**Explain how one or more performers used their skills to reveal different aspects of their character at particular moments in one live production you have seen and assess the effectiveness of these moments.**

On the 14th March 2013 I went to see Patrick Barlow’s “39 Steps”, adapted from Hitchcock’s original movie set in 1935, at the Criterion theatre directed by Maria Aitken. “39 Steps” is set in 1935 and the audience follow Richard Hannay, played by Adam Jackson-Smith, who is accused of committing murder and uncovers the secret of the “39 Steps.” The play is influenced by Brecht and is performed as an ensemble of 4 people, (Jackson-Smith, Jennifer Bryden, Stephen Critchlow and Andy Williams) who perform over 120 different characters. The actors effectively brought the characters to life and were able to convey different aspects of their character in this performance. As the play is very farcical it’s made very difficult to feel sympathy for the characters because of the hyperbolic and stereotypical characters typical of the 1930’s.

At the beginning of the play we see Hannay (Jackson-Smith) sitting centre stage on an arm chair in his living room. He directly addresses the reader and informs us that he is not only “bored” but “tired” of his life. This immediately establishes him as the central protagonist and allows the audience to go on a journey with him. Already through Hannay’s first line of “London 1935” the audience can see that he is a stereotypical British man through his posh, refined accent and stereotypical dress of a tweed jacket, the fact that his body posture is very upright and straight allows the audience to think that he’s upper class. Jackson-Smith reveals to the audience that Hannay is miserable, making him an unlikely hero, and that “no one would miss [him]”. On this line he occupies himself by pouring a scotch and looks away from the audience with his body turned away from us and is slightly hunched to shut everyone out. Jackson-Smith says this line in a slow pace which shows how he is contemplating suicide but also shows him to be reflective on his life. He then goes on to say “I could quite easily just...” and gulps his scotch without finishing his sentence as the audience can guess what he is going to say, he also has wide eyes and sits back in his chair to show his disbelief that he would think such a thing. This also connotes that he is miserable and further highlights the playwright’s intention of creating an unlikely hero.

However at the end of the play (after Hannay has “saved the day”) Hannay is no longer miserable because he has fallen in love with Pamela, played by Jennifer Bryden. Both characters have very close proxemics to highlight that they don’t really want to say goodbye to each other even though they have to say goodbye. Also, on the line “well you’re a free man anyway” Pamela gently brushed Hannay’s arm and was fiddling with her clothes to show that she really does like him but with Hannay’s blunt response of “right” in which he raises his eyebrows and looks at her longingly with wide eyes and an open mouth the audience sees a change in Hannay from the miserable character we saw at the beginning and the audience want the two characters to end up together as we have been on a journey with them and have seen their relationship progress. When Hannay says “Better be going” Pamela looks up at him with widened eyes and lowered eyebrows with a blank facial expression to show her disappointment she then looked down to the floor and pulls on the sleeves of her jacket and replies softly “yes”. Bryden’s tone of voice here contrasts from when she says her next line “certainly do” which is more abrupt because she finally realises that Hannay isn’t going to do anything about their relationship. This also relates to the theme of British reserve and sexual repression which is embodied in both characters. As Hannay begins to walk away from Pamela he turns his head back to her which allows the audience to see a contrast from Hannay from the beginning because as he turns his head back to he stares at the floor and slowly inches away from Pamela showing he is no longer miserable but his character has changed into a more happy one because of Pamela but also a sad aspect is revealed because he is leaving her. However the audience later see that Pamela and Hannay are together at the very end of the play and Hannay is smiling and has relaxed body language conveying his happiness.

When Hannay meets Professor Jordan (played by Stephen Critchlow) the audience believe that he will be a nice and charming person due to his place in society and also, like Hannay, being posh and upper class. This also introduces the theme of “the veneer of society is thin” which shows the dominant cultural expectations and that we expect the characters to be one thing and they turn out to be another. At the beginning of this section the professor is very charming saying “So sorry to have kept you” and enters with his back hunched, his arm at a right angle and exaggeratedly smoking a cigarette in a cigarette holder. He also gestures for Hannay to sit on a chair and maintains direct eye contact with him always smiling which creates a friendly atmosphere and the audience begin to like the professor. This atmosphere is continued on the professor’s line of “not at all old chap” in which he walks closer to Hannay closing the proxemics and pats Hannay on the shoulder on “old chap” revealing the aspect that he is a nice and polite character. However, when the professor reveals that he is actually evil this shocks the audience as it played on our expectations and we believed that he was going to be nice because Hannay is in the same social standings and is a likeable character, which portrays the political message of not trusting someone in the same or a higher social standing than you. Professor Jordan changes his character when he says through gritted teeth “you give me only one option Mr Hannay” and frowns his face whilst pulling out a gun and putting it to Hannay’s head lowering himself to Hannay’s level. This also highlights that evil comes in attractive forms.

Both Hannay and Professor Jordan appear to be a certain stereotype and then prove to be something different as Hannay begins by being miserable and then becomes content with his life and Professor Jordan seems a nice character but is in fact the villain. Jackson-Smith and Critchlow use their performance skills to effectively reveal these different aspects of their character to bring across the themes and political messages of the play.

Ao2- 11/17

Little reference to style (mulit-roling, breaking forth wall, representational props/costume), good knowledge of aims and the portrayal of stereotype/ veneer of society.

Ao4- 27/33

You focus on the question, but I feel you would have been more successful in this case focusing on only 2 scenes and going into more detail. Obviously this is an excellent grade, but it appears to me that you could potentially be more successful going into more depth about 2 scenes.

38/50