“London and the London Theatre Scene” Excursion, 11-14 May 2010
At one point I got lost. A stranger was willing to help me find the right path and said: “Read the directions and directly you will be directed in the right direction.” Rather confused I just thought to myself that if you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there.

Finally, I found the right way and suddenly I fell down a hole and my dress billowed like a parachute. I thought after this I should think nothing of falling down stairs. Either the well was very deep, or I fell very slowly, for I had plenty of time as I went down to look around me and to wonder what was going to happen next. Then I realised where I had arrived: The London Underground!

I was carried to the strangest places by the crowd and was afraid of getting lost again. Fortunately, I made the acquaintance of a couple of young ladies at an Indian restaurant. This was the most pleasant dinner I ever enjoyed in all my life – but not everybody was as satisfied as I was...
Things got curiuser and curiuser as I joined the young ladies on their walk through Camden Market. The entries to the shops were being guarded by huge silver men but people walked by fearlessly. But even more amazing was the speed with which the ladies filled their pockets with goods from the market……

The silver titans I had seen the other day had made my companions look comparatively small, though they were still rather huge from my point of view. This day, however, they seemed to have grown again to the size of an elephant. Naturally, it may have been the other way round and the elephant had shrunk, who knows?

The National Library marked the last station of my journey. The enormous amount of books, new ones, old ones and very old ones, amazed me. I even spotted the original version of my favourite book ever: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll. Outside the building, in front of a busy Newton, this photo was taken. As you can see, I didn’t quite manage to join the group.

Silver men, red elephants and Newton the giant… my dear diary, this has been a most remarkable week!

By Judith Hinterberger and Marie-Theres Fischer
Dear Professor Huber,

I was not amused when it was reported to me that your flight was cancelled, because the volcano ash clouds of Eyjafjallajökull made your visit to my kingdom impossible. Even Her Majesty’s power is limited and therefore please accept my sincere apologies. I would be grateful if you could provide me with further information about your theatre field trip.

Her Majesty
Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God,
of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and
Northern Ireland and of Her other Realms and
Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth,
Defender of the Faith.

Subject: Re: Field Trip to London 2010
From: "Werner Huber" <wern.huber@univie.ac.at>
Date: Mo, 17 May 2010, 9:03
To: "To The Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty" <royalmail@buckinghampalace.uk>
Your Majesty,

I was greatly honoured by your kind note. I may inform you that at last we reached the capital of your marvellous kingdom with a delay of two days. With your permission, I will give you a brief report of our field trip to inspect the London theatre scene.

After arriving at the comfortable Travelodge Hotel near King’s Cross, we enjoyed delicious traditional British pub food. Invigorated and full of anticipation we benefitted from your highly developed tube system and went to the Tricycle Theatre on the Kilburn High Road to see a modernised version of Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night. Following the English tradition, we went for a pint before returning to the hotel.

As the next morning was free, my students probably boosted the British economy, while they went on a spending spree to Camden Market, Oxford Street and Portobello Road Market. In the afternoon we had the pleasure of seeing Dionysius Boucicault’s London Assurance at the Royal National Theatre, which raised our expectations for Posh by Laura Wade at the Royal Court Theatre later that evening.

On Thursday morning we went on a walking tour through Bloomsbury, which directly led us to the British Museum. We all agreed that this collection of treasures from all over the world is absolutely impressive. Another highlight of our trip clearly was Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, where we saw A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Positioned in front of the stage, as in Shakespearean times, it almost felt like being part of the play. Since the British Library is a “must-see” for university students of English we did not miss the chance to go there before we were taken back to the airport.

So in the end everything worked out well. The volcano did not interfere with our return flight, and we reached Vienna safely. Our theatre field trip was very successful and we once again came to the conclusion that London is well worth a visit.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Werner Huber

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This is probably how Shakespeare imagined his play to be performed on stage! After all, on the “Twelfth Night” of Christmas (i.e. January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany), everything is supposed to be topsy-turvy, and that’s just what is was like! - **Samuel Foster, 42, plumber**

How utterly outrageous that the actors were wearing slovenly everyday clothes instead of proper costumes! They appeared to have been bought in a second-, no, third-hand shop. Nowadays people call themselves ‘artists’ when all they do is mimic low life. That’s ‘modern’ art for you! - **Alan McGuire, 50, librarian**

It’s amazing how a person can switch gender merely with the help of an additional pair of socks in their trousers… Simple and at the same time original! - **Belinda Rooney, 37, hairdresser**

They were all wearing everyday clothes, I thought that was awesome. Proves that you don’t have to play dress-up in order to make an impression! – **Chad Duncan, 19, American exchange student**

No chance to fall asleep, because when you least expect it, you may be asked to come onstage and join the actors in their dancing and drinking… I like being involved in a play, not only emotionally, but also physically. - **Ron Fast, 34, sports teacher**

I go to the theatre to see the actors perform, NOT to perform myself! And they didn’t even ask me if I wanted to! I was dead embarrassed and made an outright fool of myself in front of my fiancée! She might never have found out what a terrible dancer I am, and now she might never ask me to dance with her again! – **Chester Hallward, 26, technician**

I really fell in love with the actors, especially Oliver Broadbent, who played Orsino. You could tell that they enjoyed working with each other and with the audience as well. They were such nice chaps, not as hoity-toity as the actors of the big productions at the National. They even went to the pub next door and had a beer with us, so I could give them my honest opinion about their performance, namely that it was outstanding! - **Lisa Crouth, 22, political science student**

You know, what I love about the Tricycle is the small, intimate atmosphere – that’s why I chose to sit in the front row. However, during Twelfth Night, the atmosphere instantly became TOO intimate even for my taste – at one point in the play, the actors spat out their beer (which landed in my face) and I could smell the alcohol on their breath even though I was still at least a yard away from the stage. Absolutely disgusting! They should warn future theatergoers about the negative side-effects of seeing this play… - **Theresa Rodgers, 23, film student**
Great performance, considering rehearsals took only ten days! - Sue Brandon, 38, primary school teacher

Terrible performance. At the beginning, it seemed as if it had a lot of potential. Unfortunately, it was entirely wasted on sex, alcohol, and (lame) rock ’n’ roll. I shouldn’t be surprised though, considering they only rehearsed for ten days. It couldn’t have been more obvious. – Olivia Flanchester, 29, journalist

Tequila, pizza, singing, dancing and ball games – a feast for all senses! The extraordinary elements that they included, from technical special effects to artistic stunts, broadened the scope of the play’s genre. - Henry Pinter, 51, lawyer

Tequila, tequila, tequila… - Linda McGuinness, 21, barkeeper

I could never really get into Shakespeare, I just came because my girlfriend took me there for our twelfth date - get it? Now I’m glad I went because I would have missed out on an innovative and humorous, entertaining, hilarious adaptation of a play by the Bard of Avon! - Jason Dickson, 24, student

This is a stinker. Avoid it at all costs. Unless you enjoy laughing at ‘jokes’ which aren’t even funny and like being sprayed with Tequila from strangers’ mouths. I’m sure Shakespeare would have appreciated modern adaptations, but there’s a way to do it wrong. Unfortunately, Filter and Co. have succeeded at producing a major failure. Anyone who seriously enjoyed this must have had a certain dose of Tequila (or something similar) before they entered the Tricycle. - Fred Newman, 44, historian

No play of Shakespeare’s begs for music and sound as much as Twelfth Night. With the stage covered in cables, synthesizers, microphones and a transistor radio, Filter create the world of Illyria through an imaginative use of sound. The electrifying acoustic atmosphere reminded me more of a rock concert than classical theatre! – Bob Andrews, 29, DJ

Filter Company are developing cult status in London’s theatre scene. I’ve seen them several times now and it was always a big surprise and lived up to my expectations! – Lindsay Turner, 28, translator

Anahita Abrahamian, Elvira Hagen, Berit Paschen
PROFESSIONAL CRITICISM

A Dramticule

Dramatis Personae

TOMMY, a distinguished English cushion

ANGUS, a dedicated Scottish cushion

Globe Theatre. After A Midsummer Night’s Dream. At the end of long working day on the cart where the cushions are stocked...

TOMMY and ANGUS are put on stacks next to each other.

Tom. Evenin’, Angus.

Angus. Evenin’, Tommy.

Tom. Great performance tonight, ey?

Ang. Don’t get me started.

Tom. Don’t say you didn’t like it! I think it was a smashing performance. They are good, I know, but tonight, aw. And I think Miss Puck was especially sweet tonight.

Ang. Aw, it’s not about Puck though I didn’t get to see much o’er. It’s about those bloody Americans.

Tom. Americans? Did you get an American tonight?

Ang. Did I get an American tonight? Did I get an American tonight? I got an American who was so American, ‘e was a parody of ‘imself without bloody knowing it. He was so fat he would’ve needed three of us to support him; he was so bloody ignorant he asked his wife after five minutes whether those fairies on stage would go on talking fancy the way they did for the whole play and he got me full with crumbs of crisps ‘e insisted on calling chips. Bloody friggin’ Americans!

Tom. Oh, Angus, come on. It can’t have been all that bad.
Ang. Bad doesn’t even cut it, mate. It was worse than Bottom’s performance of Pyramus.

Tom. Yes, Mr Bottom outdoes himself at that. He can play so badly I would give him any theatre prize there is.

Ang. He’s a gifted man, ey?

Tom. He was a crowd pleaser tonight. He had them wrapped around his little finger. What a spectacle! But I dare say it’s not just Mr Bottom or Miss Puck or Mr Oberon alone. So much depends on the audience. We had a pleasant crowd tonight, had we not?

Ang. Yeah, all these pretty Austrian students. My, my. They were havin’ a blast. Oh, why couldn’t I get one of those! I’d had the time of my life. And I’d’ve been the perfect, the best, the softest cushion there is, I would. But, alas, not a penny in their pockets for a seat or a cushion, poor lasses. But they had fun alright, ey?

Tom. My sitter was the complete opposite. He did nothing but complain.

Ang. What’s there to complain about? Besides the friggin’ Americans, that is.

Tom. He was an Oxford professor.

(both sigh)

Tom. One of those terribly snobbish old academics who want your head on a pike should you leave out one word of the original text. They cannot agree whether Shakespeare existed or not or which text is the ‘authentic’ one, but every single one of them is a theatre critic.
Ang. Bloody spoilsports.

Tom. The 1930s setting was too contrived, the performance too frivolous in concept and execution, the actors too eager to please the crowd. You should’ve heard him complain about how “scantily clad” everyone was. I thought he would tumble right off me when Miss Puck came on for the first time. And when the lads undressed... you should’ve heard him.

Ang. Those dry-as-dust, stuck-up narrow-minded intellectuals! They wouldn’t know fun if it hit ‘em in the face, they wouldn’t. That arrogance! I think Ole Will ’imself would’ve laughed his codpiece off had he been present.

Tom. There’s no pleasing you, Angus. Either they are too dumb or they are too brainy.

Ang. That is not true, mate! I don’t mind them dumb or brainy. Just that American was so stupid, I swear, a piece of toast is Stephen Hawking compared with ’im. Know what ‘e did? When “Pyramus and Thisbe” was put on he turned to his wife an’ asked her why they would start a whole new play when the first one wasn’t over yet. Can you believe that? How daft d’you have to be not to get that it’s a play within a play? What did ‘e think Bottom and his lads were preparin’ for the whole friggin’ play long? Ah, this ignorance! It makes me want to bite their illiterate asses! If I ’ad teeth, that is.

Tom. Aw, there’s no use in complaining, is there? New performance, new chance. Maybe one of the Austrian birds saves up and you get lucky, Angus, my friend.

Ang. I wish.

Tom. ‘night, Angus. See you tomorrow for the matinee?

Ang. Aye. Give my love to the wife.

Tom. I will. ’night.

Ang. ’night, Tommy.
London Assurance – Background Revealed

Recently, hitherto unknown material has been found in the attic of Dion Boucicault’s final residence, shedding new light on his most popular play London Assurance. According to our exclusive sources, what was thought to be a fictitious play is now revealed to be based on real-life events, which caused a scandal in the mid-19th century. A sealed box containing various letters signed by nobleman Charles Palacio was found during renovation work in the attic. These letters reveal the scandalous love story between Charles Palacio and Grace Eavesdrop, who was married to his father, Sir Harcourt Palacio. Apparently Boucicault wanted to expose the truth about the incestuous relationship on stage, but upon intervention from the Lord Chamberlain’s Office the play had to be rewritten.

The published version of London Assurance tells a story similar to the true events, however in a much less controversial form. Character names and the theme of the scandalous love affair have been altered. True love only wins on stage: the plot of London Assurance revolves around Sir Harcourt Courtly, a London aristocrat who travels to the countryside to meet his young, rich fiancée, Grace Harkaway. Due to a coincidence, his son, Charles Courtly, is also present at the same country house and falls deeply in love with his stepmother-to-be. What follows is a fireworks of mistaken identities and romantic confusions, fuelled even more by the appearance of Lady Gay Spanker, an unusually strong and independent woman. Unlike in real life, Sir Harcourt falls madly in love with her and calls off the wedding with Grace. In the end everything falls into place and Charles is allowed to marry his beloved Grace.

The play, first staged at the London Olympic Theatre in 1841, is currently showing at London’s National Theatre, starring Fiona Shaw as the outstanding Lady Gay Spanker and Simon Russell Beale as Sir Harcourt Courtly. The production, directed by Nicholas Hytner, has won huge acclaim by audience and critics alike. Even the notorious Viennese critics, attending one of the matinee performances, were impressed by the irony and wit shown by this production.
Posh
by Laura Wade

Dear President of the Association of Boudica's Amazons,

I salute you most dearly. I hereby send you the requested report on Laura Wade's Posh, evaluating the threat that the play might pose to the secrecy of our esteemed association.

Having seen the play, I come to the conclusion that this is not the case at all. The Riot Club could not be more different from ours: this bunch of immature scoundrels who do nothing but behave like utter savages cannot be said to possess even one iota of the grace and dignity of our association. Indeed, comparing the Riot Club to ours would be like saying that copper is gold or turning a crow into a swan.

While we are concerned with discussing relevant issues, the Riot Club seems to be more interested in indulging in the kind of behaviour that would even put a monkey to shame. If screaming and smashing furniture to bits and pieces like a rowdy bunch of schoolboys is their favourite pursuit, it can be said that “Riot Club” is a most fitting name, because it sums up that club's purpose most accurately.

Not only are they a bunch of vandalising rascals, but their treatment of women is most objectionable. Rarely have I seen women more humiliated, insulted and mistreated than in this play. They are treated like sex objects and the only thing they are believed to be good at is giving blowjobs and being submissive slaves.

However, these boys are not only immature and irresponsible. On top of that, the Riot Club does not shy away from using violence against others.

Yet, I would not be completely honest if I did not admit that there were a few positive aspects in the performance. The boys were true eye-candies and could easily turn a girl's head. Consider, for instance, the following pictures of two club members who could readily compete for the title of “Sexiest Man Alive”. They were probably the only reason for our enduring the play until the very end.

To sum up, the Riot Club does not pose a threat to our association, but the obvious charm of its members should not be underestimated. Having concluded my report, I bid you farewell.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Blunt, Vice-President of the Association of Boudica's Amazons
Hi everyone, it's me, Bazi Bookworm. Long time no see! Actually, I've just returned from a trip to the British Library. What an amazing experience that was, but let me start at the beginning.

I was chewing my way through an anthology of English Literature in the departmental library, when suddenly the volume was taken from the shelf and before I knew what was happening I found myself in a dark and stuffy backpack. At first I wasn't too happy, but then I overheard a conversation and could not believe my good fortune. The student was about to leave for a field trip to London and the British Library was to be one of its main attractions. In the hope of getting my teeth into one of the delicacies there, maybe even the Magna Charta, I hid in the student's diary as fast as I could and off we went to London.

After a nearly endless week, we finally entered the sanctuary of books: The British Library. We had just passed the main gate, when the humans took interest in a bizarre statue of a guy called Isaac Newton. Quite frankly, he was in a very uncomfortable-looking position and I doubt that he could have developed a great idea in that kind of position, given the fact that backaches usually distract people from thinking. I took a picture, just see for yourselves!

Countless photographs later, we entered the building. The first book I saw was huge, but unfortunately made of bronze. Just some seconds later, I saw it: heaven, paradise... the King's Library. Hundreds and thousands, ten thousands of books just waiting for me. Or so it seemed, for I soon noticed that my student went round and round the vitreous cuboid that held the treasures, showing no signs of entering. We even passed the room in which the Magna Charta was exhibited without taking a look at it. Just when I was starting to wonder whether my student was an ignorant philistine, I saw them: the "authorised personnel only!" signs. What a disappointment! Had we come all the way just to see some stone heads and the admittedly impressive architecture?

Finally we turned towards the exhibition of maps. Words can't describe what I saw. Maps of all ages and all regions of this world, big maps, small maps, maps of the nocturnal sky, maps... maps... maps. My student seemed to like best a wooden map, drawn on a piece of furniture. But my favourite was the Psalter World Map, nearly as old as the Magna Charta, of great historical value and just the size of an appropriate dinner! I took the risk and jumped, ready to dig in, but...
Oh spite! An almost invisible glass case separated me from this treasure and there was no way of even getting close to it.

Still this journey was worth its while and I would suggest you go and see the British Library next time you visit London. I satisfied my curiosity, made a lot of interesting discoveries and filled my stomach chewing one of the postcards my student bought in the library shop. And what a coincidence, it showed the Psalter World Map, too.

Diana Birgmann, Verena Schneeweiß, Stefanie Böhm
Dearest Mr British Museum,

Hours have I spent trying to find words that might describe the feelings in my heart. There is no other way for me but to tell you that I love you. Just let me explain why I adore you so madly.

With all your 75,000 square metres of exhibition space you are the largest museum in Britain, and equally enormous is my love for you. Every single one of your over 7 million objects makes my heart beat faster. What I can’t stop thinking about is that they come from all continents, and in no other museum can the visitors learn so much about the world’s cultural history from the beginnings up to the present. I dream about your colossal busts from Ancient Egypt, your great collection of Western prints and drawings, your Greek vases and Roman silver, your coins and medals, to name just a few of the antiques which can be admired in your different departments. But what makes my portraits tremble most is your marvellous Rosetta Stone. This Egyptian stone slab dating from 196 BC is just another one of your many lovely features, and what I appreciate most about it is that it helped to decipher hieroglyphic writing in the 19th century.

Although your exhibits are so valuable and precious, you are modest and have never even thought of claiming an admission fee from any of the many visitors from all over the world. Fair enough, for some of your events and special exhibitions one has to pay an entrance fee, but generally your generous and good heart wants to share all the knowledge you have gained over the centuries with your visitors for free.

You certainly are the kindest museum of all as you also provide audio tours and employ knowledgeable and well-informed guides, who take your visitors through all of your wonderful exhibition spaces. And even though I know it is far too early to even think about starting a family with you, my love, your fondness of children takes my breath away. When I see how you offer various family activities and programmes for schools I feel even more drawn to you.

Now, please, don’t think I’m merely a superficial gallery but I can’t help commenting on your attractive and breath-taking exterior. Your Greek revival façade is certainly the eyecatcher in Bloomsbury, making everyone stop and take a second look at your 44 columns. But you are not only beautiful and good-looking on the outside but also on the inside... Just like any visitor who enters your glass-roofed Great Court and is overwhelmed, I am amazed and left breathless by this beautiful addition built in 2000.

I’m not sure whether I should bring up this delicate subject and I don’t want to be insensitive, but the loss of your many cherished books from the Round Reading Room in 1997, when they were
moved to the new building at St Pancras, definitely left you devastated and I hope these lines do not evoke any sad feelings. All I’m trying to say is that I’m here to help you get over this difficult time in your life, just as the few remaining books of your collections, known as the Paul Hamlyn Library, have eased your pain.

You might think our difference in age is insurmountable, as it would take yet another one hundred years for me to be opened when you were established in 1753. But as we are both in the prime of our lives, this obstacle should not stand between us any more.

My dearest Mr British Museum, these words don’t even come close to expressing my ardent love for you. Please let me know if you have the same feelings for me because if you did I would be the happiest Portrait Gallery London has ever seen.

Forever yours,

Ms Portrait Gallery

Maria Kienesberger, Katharina Küronya