroom space and that we should prepare for that. But much to our delight we found individual restrooms attached to every room we were staying in. The little things like that made my experience staying at the Quilt and Croissant a very happy one.

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is probably one of the coolest places in Stratford. The first thing we did there was go on the tour, which leads into the actual building Shakespeare's family lived in. This was very interesting and fun, but on the surface it was much like any tour I had been on. As we progressed through the tour we realized that the guides and people inside the home were actually very knowledgeable. This became very apparent when two of the people broke into acting out famous scenes from various plays. It seems to me in hindsight that the tiny moments like that were some of the most important parts of the trip. After the tourist fun, our real experience

with the Birthplace Trust began. We spent the rest of our week at small, fairly informal sessions with scholars, actors, vocal coaches, and makeup designers. Every single one of these meetings and discussions was interesting and engaging to me. I would say, as somebody with very limited experience in the theatre, I got the most out of the meetings with scholars and our meetings with various Royal Shakespeare Company actors. I've always been somebody who takes special care with reading Shakespeare's plays and interacting with them as well as I can. To me, the trip was about what I could learn from people who interact intimately with Shakespeare's plays. So when I was at the information sessions for each play we were going to see, I took care to absorb as much factual and interpreted information I could. And everything that we learned was very insightful and applicable to my future readings of these plays. Then, following our first play, we were given the opportunity to meet Nicholas Day, one of the actors from that show and the second play we saw. He gave us insight into the process of acting Shakespeare professionally and even offered a unique view on the process that made a large impact on the actors of the group. He was very friendly with us, and very happy to talk to us about everything we asked. We saw him again as an unscheduled meeting and he was happy to introduce us to other cast members. The way he extended himself to a group of American students was unexpected and our gratitude was probably a little overwhelming at times. In the end, being welcomed into the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and taught so much was one of the most powerful experiences. I really felt like I was a part of the events, despite whatever differences I may have had from the rest of the group. And, of course, the plays that we studied were even more powerful after we had seen them at the RSC.

The plays were one of the most important parts of our trip to Stratford, and also one of the most powerful experiences on the trip. The first play we saw, *Comedy of Errors* was also my first experience with the RSC Theater. I had no idea what to expect beyond an amazing performance. I think I was stunned when leaving the theatre. The creativity shown in production, and the experience of being in the theater was so powerful to me. To make it even better we were seated so close to the front that I felt we were almost a part of the performance. This was also important on the final night when we saw *Richard III*. Our seats that time were even closer, in the front two rows. Being able to sit so close to the stage drew me in so much, and at times I was able to forget I was actually watching a Shakespeare play, and that the language was so separated from my own. This was also a part of watching *Twelfth Night* in the middle of the week. The direction and acting were so magnificent that audiences were very drawn in. And after meeting some of the cast members, we were abundantly available to see the work they put into their characters. It was very special to have these plays act as almost icing to the cake that was the rest of the day's activities.

Stratford Reflection

I always return from the Shakespeare Study Course with a better idea of who I am as an actor, scholar, and human being. The way in which Shakespeare is taught and presented is accessible, educational and thoroughly enjoyable. After every lecture, class, and discussion, I felt as though my brain had expanded. Even though I have studied Shakespeare in school, performed in Shakespeare plays, and directed a Shakespeare play, I left the Shakespeare Study Course with a new, and more developed understanding of the bard's work. The lectures that we were given about *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Richard III* not only gave me enough back story to be able to follow the various plays when we saw them, but the lectures made me excited to see them. Using moments from the texts and images from past RSC productions of the plays was a great way to get the students familiar with the plays, and excited about them. The lectures were engaging as well, and I could have listened to them for multiple hours as opposed to their one-hour limit.

The classes also reminded me that there are endless layers to Shakespeare's work. The scholars always highlight moments from Shakespeare's writing, and propose theories about his writing that I would never come up with myself, but make complete sense. Shakespeare continues to gain more facets and dimensions when I listen to these scholars speak.

I particularly enjoyed the sonnet workshops with Paul because I am not as familiar with Shakespeare's sonnets as I am with his plays. I didn't realize that Shakespeare's sonnets are every bit as juicy and beautiful as his plays. Due to the fact that I was less familiar with the sonnets, I entered the sonnet lecture with more

apprehension. A few minutes into the lecture, however, my apprehension melted away. Paul told us to think of sonnets as “little sounds,” and not to think too hard about what they meant. Even this small direction made the sonnets more accessible to me, and I now feel as though I have gained a semester’s worth of study about them as opposed to two workshops.

The course was a perfect balance of history Shakespearean history, and Shakespeare’s work. Seeing the places where Shakespeare lived and worked made him was equally as educational as studying his plays and sonnets.

The talk-back with Nicholas Day was incredibly informative. Not only was he a lovely and generous person, but he was willing to answer questions and discuss his philosophy of acting. His ideas and insights challenged what I know as an actor in the best possible way, and even though I didn’t take any acting classes during the Shakespeare Study Course, I grew as an actor during the course.

Returning to the Shakespeare Study Course for a second time was amazing. It’s a course that I could return to ten times because every time I go, it’s different. Due to the fact that the plays we see through the course are different each year, the education that we receive is always different.

Trip to Stratford upon Avon

David L.

Theater III

3/30/12

Our trip to England inspired me to think more deeply about three aspects of Shakespeare. I discovered the symbolism behind his verse, the importance of directorial decisions to engage to audience instantly, and finally the range and diversity of the choices an actor can make with Shakespeare's language and then the consequences of those choices.

Upon arrival, groggy from a six hour plane ride with minimal sleep, we powered through our first day. We dropped our bags at our Bed and Breakfasts and began to explore the town. Our first stop was Shakespeare's birthplace. The two story wooden house stood out amongst the various book stores titled with witty Shakespeare puns. Inside the house, as we walked up the creaking wood staircase we could hear Shakespeare monologues. It was surreal to be standing in a room that William Shakespeare himself must have walked around in, talking to his family, and here we were listening to actors perform his various monologues. Later on in the day we visited the garden, museum and archeological dig at New Place. I was fascinated by the idea of digging for Shakespeare. At school, I am most passionate about history, and the idea about what we may discover about Shakespeare's history rather than just his literature

intrigued me. We saw old coins, miniscule dice, and all kinds of household items that had been hiding in the foundation since Shakespeare's time. The second part of the house that I loved was the garden. Not only was it simply a beautiful garden itself, but throughout were large abstract metal statues. Each statue represented a different play. We spent well over thirty minutes simply pacing this small garden, scrutinizing each form. We made a game of it. As we arrived at each statue we would shout out various guesses. However once closer up, we all began to touch and explore every little detail. Whether it was a grotesque figure topped with a crown representing King Lear, or a pained man faced with daggers from all sides depicting Julius Cesar, we grappled with the statue's identity. I loved this garden because often Shakespeare is seen in two ways: through the words of an actor or through the words on a page. This garden offered visual representations of Shakespeare's ideas - exemplifying the true symbolism that exists in each of his plays.

We saw three plays in the week. The first two were comedies, Twelfth Night and Comedy of Errors, and the final a history, Richard the Third. The mixture of these three plays really stood out to me. I had seen Twelfth Night and Comedy of Errors before, but had never seen or even heard about the plot of Richard the Third. Typically I am drawn to the tragedies and histories of Shakespeare; however the performance of Twelfth Night truly struck me.

First off, the set for Twelfth Night was beautiful. Between the three-story elevator, hanging bathtub, reclined bed on the slanted wall, and finally the pool of water, I was mesmerized. There were two crucial differences between this performance and the ones I've seen before. Where in other productions the opening scene with Viola washing up on shore is very sad, the use of the water in the Royal Shakespeare performance was

truly jarring. The play begins with a sudden commotion in the pool of water, followed by a gasping Viola. She pulled herself onto firm ground and simply lay there panting, exhausted. The production made the shipwreck real. No longer was it simply a girl who was lost in a land far from home without any relatives, but instead there was that plus the feeling that she had barely survived and was only clinging to life. With such an opening I was instantly drawn to Viola. I felt I had an emotional connection, and that we had been through something that we almost didn't survive. After the show, I realized that such a connection is essential to the success of an actor. If the audience is not invested in a character's living, it is unlikely they will care when something more trivial happens.

The second thing that really fascinated me in *Twelfth Night* was the directorial and acting choices for the character of Feste. When reading the play in a class last semester and then seeing a performance that same semester, I saw Feste as a joker or jester. He seemed to be, along with Sir Toby, the ring leader of the fools in the play. His lines were always punchy, and he simply seemed one step ahead of everyone, ready for another joke. However in the production put on by the RSC, he felt more like a bard than a jester. He was still witty, but the wit never felt hilarious, but rather just smart. At first I yearned for his jolly attitude and hilarious remarks, and yet as the play progressed, I saw the power of this different approach and I began to appreciate the actor's and director's choices. Feste has several songs throughout the play. However, instead of being jovial and carefree, this Feste performed them as heart wrenching ballads. In a play where logic is turned upside down and ridiculousness is all around us, Feste acted as a strong sobering influence. His songs took over the large theatre with their melancholy tunes. Seeing this play made me think a lot about both directorial and acting choices. I more powerfully

appreciated both the importance of engaging the audience emotionally early on and the power of an actor to interpret Shakespeare's verse in a multitude of ways. A character I had previously believed to be a joke, became a symbol of beauty and melancholy.

In a year during which I have spent much of my literary time reading and analyzing Shakespeare's words, I truly enjoyed being able to see his work and the choices that come with it in varied mediums: through visual art, through extremely arresting and jarring actions and images, and through the range of possible moods in which to portray a character.