

Jadwiga Uchman

**Reality,  
Illusion,  
Theatricality:**  
A Study of Tom Stoppard

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REDAKCJA NAUKOWO-DYDAKTYCZNA  
„FOLIA LITTERARIA ANGLICA”

*Maria Edelson, Adam Sumera*

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*Barbara Grzejszczak*

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**For Marek**





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# Introduction

## Tom Stoppard

Thomas Straussler was born on 3 July 1937 in Zlin, Czechoslovakia, the second son of Eugene Straussler, a doctor employed by the Bata shoe company. When the second world war broke out the family was transferred by the firm to Singapore where Doctor Straussler died in enemy hands. In 1946 Tom's mother married Kenneth Stoppard, a major in the British army in India where the Straussler family had moved. After the marriage, the two boys took their stepfather's surname and thus Thomas Straussler became Tom Stoppard. In 1946 the family left for England. Tom finished his education in 1954, leaving school at the age of seventeen and joined the *Western Daily Press* in Bristol, dreaming of becoming a "big-name, roving reporter" in international trouble-spots (Hunter 1982, 3). In 1958 he moved to *Bristol Evening World*, increasingly specialising in theatre and film. In July 1960 he "remembered that it was [his] twenty-third birthday, twenty-three and still unpublished, still unstaged – still, as a matter of fact, unwriting and two more years behind schedule (horrors!-two more, and [he would] have to wear the bottoms of his trousers rolled)" (Hudson interview 1974, 18) and he started writing *A Walk on the Water*. The play was produced on television, being transmitted on ITV in November 1963. In 1964 it had its first theatre production in Hamburg, during Stoppard's visit to Berlin on a Ford Foundation grant where it "was applauded downstairs and booed upstairs" (Amory interview 1974, 69). In the meantime, in 1962, Stoppard moved to London to join the short-lived *Scene* magazine as a drama critic, a job which stimulated him to see 132 plays and review a considerable number of them (Page 1986, 7). The first play Stoppard regards as really "his", called *The Gamblers*, was performed by Bristol University undergraduates around 1965. He made his name known to a great number of people only after 1967 when *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* became his first artistic success, many others to follow in the future<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For details concerning Stoppard's life and career see, among others: Hunter 1982, 1–15 and Page 1986, 7–9.

The richness and variety of Tom Stoppard's artistic output is paralleled by a similar richness and variety of criticism discussing either individual works or specific aspects of the playwright's art. A number of monographs have appeared dealing with his output in general terms<sup>2</sup>. Casebooks, collections of critical essays and a file on Stoppard have been published<sup>3</sup>. Some criticism is also devoted to chosen aspects of his art, such as the moral vision of his plays or their textual criticism<sup>4</sup>.

## Comedies of ideas

The critics have tried to classify Stoppard as a playwright, to state which artistic group or trend he belongs to. And so, for instance, both Taylor and Wiszniowska discuss his output in their books devoted to the Second Wave. The term itself, coined by the former, does not pertain to the quality of the plays discussed but results from a chronological approach, and, as the latter critic argues "the phenomenon of the Second Wave reveals a confusing variety of forces and influences" (Wiszniowska 1985, 10). While discussing Stoppard's output these two critics stress its different aspects. Wiszniowska notices the playwright's affinities with the Theatre of the Absurd, especially with N. F. Simpson and Harold Pinter, a point noticed by a number of critics<sup>5</sup>. Taylor argues: "It would be tempting to label Tom Stoppard as the intellectual among our young writers" (Taylor 1978, 94).

Most of Stoppard's pieces are plays of ideas. It is relevant to stress here that his uniqueness results from his ability to present serious ideas by means of the comic genre. Stoppard himself has commented on this issue: "What I try to do, is to end up by contriving the perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce or perhaps even high comedy" (Hudson interview 1974, 8). Many critics have noticed this aspect of his writing<sup>6</sup> and Whitaker (1986, 2) has argued that one of Stoppard's main contributions to modern drama is his "ability to shape intellectual debate into a dazzling three-ring circus". Being an outstanding modern English farceur, Stoppard differs from other comedy writers in that his "focus is consistently metaphysical" (Innes 1992, 325). Stoppard's pieces are, as he calls them, "argument plays"

<sup>2</sup> Bigsby (1976), Billington (1987), Brassell (1987), Gabbard (1982), Hayman (1979), Hunter (1982), Jenkins (1988), Kelly (1991), Londré (1981), Rusinko (1986), Sammells (1988) and Whitaker (1986).

<sup>3</sup> Bareham (1990), Harty (1988), Jenkins (1990) and Page (1986).

<sup>4</sup> Corballis (1984), Dean (1981), Deloney (1990) and Rayner (1987); Gaskell (1985).

<sup>5</sup> Cahn 1979; Levenson 1971, 431; Taylor 1970, 14; Gitzen 1976, 151; Colby 1978, 13; Gabbard 1982, 2; Innes 1992, 325, Callen 1969.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Levy 1980; Billington 1987, 132; Gussow 1995, IX; Innes 1992, 325.

(Gussow interview 1995, 35) and he writes them “because writing dialogue is the only respectable way of contradicting yourself. I’m the kind of person who embarks on an endless leapfrog down the great moral issues. I put a position, rebut it, refute the rebuttal, and rebut the refutation” (Gussow interview 1995, 3). It can be argued that the game of coin tossing which opens *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is an apt metaphor for the playwright’s creativity which is based on numerous contrasts: reality and illusion, unpredictability and determinism, the past as it was and as it is remembered, the play of ideas and farce. The last of these dichotomies, as Stoppard argues, “represents two sides of [his] own personality, which can be described as seriousness comprised by [his] frivolity, or ... frivolity redeemed by [his] seriousness” (Gussow interview 1995, 14). Duality is a characteristic trait of Stoppard’s output in which the barrier between serious and fun theatre is demolished.

## Post-modernism

Stoppard’s works can be also viewed in reference to post-modern craftsmanship, a point noticed by Hu (1989, 4) who discusses Stoppard’s use of allusions and intertextual references as a sign of post-modern aesthetics. The features of postmodernism: indeterminacy, fragmentation, decanonisation, irony, hybridisation, carnivalisation, constructionism, immanence, as defined by Hassan (1991, 196-199), can be detected in the artist’s writings. I would like to concentrate on this critic’s ninth ‘definien’ of the term, namely “*Performance, Participation*”: “Indeterminacy elicits participation; gaps must be filled. The postmodern text, verbal or non-verbal, invites performance” (Hassan 1991, 198).

## Performance and audience participation

Stoppard has repeatedly stressed that for him theatre is an event and not a text<sup>7</sup>, his plays being “written to happen, not to be read” (Gussow interview 1995, 37). He willingly participates in rehearsals and often, because of practical considerations, alters the script. In “Author’s Note” to the second edition of *Jumpers* he has written:

In preparing previous plays for publication I have tried with some difficulty to arrive at something called a ‘definite text’, but I now believe that in the case of plays there is no

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<sup>7</sup> Stoppard 1982, 3 and 9; Watts interview 1973; Gussow interview 1979, 22; Hayman interview 1980, 31; Brassell 1987, 261; Ruskin 1983, 546 and 548; Gussow interview 1995, 110.

such animal. Each production will throw up its own problems and very often the solution will lie in some minor change to the text, either in the dialogue or in the author's directions, or both.

(*Jumpers*, 1973, 11)

Consequently, many of Stoppard's plays appeared in different editions which reflect ongoing alternations<sup>8</sup>. Many changes were introduced under the influence of Stoppard's director, Peter Wood, who often pointed out their original obliqueness and allusiveness. Stoppard himself has commented on this issue saying that he is reluctant to be overexplicit while Wood argues that the audience are not given enough information (Hayman interview 1980, 29). The playwright is of the opinion that "a text that leaves no room for any kind of discovery will, in the end, be mechanistic" (Gussow interview 1995, 64). Stoppard, then, invites his audiences to take an active part in creating the meaning of his plays. The communication with Stoppard's art presupposes an aesthetic attitude where the audience are simultaneously receptive and co-operative. Their approach should be that propagated by Ingarden (1937, 38–41 and 1988, 409–436): they should locate the fields of indeterminacy and then remove them in a process of concretization. Stoppard's dramas contain many fields of indeterminacy for the audience to fill in. Each decodification will differ from others as the final responsibility for the coherence and meaning belongs to individual viewers. Elam (1980, 93) finds that the theatrical communication depends to a great extent on the intertextual basis of theatrical frame: "Appropriate decodification of a given text derives above all from the spectator's familiarity with other texts (and thus with learned textual rules)".

The intertextual basis of Stoppard's art pertains both to its thematic and structural components. Much of Stoppard's writing is characterised by an intertextual status – his works are not only artistic representations of reality but also representations of representations, so a dialogue with other artistic forms takes place. They assume a certain amount of knowledge on the part of the audience, a knowledge which will enable them not only to watch the performance peacefully and enjoy it as a form of entertainment but also, due to the intertextuality, to find new meanings and perspectives of the things presented. Hence Kinereth Meyer (1989, 105), in her article, entitled "'It Is Written': Tom Stoppard and the Drama of Intertext", writes: "'Artistic recycling' – dramatic allusion, intertextuality, parody, travesty, is not only inevitable, Stoppard is telling us, but necessary; it is only in the

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of some of the changes Stoppard's plays have undergone see: Jenkins (1990b, 1–12) and for different editions of concrete plays: Page (1986) where details concerning publication of individual plays are presented in Section 2. In his article Gaskell (1978) discusses at length the development of *Night and Day*.



interweaving of texts – the ‘convergences of different threads’ as Stoppard called it – that the new text emerges”. This critic concentrates on the thematic importance of intertextuality in Stoppard, while Wiszniowska (1994), in her article “Tom Stoppard Is *Squaring the Circle*. Some Intertextual Practices”, discusses the structural importance of figures on loan, the Brechtian use of commentators (the Narrator and the Witnesses), theatre in the theatre and the use of a frame.

## Ambushes for the audience

In her article “The Pleasure of Spectator”, Ann Ubersfeld (1982, 129) describes “theatre as sign of a gap-being-filled. It would not be going too far to say that the act of filling the gap is the very source of theatre pleasure”. Stoppard, whose aim is, as he himself argues, to “entertain a roomful of people” (Hudson interview 1974, 6) experiments with the audience’s ability to make discoveries while decoding the meaning of the pieces. He has commented on this aspect of his writing on several occasions. He has called his art “the theatre of audacity” (Hayman 1979b, 9), one of whose assets is “the dislocation of the audience’s assumptions” (Hayman 1979b, 143). In the interview for *Theatre Quarterly*, entitled “Ambushes for the Audience: Towards a High Comedy of Ideas”, Stoppard said:

I tend to write through a series of small, large and microscopic ambushes – which might consist of a body falling out of a cupboard, or simply an unexpected word in a sentence. But my preoccupation as a writer, which possibly betokens a degree of insecurity, takes the form of contriving to inject some sort of interest and colour into every line, rather than counting on the general situation having a general interest which will hold an audience. (Hudson interview 1974, 6)

Stoppard permanently dislocates the audience’s assumptions, introducing numerous ambushes of different kinds. Sometimes they consist of the possibility of a varied interpretation of verbal, visual or even sound images. At other times they pertain to the audience’s literacy which will enable them to decode the hidden literary, scientific, philosophical or art intertextual references. In all the instances the ambushes add to the overall impact of Stoppard’s art and result in the plays’ achieving their status of dramas which are simultaneously comedies and plays of ideas.

## A short survey of theoretical terms used in the study

This section of the introduction surveys the theoretical terms which will be used in my analysis of Stoppard’s output. Apart from the terms which

appear in the title of my thesis I discuss here other, related terms, such as metadrama, intertextuality, defamiliarisation and figures on loan.

## Reality and illusion in ontology and epistemology

The notion of reality can be discussed from a number of angles. *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides the following definitions:

**1a** the quality of being real or having an actual existence

**3a** Real existence, what is real; the aggregate of real things and existences; that which underlies and is the truth of appearances and phenomena

**5b** That which constitutes the actual thing, as distinguished from what is merely apparent or external  
(OED, vol. 13, 276)

*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* indicates additionally the philosophical denotations of the term:

**4a** something that exists independently of ideas concerning it. **b** something that exists independently of all other things and from which all other things derive.

(Urdang 1968, 1099)

Ontologically speaking, then, the concept of reality is linked both with “the chief thing”, “existence, esse, being” and with “objectivity” and “truth” (Dutch 1965, 397, 3, 4, 299).

In epistemology, the theory of perception, discussing the possibility of getting to know what the world and people inhabiting it are really like, the concept of reality is of paramount importance and is closely associated with the idea of perception, the latter being defined as

**4a** The taking of cognizance or being aware of a sensible or quasi sensible object

**6** In strict philosophical language (first brought into prominence by Reid): The action of the mind by which it refers its sensations to an external object as their cause. Distinguished from *sensation, conception* and *imagination* and *judgement or inference*

(OED, vol. 11, 522–523)

As the definition indicates, perception can be discussed from the psychological and philosophical perspective. As far as the philosophical issues are concerned they result from the juxtaposition of two philosophical standpoints: objective representationalism (in which what we perceive is assumed to resemble an objectively existing reality) and subjective idealism (which argues that we can never acquire knowledge of a transcendent world of things in themselves). In psychology, perception deals with the basic operations of our senses which produce sense data (reflecting objective

appearances of things) which are later on processed by our brain changing to subjective sensations. Perception is thus equivalent to “brain descriptions based on inferences from sensory data” (Harré 1986, 207). The sensory data are processed in the brain and the final description “depends very much upon stored knowledge of objects which is given by later stages of processing which are not understood in detail” (Harré 1986, 209). Both the philosophical and the psychological approach to perception stress the mystery inherent in the processes of perceiving reality.

The question follows whether there is really anything which could be given the name of “objective reality” or whether reality as we perceive it is an illusion. This notion was introduced by Plato in his famous metaphorical symbol of the cave in *Phaedrus*. In his philosophy of idealism he argued that the visible world of sense is illusive and obscures real world lying open to thought alone. In modern times, with the work of Albert Einstein and his theory of relativity, the notion of absolute values has been shattered. Everything, reality included, has become relative. It seems that the ontological status of reality can be discussed only after it has been perceived by a viewer. Even if we disagree with Plato and argue that the reality we perceive exists and is not merely an illusion, a shadowy reflection of the world of ideas, the very process of perception and then description will produce different images of the same reality. In the process many distortions occur. Two viewers may come up with two distinct versions, this discrepancy resulting from their different personalities, life experiences, associations and also from the inadequacy of language as a means of describing their experiences and feelings. Taking into account modern ideas of the alienation of language and the uniqueness of individual experiences which cannot be adequately expressed, the situation is complex and we may wonder whether we speak of reality or only of its mere illusion.

## Illusion in art

The term illusion acquires a different meaning if used in reference to an artistic representation of a reality. Here it is linked with the concept of realism. The artist will either try to depict the world and people in a realistic way and he will come up with an illusion of reality or he will stress that what we are watching, even though resembling objective reality sometimes, is not reality as such but a work of art following its own rules. If we consider the realistic approach we come across such phrases as “illusion”, “mimesis”, “imitation” or “representation”, all of which are close in meaning. The critics and theoreticians of literature and art have

widely discussed these terms, demonstrating the shifts in meaning which have taken place in the course of time<sup>9</sup>.

While it is beyond the scope of this work to discuss these notions in detail, it is important to recall the original definition as given by Aristotle and point out how it has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. And so, for instance, Abrams (1985, 83) writes in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*:

In literary criticism the word imitation has two diverse applications: (1) to define the nature of literature and other arts, and (2) to indicate the relation of one literary work which has served as a model.

The first part of the definition is very vague, indeed. Furthermore, the glossary does not include entries for "mimesis" and "illusion", either. In another book, *Doing Things with Texts. Essays in Criticism and Critical Theory*, the same author writes:

The key word in mimetic definitions of poetry, if not imitation, is another predicate that aligns the poem in the same direction: the poem is an image, reflection, feigning, counterfeiting, copy or representation.  
(Abrams 1989, 7)

This critical definition lacks in precision. A work of art is not a copy of reality, it is not a photographic representation, a point which was clarified by Aristotle who followed Plato:

The poet being an imitator, like a painter or any other artist, must of necessity imitate one of the three objects – things as they were or are, things as they are said to be, or things as they ought to be<sup>10</sup>.

Aristotle, then, "clearly did not mean faithful copying" as Tatarkiewicz argues (1970, 142–144), giving several arguments to support this view<sup>11</sup>. We could, therefore, follow Caute's opinion:

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<sup>9</sup> The following dictionary entries, books and articles are significant: 1) IMITATION: Definitions: Abrams 1985, 83; Fowler 1973, 98–100; Frye 1985, 290–291; Głowiński 1976, 163; Holman 1972, 267; Preminger 1965, 378; Shipley 1970, 159. 2) ILLUSION: Definitions: Frye 1985, 235; Shaw 1976, 87; Shipley 1970, 156. The articles and books discussing the concept: Büdel 1961, 277–291; Caute 1972; Choudhuri 1979; Głowiński 1976, 163; Morgan 1958, 91–102; Reiss 1971; Shaffer 1993, 3. MIMESIS: Definitions: Głowiński 1976, 240; Holman 1972, 321; Preminger 1965, 501, historical survey – 640–641; Shaw 1976, 176. Books and articles: Auerbach 1953; Boyd 1968; Diamond 1986; Dollimore 1980; Felperin 1977; Fuegi 1980; Gombrich 1963; Nuttall 1983; Sörbom 1966; Walton 1990.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* XXV, [in:] Butcher 1911, 97.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of Aristotle's understanding of the term "mimesis" see: Boyd 1968, 19–49; Butcher 1911, 7–111 and Halliwell 1986.

Mimesis, then, is a mirage. The best we can say for naturalist pretensions in that direction is that, according to certain cultural conventions, naturalism sets up a series of signs and signals along one code (language) which we recognise as equivalent to the signs and signals of a different code (our sense perception of the world). (Caute 1972, 101)

We could be less extreme, though, and argue that while mimesis is undoubtedly concerned with two different codes and sign systems, we sometimes tend to forget about it. It happens so, for instance, in the case of theatrical representations of reality following the rules of the fourth wall convention. Sometimes the author and all the people engaged in a theatrical production do their job in such a way and so well that we do not remember that there is a curtain separating the audience from the acting space. At moments, at least, thanks to the miracle of perfect theatrical illusion, we perceive the people on the stage not as actors but as “real” people engaged in their “real” everyday problems.

## Theatricality

The illusionist, mimetic, realistic approach is, as already mentioned, only one of the two possible extreme choices an artist can make. The second one, needless to say, is its opposite, that is the non-illusionist, non-realistic, presentational approach in which the artist keeps reminding the receiver (viewer, audience, reader or listener) that the thing perceived is not reality its artistic transformation. Also in this case there are several terms which are widely used: the above mentioned non-illusionist and presentational being often substituted by self-consciousness/self-reflexiveness and theatricality. All of them refer to the artist's deliberate emphasis upon the unreality of the world presented and to a retreat from a realistic, mimetic form of representation. Ruby Cohn (1991, 95) has written: “Non-realism in the theatre has several synonyms – expressionism, presentation, theatricalism”. Presentational staging has been defined by Hatlen (1992, 415) as “Production that is frankly theatrical, free from illusion of reality. The performer confronts the audience directly”<sup>12</sup>. The terms “theatricality” and “theatricalism”, which for Beckerman (1990, 38) are explicitly synonymous with “presentationalism”, are widely used by the critics to refer to different types of non-realistic presentation<sup>13</sup>.

Elizabeth Burns in her book *Theatricality. A Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life* discusses two aspects of the term. Starting from

<sup>12</sup> For other, similar definitions see: Elam 1984, 312 and Fuegi 1980, 111.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Hatlen 1992, 211; Connor 1992, 133 and introduction to “Theatricalism Issue” of *The Drama Review*.

“the idea of the world as a stage, of men as actors assuming and discarding different roles, and of the world of social reality becoming a play contrived by hidden, superhuman or impersonal forces”, she stresses the importance of the notion of “*theatrum mundi*” in literature and art (Burns 1972, 9)<sup>14</sup>. She then discusses what she calls “rhetorical conventions” which “relate to the establishment of the boundary between the fictive world presented through the stage actions and the world of social reality”: introduction, induction, explanatory prologue, the play-within-the play, soliloquy, aside and direct address (Burns 1972, 40–54). While dealing with the second application of the term she writes:

“Theatricality” in ordinary life consists in the resort to this special grammar of composed behaviour; it is when we suspect that behaviour is composed according to this grammar of rhetorical or authenticating conventions that we regard it as theatrical.

(Burns 1972, 33)

Similarly to Burns, Barish (1969, 1) distinguishes two kinds of theatricality: “the sustaining of a feigned person – or mimicry – and the emphatic maintaining of one’s own person, or self-manifestation.” He writes: “Santayana, in a series of brilliant essays on masks, defends theatricality as a necessary ingredient of existence” (Barish 1969, 27). The twofold application of the term “theatricality” by Burns and Barish evokes the ideas of reality and illusion both in theatre and in life. In the case of theatre, even in fully realistic plays, only an illusion of reality is created. In real life too, due to the use of masks and employment of theatricality, what we sometimes perceive is not the person as he actually is but only an appearance, an illusion created for our sake by someone who pretends to be different from what he really is.

Burns, while enumerating rhetorical conventions associates them with the notion of “theatricality”. Beckerman (1990, 111–123) discussing the nature of prologue, epilogue, direct address, aside, soliloquy, experiments with audience participation and direct presentation associates them with “theatricalism” or “presentational style”. Even though the two critics use different terms they are clearly referring to the same artistic phenomenon.

## Metadrama

There is yet another term which is used in the same context, namely metatheatre, a phrase coined by Lionel Abel in his book entitled *Metatheatre. A New View of Dramatic Form*. He defines “metatheatre as resting on two

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of this notion see also Hawkins 1966 and Yates 1969.

basic postulates: (1) the world is a stage and (2) life is a dream" (Abel 1963, 105). For this critic, who perceives metatheatre as a modern equivalent of tragedy<sup>15</sup>, the plays which are thus labelled "are theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized" (Abel 1963, 60). In his book he discusses a number of plays which are metadramatic or metatheatrical (the terms being equivalent for him). He argues that a metaplay

is the necessary form for dramatizing characters who, having full self-consciousness, cannot but participate in their own dramatization. Hence the famous lines of Jacques, Shakespeare's philosopher of metatheatre, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." The same notion is expressed by Calderon, who entitled one of his works *The Great Stage of the World*. (Abel 1963, 78)

Abel (1963, 111) stresses the importance of Bertolt Brecht and Luigi Pirandello in their endeavour of creating metatheatre, calling the first one "the epistemologist of metatheatre" and the second one its "logician"<sup>16</sup>.

Many critics have defined and discussed the notion of metadrama, sometimes slightly differently from the way undertaken by Abel<sup>17</sup>. Even though it is beyond the scope of the present study to give a detailed discussion of the criticism on the subject, it is justified to devote some time to Richard Hornby's views expressed in the book *Drama, Metadrama and Perception*. He suggests a number of axioms for relating drama to reality (Hornby 1986, 17). He argues that "metadrama can be defined as drama about drama, it occurs whenever the subject of a play turns out to be, in some sense drama itself" (Hornby 1986, 31). He also provides a list of

the possible varieties of conscious or overt metadrama:

1. The play within the play.
2. The ceremony within the play.
3. Role playing within the role.
4. Literary and real-life reference.
5. Self-reference.

(Hornby 1986, 32)

<sup>15</sup> See the chapter entitled "Tragedy – or Metatheatre, Abel 1963, 107–113.

<sup>16</sup> Numerous critics have discussed the metatheatrical character of the works of these two playwrights. See, among others: 1) PIRANDELLO: Bassnett 1980; Esslin 1970, 59–63; Fergusson 1949; Gaskell 1972, 120–127; Heffner 1965, 255–275; Tonelli 1984 and Vincentini 1977. 2) BRECHT: Abel 1963, 86–107; Büdel 1961, 286–287; Burns 1974, 368–374; Esslin 1959; Dickson 1978, 232–241 and Morley 1977.

<sup>17</sup> Calderwood 1971, 4–5; Elam 1980, 90; Elam 1989, 313; Fletcher 1976, 505; Nelson 1958; Shipley 1970, 199; Schlueter 1979; Sławińska 1990, 219–220; Sławińska 1979, 261; Świontek 1990, 80–176.

Out of the five varieties only two have been widely discussed by critics, namely the play within the play<sup>18</sup> and self-reference (or self-consciousness)<sup>19</sup>. The fourth variety, literary and real-life reference, including citation, allegory, parody and adaptation, has attracted much attention, not in the context of metatheatre, however, but in connection with the notion of intertextuality.

## Intertextuality

The critical term, first introduced by Julia Kristeva, has been widely applied, defined and redefined<sup>20</sup>. The imprecise use of the term has been criticised by Leon S. Roudiez who translated and edited her works. In the introduction to her *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, he wrote:

This French word was originally introduced by Kristeva and met with immediate success; it has since been much used and abused on both sides of the Atlantic. The concept, however, has been generally misunderstood. It has nothing to do with the matters of influence by one writer upon another; it does, on the other hand, involve the components of a textual system such as the novel, for instance. (Roudiez in Kristeva, 1980, 15)

We should return to what Kristeva herself has written. While discussing the passage from one sign system to another she argued:

To be sure, this process comes about through a combination of displacement and condensation, but this does not account for its total operation. It also involves an altering of the thetic position and the formation of a new one. The new signifying system may be produced with the same signifying material; in language, for example, the passage may be made from narrative to text. Or it may be borrowed from different signifying materials: the transposition from a carnival scene to the written text, for instance .... The term intertextuality denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign-system(s) into another but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of 'study of sources', we prefer the term transposition because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic – of enunciative and denotative positionality. (Kristeva 1980, 111)

Intertextuality, then, as the term was understood by Kristeva, is not a simple borrowing but involves taking elements from one sign system and incorporating

<sup>18</sup> Boas 1927; Cohn 1987; Cohn 1991, 95–127; Kowzan 1971; Nelson 1958; Świontek 1990, 149–176.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett 1990, 36; Caute 1972, 177; Cohn 1991, 106; Gassner 1966, 144; Holland 1984; Rogacki 1970, 50; Schlueter 1979, 2; Świontek 1990, 83–91 and 148.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance: Culler 1981, 102–118; Culler 1975, 102–152; Jenny 1988; Głowiński 1986; Lachmann 1991 and Pfister 1991.



them, in an altered position, into another. What is worth stressing here is that intertextuality may refer either to two works of the same sign system or to works belonging to different sign systems.

The very notion of intertextuality is, in a sense, connected with the study of sources<sup>21</sup>. What is important, however, is not the actual tracing of the source but finding out what the artist has done with it. In this respect this kind of intertextuality deals with an artistic reshaping not of reality as such but of its earlier representation. Furthermore, while referring not to life but to its mere illusion, such a work of art will draw attention to its own status as art. Intertextuality, then, is related to the notions of reality and illusion in artistic representations. The densely intertextual status of a play will add to its theatricality.

## Defamiliarisation

The metatheatrical character of intertextuality is linked with ideas of Russian Formalists for whom the primary aim of literature was the foregrounding of its medium, bringing it into prominence and making it dominant in one's perception. The laws of literature produce the distinctive features of literariness. For Victor Shklovsky literariness is a function of the process of defamiliarisation, *ostranienie*, making strange:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception, because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.* (Shklovsky's emphasis)<sup>22</sup>

Thus it is the task of art to liberate things from the automatisations of our perceptions, to make us look at them as if we had never seen them before. Literature should defamiliarise the world of everyday perception and renew the reader's capacity for fresh sensation. Defamiliarisation annihilates the possibility of "the reader's habitual, automatic, relation to objects, situations, and poetic form itself" (Grodén 1996, 636). The technique of *ostranienie*, then, can be used in connection not only with the reality depicted by art but also in reference to art. In the latter case it draws attention not only to the literariness of a given work of literature but also to its theatricality, its metatheatrical status.

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<sup>21</sup> Being fully aware of the fact that many features characteristic of metadrama (play within a play, the use of narrator or other kind of frame, the existence of an ur-text, etc.) can be discussed as intertextual practices, in my study I refer to intertextuality in the context of Stoppard's references to works belonging either to literature or to other sign systems.

<sup>22</sup> Wiktor Szklowski 1986, 17. The English translation quoted in Selden 1993, 31.

## Figures on loan

Theodore Ziolkowski (1983, 129–130), in a chapter of his book entitled “The Boundaries of Literature and Life”, introduces the term figure on loan and defines it as “a fictional character that a writer takes out of its original context and inserts into another one – as a kind of quotation”. The introduction of figures on loan as an alien element, being an intertextual procedure, adds to the intertextual status of the work of art. Ziolkowski goes on to write:

Like the quotation, therefore, the figure on loan must step into a new context and at the same time remain detached enough to remind us constantly of its source. Like the quotation, moreover, the figure on loan depends for its effect upon a shared cultural tradition that enables the reader immediately to recognize the alien body that has entered the fiction.

(Ziolkowski 1983, 130)

The basic phenomenon connected with all the figures on loan is the same: “the intrusion of reality into fiction”, no matter whether the figure introduced is a historical figure, a contemporary person, or the author himself. There are instances, however, where, the figure on loan comes not from reality but from another work of literature. Then, “we are no longer dealing with the relationship of fiction to reality but, instead, with the relationship of one fictional world to another – a situation that involves different aesthetic rules and implications”.

All the terms discussed above pertain to Stoppard’s theatre and a clear understanding of their meaning is necessary to avoid misunderstandings possible otherwise.

## Aim, scope and method of the present study

The aim of the present study is to analyse the concepts of reality, illusion and theatricality in Tom Stoppard’s plays written for the stage, radio and television. The analysis includes *Squaring the Circle*, his only non-collaborative film script to date<sup>23</sup>. As becomes evident from the above survey of criticism the meaning of the three concepts is by no means simple. The present study discusses the term “illusion” in reference both to its ontological and epistemological denotation in relationship with reality and in relation to the theatrical illusion, the mimetic, realistic representation of

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of Stoppard’s adaptations and film scripts see: Page 1986, 76–84.

reality in dramatic art. The situation is equally complex in the case of the term "theatricality". Here I am following the twofold understanding of the term by both Burns and Barish. Firstly, there is theatricality as a social convention, a mask or pose employed by characters in order to deceive, to make artificial appearance be taken for reality. Secondly, there is theatricality as applied to the kind of drama which departs from the mimetic representation. In the latter sense the term is equivalent to metadrama or self-conscious, self-reflexive, presentational, non-illusionist drama. The theatricality of a given drama is often achieved by means of such artistic devices as intertextuality, defamiliarisation and figures of loan.

As a rule individual plays are discussed chronologically in separate chapters. Sometimes, however, a chapter presents analyses of several plays: the first is devoted to a number of early plays, the fifth presents two short radio plays etc. In each case an explanation is provided why the plays are examined together. It would be tempting to deal with each of the three concepts separately. Having considered this possibility and having taken into account the complexity of both the three concepts and the plays themselves, I have come to the conclusion that the chronological approach is preferable.

In analysing Stoppard's output I am following an eclectic orientation which enables a flexible approach to the subject investigated. I am fully aware that such a method can be criticised by those propagating structuralism, semiology or deconstruction. It must be pointed out, however, that the majority of criticism on Stoppard's art follows this kind of approach, the only exceptions to the rule being the article by Keir Elam (1984) employing semiotics, the author being a theoretician, the paper of Neil Bennison (1993, pragmatics and discourse analysis) and the articles on Stoppard's use of intertextuality by Kinereth Meyer (1989) and Marta Wiszniowska (1994).

Some critics have noticed Stoppard's interest in epistemological questions concerning perception of a given reality. Yet the relationship between reality and its mere illusion was only occasionally discussed in books and articles which were devoted to general analyses of other issues. Two books deal more extensively with questions related to theatrical aspects of the playwright's works: Robert Gordon's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Jumpers and The Real Thing. Text and Performance*. (1991) and Stephen Hu's *Tom Stoppard's Stagecraft* (1989). The former discusses three plays only, following the basic pattern of the series in which his book is published, as defined by the General Editor, Michael Scott. Part One presents a critical introduction to the plays "using the techniques and criteria of the literary critic in examining the manner in which the work operates through language, imagery and action. Part Two takes the enquiry further into the play's theatricality by focusing on selected productions so as to illustrate points

of contrast in the interpretation of different directors and actors" (Scott in Gordon 1991, 7). As the Editor stresses, in this approach the theatricality is perceived as pertaining to an individual production and not as an element incorporated in the text written by the playwright. Similarly, Hu's study concentrates on "what an audience actually sees and hears during a live, staged performance, rather than what literary details a reader might observe during personal contemplation of a published text" (Hu 1989, 7). Both critics concentrate on concrete stage renderings of chosen plays which are the result of the joint effort of the playwright who has written the text and all those responsible for the production. Therefore it is justifiable to concentrate on the playtexts written by Stoppard and to investigate the meaning of the concepts of reality, illusion and theatricality in order to see to what extent they are important for the theme and structure of his plays. It seems that a detailed analysis of the three concepts as they appear in Stoppard's output may also help to understand why this playwright is so successful and why he has attracted so much attention both of simple theatre-goers and of more sophisticated theatre critics.

# I. The Early Plays

Tom Stoppard's early literary endeavours comprise his only novel so far, *Lord Malquist and Mr Moon*, and some short plays for the stage, radio and television. His earliest artistic attempts, even though they might seem lightweight and unimportant, still deserve attention, because they may be considered as finger-exercises preparing the playwright for his future masterpieces. The experiences of a drama critic made him sensitive to the art of theatre. The work for the radio, a purely aural medium, taught him how to use sound effects successfully, while the close-up technique of television and its insistence on the quality of visual elements increased his consciousness of this aspect of drama. On the thematic level the early pieces deal with issues which will be further developed in his full-length plays.

## 1. Stage plays

### *The Gamblers*

Jokingly referred to by Stoppard as "Waiting for Godot in the Condemned Cell" (Hudson interview 1974, 4), presenting a prisoner and a jailer in a death cell, *the Gamblers* has never been published. The passages which have appeared (quoted in Hayman 1979b, 28–31), however, bring a foretaste of the playwright's themes, style and fascination with the arbitrary nature of human condition. The significance of the title, the meaning of change and the relative nature of reality are expressed towards the end of the play by the prisoner in his speech concerning the revolution and the side you take in it:

They're two parts of the same wheel, and the wheel spins. Do you know what I mean?  
I mean that our insecure President who has just been so nearly deposed by one popular

uprising achieved his position by a similar one seven years ago ... The life cycle of government, from the popular to the unpopular. The wheel goes slowly round till you get back to the starting point, and it's time for another revolution.

(quoted in Hayman 1979b, 30–31)

This speech is a forerunner of the ideas expressed at length in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* – the prisoner and the guard initially appear to be on opposing sides of a political revolution (life situation?) but are, in fact, two sides of the same coin, two cogs in the wheel of the ultimate order.

The play also gives a foretaste of the idea of role-playing and theatricality in everyday life, themes which will become important in the plays of Stoppard to come. Thinking about becoming great, immortal, the executioner is attracted by the idea of martyrdom: “The only heroes left are the leaders and the martyrs. Either way there is glory, but a martyr’s lasts longer” (quoted in Hayman 1979b, 29). This leads him to a gradual self-preparation for the role of victim, the eating of the last supper of the prisoner being a symbolic representation of this process. In the scene on the morning of the execution he is, as the stage directions indicate, “consciously theatrical” (quoted in Hayman 1979b, 29). The play ends with the jailer wearing the condemned man’s hood while the prisoner has the executioner’s mask on. Having exchanged these attributes, symbolic of their roles in society and the parts they are supposed to play, they have, in a sense, changed their identities. The audience, and they themselves know what has actually happened and who they really are. Yet the crowd outside, gathered to watch the execution, has no chance of knowing who is who. The perception of the onlookers has been distorted by the characters wearing masks and playing roles.

### *Enter a Free Man*

1968 is the year of the first London performance of *Enter A Free Man*, a revised version of *A Walk on the Water*. Tom Stoppard himself told *The New Yorker* interviewer that he was inclined to agree with Charles Marowitz who found the play “as weighty as a feather boa”. The play nevertheless deserves attention as it foreshadows ideas which will be developed in his later dramas – the limitation of human perception and language, the difficulty of maintaining traditional relationships and people’s endeavours to cope with problems of everyday reality by means of role playing. Another aspect of the play worth mentioning is its intertextual quality. “A first play tends to be...”, Stoppard says, “the sum of all the plays you have seen of a type you can emulate technically and have admired. So *A Walk on*

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<sup>1</sup> “Tom Stoppard, Playwright Novelist”, 1968, 41. Quoted in Gabbard 1982, 16.

*the Water* was in fact *Flowering Death of a Salesman* – though, of course, I didn't think that when I was doing it" (Hudson interview 1974, 4). Other possible influences, apart from the above mentioned of Robert Bolt (*Flowering Cherry*) and Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman*) include, according to the critics, N. F. Simpson's *One Way Pendulum* (Tynan 1981, 24), Henry Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* (Hayman 1979b, 14); and the 1950s radio and television comedy scripts like those written by Alan Simpson and Ray Galton for Tony Hancock (Hunter 1982, 218). It is relevant to notice that intertextual references discernible in this drama do not add to the self-reflexive character of the play. In this early piece Stoppard is yet unable to employ intertextual practices in a creative way, defamiliarise the ur-texts, frustrate the audience's intertextual expectations and thus make them experience the metadramatic character of his own play.

### Living in the illusory world of one's own making

While the title of the first version of the play, *A Walk on the Water* derived, according to Stoppard, from Negro prison blues<sup>2</sup> and, with its Biblical allusions, proclaimed the protagonist a Christ figure, the title of the printed version, *Enter a Free Man*, stresses the illusory quality of the freedom of George Riley, limited by his family and social situation and especially by his own shortcomings<sup>3</sup>. The final title might suggest that we are about to watch a play about a truly free man. The words "Enter a free man" are the first ones uttered by the play's protagonist, George Riley, when he enters the pub on Saturday evening. A few seconds later he makes the statement sound even stronger and more convincing when he says "Free as a proverbial bird"<sup>4</sup> and tells everybody that he has just left his wife and is about to start a new life after "twenty-five years of dead domesticity, fatal to a man of creative spirit" (p. 12). After some time, however, he slightly changes the meaning of the phrase when he says: "A man is born free and everywhere he is in chains" (p. 13). Aware that he is using a quotation, yet not exactly certain about its source, he is yet sure that he is its living embodiment. The context of these statements makes it clear that the freedom he boasts of is only illusory. It is not a fact but only

<sup>2</sup> *Radio Times*, 6–12 November 1965, 25. Quoted in Brassell 1987, 69.

<sup>3</sup> Stoppard considered still another title, *The Spleen of Riley* (Amory interview 1974, 65), and two critics mistakenly gave wrong titles to it before the London opening; it was referred to as *The Preservation of George Riley*, this being an allusion to a line of Linda's in the play; and *Home and Dry*, an idiomatic expression of his state of progress as an inventor (Hu 1989, 14).

<sup>4</sup> Tom Stoppard, *Enter a Free Man*, 1977, 10. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

a dream which he cherishes and would like to come true. Hence the play deals with freedom as an illusion, limited by personal inadequacy and mutual need. The chains are not only domestic but, in a deeper sense, they are his own personal limitations.

It seems that the play's main thematic interest is of an epistemological nature. Is there any absolute truth about ourselves and other people? Can we ever really claim to know ourselves and others? Is there any chance of separating true reality from its mere illusion? The answer to all these questions as given in the play is "No". This is mainly due to two reasons. The first of these is that the process of perception is always tinted by our own preferences and prejudices. Due to this, for example, George starts perceiving Harry, an acquaintance from the pub, as his business partner and Florence, a girl he has just met, as his beloved because he has a desperate need for partners like these. The second of the reasons is related to the fact that hardly any person is really willing to reveal his true, hidden self to others and therefore puts on masks, plays different roles, employs theatricality in everyday life and thus presents varied images to individual people in different situations. This idea is raised early in the play by Linda, George's daughter, in her initial conversation with her mother when she wonders what her father is like in the pub when the two of them do not see him: "He's got to be different. ... And that goes for everyone. There's two of everyone" (p. 10).

The play presents two different Rileys, the public and the private, who appear in the pub and at home, respectively. In both these roles he presents himself as an inventor, his inventions including many useless and strange things<sup>5</sup>. Before the curtain rises the audience hear the sound of *Rule Britannia*. We soon learn it is one of Riley's inventions. He has connected a tape-recorder to a grandfather clock so that the music can be heard twice a day, at noon and midnight. The invention will not make any money, probably because, as Linda puts it, "You can't count on a sudden wave of loony patriotism to put a Rule Britannia clock in every home" (p. 53) or because it keeps waking people up during the night, as Persephone complains, urging him to disconnect it (p. 40). For the audience, the sound of the melody, heard at the beginning of each act, becomes a kind of leitmotif. It is obviously burlesqued by the droning sound of Persephone's vacuum cleaner. The latter also conveys the idea of the repetitive quality of the Rileys' life.

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<sup>5</sup> They are a bottle opener which, according to Linda "would've revolutionized bottle-opening only no one had invented the kind of bottle-top [his] bottle-opener needed to open bottles" (p. 61), "a pipe which would never go out as long as you smoked it upside down" (p. 61), special bombs invented during the war and a water-cooled machine-gun which was adapted in such a way that "the soldiers could make tea in it while it was firing" (p. 74).



As the curtain rises the audience perceive a visual image of Riley's inventiveness – the living room of the family has a lot of flower pots in it and “almost *everywhere where there is a plant there is some plumbing above it; quite discreet*” (p. 9). This is, as we soon learn, indoor rain, an arrangement of pipes from a valve and sponge on the roof. Riley is very proud of his invention: “First Watt and the steam engine – now Riley and the Sponge Principle!” (p. 36). Persephone, however, always bent on keeping the house clean and tidy, keeps watering the plants using water-jugs and insists on having the installation removed: “I’m not having the place looking like a ship’s engine room” (p. 35). The end of the play proves she is right – due to a shower of rain outside, the gadget installed only that morning starts working and the curtain falls on Linda collecting bucketfuls of water from the floor flooded by the indoor rain.

The latest invention, which keeps Riley excited and busy throughout the whole play, is a reusable envelope with gum on both sides of the flap. Riley is completely unaware of the fact, clear to everybody else, that the gum does not really matter – once the envelope is torn it cannot possibly be used, no matter whether it has gum on one side or on two. He is so overpowered by the vision of the approaching success and fortune that he suspects a stranger in the bar of being an industrial spy and convinces himself that Harry will be his partner in the business. His dream collapses in the second act when Harry crumbles the torn and useless envelope and throws it on the ground (p. 77).

Like the main protagonist of *Death of the Salesman*, George is a dreamer. He is unable to distinguish between things as they really are and as he perceives them, between illusion and reality. What is more, he even tries to make reality imitate his idea of it. That is why he gives people names different from those they have. According to him, the new names, for one reason or another, fit them better and suit their roles in his fantasy. Dick, the most inexperienced person in the bar is nicknamed by him Able, probably a reference to his prowess as a sailor; Victor is renamed Carmen as it rhymes with barman. Persephone is also a nickname which he once gave his wife who was originally Constance. For him, her new name is most probably associated with “dead domesticity” (p. 12) as, in Roman mythology Persephone was the queen of the lower world and the goddess of death. He seems not to realise that Persephone also functions as the personification of spring and rebirth. The latter meaning is close to the connotation of her original name, Constance, and that is what she really is – a faithful, patient wife who accepts all his weaknesses and is always there – waiting for him to come back home after a series of “final”, as he sees them, attempts to leave it forever.

Riley is not the only character in the play who is living in an illusory world of his own making. Linda resembles her father, the only basic

difference being that she is the one who provides for the family. She is also a dreamer, hoping to find a fairy prince, a knight in silver armour (p. 41). She, too, is dissatisfied with their mundane family crisis and their dull, monotonous existence. Being more active, however, she actually makes an attempt to change something, eloping with a man only to discover that he is married. The ironic similarity between these two characters becomes clear when a sentence of Linda's, concerning her beloved "I thought I *knew* him – I thought I knew everything about him. ... I didn't even know his name" (p. 81), echoes Abel's remark about Riley and his would-be partner, Harry: "You didn't even know his name ..." (p. 78). Furthermore, taking into account both Riley's and Linda's earlier experiences, it seems highly probable that they will go on talking about leaving and even try to do so, but they will still keep coming back home, back to the quiet, clean and secure shelter provided for them by the loving Persephone. Therefore, unable to stand the grim reality, they will take advantage of escaping into the world of illusion.

### Theatricality as a social convention

George's principal method of escaping the reality which he cannot stand is role-playing, putting on a mask and pretending to be someone different from the person he actually is. He plays the role of an outstanding inventor both at home and in the pub, yet there are other roles which are specific to one of these two places only. At the pub he is a hero-buffoon. When he sees Brown, a newcomer to the pub, for the first time, he insists he saved his life at Monte Casino (p. 11). The latter expresses his astonishment, which makes Riley later put him into another fantasy – he must be an industrial spy. George is very theatrical in what he says and does, yet he does not seem to achieve the result he yearns for. Such is the case, for instance, with his first appearance in the play when he enters the bar "*with a flourish*" yet "*his entrance makes no impact*" (p. 10). Similarly, in the second act, he enters "*with great significance. ... He is complacent, aware of the effect he is achieving on CARMEN, who stares at him dubiously. RILEY'S triumph is quiet but deeply and excitedly felt*" (p. 69). He also displays theatrical intent in his verbal outbursts. His speeches are characterised by a highly stylised delivery, his words reveal showmanship and his manipulation on the part of the speaker rather than an honest attempt to promote social discourse. He uses a lot of quotations and famous proverbial sayings, not always aware of where they come from: "A man is born free and everywhere he is in chains. ... Who said that?" (p. 13), gambling is "The opiate of the common herd" (Ibid.), "The government's taking a tip

from the Romans. ... Bread and circuses" (p. 14), "I think therefore I am" (pp. 16 and 32), "Progress is the child of invention", "The die is cast" (p. 22), "The last of the breed" and "Survival of the fittest" (p. 21). The purpose of all these remarks is to impress his companions, to create an illusory image of himself being better and cleverer than he actually is.

He also pretends to have no money problems, to be a well-off, successful inventor, as, for instance, when he tells Carmen to put Champagne on his account to which the latter answers: "You haven't got an account and I haven't got any champagne". Paying no attention to the first part of the barman's sentence, Riley takes up the pose of a demanding customer and experienced businessman (pp. 75-76). On the other hand, however, he is not ashamed to have no cigarettes of his own and has to take his fags from Able (pp. 11, 20, 22, 24, 73).

At home, Riley adopts the roles of the head of the household and strict father. He is angry at Linda because of her staying in bed too long and argues: "It's disgusting. That's no way to get on in your work - *malinger*ing. Lying in bed because you can't be bothered to go to work" (p. 45). He seems to have lost contact with his daughter and accuses her of having lost faith in him. He would like to go for a walk with her to the park. He has not noticed the passage of time and is still living, according to Linda, in her childhood (p. 62). He insists on getting to know her present boy-friend and is unable to understand why she is unwilling to allow this after an experience in the past when a boy who came to take her to the pictures was first told by Riley that she was his only treasure which he hoped the boy would cherish in years to come, and then asked whether there were any hereditary diseases in his family (pp. 44-45). While insisting he is Linda's father and the head of the family, he seems not to notice he stopped really being these a long time ago. Instead of running his father's business or undertaking any other job he has never worked, the family being supported first by his wife, Persephone, and now by his daughter, Linda. The thing that irritates the latter most is that her father does not want to go to the Labour Exchange to register and get unemployment money on the ground that he is "an inventor" (p. 48). She also argues that "the only thing he's ever invented is a way of having a job without earning money" (p. 62). She is fed up with the game of pretending, of creating an illusion which matches Riley's perception of reality and says she is not going to play much longer (p. 48). She refuses to give him his weekly ten shillings' pocket money, one of the routine elements of the game of illusion they have been playing for a long time. On each such occasion he would take out his notebook and write down the money he owed her, pretending (or maybe really believing?) he would give it back some day. Linda, however, realises it is only an illusion: "... another ten bob down

the drain. Seems a funny thing giving your father pocket money. Specially when he never gave you any" (p. 45).

No matter whether at home or in the pub, George Riley lives in the world of his illusions and dreams, always playing some kind of role, putting on one mask or another. Trapped in his divergent roles he indulges in dreams of escape. He mentions them in both locations, so it is clear that neither home nor the pub make him really happy. Talking to Florence in the bar he says at the moment when he still hopes the envelope will be a success:

Florence, look at me. You see a man standing on the brink of great things. Below me, a vast plain stretches like an ocean, waiting to receive my footprints, footprints that will never be erased, and in years to come, people will see this once uncharted untrod path and say ... George Riley walked this way- (p. 32)

In this highly stylised, poetic speech, with its Biblical references explaining the original title *A Walk on the Water*, he expresses his deepest yearnings: he would like to do the impossible and to be remembered forever. At home, he expresses his longing to get a way from his life by means of the image of a boat: "I sometimes think of myself as a sailor, in a way ... with home as a little boat, anchored in the middle of a big calm sea, never going anywhere, just sitting, far from land, life, everything" (p. 75). The boat must often be mentioned in the conversations at home because it is referred to for the first time in the play by Linda when she finishes a sentence her father has started uttering (p. 51) and comes back again at the end of the play (p. 84). The image will reappear in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* to express a similar longing of the characters of the play, while the theme of the inventor/artist and his right to withdraw and create will be tackled in some of Stoppard's later plays.

### **Disrupting realistic presentation**

Ronald Hayman (1974, 20) has written that *Enter a Free Man* "looks like a realistic play about a man with an unrealistic image of himself". The play has been described by Susan Rusinko (1986, 16) as an example of kitchen sink drama and by Stephen Hu (1989, 9) as "illusionistic domestic drama". Victor L. Cahn (1979, 34, *italics mine*) has noticed, however, that "It is *primarily* a realistic work". Even though at first glimpse it might seem that the play is a realistic one, following the rules of the fourth wall convention of drama, a closer investigation reveals that Tom Stoppard has already departed from strict representationalism and has started his experiments with theatricality and the breaking down of theatrical illusion.

One of the devices aimed at breaking down the fourth wall and bursting the confines of representational drama is the use of multiple playing areas. Katherine Kelly (1991, 68) notices that “The most obvious of these self-reflexive devices, the split stage signifying pub (stage left) and home (stage right) may have been adapted from the composite interior/exterior sets of the two principal sources, Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* and Robert Bolt’s *Flowering Cherry* (influenced in its turn by Miller)”. The play’s action, divided into two locales, is indicative of George’s private and public selves. Thus, the split stage image is a structural counterpart of the thematic question of Riley being a different person in different circumstances and environments. The style of the scenes in the play depends on the place where they take place – the pub scenes are more theatrical as far as Riley’s behaviour is concerned, while the dialogue in the domestic setting is more realistic. This is meant to be a reflection of the fact that even though Riley is always acting, pretending, it is in the pub that he still hopes to impress people. At home he is allowed to do just as he pleases because nobody seems to have many illusions left.

The device of shifting locales as a means of disrupting realistic presentation is accompanied in the first act by the disruption of the linear time sequence. It starts with a home scene, slightly after noon when Linda and Persephone are having a short conversation just after Riley’s departure for the pub. They talk about trivia and wonder what he is like in the pub, when not seen by them. During their conversation the lights slowly fade in on the bar and Linda’s sentence “There is two of everyone.” is uttered while the audience are already watching events taking place in the pub. Then there is a short period of time when characters from the two locales speak, as it were, simultaneously – Riley’s entrance into the pub and his sentence uttered on this occasion: “Enter a free man” is followed by the end of the home conversation and Linda’s remark “Poor old Dad” (p. 10). Stephen Hu (1989, 16), discussing this scene, writes:

The transitional device that Stoppard uses twice to shift locales in Act I is known in film and video editing as an audio bridge, a relatively uncommon technique in which aural and/or verbal cues from a scene bear some informational relationship to elements in the scene to follow. Visuals in the second scene begin to dissolve-in or fade-in while the audio of the first scene continues, sometimes as a voice-over narrative.

Tim Brassell (1987, 75) has referred to this scene as one employing “a superficially expressionistic cross-fading technique” which forces us to “see the play in terms which contradict its linear direction”. The technique employed by the playwright makes the audience aware of the two selves of Riley and urges them to judge by themselves whether he is a free man” or “Poor old Dad”.

The second, longer scene, which takes place in the pub, finishes with a long speech of Riley about his home, wife and daughter and their monotonous existence. Towards its end the bar set fades out and while we are already watching Persephone watering the plants at home he is still finishing his speech in the bar: "and when I came down this morning, there she was, just watering the flowers from a jug, as usual ... That was the first thing that happens this morning ... (*To PERSEPHONE.*) There's no need-" (p. 35). Simultaneous action is going on in the two locales again. This scene, however, is more complex than the previous one. Firstly, Riley's speech goes on, uninterrupted, as it were, while not only the place but also the listener changes, Florence from the bar being replaced by Persephone at home. Secondly, and more importantly, there is a quite clear disruption of the linear sequence, time moving back to the morning before Riley's going to the pub. What follows is a conversation at home, Riley's becoming angry at being criticised by Linda and, after taking the weekly allowance from her, promising he is not coming back. The end of Act I, after his departure, is an exact repetition of the beginning of the play. Anthony Jenkins (1988, 4) has written: "By backtracking, Stoppard allows us to view Riley's complaints about his family's lack of appreciation with prior knowledge that he will be equally frustrated and inadequate in the outside world".

The way in which the consecutive scenes replace one another is also important for some other reasons. The circular quality of the first act and the repetition of some of the events in the second one stress the monotonous, cyclic existence of the characters. Furthermore, while manipulating the illusion of reality of the things presented, Stoppard creates a kind of distance between his *dramatis personae* and the audience helping the latter to keep a balanced sympathy for the characters.

### Stoppard's first ambush

In *Enter a Free Man* Stoppard sets the first of his ambushes for the audience. Early in the play the audience realise that the inevitable must follow, that George's hopes and dreams concerning his most recent invention will be shattered. His envelope is a hopeless invention which will never bring him any money or success. Our expectations are gratified. And then, when he comes back home at the end of the play as a defeated man, all of a sudden a storm comes and his indoor rain starts working. Linda notices "(levelly)" "My God, it works-" (p. 84). For a moment the audience also start believing that he has succeeded at last, that he has created a great invention. Soon, however, as the water starts flooding the floor of the

living-room they discover that they, too, as Riley and Linda, have for a moment forgotten about reality and lived in the world of illusions. Their illusions collapse, just as Riley's have collapsed for some time now. In their case it is final, at least as far as their evaluation of Riley as an inventor is concerned. Whether it is final in the case of both Riley and Linda remains an open question.

## 2. Radio and television plays

### *The Dissolution of Dominic Boot*

*The Dissolution of Dominic Boot* and "*M*" is for Moon among Other Things were written for a BBC series of fifteen-minute radio plays, *Just Before Midnight*, early in 1964<sup>6</sup>. The first play begins with Dominic dropping his fiancée from the taxi only to realise that he does not have enough money to pay the fare. What follows is a number of scenes presenting his frantic travels around London trying to raise it. As the episodes interlock and overlap, we hear the sound of the idling taxi-engine and the noise of the meter ticking over relentlessly. The consecutive scenes create a sense of a building catastrophe. At the end, penniless and without proper clothes (he is wearing pyjamas, having given his suit to the taxi-driver), sacked by his employer, he is soothed by the latter's secretary: "What's the matter Mr Boot, you seem awfully upset"<sup>7</sup>. The woman hails a taxi telling Dominic he can drop her off. The play has progressed full circle, it seems.

### *"M" is for Moon among Other Things*

#### The inner and outer reality

"*M*" is for Moon among Other Things (transmitted on 6 April 1964) was originally conceived as a short story but rejected by Faber and Faber (Hudson interview 1974, 5). It employs for the first time the technique of

<sup>6</sup> Tom Stoppard recalls: "The peg for *Dominic Boot* – a man riding around in a taxi trying to raise the money he needs to catch up with the meter – is the only self-propelled idea-for-a-play I ever had and I think I wrote it in a day". ("Introduction", [in:] *The Dog It Was That Died and Other Plays*, 1983, 7).

<sup>7</sup> *The Dissolution of Dominic Boot*, [in:] *The Dog It Was That Died and Other Plays*, 1983, 58. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

direct presentation of the thoughts of the characters, a technique which is especially suitable for the properties and possibilities of the radio medium. One of the great assets of radio drama, skilfully used by Stoppard, is a free flow between inward and outward events. This play favours inner processes and the listeners learn more about what the characters are thinking and feeling than about what they are doing. Ronald Hayman (1979b, 25) has written about the play: "It would be unstageable not because there is too much movement from place to place" (as the case with *The Dissolution of Dominic Boot* was) "but because there is too little movement of any kind except inside the characters' minds". The play presents a middle-aged, middle-class, childless couple in late evening, August 5th, 1962. Both of them are reading – as the play opens we can hear the rustle of pages being turned over. He is busy reading a newspaper while she is engaged in perusing the M to N instalment of her mail-order encyclopaedia – *The Universal Treasury of People, Places and Things: Illustrated*. Early in the play, the listeners realise that what they hear is a complex web of sentences spoken on two levels, as it were. On the one hand, there is a casual exchange of banal remarks, a conversation one could hear in everyday life. On the other hand, there also exists the second, more important level on which their dreams, hopes and frustrations emerge. The listeners soon learn that Constance is obsessed with the passage of time – she insists on being given the exact date and tells her husband that in half an hour she will be "forty-two-and-a-half years old"<sup>8</sup>. The anniversary makes her think about everything "slipping by" (p. 65) and recall the past when everything was simple, as in a children's ABC – "M was for Moon" (p. 66). The motif of the moon has already appeared in her earlier speech, when she said: "I don't want the moon, Alfred, all I want is the possibility of an alternative so that I know I'm doing this because I want to instead of because there's nothing else" (p. 63) and was hushed down by her husband, unwilling to listen to his wife because the TV news was just beginning. The news is broadcast about Marilyn Monroe's death which greatly upsets Alfred and makes him say "It's such a cold shallow world she was living in. No warmth and understanding – no one understood her, she was friendless" (p. 64). He does not realise that his description of the situation Marilyn Monroe was in is an adequate one to describe the present condition of his wife. As the play ends, Alfred retreats into a fantasy in which he gives comfort to Marilyn who has just phoned him. His inner private fantasy surfaces and he utters the last words aloud "Poor old thing". Thinking that he is talking to her, Constance says: "Oh, you mustn't worry about

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<sup>8</sup> "M" is for *Moon among Other Things*, [in:] *The Dog It Was That Died and Other Plays*, 1983, 62. All the references in the text will be to this edition.



me, Alfred, I'll be all right" (p. 67). The scene is bitterly ironic: Alfred feels compassion for the actress, while in real life he is unable to show any concern for his own wife's problems.

As already stated, the play takes place on two levels. The characters' daydreams are prompted by what they read and also by the TV news and are different for each of them, yet the separate motifs of their private selves occasionally merge. The interior monologues provide separate perspectives through which they perceive reality and due to which they sometimes do not realise what the other is talking about. The confusion in the minds of the speakers and occasionally of listeners produces a comic effect. The humour of the piece is of a very sad, bitter kind, however, as it results from the inability of Alfred and Constance to understand each other. Both of them have escaped from the reality of their dull, monotonous existence into their private fantasies.

### **Defamiliarisation technique**

*"M" is for Moon among Other Things* is Stoppard's first play employing the technique of defamiliarisation in a successful way. Departing from realism, in one of his first attempts as a playwright, he makes it unclear when the shifts from the inner to the outer speech take place. Soliloquy is a non-realistic device yet it has come to seem natural through extensive use. Stoppard defamiliarises it to point out its non-illusionistic aspect. Thus he does not try to conceal the artistic processes governing art but, on the contrary, stresses the fact that art is art. While presenting the monologues of Alfred and Constance, while blurring the border between the inner and outer reality, he frustrates the audience's expectations. The theatregoers have seen many plays and have accustomed to certain highly artificial conventions, soliloquy among others, which are used so often that they seem natural. Stoppard keeps reminding them that things may be not exactly as they imagine them to be, that people should free themselves of the automatic associations and remember that the image of reality depicted by art is never equivalent to reality.

### ***If You're Glad I'll Be Frank***

Tom Stoppard's next play, *If You're Glad I'll Be Frank*, was transmitted by BBC, 8 February 1966<sup>9</sup>. It begins with Frank dialling TIM and

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<sup>9</sup> Stoppard recalls that this radio drama "actually had its origins in a series the BBC were contemplating ... about people in absurd jobs which didn't really exist, and the idea

discovering first “*with dismayed disbelief*” and then “*with joy*”<sup>10</sup> that the voice giving the exact time belongs to his wife, Gladys. What follows are thirteen scenes which switch between settings that present Gladys at work announcing the passage of time, some people at the Post Office, and Frank, desperately trying to reach his wife and help her. Frank is unable to do this for at least two reasons. Firstly, as a bus conductor he must keep his schedule and, even though he at times leaves his passengers waiting on the bus while he goes off to dial TIM and later on parks his bus in forbidden places, he never has enough time to settle the matter. Secondly, when he finally arrives at the Post Office and gets access to the 1st Lord he is told that they “wouldn’t trust [his] wife with the time – it’s a machine” (p. 111). The head of the Post Office has early in the play stressed the importance of time, when he said: “We can’t afford to lose track of time, or we’d be lost” (p. 90). All the characters are imprisoned by the society’s view of time as the key to efficiency. The employees of the Post Office make their entrances “*on the first, third, fifth, seventh and ninth strokes of Big Ben*” (p. 88), and the porter is glad to announce that all is “on schedule” (p. 89).

The importance of time in the play is underscored not only by the repeated mention of the exact minutes and even seconds but also by sound images – the strokes of Big Ben and Gladys’ repeated enunciation of the exact time. The impression could be one of order and efficiency. This appearance is undermined, however, by the protagonist of the play, Gladys herself. Originally she volunteered for the job, after having been refused admission to a nunnery. In endeavour to become a nun she was looking for “serenity” and “the clean linen” (p. 104), while accepting her present job she hoped to find “peace” (p. 105). She has not achieved what she was hoping for. On the surface she seems well organised, peaceful and exactly correct. Yet deep inside, she is slowly approaching a nervous breakdown. This duality is evoked by means of a device making full use of the qualities of the radio medium which consists in manipulating the inner and outer voice of Gladys. At times, both her voices are heard simultaneously: the public voice of a person turned into a time-machine, which is announcing the “pips” and counting the seconds and her private voice, expressing her intimate thoughts concerning the very activity of counting and measuring time. Gladys realises that time cannot be measured and controlled like the seconds she ticks off daily to the people who dial TIM. She expresses it in the first instance of the stream-of-consciousness

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of doing one about the speaking-clock girl occurred to me then. For me it is such a relief to get an idea!” (Hudson interview 1974, 8).

<sup>10</sup> *If You’re Glad I’ll Be Frank*, [in:] *Four Plays for the Radio*, 1984, 88. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

technique: "Or to put it in another way, three minutes past nine, precisely, though which nine in particular, I don't say, so what's precise about that? ..." (p. 91). She soon realises that time is something people invented for their own convenience. What is even more, "they don't know what time is. They haven't experienced the silence in which it passes impartial disinterested godlike. Because they didn't invent it at all. They only invented the clock" (p. 96). She realises that while acting as a speaking clock she is taking part in the game common to all the characters of the play and thus she muses she "could refuse to play, sabotage the whole illusion" as in reality "silence is the sound of time passing" (p. 98). Towards the end of the play, after having "seen the infinity" (p. 112), in which, for her, time acquires the spatial image of a height from which she perceives life as "disappearing tininess" (pp. 92-93), made dizzy by the awareness of the temporal infinite, she goes through a short nervous breakdown and refuses to participate in a clockwork-orange kind of existence. Soon she is brought back to "normal" by the 1st Lord who tells her to carry on and promises he will check her "again within the hour, as usual" (p. 112).

While introducing the inner, melancholic and sometimes highly poetic voice of Gladys, Stoppard makes us recognise that time understood as a linear continuum is a means of creating an illusion of order and efficiency. The moments when Gladys felt really happy were the moments when Frank "had all the time in the world for [her], such as it was" and "there was time to laugh then but while [she] laughed a bumblebee fluttered its wings a million times" (p. 100). Now, just like everybody else, they are imprisoned in time: Gladys must continue to work as a mechanical time-piece and Frank must follow his bus schedule. There is no time for tenderness, mutual understanding and being together. The illusion of external order has replaced the real human peace and understanding people so often long for.

In the play Stoppard manipulates theatrical illusion in an original way. On the one hand, he constantly shifts the distance between the two voices of Gladys. At the beginning, in the first scene, only her public voice can be heard. In the later scenes both can often be heard simultaneously at the beginning yet gradually the public voice becomes a background sound only to fade away completely as the private self takes over. An illusion is created that the listeners have found themselves inside her mind. On the other hand, Stoppard indicates in the stage directions that the actual time Gladys announces should be equivalent to the number of minutes and seconds that have passed in the performance (p. 87). The artist, then, makes the listeners both identify with Gladys but also hear her from a safe distance. They are made to wonder whether they themselves do not create similar illusions of order in their everyday reality.

## *A Separate Peace*

This half-hour play for television (BBC, 22 August 1966), presents a man, Brown, admitting himself to hospital and calling it an emergency even though nothing is the matter with him. What he is longing for is "privacy and clean linen"<sup>11</sup>. His wish to escape, his desire for "the quiet and routine" (p. 174) as well as his admiration of the hospital which is "Like clockwork. Lovely" (p. 170) are reminiscent of Gladys' endeavour to find a secure and peaceful place. What also makes these two characters similar is their having wanted to find shelter in a monastery and a nunnery, respectively, and having been rejected for the same reason: they "did not believe enough"<sup>12</sup>. Brown's hopes of finding peace are also, like those of Gladys, shattered. While making him busy himself with basketmaking, which he does not like, and with painting, which he enjoys, the hospital authorities keep searching for some clues to his identity. Finally, they manage to find his sister Mabel and her husband and tell him he has to leave the hospital and "to connect" (p. 183). What makes *A Separate Peace* different from *If You're Glad I'll Be Frank*, however, is the fact that, as Anthony Jenkins (1988, 19) has observed, "the script's interests are purely narrative" and, as a result, it seems to be the least successful of Stoppard's early plays.

## *Teeth*

This half-hour television play, broadcast on 28 June 1967, makes a greater use of the possibilities of the medium than *A Separate Piece* and is much more entertaining and amusing. It successfully uses the ambiguity arising from the discrepancy between the expectation on the part of the audience and the reality of the situation of the characters. In this drama we can notice several ambushes skilfully set for the audience by the playwright. While it could be argued that in several instances the situation of his play does evoke general interest on the part of the audience, it is undoubtedly true that a part of the play's success, at least, is due to his successful use of ambushes.

As *Teeth* opens we see a number of people in the waiting room of a dental surgery and listen to their conversation concerning sex and teeth, a love affair of one of the patients which ended when her lover entered the bathroom without knocking and noticed that her two front teeth were

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<sup>11</sup> *A Separate Peace*, [in:] *The Dog It Was That Died and Other Plays*, 1983, 168. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

<sup>12</sup> The Faber edition does not contain the passage referring to this event of Brown's life but it is found in *Playbill Two* (edited by Alan Durband, Hutchinson, 1969) and discussed by Hunter 1982, 219 and Hayman 1979b, 60.

artificial. Listening to the exchange between the receptionist and George, a patient, it could be assumed that they are lovers who are angry with each other – she accuses him of forgetting about her birthday and he is jealous seeing her new earrings, suspecting that she has got them from Harry, the dentist. They keep their voices down and the receptionist jumps when the surgery door opens and the dentist enters which could be indicative of the latter's being her husband. Such an assumption is soon shattered, however, as it is revealed that it is the receptionist, Mary, who is George's wife. Furthermore, when George is already seated on the dentist's chair, Harry starts a conversation which demonstrates that he suspects him of having a love affair with his wife, Prudence. Whilst using more and more sophisticated dental equipment Harry also tortures George by a cunning technique of withholding information about how much he knows. A lot of what he says could refer either to dentistry or adultery, as, for instance, the remark "I can spot the signs, you know"<sup>13</sup> can allude both to tooth decay and sexual duplicity. These *double entendres* broaden into farce when Harry fiddles with a hypodermic syringe and argues that the liquid which stains the teeth green is very good for George's "condition" (p. 84).

The scene is effective due to its numerous ambiguities and skilful use of the TV medium: there are many close-ups of George's eyes dilated with fear connected with what is happening inside his mouth and also with the conversation and his growing awareness of the fact that the cuckolded husband can, as a dentist, take a specific kind of revenge on him. As the play ends George, still seated in the chair, having his middle tooth pulled out, can overhear the conversation of Harry and Mary which indicates that the two are having a love affair. "*The dialogue runs down to silence while we stay on GEORGE'S face. His eyes move right and left. He tries to twist but he can't see behind the head-rest*" (p. 87). When the two come in sight again "*Harry's tie is almost under his ear*" (p. 87) and Mary's cap is askew. The play ends with George, his front tooth missing and his sexual appeal reduced, being asked to allow Mary to "stay behind a while" as they have some paperwork to catch up with (p. 88). The two lovers are hiding the exact nature of their relationship behind the useful smokescreen of an illusion of a professional meeting.

### ***Another Moon Called Earth***

In many respects this short play, first shown on BBC Television, 28 June 1967, may be treated as a finger-exercise for the later, 1972 stage play, *Jumpers*. The play tackles three issues related to the relationship between

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<sup>13</sup> *Teeth in The Dog It Was That Died and Other Plays*, 1983, 77. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

appearance and reality: the moon landing and the parade which is taking place outside the Bones' windows, the relationship between Penelope and her doctor, Albert, and finally the death of Penelope's servant, Pinkerton. All three issues are ambiguous. The moon landing is perceived differently by Penelope and her husband. Her views seem to resemble those of Stoppard himself who said: "Years and years ago, before a moon-landing seemed imminent at all, I thought, I *felt*, that the destruction of moon mythology and moon association in poetry and romance, superstition and everything, would be a sort of minute lobotomy conducted on the human race, like a tiny laser making dead small parts of the psyche" (Hudson interview 1974, 17). According to Penelope the moon landing "brought everything into question"<sup>14</sup> as the lunonaut "Has seen the whole thing for what it is – not the be-all and end-all any more, but just another moon called Earth" (p. 108). The moon landing has had such a great effect on her that on the day it happened she took to bed and, according to her doctor, Albert, "will never walk again" (p. 108). To Bone, who is a logician bent on finding the grand design in history and to prove there are no random events, there is nothing exceptional about the event – for him the lunonaut was "A cargo. He might have been a piece of cheese. He used to be a monkey. Before that he was a television camera. Now he is a man – but still a cargo" (p. 92).

There is also an ambiguity concerning the relationships between Albert, the doctor, and Penelope, his patient. If he really is only a physician why does he bring her flowers whenever he comes on his regular visits? When Bone goes into her bedroom, he finds them kissing. Are they lovers or are they only playing a charade, Penelope being very fond of different games? The situation is complicated further when Bone enters the bedroom later to see the drapes drawn round the bed and Albert's shoes, stick, hat and cape lying on the floor (p. 105). Bone's remark to Crouch: "My wife's in bed with the doctor at the moment" (p. 106) neatly undermines the ambiguity of the situation. The meaning of all these incidents remains unexplained both to the husband and to the audience. On the other hand, however, it could be also argued that the situation is clear enough here and that it is the behaviour of the husband which is farcical and not real. Stoppard's rendering of the motif in *Jumpers* moves towards strengthening the ambiguity. In the later play the nature of reality becomes more difficult to grasp and define.

The play also introduces a murder mystery – what has happened to Pinkerton? Has she been pushed out of the window by Penelope, according

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<sup>14</sup> *Another Moon Called Earth*, [in:] *The Dog It Was That Died and Other Plays*, 1983, 92. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

to what the latter tells her husband early in the play (pp. 95–96)?<sup>15</sup> But how could she possibly have done it if she is bed-ridden? As the play ends the different ambiguities merge – we see Penelope standing at the window and watching the parade. The explanation which might be given is that, her trouble being “psychosomatic” (p. 97), she is able to walk whenever she really wants to. Whether she wanted to kill her nanny and actually did so remains an open question. It is impossible for the audience to sort out the truth, to state what is real and what is not, as Penelope tells her husband at the end of the play while talking about herself and the doctor: “Nobody knows except me, and him; so far. Albert almost knows. You’ll never know” (p. 108). Again a question arises – why does she use the word “almost” when referring to Albert? Does she mean to say that she hides certain secrets even from Albert or that no one can ever be absolutely certain? No answer is provided. If the second interpretation is accepted, however, the play seems to express the idea of the impossibility of distinguishing between true reality and the mere illusion of reality.

*Another Moon Called Earth* is characterised by a specific use of the TV medium. The scenes move quickly between three acting areas – Bone’s study, Penelope’s bedroom and the hall in – between them. The parade taking place in the street outside their windows can be viewed on the screen of a TV set in Penelope’s room. A TV play presents its characters watching a TV broadcast, this being a variant of play within a play. The relationship between reality and its representation on the TV screen comes out humorously into the drama when Bone turns off the TV transmission of the parade. The music, however, still interferes with their conversation as it “*continues, fainter, but more real*” coming directly from the street below (p. 92). This scene might help to explicate the end of the play – moved by the moon landing Penelope does not want to watch the parade on the television, no matter how important it is as a documentary. She wants to watch the *real* event, not its representation. It could be argued, however, that there is nothing truly *real* about it, that it is a media oriented theatrical show-business type of celebration. Once more the true reality cannot be specified, reality and illusion merge, the ambiguity remains.

### *Albert’s Bridge*

Winner of the Prix Italia radio award, *Albert’s Bridge* (BBC Radio, 13 July 1967) has been called by Ronald Hayman (1979b, 65) a triumph of expertise which challenges comparison with the best radio writing of Beckett

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<sup>15</sup> Such an interpretation is given by Stoppard in “Introduction” to the printed text (p. 8).

and Pinter". Katherine Kelly (1989, 443) greatly praised the play stating: "Stoppard has combined spatial imagery and time marking with the confidence and skill of a writer sure of his medium". The craftsmanship of Stoppard is visible already in the first scene when an original and precise manipulation of sound effects suggests spatial arrangement. The microphone is placed "*at Albert's level, the top*", and the four men painting the bridge "*are spaced vertically*"<sup>16</sup>. The day's work being over, they call to one another to finish and start descending. The first one to call is the painter who is most distant from Albert, that is the one closest to the ground. His calls are followed by those of the painter above him and so on until Albert hears the calls. As they start descending the distance between them closes. Through a skilful manipulation of the sound volume the impressions of height and distance are created. Furthermore, the placing of the microphone at the top, next to Albert, indicates that the listeners perceive the events of the play from his perspective.

Albert, a philosophy graduate, like many other Stoppardian characters, is looking for peace and order in life and finds these in his holiday job of painting a bridge. The bridge has opened a new perspective to him:

It was fantastic up there. The scale of it. From the ground it looks like a cat's cradle, from a distance you can take it all in, and then up there in the middle of it the thinnest threads are as thick as your body and you could play tennis on the main girders. (p. 126)

Seen from the height of the bridge, life seems absurd:

being up there, looking down on the university lying under you like a couple of bricks, full of dots studying philosophy – what could they possibly know? I saw more up there in three weeks than those dots did in three years. I saw the context. It reduced philosophy and everything else. I got perspective. (Ibid.)

These two speeches indicate that perception of reality depends on the perspective from which the latter is viewed. Furthermore, the bridge is not only different to the same viewer depending on his perspective but it also represents distinct values to individual people: for the old workman it stands for a wasted life; it is a challenge to the efficiency expert, Fitch; to the Council Chairman it is a family memorial; to the people of Clifton the bridge is their prosperity, efficiency and respectability; and, finally, to Albert's parents and wife it entails personal tragedy, separation and divorce.

Albert's fascination with the bridge as a metaphor of escape and order opposed to the chaos down there in the town, is shared by Fraser,

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<sup>16</sup> *Albert's Bridge*, [in:] *Four Plays for the Radio*, 1984, 117. All the references in the text will be to this edition.



a would-be suicide, who abandons his self-destructive thoughts once he gets to the top of the bridge and faces the world at a safe distance. Their separation and distancing from life, living away from reality in the illusory world, brings about a catastrophe and the bridge collapses at the end of the play.

While on the thematic level the play demonstrates that one is forbidden to live in an illusory world and must, for the sake of oneself and one's family, face reality, on the structural level it creates a perfect illusion of reality making the listener, at times at least, identify with Albert. It is so partly due to the fact that the play takes place largely inside Albert's head and thus his thoughts are heard. When he is left alone on the bridge to work there, the language he uses changes from prose to poetry. In this respect these stream-of-consciousness passages are reminiscent of the monologues of Gladys in *If You're Glad I'll Be Frank*. In one of the scenes Stoppard employs a technique successfully used by the first narrator in Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*. Albert urges us to "Listen" and "Look down" (p. 135). And thanks to Stoppard's skill as a playwright we can visualise the distant dots of people down there and for a moment hear the sounds of the town below. A perfect illusion of reality has been created: listening to this radio play we not only hear but also see.

### *Neutral Ground*

Transmitted by Granada Television, 11 December 1968, yet written about three years earlier (Billington 1987, 69), this play was called by Michael Billington Stoppard's "Sophoclean spy tale"<sup>17</sup>. It is based on *Philoctetes* by Sophocles and John Le Carré's thrillers<sup>18</sup>. This drama, "Stoppard's most conventional play" (Ryan 1974, 8), even though well written, seems to lack the ingenuity and complexity of his other works and therefore attracted little critical attention. It is justified not to discuss it here, as it does not deal with reality and illusion and does not make any use of theatricality as a technique of representation so important for Stoppard's other plays. Being a spy thriller, the play is obviously concerned with the different names (identities) of the main hero, Philo, but this results solely from the fact that it belongs to a genre which makes use of deliberate deception.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Billington, *Times*, 3 December 1968, 12. Quoted in Rusinko 1986, 120.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the influences see: Jenkins 1988, 21–22; Kelly 1991, 51–53; Rusinko 1986, 119; Billington 1987, 69–7 and Taylor 1978, 102.

Stoppard's early works for the stage, radio and television can be viewed as finger-exercises for his more mature, later plays. Yet already there the notions of reality, illusion and theatricality can be detected. On the epistemological level, quite often the dividing line between reality and appearance is blurred and thus the objective truth concerning people and events is difficult to define. This may be due to people's employment of theatricality in everyday life in order to deceive the onlookers, to make them take appearance for reality (*Enter a Free Man*). Another variant of this is a conscious deception, an attempt to hide the true real behind the smokescreen of appearance (*Teeth*). Sometimes, too, the reality presents divergent images depending on the perspective at which it is viewed (*Albert's Bridge*). The difference between the inner and outer reality becomes the focus of interest in *If You're Glad I'll Be Frank*.

Stoppard's early plays also indicate the playwright's interest in non-realistic presentation and these pieces are characterised by theatricality or a self-reflexiveness. *Enter a Free Man*, even though seemingly realistic, multiplies playing areas and disrupts the linear time sequence, and thus departs from the representational, illusionist technique. "*M*" is for *Moon among Other Things*, *If You're Glad I'll Be Frank* and *Albert's Bridge* take place on two levels of reality: the inner and the outer ones. *Another Moon Called Earth* presents a TV broadcast within a TV play (a variant of play within a play) and is thus theatrical and self-reflexive. It must be noticed, however, that while the concepts of reality, illusion and theatricality are detected in Stoppard's early endeavours, it is only later on, in his mature plays, that the artist makes full thematic and structural use of them.

## II. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

*No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;  
Am an attendant lord, one that will do  
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,  
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,  
Deferential, glad to be of use,  
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;  
Full of high sentence, but abt obtuse;  
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous –  
Almost, at times, the Fool.*

Thomas Stearns Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*  
(Eliot 1970, 16)

*I know of nothing in all Drama more incomparable from the point of view of Art, or more suggestive in its subtlety of observation, than Shakespeare's drawing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. ... When at last, by means of the play within a play and the puppets in their dalliance, Hamlet "catches the conscience" of the King, and drives the wretched man in terror from his throne, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz see no more in his conduct than a rather painful breach of court-etiquette. ... They are close to his secret and know nothing of it. Nor would there be any use in telling them. They are the little cups that can hold so much and no more. Towards the close it is suggested that, caught in a cunning springe set for another, they have met, or may meet with a violent and sudden death. But a tragic ending of this kind, though touched by Hamlet's humour with something of the surprise and justice of comedy, is really not for such as they. They never die. ... Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are as immortal as Angelo and Tartuffe, and should rank with them. They are what modern life has contributed to the antique ideal of friendship.*

Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* (Wilde 1990, 949–950)<sup>1</sup>

In 1964, during his stay in Germany, on a Ford foundation grant, Stoppard presented his first version of a Rosencrantz and Guildenstern play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear* (Tynan 1979, 70). This short verse play, the writing of which had been suggested by the playwright's agent, Kenneth Ewing was considered bad both by Stoppard himself (Hudson interview 1974, 19) and by others (Marowitz 1973, 123). He then

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<sup>1</sup> Theatre programmes for the 1967 National Theatre Company productions included a lengthy quotation of Wilde's work (Hu 1989, 30).

expanded it into a full-length, two-act version (Tynan 1979, 70) which was produced during the Edinburgh Festival in 1966. Ronald Bryden, in his review of the play argued it was "the most brilliant debut by a young playwright since John Arden's"<sup>2</sup>. Within a week of that review the National Theatre acquired the rights for the play and after Stoppard had introduced some changes, the three act play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, "achieved overnight success with the opening of the London production in April 1967" (Jenkins 1988, 37)<sup>3</sup>.

The London premiere brought fame to Stoppard, which was surprising to the playwright who was hoping the novel (*Lord Malquist and Mr Moon*, published in 1966) "would make his reputation, and the play would be of little consequence either way" and "was slightly taken aback" when he read the reviews (Watts interview 1973, 12)<sup>4</sup>. "Not only did he become the youngest playwright to have a play staged by the National Theatre" (Deloney 1990, 2) but was also highly praised by critics in numerous reviews which followed. Harold Hobson (1967, 49) described the opening as "the most important event in the British professional theatre in the last nine years", Ronald Bryden hailed it as "the most brilliant dramatic debut of the sixties"<sup>5</sup>, Irving Wardle (1967, 8) saluted its originality arguing he knew "of no theatrical precedent for it" and Charles Marowitz (1973, 126) wrote: "The critics have done their nut hailing the most striking debut since John Osborne and one can do little more than say: it's true, it's true. There is a writer in our midst". Soon after its London opening, the play was produced world-wide (Deloney 1990, 2). In England, Stoppard was voted the "Most Promising Playwright" in the *Evening Standard* Theatre Awards and won the John Whiting Award and *The Plays and Players* Best Play Award. After the Broadway opening, he won the Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award in the USA, and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play of 1967-1968 (Brassell 1987, 35; Gabbard 1982, 24; Hu 1989, 31 and Londré 1981, 11).

Not all the reviews were so full of praise, however, the most critical being that by Robert Brustein entitled "Something Disturbingly Voguish and Available" in which he charges Stoppard of "theatrical parasitism", rechristening the play *Waiting for Hamlet* and indicating that Stoppard

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<sup>2</sup> R. Bryden, "Theatre: Windy Excitement", *The Observer* (London), 28 August 1966, 15. Quoted in Bareham 1990, 69.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the development of the play and the consecutive versions and productions see also: Brassell 1987, 36; Hayman 1979b, 32; Tynan 1978, 34 and Stoppard's interviews with Hayman (1979b, 8), Gordon (1971, 78 and 83) and *Theatre Quarterly* journalists (Hudson interview 1974, 6).

<sup>4</sup> See also Deloney 1990, 16.

<sup>5</sup> R. Bryden, *The Observer*, 16 April 1967, 34. Quoted in Brassell 1987, 35.

merely offers “a form of Beckett without tears”<sup>6</sup>. He writes: “As is now generally known, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is a theatrical parasite, feeding off *Hamlet*, *Waiting for Godot* and *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Shakespeare provides the characters, Pirandello the technique and Beckett the tone in which the Stoppard play proceeds” (Ibid., 93). The opinions of Arnold Hinchliffe (1974, 142) are very similar when he writes that the play is “a parasite feeding off Shakespeare, Pirandello and Beckett”. Helene Keyssar-Franke (1975, 85) has argued that the piece is “blatantly derivative”, calling forth not only *Hamlet* but also the works of Pirandello, Brecht, Beckett and many others. The opinions of Katherine Kelly and Michael Hinden, however, seem more convincing when they write, respectively: “*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is the first major stage play in which Stoppard ventures a series of overlapping misreadings of major works in the formalist spirit of disrupting the canon” (Kelly 1991, 71) and it “is not a derivative play that feeds on Shakespeare, Beckett and Pirandello, ‘he dines with them’” (Hinden 1986, 2).

## Intertextuality

Intertextual references to the output of two playwrights, William Shakespeare and Samuel Beckett, are unquestionably discernible in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. It should be stressed that the works of Stoppard’s predecessors are also characterised by a metatheatrical, self-reflexive quality<sup>7</sup>. Stoppard chose *Hamlet* partly due to Kenneth Ewing’s suggestion (Tynan 1978, 34) and partly because of the archetypal significance of this tragedy<sup>8</sup>. In his play Stoppard recycles Shakespeare’s drama changing the perspective from which the events are perceived. His play is an inversion of *Hamlet*, and whenever there was an entrance in Shakespeare there is an exit in Stoppard, and vice versa, “every exit being an entrance somewhere else”<sup>9</sup>. The inversion is indicative of the fact that the focus has been shifted

<sup>6</sup> Brustein. Quoted in Bareham 1990, 93–95.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of this aspect of Shakespeare’s output see, among others: Abel 1963, 41–58; Bethell 1944, 33–42; Boas 1927; Calderwood 1971; Calderwood 1979; Felperin 1977; Forker 1963; Holland 1984; Nelson 1958; Nuttall 1983; Righter 1964 and Rogacki 1970. The notion of theatricality in Beckett is discussed, among others, by: Cohn No. 29 and Abel 1963, 83–103.

<sup>8</sup> He told Giles Gordon (interview 1971, 80) that the characters “chose them selves to some extent. I mean that the play *Hamlet* and the characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the only play and the only characters on which you could write my kind of play. They are so much more than merely bit players in another famous play. *Hamlet* I suppose is the most famous play in any language, it is a sort of common mythology”.

<sup>9</sup> *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, 1978, 21. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

from Shakespearean main characters to the two minor ones. In the ur-text the two courtiers are merely functionaries in a plan set up for them by the King. They are, according to Stoppard, "two courtiers in a Danish castle. Two nonentities surrounded by intrigue"<sup>10</sup>. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* we have a chance to look at the reality of the *Hamlet* world from the perspective of these two minor characters, who are "more nearly representative of the Common Man" (Hayman 1979b, 138).

William E. Gruber (1981–1982, 295) has written that "Stoppard is not using *Hamlet* as a script; rather, the script of *Hamlet* forms part of the material for a discursive element, a literary exercise, as it were". Such a way of looking at Stoppard's play provides a justifiable and convincing explanation of the differences between the ur-text (*Hamlet*) and the metatext (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*)<sup>11</sup>. It also prevents us from accepting the often voiced opinion that due to the characters' "intertextual status, i.e. properties and roles inherited from other plays or texts (the characters of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* are directly 'taken over' from *Hamlet* and so, to some degree pre-defined)" (Elam 1980, 132), they are "caught up" in the *Hamlet* pattern (Duncan 1981, 6), its "story line [being] already a limitation" (Bassnett 1980, 83) and its plot becoming their "destiny" (Gordon 1991, 18). Contrary to these opinions, writing his *own* play, and not merely repeating the *Hamlet* plot, Stoppard emphasises the fact that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern could change their fate by choosing not to be passive in obeying instructions. Guildenstern realises "there must have been a moment, at the beginning, where we could have said – no. But somehow we missed it" (p. 95). He does not remember the moment on the boat when they could have done something, could have changed the course of events but decided not to change anything, this choice of choosing not to do anything still being a choice<sup>12</sup>.

Many critics have discussed the relationship between Stoppard's play and Shakespeare's tragedy. They have pointed out thematic and structural similarities and differences. Some of them have argued that *Hamlet* functions within *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* as a play within the play (Hinden 1986, 3; Kelly 1991, 82 and Schlueter 1979, 99). Two critics, however, seem to come closer to the crux of the relationship between the two plays. Ruby Cohn (1991, 111) has argued: "Strictly speaking, *Rosencrantz*

<sup>10</sup> J. Bradshaw, "Tom Stoppard, Non-stop: Word Games with a Hit Playwright", *New York*, 10 January 1977, 50. Quoted in Deloney 1990, 15. See also other comments of Stoppard on the same issue: Gordon interview 1971, 80 and Hudson interview 1974, 6.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the most important differences see: Brassell 1987, 44; Cohn 1987, 7; Cohn 1991, 51 and Huston 1988, 64.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of this scene see: Brassell 1987, 39; Dutton 1986, 147–149; Egan 1979, 67; Gruber 1981–1982, 306; Londré 1981, 33–35 and Sales 1988, 56.

*and Guildenstern Are Dead* is not a play within a play, but rather a play dancing within the structural frame of the most celebrated tragedy in the English language". William E. Gruber (1990, 86) has written that the two texts "are not simply 'joined'; they exist as a colloidal suspension". Or to put it in a still different way, Stoppard's play presents not only the part of the lives of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern which is their on-stage existence in *Hamlet* but also their private lives which are an off-stage existence seen from the point of view of Shakespearean drama but which, in fact, are their true (even though on-stage, so illusory) lives in Stoppard's drama.

Critics have noticed that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a combination of two ur-texts – *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot*. Some of them have argued that it is *Hamlet* written "as if from a backstage Beckett's-eye-view" (Whitaker 1986, 1) or that Stoppard proved "extremely skilful in dovetailing the *Hamlet* scenes into the *Godot* situation" (Cohn 1976, 217). Many, however, stress the fact that, as Robert Egan put it, "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is not essentially, a recasting of *Waiting for Godot* in Shakespearean terms" (Egan 1979, 59) and that "with hindsight, we can see that *Godot* was stylistically rather than philosophically seminal for Stoppard" (Cohn 1981, 114). This way of looking at the play seems to find support of Stoppard himself who said that he did not mean to write a play about alienation<sup>13</sup> and that he understood what the word "existential" meant only after it had been applied to *Rosencrantz* (Hudson interview 1974, 6). On the other hand, however, he admitted his indebtedness to *Waiting for Godot* (Stoppard 1968, 47). On another occasion Stoppard mentioned "a certain kind of intellectual or verbal humour" characteristic of Beckett which "appears in various forms but it consists of a confident statement followed by immediate refutation by the same voice. It's a constant process of elaborate structure and sudden – and total dismantlement" (Hayman interview 1974, 19). Samuel Beckett, so unwilling to make comments on his writing, once said: "I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. It is even finer in Latin. 'Do not despair, one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume, one of the thieves was damned.' This sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters" (Hobson 1956, 153). The remark made by Beckett refers to an equal extent to the characteristic feature of the writings both of himself and of Stoppard. Stoppard has voiced a similar view when he said "that there is very often *no* single, clear statement in [his] plays" (Hudson interview 1974, 6–7). On another occasion

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<sup>13</sup> T. Prideaux, "Uncertainty Makes the Big Time", *Life*, 9 February 1968, 76. Quoted in Berlin 1990a, 46.

he phrased the same idea in a different way: "What I am always trying to say is 'Firstly, A. Secondly, minus A'" (Hayman 1979b, 10). Things may have different meanings depending on the shifting of the perspective. When viewed from the perspective of *Hamlet* Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are marginal figures of little importance. In Stoppard's drama, when the audience watch their on- and off-stage existence they become "bewildered innocents" (Gordon interview 1971, 80). To some onlookers they present one image, to others the other, still to others – both. Which of these existences are real – neither, or both of them? Here the two playwrights give a similar answer. Beckett says: "The key word in my plays is 'perhaps'" (Driver 1961, 23) and Stoppard argues: "What I think of as being my distinguishing mark is an absolute lack of certainty about almost anything"<sup>14</sup>. Incidentally, "an absolute lack of certainty" is not only a statement concerning the use of contradictions but also a contradiction in itself.

The lack of absolute certainty and the numerous perspectives in the play, the possibility to investigate it from the viewpoint either of *Hamlet* or of *Waiting for Godot* add to its complex structure and meaning. The world of this play, however, is neither the world of Shakespeare nor of Beckett<sup>15</sup>. The numerous references to the two ur-texts, the similarities and differences, help to create a complex image of reality which can never be exactly specified and defined – the epistemological uncertainty always remains. What is the real nature of the characters and what is really happening to them? Are they determined or free to act? Are they really dead?

While Stoppard acknowledges his indebtedness both to Shakespeare and Beckett he does not indicate other influences, arguing that most often it is only a "coincidence" (Hayman interview 1974, 19). Luigi Pirandello is the playwright most often mentioned as a possible influence, the similarities pertaining to role-playing, concern with the nature of reality, the relativity of truth, the fluid nature of identity, the self-reflexibility and theatricality of their plays being mentioned<sup>16</sup>. Stoppard told an interviewer in 1968 that he was not conscious of Pirandello's influence on his work (Gordon 1971, 82). Katherine Kelly (1991, 77) has rightly observed that "On balance, the differences between the two plays are more instructive than their similarities". Two more possible influences are mentioned, those of Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade*, which Stoppard may have seen during his stay in Berlin (Draudt 1981, 352) and James Saunders's *Next Time I'll Sing to You* (Kelly 1991, 74; Sammells 1986b, 71–78; Whitaker 1986, 45 and Zeifman 1990b, 177).

<sup>14</sup> Tom Stoppard's interview with A. C. H. Smith, *Flourish*, RSC Club News-sheet, 1974, issue 1. Quoted in Hayman interview 1974, 40.

<sup>15</sup> For similar opinions see: Gordon 1991, 11, 16, 20 and Kelly 1991, 164.

<sup>16</sup> Bigsby 1976, 17; Brassell 1987, 53; Dean 1981, 42; Gordon 1991, 67; Londré 1981, 39–40; Schlueter 1979, 100 and Whitaker 1986, 54.



Stoppard knew both Saunders and his play<sup>17</sup>. Whereas it is difficult to specify the possible influences precisely, undoubtedly all of the above mentioned playwrights shared some common interests. The most important of these were, on the thematic level, the difficulty of establishing the difference between reality and its mere illusion as well as the ontological and epistemological uncertainty concerning reality. On the structural level, the use of certain devices bringing about the self-reflexibility of their plays which are thus characterised by a high degree of theatricality.

## Reality and illusion

It seems that the main interests of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* are connected with the difficulty and even impossibility of establishing absolute truth or of separating appearance and reality. As far as truth is concerned, the Player says:

For all anyone knows, nothing is [true]. Everything has to be taken on trust; truth is only that which is taken to be true. It's the currency of living. There may be nothing behind it, but it doesn't make any difference as long as it is honoured. One has to act on assumptions.

(p. 49)

Truth, then, is something arbitrary and relative yet it must be accepted. The world Stoppard's characters inhabit is one of relativity, and they are forced to come to terms with the player King's dictum: "Uncertainty is the normal state" (p. 49). The relative quality of truth results from the relative quality of reality itself. The very essence of reality is constantly questioned, one of the earliest instances taking place before the first entrance of the Tragedians:

ROS: (*alert, listening*): I say –! I say–

GUIL: Yes?

ROS: I can hear – I thought I heard – music.

(*Guil raises himself.*)

GUIL: Yes?

ROS: Like a band. (*He looks a round, laughs embarrassedly, expiating himself.*) It sounded like – a band. Drums.

GUIL: Yes.

ROS: It couldn't have been real.

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<sup>17</sup> They met during a seminar in Berlin and the latter urged Stoppard to rewrite the first version of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet Lear* (Tynan 1979, 70). While working for *Scene* Stoppard wrote a review of *Next Time I'll Sing to You*, noticing its Beckettian origins (*Scene* 18, 9 February 1963, 46–47. See: Sammells 1986b, 73 and Zeifman 1990b, 177).

GUIL: "The colours red, blue and green are real. The colour yellow is a mystical experience shared by everybody" – demolish.

(*at edge of stage*): It must have been thunder. Like drums ...

(*By the end of the next speech, the band is faintly audible.*) (p. 15)

Both characters wonder about what is real. On hearing the sound of music, Ros makes a comment about having heard a band. On second thoughts, however, realising it is hardly probable that it is really a band, he starts distancing the idea, changing, as it were, the interpretation of reality as he has perceived it: "it sounded like", "couldn't have been real", finally to come to the conclusion that "it must have been thunder". Unwilling to accept an improbable reality he has changed it into a mere illusion and replaced it by an acceptable kind of reality (the thunder). Guil, on the other hand, unable to accept the idea that the yellow colour is only a mystical illusion and therefore not as real as the others, decides to reject the assumptions concerning primary and secondary colours. Pondering about the generally accepted classification as it is defined by physicists, though imprecise about the concrete categories, he rejects the scientific definitions. To a physicist some colours may be real, primary, while others are not, to a layman all of them are equally real. In this case reality presents a different image to different people depending on their knowledge and perception. People's interpretation of reality is further investigated in a speech of Guil:

A man breaking his journey between one place and another at a third place of no name, character, population of significance, sees a unicorn cross his path and disappear. That in itself is startling, but there are precedents for mystical encounters of various kinds, or to be less extreme, a choice of persuasions to put it down to fancy; until – "My God", says a second man, "I must be dreaming. I thought I saw a unicorn". At which point, a dimension is added that makes the experience as alarming as it will ever be. A third witness, you understand, adds no further dimension but only spreads it thinner, and a fourth thinner still, and the more witnesses there are the thinner it gets and the more reasonable it becomes until it is as thin as reality, the name we give to the common experience. ... "Look, look!" recites the crowd. "A horse with an arrow in its forehead! It must have been mistaken for a deer."

(p. 15)

This speech indicates that reality as people describe it is not a product of perception only. The first onlooker seems to accept the unicorn as a kind of transcendent reality, "a mystical encounter". The second one does not want to accept the reality of what he sees and therefore he distances it at once – he does not say "I see a unicorn" but "I thought I saw a unicorn." As other people make their successive remarks the demythologising process continues and finally the unicorn is accepted as "a horse with an arrow

in its forehead". Rodney Simard, in his article entitled "The Logic of Unicorns: Beyond Absurdism in Stoppard", has rightly recognised that Stoppard's unicorn resonates with metaphysical, even theological implications. He has also written: "Reality remains an individual choice, for the individual must define it" (Simard 1982, 41). The interpretation of reality is a complex process, especially if one perceives something which is said not to exist. Some people are ready to accept it as a kind of reality, others, due to their scepticism, destroy the miracle and start the inexorable process of reducing it to a rational explanation. What seems to be most important is the individual perception of reality. The thing which is generally accepted, however, is often "thin as reality, the name we give to common experience".

The choice of a unicorn for a presentation of people's different reactions to the same phenomenon is an extreme case as it is associated with transcendental metaphysics. Alfred Jules Ayer, whose philosophical views form one of the backbones of *Jumpers*, has argued that philosophical statements make sense only if they are restricted to phenomena bound within the limits of sense-experience (Ayer 1970, 34). He proves this proposition by examining the meaning of the sentence "Unicorns are fictitious" (Ibid., 43). Stoppard's passage may also be an echo of another philosopher, namely Ludwig Wittgenstein (1974, 203e) who wrote in *Philosophical Investigations* about "an animal in a picture ... transfixed by an arrow". It is not certain, however, whether, at the time of writing *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Stoppard was already familiar with the works of Ayer and Wittgenstein as he openly admitted his fascination with the writings of logical positivists slightly later on, namely in 1970<sup>18</sup>. The similarities in the opinions expressed by the three of them still remain, though. Yet there are also some differences. The above mentioned philosophers argue that statements belonging to the realm of transcendental metaphysics are not verifiable and thus meaningless and that no valid description of reality must go beyond sense-experience. The validity of statements describing objective reality, however, is also often put into question by Stoppard's play.

The situation Ros and Guil are in bears many similarities with the one described in the unicorn story. They, too, are making a stop in their journey "in a place without any visible character" (p. 70) and are wondering what is real and what is not. Being involved in his quasi-philosophical thoughts, Guil does not notice what is happening around him. He does not hear the band and finishes his unicorn story saying: "I'm sorry it wasn't a unicorn.

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<sup>18</sup> Katherine Kelly mentions the possibility of such an influence while discussing the law of probability in reference to the tossing of coins and mentions the work of Richard Mises. See: Kelly 1991, 164 note 3.

It would have been nice to have unicorns" (pp. 15–16). At the same time, he is unwilling, as his consideration of different colours indicates, to accept the general, common definition of what is real and what is not. Ros, on the other hand, seems to go through different stages of evaluating his perceptions of reality. His initial acceptance of the reality, of what he sees, resembles the reaction of the first person in the unicorn story. The following distancing and disbelief recall the reaction of the second onlooker. While in the story, however, the end denotes the rejection of what everybody sees, his final reaction is just the opposite: "I knew all along it was a band" (p. 15). This may be partly due to the fact that whereas the existence of unicorns is absolutely impossible, the existence of a band in the midst of nowhere, even though improbable, is yet possible.

The unicorn passage is important for a number of reasons. The fact that it precedes the entrance of the Tragedians is indicative of their role in shaping the different levels of reality in the play. It also indicates at the very beginning of the play that one of its main interests is the manifold nature of reality, which appears to be different to individual people and even to the same person depending on a number of factors the most important of these being a shifting perspective. This idea of the relative quality of reality is brought about explicitly in two other moments in the play. Towards the end of the play Ros remarks: "The sun's going down. Or the earth's coming up, as the fashionable theory has it" (p. 95). The reality of what is happening is exactly the same in both descriptions. The ways of describing it, however, are yet completely different. Hence the two accounts of the same event seem to be referring to two different events. On another occasion Guil says:

A Chinaman of the Tang Dynasty – and, by which definition, a philosopher – dreamed he was a butterfly, and from that moment he was never quite sure that he was not a butterfly dreaming it was a Chinese philosopher. Envy him; in his two-fold security.  
(p. 44)

This speech relates to one of the main problems in the play, namely that referring to the difference between the reality and its mere illusion. Leslee Lenoff (1982, 60) writes "The boundary between illusion and reality is neither rigid nor distinct. As Guildenstern notes, the philosopher's dream of the butterfly becomes a reality while the reality of the philosopher assumes an illusory quality". Douglas Colby (1978, 41–42), commenting on the same sentence, has written: "Like the Chinese philosopher, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are to be envied for being able to see themselves from two different perspectives and never knowing for certain which is the correct one".

## The coin tossing game

The dominant impression created by the play is one of permanent shifts of perspective resulting in a forever changing image of reality. Throughout the drama, we are presented, as it were, with two sides of a coin – at one moment it is heads, at another it is tails. The two sides are different, even contradictory, yet the picture obtained is a combination and permutation of the opposites which sometimes merge to form a new quality and sometimes exist side by side simultaneously. In the course of the play the coin appears as a visual image several times during the coin tossing game (pp. 7–11, 21, 25, 44, 45, 51 and 77). It is also discernible as a verbal image referring to the fact that things are different depending on the perspective from which one is watching them.

This impression derives from the first scene of the play in which Ros and Guil are tossing coins. “*The run of ‘heads’ is impossible*” as the stage directions indicate (p. 7), the coin falling heads eighty-nine times in succession. Guil start worrying and looking for some acceptable explanation. Rejecting the materialistic idea that “It must be indicative of something, besides the redistribution of wealth” (pp. 10–11), he mentions several possible explanations including those taken from Beckett<sup>19</sup> and the Bible, finally to say it may be treated as “a spectacular vindication of the principle” of probability (p. 11). He finishes his philosophical interpretation of the phenomenon by saying:

we can take it that we are not held within un- sub- or supernatural forces after all, in all probability, that is. Which is a great relief to me personally. (*Small pause.*) Which is all very well, except that – (p. 12)

This last sentence itself seems to present two sides of the coin, too. Guil rejects the possibility of the intrusion of fate or any other forces. The phrase “in all probability”, however, makes this rejection doubtful as he arrives at it while pondering about the notion of probability itself.

Guil’s reaction to the run of heads expresses his mixed feelings towards what he is witnessing. Arguing that “the scientific approach to the examination of phenomena is a defence against the pure emotion of fear” (p. 12), he yet realises that something unusual is happening. The previous “harmony and a kind of confidence” have been shattered by the coming of the messenger (p. 13). The run of coins is viewed by Guil from two different

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<sup>19</sup> The “private atonement for an unremembered past” (p. 11) brings to one’s mind Samuel Beckett’s idea of an inevitable punishment for the major sin “of being born” (Beckett 1970, 49), while “Time has stopped” is a sentence uttered by Vladimir during his first encounter with Lucky and Pozzo (Beckett 1969, 36).

perspectives: it causes some kind of unspecified fear, yet there should not be anything surprising in it. Many critics have stressed that the scene “defines what has been called a ‘boundary situation’” (Gruber 1981–1982, 302), that it signals “the suspension of the ordinary and the entry into art” (Kelly 1991, 74) and that “Ros and Guil exist in a world in which normal rules of probability and expectation are simply not operating” (Brassell 1987, 40). This scene is, in fact, another example of a concrete reality presenting different images. This duality is also visible in Guil’s reaction: looking at it from the point of view of an average man he is terrified, but investigating it from the point of view of science he knows there is nothing exceptional about it. In this respect his complex reaction is a kind of repetition of the ideas earlier expressed in reference to primary and secondary colours.

The law of probability is usually oversimplified by people who tend to forget that it is a law concerning large numbers. Two critics have argued this point: Katherine Kelly (1991, 74) notices the similarity of the scene to Richard Mises’s definition of probability, and having mentioned that Stoppard told Kenneth Tynan early in 1970 about his fascination with the work of logical positivists she ponders about the possibility of this influence. Richard Mises (1957, 11) finds that, according to the law of physics, “we may say that in order to apply the theory of probability we must have a practically unlimited sequence of uniform observations” and mentions the game of “heads and tails”. John Harry Lutterbie (1986, 87), noticing that Stoppard is an avowed admirer of Bertrand Russell, mentions the philosopher’s ideas ‘concerning the question of probability. The opinions of these two philosophers, even though employing different ways of phrasing, express the idea voiced by Guil while applying “the scientific approach” to the phenomenon of “the impossible” run of heads.

The coin tossing game can be treated as a way of introducing the notions of probability, chance, determinism and even fate<sup>20</sup>. It is also used to demonstrate in stage terms the notion that reality presents itself as a kind of dichotomy<sup>21</sup>. The most obvious result of this duality is the fact that

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of these ideas see: Draudt 1981, 348; Farish 1975, 18 and Lutterbie 1986, 87.

<sup>21</sup> Douglas Colby (1981, 32, 35, 36–37) in his article “The Game of Coin Tossing: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* by Tom Stoppard” discusses four major themes encompassed by the coin metaphor: 1) two sides of the story of Ros and Guil (Shakespeare’s and Stoppard’s), 2) the fact that the two characters “are essentially two sides of the same person”, 3) the role of fate: “all the experiences Ros and Guil undergo are determined, predetermined by Shakespeare and Stoppard”, 4) the cyclic quality of the play – “Although *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* are fated to die during both *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, they are also set to be reborn as soon as either of these plays begins to be performed again.”

Stoppard's play presents two aspects of Ros and Guil's existence – that which is known from *Hamlet* but also the other one, consisting of their existence outside the scope of that great drama. This notion finds its expression in the stage image of the sequence of heads being replaced by tails at the first intrusion of a *Hamlet* scene (p. 25).

The use of the famous dramatic masterpiece fulfils two functions in Stoppard's play. It enables Stoppard to write his own supplementary part of Shakespearean drama, the part missing in the original as dealing with the lives of characters of secondary importance to the main plot. It also makes it possible for Stoppard to deal with the problem of reality and illusion not only from an epistemological viewpoint but also from the point of view of art as a means of creating an illusion of reality. Thus, the play presents a double dichotomy, as it were. If the nature of reality and truth are difficult to establish in everyday life, the situation becomes even more complex in the case of art. In an artistic representation, the vision is much more complex because it is tinted by the artist's imagination and affected by those participating in the process of artistic presentation and perception. The play can be viewed from a number of different perspectives, one of them being the double dichotomy of reality/illusion in life/art. The new standpoint will show the multiplicity of meanings visible not only in the varied status of different characters but also in the way of viewing such issues as the meaning of life and death or the function of theatricality in life and drama.

### Three levels of reality

The metatheatrical, self-reflexive quality of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is the result of an elaborate interplay of a number of elements: the employment of ur-text (or to be more precise two of them), the constant references to acting and theatre and the presentation of a group of actors on the stage, experts in creating theatrical illusion. When we go to the theatre and watch a production of a realistic play, due to the employment of the fourth wall convention we tend to forget that we are watching merely an illusion of reality and we start treating it as reality itself. In the case of this play, however, such an attitude is impossible. While watching *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* we are constantly reminded that the play is a play. There are moments in it, no matter how rare and short, when we forget the dichotomy of reality and illusion and take the theatrical illusion for reality itself. Much more often, however, we are made aware that the play is a non-mimetic, artistic enterprise. The piece presents an illusionist mirror of life, the process of constructing that mirror (the actors)

and the mirror of a mirror of life (Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a mirror or representation of life, becoming in Stoppard's play a representation of representation).

These three diverse kinds of relationship between reality and illusion are reflected in the three kinds of characters in the drama, differentiated by their status in the play. The first group consists of the *Hamlet* cast with the exception of Ros and Guil and the Players for obvious reasons. There is a strange paradox to be noticed here. Hamlet and the other characters seem to be the most lifelike and real, the only exception being the behaviour of Hamlet and Ophelia in the first, mute scene which, as stage directions indicate, is characterised by a high degree of theatricality and artificiality (p. 26). Hamlet in Stoppard's play does not discuss matters concerning the clash of reality and illusion. His conversation with the actors has been deleted just like the soliloquy, "O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!", following it (Act II, sc. II). Whereas Shakespeare's play is characterised by a high degree of self-reflexibility this element is completely missing in Stoppard's rendering of the scenes taken from the ur-text. As a result, we tend to forget that *Hamlet* characters on the stage are not "real" people but only actors performing parts of fictitious characters. On the other hand, however, there can be no member of the audience who would fail to recognise them as characters taken from another play, thus not a reality in its own right but only a representation of representation. Furthermore, as Richard Corballis (1984, 37) has noticed, in Stoppard's play "the *Hamlet* characters, by virtue of the onstage audience (added to the offstage one), are made to appear all the more stagey, 'clockwork' and 'unreal'".

The second group of characters, the Players, fulfil many functions in the drama: firstly, they act as mediators between Ros and Guil and the world of *Hamlet*, secondly, twice in the course of the play, they reveal Ros and Guil's entrapment in the *Hamlet* plot (pp. 57 and 92), which is expressed verbally by means of an often repeated phrase "caught up" or its variations (pp. 17, 30, 34, 45, 47)<sup>22</sup>. Finally, they function in presenting one of the basic interests of the play, namely the idea of art as a means of creating an illusion of reality. The play scrutinises the nature of acting which has become a professional function as well as a mode of being. In many sentences the Player expresses the idea of the dichotomy of art and life, actor and spectator and on- and off-stage existence. In the first encounter with Ros and Guil he calls them "fellow artists", explaining afterwards:

<sup>22</sup> The notion of entrapment in the *Hamlet* plot, also by means of other characters of Shakespearean drama who "are coming" or "pouring in from every side", is expressed verbatim first by Ros (p. 54) and later by Guil (p. 65).



For some of us it is performance, for others, patronage. They are two sides of the same coin, or, let us say, being as there are so many of us, the same side of two coins.

(p. 17)

This idea is further developed when they meet for the second time in Elsinore. The Player accuses Ros and Guil of having deserted them on the road before the actual performance staged by the Tragedians could take place:

You don't understand the humiliation of it – to be tricked out of the single assumption which makes our existence viable – that somebody is *watching*. ...

(p. 46)

and

Don't you see?! We're *actors* – we're the opposite of people! ... We're actors ... We pledged our identities, secure in the conventions of our trade; that someone would be watching.

(p. 47)

“People” are secure (or not) in their own personalities, but an actor only creates one in the illusion he offers to an audience which is, therefore, indispensable for his existence. For an actor existence is equivalent to being watched. In this passage Stoppard has transformed the existential “need for the other”, characteristic of the majority of Beckett’s characters, into an actor’s professional need for an audience indispensable for his profession<sup>23</sup>.

Having accepted acting as a mode of living the Tragedians have freed themselves of existential uncertainty. The human condition is an alternation between security and insecurity. The Players, as opposed to “people” feel safer in someone else’s script. They are “always in character”, “always on” stage (p. 25). Being experts in tragedy and theatrical illusion they know that their presentations should follow linear development towards death (p. 59). Everything “is written”, predetermined by the script at hand, as the Player explains (p. 60).

The Tragedians as characters perceive life as equivalent to acting, all they or anyone else should do is “act natural” (p. 49), a contradiction in itself because acting is always related to some exaggeration, artificiality as the comparison between the success of the fake death scene and the failure of an actual death sentence executed on the stage indicate<sup>24</sup>. It might seem that for the Tragedians the process of creating an illusion of reality has

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<sup>23</sup> Beckett seems to follow Bishop Berkeley and his notion of “esse est percipi” and Martin Buber’s concept of the necessity of relationship with other human beings which makes one feel real and concrete. Beckett himself has said that sometimes he thinks that perception (or being perceived by others) is equivalent to existence (Schlossberg 1973, 46).

<sup>24</sup> These two deaths will be discussed later on in connection with the problem and meaning of death in the play.

replaced this reality. It is due to their presence in the play, to their numerous discussions of the dichotomy of life and art, reality and illusion that the audience are constantly reminded of the theatrical illusion; they get the multiple perspectives of the play and they realise that the play is characterised by a high degree of theatricality.

There are two more scenes with the Tragedians worth discussing in this respect. Firstly, there is the dress rehearsal which is ironic and paradoxical because the Tragedians have argued that they are always "in character", always on stage and in costume. The fallacy of this statement is exposed early in the play when Alfred keeps changing in and out of costume for the performance of *The Rape of the Sabine Women* (pp. 19–20). Furthermore, the Player in the rehearsal scene starts playing the part of director which brings about the notion of theatricality in everyday life, of putting on different masks and roles by ordinary people, not only professional actors. Secondly, there is the scene when Ros mistakes Alfred wearing women's clothes for the Queen (p. 56). The sight gag of mistaken identity serves several dramatic functions: it adds to the comic quality of the play but also reinforces the motif of blurred boundaries between art and life being one of the numerous instances of the interchangeability of characters belonging to different groups in the play. In this case, the Tragedians and the characters of *Hamlet* are mixed. The notion is worked up fully in the final tableau of the play, when the stage image reveals "*arranged in the approximate positions last held by the dead TRAGEDIANS, the tableau of court and corpses which is the last scene of Hamlet*" (p. 96). These two scenes demonstrate that it is neither possible to separate the concrete notions, groups of characters, reality and illusion, nor to arrive at a concrete, absolute truth. The image presented by the play is one of blurred boundaries and ever-persistent doubt and uncertainty.

Ros and Guil form the third group of characters in the drama. They exist basically on two levels – the on-stage reality of the *Hamlet* world and the reality of their private lives which is to quite a great extent reminiscent of the existence of the two tramps in *Waiting for Godot*. Furthermore, their lives can also be discussed from the point of view of the numerous roles they choose or are forced to play; they are just "ordinary people" or characters from *Hamlet* or spectators, actors and finally directors within the script of Stoppard's drama or even actors of the evening's performance of the play in the theatre. At times, however, they fulfil many of the functions simultaneously. Depending on the perspective at the given moment their reality presents a different image which is still further shaped by each spectator's individual response.

When the Player says that there are actors and patrons and that there is an opposition between people and actors he mentions two sides of a coin

representing people belonging to the realm of life and theatre respectively. Ros and Guil seem to be representing different sides of the coin as they are discernible in a given individual in everyday existence. Furthermore, whereas each coin has two sides, this duality being stressed by the Player, in the case of Ros and Guil there are many different sides depending on the situation they are in and also on the perspective from which they are perceived and interpreted. Since the play focuses to a great extent on art it is no wonder that these different aspects of their personality resemble roles undertaken by people engaged in the process of staging plays. The only aspect of their personality which is given a name in the play is "spectators" (p. 59), but we can also view them as actors, directors and even possible authors of the drama of their lives. Besides, while the Player discusses the interplay of reality and illusion as an aspect of theatrical convention, the dichotomy in the case of Ros and Guil is of another kind being connected with social life. This aspect of the play has been noticed by June Schlueter (1979, 11) who has written that the relativity of identity often results from man "donning masks in order to play the roles demanded of him". She refers to the work of the social psychologist, Erving Goffman (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*) in which the author studies "the sociology of life in terms of the theatrical metaphor"<sup>25</sup>.

The notion that Ros and Guil are constantly playing roles and putting on masks is discernible in an often repeated comic rhyme which becomes a refrain in the play: "Give us this day our daily mask" (p. 30), "Give us this day our daily week" (p. 34), "Give us this day our daily round" (p. 71) "Give us this day our daily cue" (p. 77) and "Call us this day our daily tune" (p. 86). These grotesque parodies of the *Lord's Prayer*, differentiated according to the needs of concrete moments at which they are uttered, indicate that masks and cues, usually associated with acting, are indispensable for them in their everyday existence which consists of acting and playing. Critics have noticed that play-acting and role-playing are significant in the play (Hayman 1979b, 44 and Londré, 1981, 31), that the "theatrical metaphor which sustains itself throughout the play underscores the playwright's vision of life as essentially dramatic and of living as nothing more than playing a role" (Schlueter 1979, 99)<sup>26</sup>. Robert Gordon (1991, 70) discusses various meanings of acting in the play (theatrical role playing, conscious social deception, unconscious social role-playing and spontaneous acts of self realisation) and Ruby Cohn (1981, 113) argues that "Stoppard underlines ... that homo sapiens is homo ludens" and "highlights the old life-role

<sup>25</sup> Theatricality as a social convention is discussed at length by Elizabeth Burns (1972).

<sup>26</sup> Similar ideas are also expressed by Zeifman 1984, 87.

topos; all the world's a stage, and all the men merely players in an incomplete drama"<sup>27</sup>.

Ros and Guil, while characters in Stoppard's play, are spectators of another play, or to be more precise of two kinds of performance – the scenes from *Hamlet* and those presented by the Tragedians. In the case of the former, they are spectators pure and simple. Several times in the course of the play, we see them downstage watching scenes of Shakespeare's play enacted upstage (pp. 38, 45, 58). The scenes from *Hamlet* which they watch are separated from those in which they participate. Furthermore, those scenes are not presented as instances of acting – Ros and Guil simply watch and hear what other "people" are doing and saying.

The situation in scenes with the Tragedians is not so simple, however. The two main characters are, in most of the cases at least, fully aware that they are watching a show which is being staged for their sake. There are moments when they enjoy the performances presented by the Tragedians and express applause clapping their hands – such is the case with the long speech delivered by the Player on his coming to Elsinore (p. 47) or with the fake death scene (p. 94). Early in the play, in the first encounter with the Players, they are told: "It costs little to watch, and little more if you happen to get caught up in the action" (p. 17). What the Player refers to while using the phrase "get caught up" is participation in the performance, taking part in the show and becoming an actor. What happens in the course of the play, however, is their being caught up in the events of another reality (the *Hamlet* plot) and having to follow the instructions given there. Ros and Guil desperately try to avoid being caught up. They desire to remain spectators pure and simple, to watch the events from a safe distance and not to get involved. Guil's remark, coming during the rehearsal of the mime: "Keep back – we're spectators" (p. 59), is a clear indication of this attitude. An even clearer disclaimer comes later on when they watch the scene depicting the spies:

*(The whole mime has been fluid and continuous but now ROS moves forward and brings it to a pause. What brings ROS forward is the fact that under their cloaks the two SPIES are wearing coats identical to those worn by ROS and GUIL, whose coats are now covered by their cloaks. ROS approaches 'his' SPY doubtfully. He does not quite understand why the coats are familiar. ROS stands close, touches the coat, thoughtfully ...)* ROS: Well, if

<sup>27</sup> It would be interesting to investigate the role of game playing in this drama, an idea which is discernible in Beckett's piece where the characters engage in numerous games in order to pass the time and forget about the "suffering of being". For Beckett's understanding of ideas of Time, Habit and Memory, suffering and boredom see his study of Proust (Beckett 1970) while for a discussion of the notion of playing in his dramas see: Uchman 1987, especially 15–17 (*Waiting for Godot*) and 34–36 (*Endgame*).

it isn't –! No, wait a minute – it's along time since – where was it? Ah, this is taking me back to – when was it? I know you, don't I? I never forget a face – (*he looks into the SPY's face.*) ... not that I know yours that is. For a moment I thought – no, I don't know you, do I? Yes, I'm afraid you are quite wrong. You must have mistaken me for someone else.

(p. 62)

At the beginning of this passage, Ros and Guil fleetingly recognise themselves in the two spies. Then, however, Ros blocks the painful recognition by the nonsensical reversal that the dead men must have mistaken them for somebody else. Distancing themselves from the action in the scenes presented to them, Ros and Guil become spectators not only of different performances but also of their lives, an attitude which may be treated as a sign of their passivity.

There are moments in the play, however, when they seem to be aware of being actors, of performing a role which has been devised for them – the role of spying on Hamlet. Discussing their encounter with the Prince, Guil says: "We played it close to the chest of course" (p. 41) and towards the end of the play Ros remarks: "We don't question, we don't doubt. We perform" (p. 81). It could be argued, perhaps, that the use of the words "played" and "perform" is not in itself connotative of their awareness of being actors, that these words are also used in everyday life, not only in their theatrical meaning. For the audience, however, especially in the context of the Player's remark concerning the fact that everything "is written", they are combined with the notion of acting. Moreover, on two occasions Ros and Guil clearly behave as actors (in the professional sense of the word) preparing for a performance: when they are getting ready for their future encounters with Hamlet (p. 35) and the English king (pp. 81–82 and p. 92). In connection with these scenes it could be said, then, that the idea of their being actors is related to the twofold connotation of theatricality – it may be treated as pretending, putting on masks in everyday life but also as a characteristic feature of theatrical convention.

At times Ros and Guil try to become directors or even authors, quite unsuccessfully, though. Such is the case in the scene when, after having been left alone by the Player who went away to learn his lines, Ros shouts "Next" yet no one enters (p. 51), a scene which is put in contrast with a later one when after the Player has uttered the same word the next scene of the mime is performed (p. 61). The Player is able to demand something, to set an action going (if only a rehearsal). They themselves are not. This becomes evident when they decide to be directors and Ros expresses his anger with the situation they are in:

They're taking us for granted! Well, I won't stand it! In the future, notice will be taken. (*He wheels again to face into the wings.*) Keep out, then! I forbid anyone to enter! (*No one comes – Breathing heavily.*) That's better ... (*Immediately, behind him a grand procession enters. ...*) (p. 53)

Neither in the world of the Tragedians nor in the *Hamlet* world are they able to be directors, to give orders which will be obeyed. They cannot be the directors of their own fate, either. When they decide to set up a trap for Hamlet Ros's trousers fall down (p. 67) and so a moment charged with significance is transformed into mere grotesque<sup>28</sup>. On another occasion, while rehearsing the meeting with the English king, they accidentally open the letter they are delivering and discover its contents. For some time they contemplate the possibility of doing something yet later they give up the idea, Guil arguing "it would be presumptuous [of them] to interfere with the designs of fate or even of kings" (p. 83). What this sentence demonstrates is their unwillingness to accept responsibility for an action of their own making. They are given a chance to be active, creative, become authors not only of their own lives but also to affect that of Hamlet, yet they choose not to take advantage of this possibility. They prefer to remain mere spectators. If they are forced to, they may at best be actors fulfilling the orders, following the scripts determining their actions.

Ros and Guil can be perceived as spectators, actors, directors and even potential authors of their life stories. The scenes depicting them demonstrate their using masks, their role playing or employing theatricality in social life. There are moments in the play, however, when they must be treated not only as characters in a play but also as actors taking part in the evening's performance. There are a number of sentences in the play characterised by double meanings which carry also this connotation: "There is an art to the building up of suspense" (p. 7), "I'm good only in support" (p. 78), "Now we've lost the tension" (p. 80), "They won't notice the broken seal, assuming you were in character" (p. 83) and "Quick – before we lose our momentum" (p. 85). These sentences, just like phrases "act natural" (p. 49) and "perform" (p. 81), stress the notion of theatricality in reference not only to social life but also to the idea of theatre itself. In some cases, both the readings are possible (after all, such phrases are often encountered in life with no underlying reference to theatre). Sometimes, however, they do not seem to make much sense if they are not viewed from the perspective of the theatre, performance and the very idea of acting. Therefore it must be argued that there is no other justification of Guil's

<sup>28</sup> This scene becomes more meaningful if one remembers the scene from *Waiting for Godot* when the tramps decide to hang themselves using Estragon's belt due to which his trousers fall down (Beckett 1969, 93), a scene also charged with absurd overtones.

sentence, "There is an art to the building up of suspense" (p. 7) than to point out to the audience that they are in theatre and have started watching a theatrical performance.

Thus another level of meaning is added. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* consists of three kinds of representation: the representation of the reality of Ros and Guil, both inside and out of the *Hamlet* plot, the representation of representation (the *Hamlet* plot) and the representation of the act of creating theatrical illusion (the Tragedians). It is a self-reflexive play constantly stressing its illusory character. Depending on which level of its meaning is taken into consideration, it can be treated in a variety of ways. Its true value, however, results from the numerous permutations and the fact that there are always two sides to any coin (in this case a number of different sides, in fact). There are numerous images and motifs in the play which acquire a metaphorical significance in the drama: the summons by the messenger, mentioned several times (pp. 12, 13, 14—twice, 29 and 95)<sup>29</sup>, the meaning of the boat, and its associations with box and barrel<sup>30</sup> and finally the idea of death itself. For the present study, however, the notion of death as presented in the play seems to be the most important one.

### Three kinds of death

The very title of the play which indicates that Ros and Guil are *dead* and the fact that when the play begins we see them *alive* on the stage denote that the meaning of the notion of death in the drama is not easy to define<sup>31</sup>. The piece presents many aspects of death — it is something different for the *Hamlet* characters than for the Tragedians and it presents a number of different faces to Ros and Guil. Our understanding of the notion depends also on whether we treat the play as a representation of reality or whether we focus on the self-reflexive and thus theatrical quality of the drama.

The characters of the play may be divided, as argued before, into three groups and the meaning of death is different for each of these groups. It

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of this motif and its symbolic implications see, among others: Duncan 1981, 59–60 and 67; Gabbard 1982, 34; Lee 1969, 43; Sales 1988, 41 and Zivanovic 1981, 46.

<sup>30</sup> These problems are discussed, among others, by: Colby 1978, 39; Duncan 1981, 67; Egan 1979, 66; Farish 1975, 25–26; Gabbard 1982, 31–33; Hu 1989, 45; Lenoff 1982, 45 and 54–56; Londré 1981, 27 and 32; Sales 1988, 40; Schlueter 1979, 101 and Whitaker 1986, 62.

<sup>31</sup> J. Dennis Huston (1988, 48–53) discusses at length the possible interpretations of the title. Also other critics give their interpretations: Berlin 1990a, 44; Lutterbie 1986, 82; Zivanovic 1981, 55 and Whitaker 1986, 41.

seems that death in the case of the *Hamlet* characters is something final. The death of one of the *Hamlet* characters is shown to the audience and to Ros and Guil – that of Polonius. First, during the mime, we watch “a very stylised reconstruction of a POLONIUS figure being stabbed behind the arras” (p. 61) and a few moments later “HAMLET leaves, dragging the BODY” (p. 68). The two combined scenes are an instance of the blurring of the border between different levels of reality in the play, the death first being presented by the Tragedians and later on enacted as actually happening in the *Hamlet* world. Hamlet’s exit is followed by a conversation of the two protagonists:

ROS: (*worriedly – he walks a few paces towards HAMLET’s exit*): He was dead.

GUIL: Of course he’s dead!

ROS (*turns to GUIL*): Properly.

GUIL (*angrily*): Death’s death, isn’t it?

(ROS *falls silent. Pause.*)

(p. 68)

Due to Guil’s insistence on death being death, Ros’s doubts are dismissed and he, too, accepts this case as final and thus Polonius’s death remains the only instance of such a kind of death we witness in the course of Stoppard’s play<sup>32</sup>.

The Players are interested in rendering death in theatrical terms. This notion is visible in the conversation between Guil and the Player when the former ponders what the actors can know about death and the latter answers that is what the actors are best at doing. Furthermore, the Player argues that when an actor once was actually killed on the stage, the death being the execution of the sentence for his crime, “the whole thing was a *disaster!*” (p. 64).

In his book, entitled *Theatrical Presentation: Performer, Audience and Act*, Bernard Beckerman (1990, 21) writes: “the act of dying onstage has an eternal fascination. It is the moment when the performer does the impossible”. Good acting should be a combination of actuality and artificiality accepted by the theatrical convention and should evoke in the audience feelings both of attachment and detachment. While watching the condemned actor’s actual death on the stage the viewers found it unconvincing – the element of actuality having completely shattered the necessary element of artificiality. There is always a difference between actual reality and its even most realistic rendering in theatrical terms.

“There is nothing more unconvincing than an unconvincing death”, the Player argues (p. 57), the death of the condemned actor being a very vivid

<sup>32</sup> J. Dennis Huston (1988, 64, note 6), discussing the New York, Grove Press, 1967 edition of the play, writes that “Polonius reappears after his death.” If this version of the play is taken into consideration not even this death is final, then.



example here. In theatre the presentation of death by an actor may be convincing or not. In real life, death is not described in such terms, though. That is what Guil tells the Player, scornfully commenting on his sentence "In our experience, most things end in death":

*(fear, vengeance, scorn) Your experience? Actors! (He snatches a dagger from the PLAYER's belt and points at the PLAYER's throat: the PLAYER backs and GUIL advances, speaking more quietly.) I'm talking about death – and you've never experienced that. And you cannot act it. You die a thousand casual deaths – with none of that intensity which squeezes out life ... and no blood runs cold anywhere. Because even as you die you know that you will come back in a different hat. But no one gets up after death – there is no applause – there is only silence and some second-hand clothes, and that's – death – (And he pushes the blade in up to the hilt. The PLAYER stands with huge, terrible eyes, clutches at the wound as the blade withdraws: he makes small weeping sounds and falls to his knees, and then right down.) (While he is dying, GUIL, nervous, high, almost hysterical, wheels on the TRAGEDIANS –)* (p. 93)

After a brief silence the Tragedians applaud while the Player stands up and brushes himself down. Only the Tragedians, familiar with the tricks of the trade, know it is not reality itself but only a case of a competent creation of theatrical illusion. The rendering of the scene by the Player is so convincing that both Ros and Guil are taken in completely. When he tries to kill the actor Guil wants to uphold the rights of life against the deformations of mediocre art. What he demonstrates, though, is that art, competent art, is sometimes more real than actual life. What is also important in this scene is that, thanks to the daring theatricality of the moment, Stoppard makes the audience live through the illusion despite the play's constant reminders that it is just an illusion. The fake death of the Player is more real than the actual death of the condemned actor. An illusion created by great art may be more appealing than the reality itself<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Margarate Holubetz (1982) mentions the possibility of John Webster's influence on Stoppard and discusses the similarities in the presentation of fake death scenes presented by the playwrights, while Lionel Abel (1963, 80) and Susan Bassnett-McGuire (1980, 99–100) analyse the presentation of death in the works of Luigi Pirandello from the point of view of theatricality characteristic of metatheatre. It seems worthwhile here to mention a play by a modern Spanish playwright, Rodolfo Sirera, *El veneno del teatro* (first produced in the Maria Guerrero Theatre, Madrid in 1983), dealing extensively with the problem of acting out death on the stage. A Marquis invites a Comedian, Gabriel de Beaumont, to his house as he wants him to enact a scene from a play he has written which presents the death of Socrates. Not being satisfied with the actor's performance, the Marquis tells Gabriel that the wine his guest was given at the beginning of his visit was poisoned and urges him to present the scene once more, now with the full awareness of the fact that if he is not convincing he himself will die as the antidote will not be given to him. The actor is much more successful this time and so is given some liquid to drink. It appears, however, that the first drink he got was just a kind of drug and the second one is the real poison. The Marquis explains

The Player, an expert at creating theatrical illusion, is interested in the problem of death only from the perspective of acting and does not notice the existential aspect of the phenomenon. This becomes evident when he asks the question "Do you know what happens to old actors?" and then answers himself: "Nothing. They're still acting" (p. 87). For him acting is equivalent to living, he does not worry about existential problems of life and death, his only interest being in a good, efficient, convincing way of acting.

The meaning of death in respect to Ros and Guil is diametrically different, and the notion can be viewed in a variety of ways depending on the perspective assumed. The title of the play, a sentence actually uttered at the end of Stoppard's play by the ambassador, was earlier used by this character's prototype in Shakespeare's play. If we view Ros and Guil from the bias of the ur-text then, Ros and Guil are dead, their fate having been predetermined. This interpretation, though undoubtedly justified from the perspective of *Hamlet*, is not the only possible one. Moreover, it is hardly satisfactory, as Ros and Guil, the characters of Stoppard's play, differ from their Shakespearean prototypes. The meaning of the concept of death in reference to Ros and Guil may be discussed from different perspectives which overlap occasionally. On the one hand, they are two "bewildered innocents", "Everyman condemned to live and die they know not where and why" (Cohn 1976, 216). On the other hand, however, they are actors producing an evening's performance of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

Ros and Guil seem to be obsessed with the idea of death which is the recurrent subject of their conversations. Early in the play Ros, while cutting his fingernails says: "Another curious scientific phenomenon is the fact that the fingernails grow after death, as does the beard" (p. 13) showing that he realises signs of body growth do not necessarily mean life. This statement acquires an extra dimension in the context of the sentence of Guil "But you're not dead", uttered a few moments later. There are a number of other instances when the word "dead" and its variants appear: "I tell you it's all stopping to a death, it's boding to a depth, stepping to a head, it's all headlong to a dead stop —" (p. 28), "GUIL: Are you deaf? ROS: Am I dead? GUIL: Yes or no? ROS: Is there a choice?" (pp. 32–33), "over your dead body" (p. 59) and "*That's* a dead end" (p. 91). It could be argued, then, that in the above instances the border between life and death

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that death cannot be enacted successfully and that only actual death is really convincing. As the play ends we see him observing Gabriel approaching death, the host saying that the night is the night of a premiere and the spectacle is just about to start. The play's treatment of the nature of theatrical performance, of the interplay between reality and illusion, of the possibility/impossibility of an actor's enactment of death, bears numerous resemblances to Stoppard's presentation of these subjects. (Published in Polish as *Trucizna teatru. Dialog między arystokratą i komediantem*, transl. Marcei Minc, in *Dialog* 1993, no. 3, 73–86).

is thin, indeed. In this respect, the play seems to be reminiscent of Beckett's plays which, as I have argued elsewhere, "present in a metaphorical way life as dying, as always pursuing the desirable yet hardly attainable salvation, release, escape from the burden of living"<sup>34</sup>.

The two protagonists try to recall the moment in childhood when they first thought of death (p. 53), imagine death as "lying in a box with a lid on it" (p. 52) or as a boat (p. 81), and are terrified by the prospect of "death followed by eternity ... the worst of both worlds" (p. 54). Ros and Guil, even though dissatisfied with life they are living, fear death, a thought which Guil tries to dismiss saying: "As Socrates so philosophically put it, since we don't know what death is, it is illogical to fear it" (p. 83). Trying not to experience the feeling of existential *Angst* they are unwilling to accept the fact that the staging of the death of the spies, which they witness twice in the course of the play, is the staging of their own death (pp. 61, 94). Furthermore, the second presentation, unlike the first one, does not evoke any reaction on their part whatsoever.

John M. Perlette (1985, 661) has discussed the reactions of Ros and Guil to death from the point of view of Freudian analysis. Freud finds that man tries "to shelve death", "to eliminate it from life". Trying to "shelve death" they argue that

Death is ... not. Death isn't. ... Death is the ultimate negative. (p. 81)

and

Death is not anything ... death is not ... It's the absence of presence, nothing more ... the endless time of never coming back ... a gap you can't see, and when the wind blows through it, it makes no sound ... (p. 95)<sup>35</sup>

The same idea is expressed in the scene when, on the deck of the boat, they notice Hamlet's barrel missing. Learning from the Player that Hamlet is gone, yet in the absence of precise information about his actually being dead, Ros remarks: "He's dead then. He's dead as far as we're concerned" to which the Player adds: "Or we as far as he is" (p. 90). The exchange makes it clear that death, as perceived by the characters, is something relative, depending on one's perspective. While stressing that death is

<sup>34</sup> Uchman 1987, 5. See also 5-7 for a discussion of life-death dichotomy in Beckett's plays, 21 for an interpretation of Godot as death, and 45-57 for a discussion of the theme of ending, approaching death in *Endgame*.

<sup>35</sup> This passage made Charles H. Salter (1976, 147) comment: "Here there is a reference to Sartre's existentialism, the ambiguous void which is also Nothingness or Nothing, le Néant, a felt absence".

equivalent to not being perceived it also refers to Beckett's idea of the need of the other and Bishop Berkeley's notion of *esse est percipi*<sup>36</sup>.

The end of the play, demonstrating first Guil's surprise at the disappearance of Hamlet and then his own disappearance, can be interpreted as a presentation of their death, the idea further stressed by the unfinished sentence: "Now you see me, now you –" (p. 96). Ros and Guil are not permitted to die on stage, they disappear while the stage is fully lit up for the speeches from *Hamlet* delivered by Ambassador and Horatio and the final stage image "revealing, upstage, arranged in the approximate positions last held by the dead TRAGEDIANS, the tableau of court and corpses which is the last scene in *Hamlet*" (p. 96). It seems to be of some interest here to mention the ending of the first, 1967 Faber and Faber edition of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* which includes Fortinbras's tribute to Hamlet and a dialogue of two English ambassadors highly reminiscent of Ros and Guil's earlier conversations. All the four men seem equally puzzled and uncomprehending. Moreover, while the ambassadors are wondering what they are supposed to do, "From outside there is shouting and banging, a Man, say, banging his fist on a wooden door and shouting, obscurely, two names"<sup>37</sup>. The original ending, introducing the image of a messenger, whose coming was so important for the protagonists, stresses the fact that there is no shortage of attendant lords, that Ros and Guil, who are dead, will be replaced by other people who will play their parts equally well. The changed, second edition, however, while also implying a future repetition of what has happened, indicates that the disappearance of Ros and Guil is not final – they will reappear again in the next performance of Stoppard's play. Just before his disappearance, Guil says "Well, we'll know better next time. Now you see me, now you –" (p. 96). While his second sentence may be interpreted as a description of his death (absence of presence) the first one simply does not make sense if interpreted in this way. It is not a sentence uttered by a character but one belonging to an actor taking part in the evening's performance. Thus the final impression of the present version of the play, stressing its theatrical aspect of representation, focuses on the reality of the actors participating in the evening's performance.

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of George Berkeley's immaterialism see Tatarkiewicz 1978, vol. 2, 107. For S. Beckett's ideas concerning this aspect of perception and existence see Uchman 1987, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Faber and Faber 1967 edition of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, reprinted in Brassell 1987, 270–271.

## Interaction with the audience

Roger Sales (1988, 4) finds that “Stoppard is playing with a coin which has a coffin on one side and the theatre on the other”. Two of the main interests of the play – the notion of death investigated from a number of different perspectives and the metatheatrical quality of the drama are thus underlined by this critic. The self-reflexiveness of the piece results from a number of reasons: the play is a case of intertextual recycling of two well known dramas, it contains numerous references to theatre and the actor’s role in creating theatrical illusion of reality, it also introduces a play within a play. Furthermore, it acknowledges the presence of the theatre audience and thus assumes their taking an active part in the evening’s events.

There are several instances in the play when the words uttered by Ros and Guil are out of character if spoken by characters of Stoppard’s drama and are justifiable only if we accept the notion that they are uttered by actors engaged in presenting these parts in the evening’s production of Stoppard’s play. Such is the case with the following remarks: “but we are brought round full circle to face the single immutable fact – ” (p. 76) or “And it *has* all happened. Hasn’t it?” (p. 81). There are also sentences which acquire double meanings depending on the perspective one assumes. When discussing the encounter with Hamlet, for instance, Ros says “He murdered us” (p. 41). If the sentence is viewed from the stand of Ros and Guil as protagonists it means that he has outwitted them. When, however, we assume that it is uttered by the actors engaged in the evening’s performance, it implies the actors’ knowledge that Ros and Guil have already been murdered in earlier productions, they are about to be murdered tonight and will also be murdered in the future, during the successive productions of both Shakespeare’s and Stoppard’s plays.

Stoppard goes still one step further in his use of theatricality in the play – not only does he constantly shatter the illusion of his theatrical representation, not only does he make us perceive Ros and Guil as actors in the performance, but he skilfully demonstrates our own presence in the theatre, he makes us aware of being an audience watching a performance. Several times in the play Ros and Guil direct their speeches straight at the audience as, for instance, when Guil says “They’re waiting to see what we’re going to do” (p. 65). On other occasions, though, they pretend that there is no audience at all:

GUIL: See anyone?

ROS: No. You?

GUIL: No. (*At footlights.*) What a fine persecution – to be kept intrigued without ever being quite enlightened ... (*Pause.*) (p. 31)

In this scene Stoppard reverses the traditional distinctions between actors and spectators by making the actors watch the audience. Furthermore, both Ros and Guil insist that they see no one. When, however Guil utters the last sentence he seems to be voicing the opinion of a member of the audience, not only his own opinion as the character of the play. In a sense, then, he becomes an extension of the audience, the audience, too, is sucked into the performance<sup>38</sup>. Gillan Farish (1975, 21) has aptly written that "Stoppard makes sure that the paying audience understands [the play's] self consciousness by making it feel self-conscious too. In the Young Vic's current production, Ros and Guil occasionally go and sit among the audience".

The self-conscious quality of the play, its reminders directed to the audience about the play being just a play, should be expected to produce a kind of distancing, alienation effect. Yet, on some occasions, the spectators are taken in, just as the characters are, the most obvious examples being the scene when Alfred, dressed up as a woman is taken to be one (p. 56) and the fake death scene (p. 94). In such moments, both the theatre-goers and the onstage characters experience a moment of perceptual illusion, take the illusion to be reality itself. Stoppard makes sure to manipulate the audience's attachment, identifying with the characters and to counterbalance it by evoking detachment. A scene which seems to work on both the levels – that of attachment and detachment is the scene when Hamlet

*comes down to footlights and regards the audience. The others watch but don't speak. Hamlet clears his throat noisily and spits into the audience. A split second later he claps his hand to his eye and wipes himself. He goes back upstage.* (p. 88)

This scene, just as the entire play, may be interpreted in a number of ways. On the one hand, the notion of identification is evoked. Normally, however, it is the audience which identifies with the character. In this case Hamlet identifies himself with the audience while wiping himself (now standing for the audience) after having spat on them. On the other hand, this is one more case of shattering the traditional theatrical assumptions. Hamlet appears to be here not only a character of the play but also a representative of the audience who are once more made aware that they are watching a performance.

At another moment, due to an estranging, alienation effect, the audience are fully detached from what is happening on the stage. It is when Ros bellows "Fire!" at the audience and only Guil reacts asking "Where?" to which Ros answers:

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<sup>38</sup> This aspect of the drama has been noticed by: Bareham 1990, 15; Colby 1978, 42; Corballis 1980, 68; Gordon 1991, 63; Hayman 1979b, 39 and Whitaker 1986, 40.

It's all right – I'm demonstrating the misuse of free speech. To prove that it exists. (*He regards the audience, then front again.*) Not a move. They should burn to death in their shoes. (p. 44)

Guil, an on-stage character reacts to Ros's cry, the audience do not. This scene is interesting for another reason, too. Ros appears here to be an actor taking part in a performance and acknowledging the presence of the audience. As an actor, he must follow the script which contains the directives and speeches governing his behaviour and utterances. Guil, however, does not expect to hear Ros's bellowing. At least, this is what his reaction seems to imply; he is Guil, the character, and not an actor playing the part. If this interpretation is accepted, the scene presents Ros and Guil side by side on the stage at a moment when each of them belongs to a different level of reality in the play.

The entire drama is characterised by blurring of different categories and levels of meaning. This phenomenon refers to the identity of the characters (Ros and Guil are mixed up by other characters, sometimes they themselves do not know which one is which (see pp. 16, 17, 26, 27, 35, 39, 40, 65, 78, 92 and 96), different levels of reality (the scene with the spies already discussed, see also, for other cases, pp. 58, 64), life and art, reality and illusion, actors and spectators. There is also a moment in the play when the distinction between the theatre and the world itself is shattered. It occurs during the first encounter of Ros and Guil when the Player, after having made the distinction between actors and spectators and having said that they are two sides of the same coin, remarks: "Don't clap too loudly – it's a very old world" (p. 17). The sentence is a variation of Archie Rice's sentence uttered in *The Entertainer* by John Osborne: "Don't clap too hard – it's a very old building" (Osborne 1969, 59)<sup>39</sup>. In Osborne's original, also characterised by a metatheatrical quality, the sentence is uttered by an old music-hall entertainer and addressed to the theatre audience. In Stoppard's play, the sentence is directed to Ros and Guil, the onstage audience but also, by extension, to the theatre audience. The changing of the word "building" into "world" introduces "the twentieth-century version of the *theatrum mundi* trope" (Egan 1979, 62, note 4) and thus the sentence becomes an extreme case of the self-reflexibility of the play.

As mentioned before, many critics have voiced positive and also negative opinions about the drama. And so, for instance, C. O. Gardner (1970, 80), in the polemics with R. H. Lee's article, stresses that "it lays itself open to a very important criticism, indeed to a sort of disqualification: it takes

<sup>39</sup> This ur-text has been mentioned by Bigsby 1976, 13; Draudt 1981, 351, note 10 and Egan 1979, 62, note 4.

seriously, not to say solemnly, a play which does not merit serious critical attention". It seems impossible to accept this critic's opinion. On the contrary, one must argue that the play, due to its different perspectives and levels of meaning, has intrigued both audiences and critics which has found an expression in the number of performances, numerous reprints and abundant criticism it has sparked. The success of the drama is due to the very image of the world presented in it, for the description of which, as Thomas R. Whitaker (1986, 39-40) argues, we "would need something like Niels Bohr's notion of complementary explanations, according to which opposite concepts have meaning only in terms of their participation in each other".

Stoppard himself has, on several occasions, made comments on the play. He said, among others: "a play like *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a play in which people tend to look for messages and in that case I can say quite categorically that one doesn't write a play and hide something in it to see if people can find it all. I mean to me *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a play about two Elizabethan courtiers in a castle, wondering what's going on. That's what it's about. That situation reverberates in different ways to people who see it, obviously" (Kuurman interview 1980, 51). At the same time, however, he has remarked on the validity of individual response to the play and the possibility of a variety of different interpretations (Hudson interview 1974, 6). On another occasion, during a Santa Barbara lecture he remarked:

Whenever I talk to intelligent students about my work I feel nervous, as if I were going through customs. "Anything to declare, sir?" "Not really, just two chaps sitting in a castle at Elsinore, playing games. That's all." "Then let's have a look in your suitcase, if you don't mind, sir." And sure enough, under the first layer of shirts there's a pound of hash and fifty watches and all kinds of exotic contraband. "How do you explain this, sir?" "I'm sorry, officer. I admit it's there, but I can't honestly remember packing it."

(quoted in Tynan 1979, 118)

While Stoppard appreciates the potential for an individual having a wholly private understanding of the play, at the same time he dismisses the tendency of literary criticism toward overintellectual interpretation of the subject which has nothing to do with the experience of watching a performance, an idea which he expresses in his article *Playwrights and Professors* (Stoppard 1972). In *Ambushes for the Audience* he voices the same notion while stressing that the entertainment of the audience was his primary intention: "What was actually calculated was to entertain a roomful of people with the situation of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at Elsinore" (Hudson interview 1974, 6). And this is just where the play's real value resides. Individual people may view the play differently, provide varied, sometimes contradictory interpretations, yet most of them (if not all) have a really good time when watching a performance of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.



### III. *The Real Inspector Hound*

Tom Stoppard's next play, *The Real Inspector Hound*, first produced on 17 June 1968, is a hilarious parody of both a traditional whodunit play and the responses of theatre critics<sup>1</sup>. The fact that the two main characters of the play, Moon and Birdboot, are theatre critics seems to be of secondary importance for Stoppard who commented on the play in an interview with Roger Hudson (1974, 8):

The one thing that *The Real Inspector Hound* isn't about, as far as I am concerned, is theatre critics. I originally conceived a play, exactly the same play, with simply two members of the audience getting involved in the play-within-the-play. But when it comes actually to writing something down which has integral entertainment value, if you like, it very quickly occurred to me that it would be a lot easier to do it with critics, because you've got something known and defined to parody.

He then mentioned "a goon-version" of the play presenting two members of the audience (not theatre critics) watching a whodunit and getting involved in it. The profession of the two main characters is not important in respect of what happens to them in the course of the play which, according to Stoppard, presents "the dangers of wish-fulfilment" (Hudson interview 1974, 8). It could be argued, however, that the comic effect of the presentation of their reactions to the play they are watching is strengthened by their profession and the critical jargon they use.

Stoppard's own experiences as a drama critic may have had some influence on his decision to parody the thriller genre. In 1962, he wrote a review of Agatha Christie's trilogy, in which he depicted a drama critic caught up in the play he was reviewing. This article, entitled "Who Killed Peter Saunders", published in *Scene* (15, 27 December 1962, pp. 30–31), discusses the unprecedented boom in the whodunit. It also draws attention

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<sup>1</sup> The play's impact as a parody has been noticed by many critics: Bennett 1990, 47; Brassell 1987, 96; Cohn 1987, 9; Hayman 1979b, 69; Kelly 1991, 82; Kennedy 1968–1969, 437 and Whitaker 1986, 70.

to the cardboard quality of the characters and highly stereotyped kind of action<sup>2</sup>. The playwright's decision to use a whodunit was partly due to the popularity of the genre at the time and partly to his "enormous difficulty in working out plots" (Hudson interview 1974, 8). Many critics discuss the similarity between *The Real Inspector Hound* and Agatha Christie's long-running *The Mousetrap*<sup>3</sup> and Tim Brassell (1987, 94) mentions its correspondence to Agatha Christie's *The Unexpected Guest and Peril at End House*. Katherine Kelly (1991, 82), however, rightly observes that the play "parodies a popular genre rather than a single classical text" and that "the mockery is general, not particular". The success of detective stories with their stock features in which the skilful detective discovers the identity of the murderer and his fiendish schemes, is rooted in the audience's craving to see man reasserting himself against destructive forces and defeating them. What also makes this genre appealing is the fact that the reader, making his own guesses, participates in solving the mystery and supplying a satisfactory explanation. It might also be worthwhile mentioning here that, quite often, detective fiction is an intensely metafictional genre. The intertextual allusions of *The Mousetrap* itself, constant theatrical themes and metaphors in Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers and Ngaio Marsh, among others, draw attention to the cosy, corny artifice of this kind of fiction.

## Two levels of reality

*The Real Inspector Hound* exists on two levels. First, there is the fictitious play within the play<sup>4</sup> presenting the whodunit mystery at Muldoon Manor which Moon and Birdboot are watching and trying to review. Second, there is the outer play dealing with the presentation of Birdboot and Moon not only as spectators of the evening's performance but also as "real" people whose reactions to the performance are influenced by their different personalities and their dreams. Just as in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, we are confronted here with a piece presenting a play within a play. In this case, however, the inner play is not a familiar one but as fictitious as the outer one, both the pieces having been written by Stoppard himself. Furthermore, while creating the inner play, Stoppard parodied a conventional whodunit and pointed out the inefficiency of the fictitious playwright. It could be argued that the two plays which constitute the whole present two

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the article see: Sammells 1988, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Cohn 1987, 9; Crossley 1977, 78; Gabbard 1982, 67; Jenkins 1988, 51; Sales 1988, 94–95 and Whitaker 1986, 72–74.

<sup>4</sup> I am here following the terminology concerning the "fictitious" and "familiar" play within a play as used by Cohn (1991, 109 and 118).

different kinds of reality. Such a statement, indicating the existence of two separate worlds, is undoubtedly true of the beginning of the drama. Gradually, however, the dividing line between the two plots becomes thinner and thinner, to disappear completely. At the end of the play there is no possibility of distinguishing between the two levels or plots as the reality of the critics and the theatrical illusion created by the presentation of the inner play become fused and cannot be separated.

## The inner play

If we viewed the Muldoon Manor plot as a separate entity existing outside Stoppard's whole drama, we could say that it is a case of a realistic play making full use of the fourth wall convention and thus creating a theatrical illusion of reality. The existence of Birdboot and Moon, the on-stage audience, however, makes us realise that we are merely watching a fiction, a representation of reality. When we look at it closer we notice that, at certain moments, this representation is characterised by high artificiality, theatricality which unintentionally keeps reminding us of the fact that it is only a play, a performance. This artificiality is caused by a number of factors connected with the lack of proper artistry on the part of the fictitious playwright and the inefficiency of the actors and other people responsible for the production. The producers of the performance seem to pay much attention to realistic details. The stage directions tell us that the "*acting area ... represents, in as realistic an idiom as possible, the drawing-room of Muldoon Manor*"<sup>5</sup>. Through explicit stage directions and implications from the dialogue we get information about furnishings and stage properties required for the action (pots and cups for tea, biscuit plate, card table etc.).

The fictitious playwright, however, does not seem to be fully in command of the theatre medium. He pays too much attention to its verbal aspect and does not manage successfully to use the other resources available in a theatrical production. He does not succeed in creating a fully convincing, realistic exposition, for instance. The audience is brought into the play by means of three devices: a telephone conversation, an exchange between the maid and a newcomer and a radio message. The first of these is additionally comic as the stage directions indicate:

*The phone rings. MRS. DRUDGE seems to have been waiting for it to do so and for the last few seconds has been dusting it with an intense concentration. She snatches it up.* (p. 15)

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<sup>5</sup> *The Real Inspector Hound*, 1975, 9. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

There is no possible explanation for the fact that a real person in these circumstances should be awaiting a telephone call. It is clear, therefore, that the anxiety, the waiting are characteristic of the actress playing the part, not of the character herself. Most probably the scene is an indication of some kind of mistake by a stage-hand engaged in the production who has forgotten to make the telephone ring at the proper moment. The theatrical illusion is weakened, if not shattered, by the inefficiency of those engaged in the production. It is also destroyed by the fictitious playwright who makes the character speak in a highly artificial way, greatly distanced from how it would sound in real life:

MRS. DRUDGE (*into phone*): Hello, the drawing-room of Lady Muldoon's country residence one morning in early spring? ... *Hello!* – the draw – Who? Who did you wish to speak to? I'm afraid there is no one of that name here, this is all very mysterious and I'm sure it's leading up to something, I hope nothing is amiss for we, that is Lady Muldoon and her houseguests, are here cut off from the world, including Magnus, the wheelchair-ridden half-brother of her ladyship's husband Lord Albert Muldoon who ten years ago went out for a walk on the cliffs and was never seen again. (p. 15)

In real life one simply does not give an unknown caller details concerning the setting, season, dramatic atmosphere, principal characters' names, family history and so on. The dialogue between Mrs. Drudge and Simon Gascoigne (p. 16) is also highly artificial and functions as a means of providing information, in the process losing its ordinary, everyday realistic quality. Stephen Hu (1989, 64), discussing this scene, writes: "Humor derives from the awkward reliance by the author of the play-within-the-play upon verbal description to provide information in lieu of using other theatrical possibilities". Unlike Stoppard himself, the fictitious playwright has not mastered all the possibilities offered by the theatrical medium.

The announcements on the radio concerning the police messages about the search for an escaped madman are equally artificial, being not in the least incorporated into the stage action. On the first occasion, the radio is switched on by Mrs Drudge, alone on the stage, just in time for the message and then switched off immediately (p. 13). Then "*A strange impulse makes SIMON turn on the radio*" for the second message (p. 18). And, finally, it is Felicity who turns on the radio and turns it off just after the police news (p. 29). In all the cases there is no reason for any of the characters to fidget with the radio. Furthermore, it seems highly improbable that such random choices of the moment could in reality coincide with the time of actual broadcasting of the message. Trying to stick to realistic principles of presentation the playwright of the inner play, due to his inefficiency, makes the audience aware that what they are watching is not reality but only an unsuccessful attempt at creating an illusion.

He also makes other mistakes in result of which the theatrical illusion of reality is shattered and we become aware of the play being just a play. Such is the case, for instance, when Lady Cynthia enters for the first time: "*She wears a cocktail dress, is formally coiffured, and carries a tennis racket*" (p. 22). The visual humour results here from an unsuccessful attempt to make a link between the immediate past when she played tennis (the racket) and the present when she is ready for tea and a game of cards (the cocktail dress and the hair-do). The amateurish timing of the events produces a non-realistic, extremely funny effect.

A similar effect of unintended laughter is created in the scene presenting the entrance of Inspector Hound. After the third radio message, finding Simon missing, Felicity expresses her unspecified fear and they all come to the conclusion that the inspector will never come and that the madman is free to act as he pleases. Just at that moment "*A mournful baying hooting is heard in the distance, scary*" to which Felicity remarks "*(tensely)* It sounded like the cry of a gigantic hound!" "*The sound is repeated, nearer*" and Mrs Drudge enters, announcing the arrival of Inspector Hound (p. 30). If we treat the scene as one actually written by the fictitious playwright it is a failure because, having raised the tension and suspense to the peak, he lets them drop suddenly and give way to hilarious grotesque, further strengthened by the way in which the Inspector is dressed. It can be argued, however, that the passage belongs fully to Stoppard and is an extreme example of his parodic abilities and great sense of humour. It has an additional aspect discernible in the name of the Inspector as well as in the associations of the name with a dog further stressed in the neighbouring dialogue. It is namely evocative of the story of Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a murder mystery *The Real Inspector Hound* seems to be using as one of its sources<sup>6</sup>.

The fictitious playwright seems, on the whole, capable of keeping up suspense, making many characters in the play become suspects and appear to be the "real" murderer. There seems to be a kind of inconsistency here, though. On the one hand, the body of the dead person is revealed in the opening stage image both to the audience and to the two critics. The other characters are as yet fully unaware of its presence (p. 13, 14, 24, 26 and 28) until it is accidentally discovered by Inspector Hound (p. 33). On the other hand, however, the characters, involved in the numerous intrigues and love affairs past, present or expected in the future, threaten that they will kill someone, the threats being voiced by Felicity (p. 21), Simon (p. 23), Magnus (p. 24) and Cynthia (p. 26). The behaviour and threats of the characters make the audience, represented by Birdbood and Moon,

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the similarities between these two see: Whitaker 1986, 74.

make guesses about the identity of the killer (pp. 12, 19, 21, 24, 27, 34, 40, and 42). Two crimes are interrelated, as it were. While making their guesses about the murderer the critics seem to be thinking about the body whose presence on the stage is pointed out so many times. Making their comments, however, they appear to be speaking about motives for a future crime too. When Simon is actually shot (and then Birdboot and Moon) it appears that one of their guesses was correct – it is really Magnus who is the killer, the only surprise being that he is not only Magnus but also the husband, Lord Muldoon, who has been missing for ten years (a character from the Muldoon play) and Puckeridge, the third-string critic performing his part and taking advantage of killing off his betters in the world of critics. Thus, then the solution of the mystery in the inner play is simultaneously a solution of the plot concerning the critics in the outer play. They started watching the thriller as mere spectators and end up as victims.

## The outer play

At the beginning of *The Real Inspector Hound*, however, the two critics, Birdboot and Moon, appear to belong not to the world of fiction but to the “real” world of the audience. They seem to be an extension of us: all of us have gathered in the theatre to watch a performance. The initial stage directions are very telling:

*The first thing is that the audience appear to be confronted by their own reflection in a huge mirror. Impossible. However, back there in the gloom – not at the footlights – a bank of plush seats and pale smudges of faces. ... Between MOON and the auditorium is an acting area.*  
(p. 9)

This visual image of the presence of the audience in the theatre is strengthened by the auditory effect of having their conversations amplified by means of microphones. Stoppard insists, however, that: “*The effect must be not of sound picked up, amplified and flung at the audience, but of sound picked up, carried and gently dispersed around the auditorium*” (Ibid.). Both the visual and aural images, then, imply that Moon and Birdboot are similar to us, the audience. They become our representatives behaving like typical auditors – they noisily thumb programmes, eat chocolates, gossip and comment on the play they are about to see.

As their conversation progresses we get some information about them as “real” people. Moon, the “*less relaxed*” of the two (p. 10) is the second-string critic sitting in for Higgs. He comments sadly: “It is as if only we existed one at a time, combining to achieve continuity. I keep

space warm for Higgs. My presence defines his absence, his absence confirms my presence, his presence precludes mine ..." (Ibid.). His frustrations get stronger a few moments later when he mentions dreaming "of revolution, a bloody *coup d'etat* by the second rank" (p. 11). Birdboot, on the other hand, is a successful critic. His entire review has been reproduced in neon, the transparencies of which he is eager to show to Moon as he happens to have them with him together with a battery-powered viewer (pp. 14–15). We also learn that he is having a love affair with the actress playing the part of Felicity in the performance. When Moon comments about Birdboot's numerous love affairs the latter protests insisting he is "a family man" devoted to his wife, "a man of unscrupulous morality" (p. 12) and "a respectable married man" (p. 13). Unwilling to show his real licentious character, he puts on a mask, playing an untrue role and thus he employs theatricality in everyday life.

Gradually, we start getting different images of both Moon and Birdboot, the sentences uttered by them belonging, as it were, to different levels. On the one hand, there are the casual exchanges between them, referring both to their private lives and the play they are witnessing. On the other hand, as Stoppard indicates in the stage directions, they "*have a 'public' voice which they turn on for sustained pronouncements of opinions*" (p. 19), the shift from casual remark to the "public voice", from a mere spectator to a reviewer being signalled by clearing throat (pp. 19, 28 and 35). When they put on the mask of renowned critics they thus manifest it by a theatrical voice and pose. As far as their inner feelings are concerned, these are presented by internal monologues recalling the stream-of-consciousness technique earlier employed by Gladys in *If You're Frank I'll Be Glad* and Albert in *Albert's Bridge*. These speeches reveal their most hidden thoughts and feelings, their real selves hardly discernible in casual conversations and completely hidden by skilfully used masks and roles when their public voices take over.

As the play develops, we become aware that their private perspectives influence their judgements. While watching the play they are providing their own interpretations in the process of concretisation, filling in the gaps existing in the fields of indeterminacy. Obviously, the process of gap-filling is different for individual people, depending on their knowledge but also on personal prejudices and preferences, in other words, on the psyche and character of a given person. Stoppard made a distinction between the two characters when he said: "Moon purports to see profound things. Birdboot is very matter of fact" (Gussow interview 84, 20)<sup>7</sup>. The difference in the

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<sup>7</sup> Hu (1989, 66) has remarked on the contrast between pensive Moon and sensualist Birdboot and Sammells (1988, 57) discusses Stoppard's presentation of the critical remarks of these two characters as "Birdboot's tabloid common-sense and Moon's upmarket intellectualism".

attitude of the critics is visible at the very beginning when they discuss the play which has not started yet:

BIRDBOOT: .... – I mean it's a sort of a thriller, isn't it?

MOON: Is it?

BIRDBOOT: That's what I heard. Who killed thing? – no one will leave the house.

MOON: I suppose so. Underneath.

BIRDBOOT: *Underneath*!!! It's a whodunit, man! – Look at it!

(*They look at it. The room. The BODY. Silence.*)

(p. 11)

The difference between their understanding the play results from the fact that whereas Birdboot recognises the genre convention and appropriately reads the intertextual tags, Moon does not and he interprets it without reference to the norms of detective fiction. Birdboot accepts what he sees, there is a body visible on the stage so they are about to see a thriller. Moon, on the other hand, being more profound in his way of perceiving and discussing things, will try to look for hidden meanings. At times, he will present Freudian interpretations of the play (p. 19 and 23). On other occasions, he will go into lengthy discussions which do not seem to make much sense in connection with what they and the audience are watching performed on the stage, as in the following:

There are moments, and I would not begrudge in this, when the play, if we call it that, and I think on balance we can, aligns itself uncompromisingly on the side of life. *Je suis*, it seems to be saying, *ergo sum*. I think we are entitled to ask. For what in fact is this play concerned with? It is my belief that here we are concerned with what I have referred to elsewhere as the nature of identity. I think we are entitled to ask – and here one is irresistibly reminded of Voltaire's cry, '*Voilà*' – I think we are entitled to ask – *Where is God?*

(p. 28)

In this case he is not really discussing the play itself but rather going into his own existential obsessions with the notion of identity and the question of the existence of God. Finally, he comes to the conclusion that the author "has given us the human condition", "an uncanny ear which belonged to a Van Gogh" and goes on to pronounce a long list of names of possible influences evoked by the play (p. 36). Getting completely lost in his profound yet completely absurd and irrelevant interpretations, Moon is clearly contrasted with Birdboot who knows that Magnus is the killer (p. 27), that Simon will be killed, which actually happens immediately after he utters his opinion (p. 34), and who gives a sound review of the play including the praise of the actress playing Cynthia who has replaced in his affections the actress playing Felicity.

It becomes clear, then, that their interpretation and evaluation of the play depend on who they are and what they long for. The way in which



they perceive the play and react to it is shaped to a great extent by their private thoughts, worries and desires of which we become aware during their stream-of-consciousness monologues (pp. 18–19, 26 and 35). The second act of the inner play ends with Inspector Hound saying: “And now – who killed Simon Gascoigne? And why?” which is followed by a conversation between Birdboot and Moon, some sentences of which are actually spoken aloud while others express their inner feelings and thoughts:

MOON: Why not?

BIRDBOOT: Exactly. Good riddance.

MOON: Yes, getting away with murder must be quite easy provided that one's motive is sufficiently inscrutable.

BIRDBOOT: Fickle young pup! He was deceiving her right, left and centre.

MOON (*thoughtfully*): Of course. I'd still have Puckeridge behind *me* –

BIRDBOOT: She needs someone steadier, more mature –

MOON: – And if I could, so could he –

BIRDBOOT: Yes, I know of this rather nice hotel, very discreet, run by a man of the world –

MOON: Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.

BIRDBOOT: Breakfast served in one's room and no questions asked.

MOON: Does Puckeridge dream of me?

(p. 35)

While commenting on the murdering of Simon they give different reasons for their support of this “good riddance”. Moon is obsessed by jealousy of the number one critic, Higgs, which is evident several times in the course of the play. He dreams of his disappearance and even of killing him and muses whether Puckeridge has similar feelings concerning Higgs and Moon himself (pp. 10, 11, 17, 27, 35, 39 and 43). As becomes evident at the end of the play, Puckeridge *does* have similar thoughts and, what is even more, makes them come true by killing first Higgs and later on Moon. Birdboot treats Simon's death as an act of justice, a kind of punishment for his licentiousness. Then he expresses his belief that “she needs someone steadier, more mature”, meaning himself and starts dreaming about meeting her in a discreet hotel. Two more things are important here, both of which mark a mixing up of reality and fiction. Firstly, Birdboot does not distinguish between the character on the stage and the actress playing the part. When he speaks about Simon's deceiving the girl he means the character, when, however, he implies needs someone more mature and then keeps dreaming of being this someone, he means the actress. Secondly, he does not seem to notice that he is criticising the fictional Simon for doing things which he himself is doing in reality: Simon transferred his allegiance from Felicity to Cynthia. Similarly, Birdboot came to the theatre because of his infatuation with the actress playing Felicity, but the moment Cynthia makes her entrance he transfers his attention to her. Later on, in his review of the play, he concentrates on the latter's acting which makes the surprised Moon

say "Well, you fickle old bastard!" (p. 27). The use of the word "fickle" by both Birdboot (in reference to Simon) and Moon (in connection with Birdboot) makes the similarity between Birdboot and Simon even more evident. If, then, Birdboot considers Simon's death justified so his should be which takes place later when he replaces Simon on the stage.

After the stream-of-consciousness moment Birdboot and Moon put on the masks of efficient critics – Birdboot "*clears throat*" and comments: "It is at this point that the play for me comes alive" (p. 35). He does not realise, however, that a few moments later, with the ringing of the on-stage telephone it will literally come alive for him. The dividing line between different kinds of reality is shattered by Birdboot in his mixing up of Cynthia – the actress and Cynthia – the character. This shattering is further strengthened when "*the phone starts to ring on the empty stage*", and Moon, after trying to ignore it for some time, finally answers it (p. 36). Moon does not assume that the phone is a prop which is being tested or which is simply malfunctioning, as Mrs. Drudge's waiting for it to ring in the first act might indicate. He takes it to be real, to belong to their world of reality not to the world of theatrical illusion. And he is right, it appears, as the caller is Myrtle, Birdboot's wife, checking up on her husband. The fusion of the critic's reality and the illusion of the inner play is established and further on developed when the actors enter, the inner play begins and Birdboot, still on the stage, finds himself become incorporated in the inner action<sup>8</sup>.

## Fusion of the levels of reality

This moment marks the beginning of a new stage in the play. Birdboot and Moon start existing on another level: they become actors (and also characters) in the inner play. What is interesting is that their entrance into the world of fiction effects not only them but also the inner play. One

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<sup>8</sup> It may be of some interest here to mention that Kenneth Tynan (1979, 87) discusses the scene voicing his suspicion "that a hitherto undetected influence on *Inspector Hound* is that of Robert Benchley. ... Surely this calls to mind a legendary moment during a Broadway production premiere when a phone rang on an empty stage and the critic Benchley, remarking, 'I think that's for me', rose and left the theatre. Nor is Stoppard's play the first in which a drama critic has been seen dead onstage. Back in 1917, seeking material for a newspaper magazine, a writer lately employed as the drama critic of *Vanity Fair* played the role of a corpse in *The Thirteenth Chair*. His name, guessably, was Robert Benchley". Ronald Hayman (1979b, 73) has also pointed out the similarity between this scene and the actual situation: "I do not know whether the American humorist Robert Benchley was the first member of an audience to answer a telephone that was ringing on stage; I assume that *The Real Inspector Hound* was the first play to show a member of the audience succumbing to the temptation".

could suppose that the fictional play will continue with Birdboot replacing Simon and, later on, with Moon starting to play the part of Hound. But contrary to such expectations, it is not the third act of the inner play which follows but a re-run of the first which starts with the conversation between Birdboot/Simon and Felicity. The lines delivered by them are nearly identical to those uttered in the original encounter but now they are endowed with additional import and can be understood on two levels simultaneously. On the one hand, this is an exchange of two characters within the fictitious play, on the other, a conversation between the actress and Birdboot. Some of the sentences belong simultaneously to the character in the play (Simon) and to the "real" person (Birdboot). Some, however, like "I have my reputation – people do talk" or "and my wife too" (p. 37) are uttered by Birdboot, the critic, yet could still equally well be used by Simon. Later on in the same scene, during the conversation between Birdboot and Cynthia, most of the sentences are still in character for Simon's speeches yet some, like "You mean Myrtle? She means nothing to me – nothing" (p. 39), clearly belong to Birdboot.

During this act different kinds of verbal exchange intermingle. Firstly, there are the speeches of the characters in the inner play which take place on the fictional level. Secondly, there are exchanges between Birdboot and Moon as spectators who belong to "real" life, as it were. For instance, Moon tells Birdboot to come back and take his seat (pp. 38 and 40) and says he is "turning [the play] into a complete farce" (p. 43) and Birdboot makes critical remarks about the play while already taking part in it (pp. 40 and 42). Thirdly, there are instances when Birdboot and Moon, being already involved in the inner play, speak on two levels simultaneously, the obviously fictitious and the seemingly real one. Such is the case with the already mentioned conversations between Birdboot and first Felicity and later Cynthia. When Moon, playing the part of Inspector Hound, says "Who did this and why?" (p. 44) he is referring not only to the shooting of Birdboot/Simon (a character in the play) but also to the death of people from outside the inner play (Higgs and Birdboot). The first rendering of the scene referred to the fictitious world of the play within the play (p. 35), the present repeat deals simultaneously with the fictitious death of a character but also with the "real" death of his fellow critics.

Knowing the play from earlier viewing, Birdboot can now check whether things really are what he supposed them to be when he watched the production. He is glad to notice that Cynthia "*does* have her mouth open" while kissing (p. 38) which he only suspected and commented on while watching the scene earlier (p. 23). Sometimes, however, he is unable to use the knowledge he acquired earlier, as, for instance, when he tries to avoid the wheelchair which earlier knocked Simon down (p. 25): "BIRDBOOT

*prudently keeps out of the chair's former path but it enters from the next wing down and knocks him flying*" (p. 39). He tries to separate the fiction of the inner play and his own reality, yet it appears that they affect and influence each other. He insists on their separation when he is asked by Magnus: "How do you like it here?", a question the fictitious character, Simon, was asked earlier (p. 24). He answers: "I couldn't take it night after night" (p. 40) and thus indicates his status as an actor taking part in the evening's performance.

Moon's judgement that Birdboot's taking part in the inner play turns it into a farce (p. 43) proves to be true. Once the two critics enter the world of fiction, once the distinction between the fictional character of the inner play and the reality of the two critics is abolished, we get into a world which is characterised by general confusion. The so far separate realities blur and so do the identities of people in both the inner and the outer plays. This is perhaps best visible in the two card games, the one taking place in the fictional play (pp. 24–25) and its repeat, later on, in the world of the mixed up fiction and apparent reality (pp. 40–41). The second game is a strange, bewildering mixture of poker, bridge, chess and, finally, roulette. Jeffrey D. Mason's (1988, 117) comment on it is that "any such game involves a set of arbitrary rules and values which the players agree to accept", while Robert Gordon (1991, 31) discusses it as "burlesque of the hackneyed stage business characteristic of the well-made Agatha Christie type of stage whodunit". It seems, however, that while the scene may be discussed in terms of parody of a conventional thriller which follows the arbitrary rules and values of detective fiction and while the characters seem to know what game they are playing, the arbitrariness of the rules and values is most important here and consequently the situation presented evades any rational, convincing explanation.

The fact that Stoppard chose a whodunit for the inner and then, after the involvement of the critics, also, by extension, for the outer play, bears significantly on the overall effect of the drama. A typical whodunit is a supreme example of rationality, being based on the conviction that the individuals are identified with their roles in the crime: there is a victim, a murderer and a clever inspector or detective who solves the mystery and provides a justifiable explanation. Stephen Hu (1989, 60) finds that "Stoppard's caricatures of detectives suggest a profound distrust of reason and empirical method, two primary instruments of human comprehension". As the two investigations presented in the play demonstrate a reliable deduction from available evidence is ultimately impossible. When Inspector Hound makes his grotesque entrance in the inner play he tries to appear to be an efficient detective. He withholds some information to get all the necessary details from those present and he mentions the presence of a murderer in their

midst. He is not certain yet whether anyone has actually been killed. Finally, after the discovery of the body, he decides to call the police. He is not able to do so as the lines have been cut. Simultaneously he is reminded by Cynthia that he is himself the police. Furthermore, when at the end of the scene he says that he will discover who and why killed Simon Gascoigne, he seems to have forgotten that there was another, earlier, still unidentified victim (pp. 31–35). Far from providing a reliable explanation he creates general confusion, mixing up the identity of both murderers and the murdered.

The same scene is re-enacted later on with Birdboot on the stage playing the part of Simon while conversing simultaneously with Moon who is still off-stage, in the auditorium. It is Simon now who discovers the body (and not Inspector Hound) and identifies it as Higgs. The remarks uttered by Moon during this exchange, such as “I swear I didn’t –” indicate that he fears he may be accused of being the murderer and thus he mixes up his dreams concerning killing Higgs with his actual death. When a shot is fired and Birdboot (like Simon in the original version) falls dead, Moon runs to his body on the stage. As he gets there, Cynthia enters and asks “Oh my God – What happened, Inspector?” Moon, already involved in the action of the inner play, tries to go back to his seat and discovers that “SIMON and HOUND are occupying the critics’ seats”. He starts playing the part of Inspector Hound and is about to investigate “who did this and why?” (p. 44). Trying to arrive at a satisfactory explanation he begins the interrogation and listens to what the people gathered have to tell him about the case. He ridicules what he is doing by remarking a few moments later that “It is from these chance remarks that we in the force build up our complete picture before moving in to make the arrest” (p. 46). When Felicity notices “it doesn’t make sense” (p. 47) Magnus accuses Moon of being the madman, the actual killer pretending to be Inspector Hound:

MOON: But ... I’m not mad ... I’m almost sure I’m not mad ...

MAGNUS: ... only to discover that in the house was a man, Simon Gascoigne, who recognised the corpse as a man against whom he had held a deep-seated grudge –!

MOON: But I didn’t kill – I’m almost sure I –

MAGNUS: I put it to you! – are you the real Inspector Hound?!

MOON: You know damn well I’m not!

(p. 47)

The passage is important for a number of reasons resulting from a general confusion of the levels of meaning and of the identities of the people appearing on them and also from a complete shattering of the dividing line between reality and illusion (whatever these two may mean). On the one hand, Moon confuses his private fantasy with “actual” murder when he insists he is not the murderer. When he argues he is not the real

Inspector Hound he stresses that he is neither a character from the inner play nor even the actor performing the part but an outsider, belonging to the “real” world of the audience. At the same time he discovers a kind of similarity between himself and Puckeridge – yet while he was able only to dream of killing Higgs, Puckeridge has actually done it. Realising that Puckeridge, wanting to become the top critic might want to kill him as well, he tries to run away and is shot by the impostor who (playing the part of Hound) tells him to stop “in the name of law”. To make the confusion even more complete Magnus (the real Inspector Hound on the level of fiction) confesses that he is “not only that! – I have been leading a double life – at *least!*” (p. 48) – he is also Albert, the husband of Lady Cynthia who has been missing for a long time. Thus, the different identities are mixed up both in the world of fiction and the world of the critics. When we remember that the events happening on the stage are now viewed by the actors, who originally played the parts of Simon and Hound and who have taken the seats, earlier belonging to the critics, the confusion is complete.

The fact that the former actors participating in the performance have taken the critics’ places in the audience can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Anthony Jenkins (1988, 54) has argued that “the logic behind this seems tenuous at best” and that “these two characters appear to be controlled by the playwright’s ends rather than by the necessities of the action”. Thomas Whitaker (1986, 75), however, finds that “The ingenious correspondence between the first two ‘acts’ of the thriller and the replay with Birdboot and Moon set up an internal mirroring, which is redoubled and reversed when Moon is trapped on stage and Simon and Hound, occupying the critics’ seats, begin to talk like parodies of those already parodied critics”. *Real Inspector Hound* presents a number of mirrors reflecting different levels of reality: Simon’s licentiousness is a reflection of Birdboot’s dreams and the actuality of his love affairs. Puckeridge’s killing of Higgs and Moon is a reflection of Moon’s dreams about murdering Higgs and becoming the top critic. The dreams dreamt by Moon and Birdboot materialise in the world of fiction of the inner play but, at the same time, lead to their deaths. Illusion, then, not only creates a mirror image of reality but is also able to alter the reality itself. Birdboot and Moon who were only spectators at the beginning, later on become actors in the performance to finish up as “real” people getting killed in the course of the performance, now being watched by new spectators (the former actors).

The end of Stoppard’s drama is an extreme case of mixing the levels of meaning. The plot of the play within the play and the plot concerning the critics blur. The distinction between art and illusion created by it, on the one hand, and the “real” world of the critics, on the other, is abolished

in an extreme case of theatricality and the self-reflexive, metatheatrical quality of the piece. As already mentioned, the inner play is also characterised by some artificiality and theatricality resulting from the inefficiency of the fictitious playwright, actors and other people engaged in the production. The metatheatrical character of this level, however, is mainly achieved by its status in Stoppard's play. Due to the presence of the on-stage audience and their comments, the inner play is set in perspective and we are constantly reminded that it is not reality but only its representation a case of theatrical illusion.

## Involving the audience

The existence of an audience watching the inner play (whether it consists of the critics, as at the beginning of the play, or of actors, as at its) end introduces the idea that there is a real audience watching Stoppard's play being performed in the theatre. Thus the metatheatrical, self-reflexive quality of the drama depends not only on its existence on two levels – the "real" one of the critics and the fictitious one of the Muldoon Manor plot, but also on the fact that the actual audience, present in the theatre, are also made aware of their own existence. As the aural and visual aspects of the initial stage image indicate, the two critics are the audience's extension. The use of mirrors in a theatrical performance is a way of confusing different kinds of reality, of blurring the distinction between reality and illusion, between life and art. This device was successfully used by Jean Genet in *Balcony* and some other playwrights experimenting in the realm of metatheatre<sup>9</sup>. The mirror in Stoppard's play fulfils many divergent functions. Firstly, it makes the audience recognise themselves as the audience. Secondly, it reminds them that the theatrical artefact reflects life, being its mirror image. Thirdly, because *Birdboot and Moon* are, in a sense, reflected in the Muldoon Manor plot, we have to do here with a hall of mirrors. Fourthly, which results from the above, the use of the mirror strengthens the metatheatrical, self-reflexive quality of the play.

At the beginning of the play *Birdboot and Moon* create the illusion of being members of the real audience. At the same time, however, we soon become aware that what we are watching is only a wonderful imitation of "real" life and of fiction. This idea is further strengthened when *Birdboot*

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<sup>9</sup> See the article of Thomas Adler (1980) entitled "The Mirror as Stage Prop in Modern Drama" for his discussion of the plays by Luigi Pirandello, Eugene O'Neill, Albert Camus and Jean Genet. The importance of the mirror image in *The Real Inspector Hound* has been discussed by: Cahn 1979, 97; Colby 1978, 14; Corballis 1984, 49; Dean 1981, 47; Hunter 1982, 36; Londré 1981, 115; Sammells 1988, 55; Whitaker 1986, 74 and others.

asks "Has it started yet?" and, after receiving a positive response, he expresses his doubts to which Moon says: "It's a pause." Birdboot is still not satisfied and argues "You can't start with a pause!" (p. 11). Some critics have pointed out that the reference to pause is the critic's expression of dissatisfaction with the extensive use of pauses in Pinter (Kelly 1991, 83) and Absurdist playwrights (Gabbard 1982, 59). This dialogue may also have yet another meaning when discussed in connection with Stoppard's own play. If we regard the drama from the point of view of the critics, the play has not started yet – they *do* see a body on the stage yet the action of the play has *not* started. What they see is just an empty stage (the body, in this respect, may be treated as an element of the stage setting). The play will start in a moment with the entrance of the characters (or the actors playing them). If, however, we treat Birdboot and Moon as characters in Stoppard's drama, the play has already started, at least for us. It seems that Stoppard's initial idea of having Birdboot and Moon seated among the actual audience would have made the fusion of their reality and ours more complete. As it is, however, their being seated on the stage and separated from us by the acting area indicates that they belong to the theatrical reality. They only exist as a fiction in Stoppard's play, a fiction which is made "real" by the more distanced fiction within the fiction, that is by the inner play.

The process of watching a play is a process of simultaneous identification with the characters of the play and of a kind of detachment. Lucina Pacquet Gabbard's idea (1982, 61) that *The Real Inspector Hound's* main interest focuses "on audience response" is very true. The traditional approach to watching a performance assumes a kind of empathy on the part of the audience which Eric Bentley (1966, 161) has discussed as an identification process. And this is exactly what Birdboot and Moon do while watching the play. While evaluating it they view it in terms of their own preferences and prejudices, their reaction to the killing of Simon, discussed earlier, being the most evident example of this (p. 35). Their identification with the characters presented makes them forget about the difference between reality and art, take a mere illusion (the prop-telephone) for a real object, enter the stage and get killed. Our, that is the audience's, reactions seem to resemble those of the critics to some extent. We, too, identify with fictional characters in the process of watching a thriller. Just like they we play our guessing game, trying to sort out who the real killer is (first in the inner play and then in the outer one). Yet we differ from them in that we never allow ourselves to be completely involved. We remember about the need to be not only involved but also detached. Our attitude to the play, the shift from total involvement to some detachment, is unquestionably the result of Stoppard's skilful handling of the interplay of seeming reality (or its representation) and fiction (or representation of representation).



Irving Wardle (1968, 19), in his review of the play entitled *Grin Without a Cat*, writes: "[Stoppard] establishes different planes of action, and then negates the contrast by showing up every plane as equally unreal. His work is a series of looking-glass adventures, with the difference that his mirrors reflect nothing but themselves. There is no starting point in actuality". It seems it is just impossible to accept this way of looking at the play. It is true that on both basic levels of *The Real Inspector Hound* the images presented are very vague, imprecise and sometimes even absurd or contradictory. It is a hopeless task to establish a convincing image of reality or identity of a given person. Writing a parody, Stoppard is justified, however, in presenting a grotesque, not quite a life-like image of reality and the identity of his characters. Yet if we looked at Birdboot, for instance, as a "real" person, we might ask: what is he really like? Is he really a successful critic expressing profound insights in the plays he is reviewing (which can be proved by the success of his review displayed in the form of a neon) or is he just an efficient craftsman making his reviews so general that they appeal to everybody (as his remarks made during the play indicate)? Or, if we look at him as a husband – is he really a "family man devoted to his homely but good natured wife" or a licentious man, as his attitude towards the actresses taking part in the play indicates? Even if we look at him, then, as a private and professional man where is the actuality to be found? Where is the real man and where is the mask he chooses to put on? Can we ever be certain what reality or actuality are really like and what they mean? This notion is introduced by the very title of the play including the word "real" which indicates that one of the questions tackled by it is the question of reality as such which, with its epistemological and ontological implications, seems to be one of the basic preoccupations of Stoppard.

The title of Wardle's review evokes a protest. "A grin without a cat", as the critic seems to be using the term, seems to refer to the content, to the fact that the play does not carry any specific meaning. If you have a grin, however, there must be something which makes you grin or smile. And this is what the play is undoubtedly characterised with: it is unquestionably very entertaining. Even if, especially on the first watching, the audience may get lost in trying to decide who is who and why the consecutive people are murdered, they are undoubtedly entertained. Leaving the theatre they are too amused to try to wonder about answers to concrete questions or to bother about whether the play has a "starting point in actuality" or not. Reading Irving Wardle's article one wonders whether, after all, the play does not actually start in the concrete actuality of theatre critics who, like this one, are not able to write reviews of plays which can adequately express the feelings of theatre audiences.

## IV. *After Magritte*

*After Magritte*, first performed in the Ambiance Lunch-Hour Theatre Club at the Green Banana on 9 April 1970, has been described by Randolph Ryan (1974, 5) as “a clever and funny look at the problem of determining reality, reduced from philosophic terms to those of farce”. While, undoubtedly, the play is hilariously funny, nevertheless, even though the farce dominates, the philosophical problem still remains valid. The play deals with the questions of defining reality, mysteries of perception, the slippery elusiveness of empirical and logical truth, the nature of point of view, the reliability of witnesses and testimony and finally the conflict between appearance and reality. Stoppard himself, in an interview with Hudson (1974, 7, 8) referred to the possibility of viewing the play differently: “If you are thinking of a situation as being a metaphor for a more general confusion then of course that’s true of *After Magritte*; but that’s not an intellectual play, it’s a nuts-and-bolts comedy”. While comparing this play with his other pieces in which he is trying “to marry the play of ideas with comedy or farce”, he remarks: “*After Magritte* and *The Real Inspector Hound* are short plays and they are really an attempt to bring off a sort of comic coup in pure mechanical terms. They are conceived as short plays”. The starting point of the play is a bizarre, surrealistic stage image connected with Stoppard’s absorption with the mysteries of reality and perception. The play itself, however, pokes “fun at the logic of linguistic and visual representation of experience” (Kelly 1991, 90), and the end of this “nuts and bolts comedy” provides a logical explanation for the most astonishing, absurd appearances. Thus the play moves from a seeming chaos to order, the mysteries being solved simultaneously on two levels: the visual and the verbal.

### Visual and verbal ambushes

The play makes use of two mysteries, ambushes set up for the theatre audience and the characters of the play alike. The first of these is the visual riddle of the opening stage image presenting the Harrises’s room

which appears at least strange and inexplicable both to us and to Constable Holmes watching it through the window from the outside. The second one, also connected with visual perception, concerns the identity of the man who most of the characters of the play saw earlier. This mystery is presented not in visual but in verbal terms as he is described by the characters in a number of divergent, sometimes contradictory ways. Thus, the second mystery contains an element characteristic of the first one yet develops it further and new complications appear. While in the case of the first mystery the problem consists of the individual perception and understanding of the reality perceived, in the case of the second one a question is added concerning an adequate description of the individually perceived reality in linguistic terms.

The two mysteries presented in the play seem to have traceable origins. The initial stage image is reminiscent both of René Magritte's painting *L'assassin menacé*<sup>1</sup> and of the beginning of Sławomir Mrożek's *Tango*, a play which Stoppard translated in 1966. The story of the strange man in the street, as Stoppard says

was based on fact for a start – somebody I know had a couple of peacocks in the garden, and one escaped while he was shaving. He chased it and he had to cross a main road to catch it, and he was standing in his pyjamas with shaving cream on his face holding a peacock when the traffic started going by. (Hudson interview 1974, p. 17)

*After Magritte* opens with a bizarre stage picture. The room with “most of furniture ... stacked up against the street door in a sort of barricade”<sup>2</sup>, is occupied by three people:

MOTHER is lying on her back on the ironing board. ... her downstage foot up against the flat of the iron. A white bath towel covers her from ankle to chin. Her head and part of face are concealed in a tight-fitting black rubber bathing cap. ... She could be dead; but is not. ... THELMA HARRIS, ... dressed in a full length ballgown. ... is discovered on her hands and knees, staring at the floor ahead and giving vent to an occasional sniff. REGINALD HARRIS is standing on the wooden chair. His torso is bare, but underneath his thigh-length green rubber fishing waders he wears his black evening dress trousers.

(p. 10)

From the ceiling hang the central light with a lampshade which is a “heavy metal hemisphere” and “a fruit basket attractively overflowing with apples, oranges, bananas, pineapple, and grapes”. Behind the window, “absolutely motionless”, gazing at the scene, is “a uniformed Police Constable (HOLMES)” (p. 10).

<sup>1</sup> The similarity between the two is mentioned by: Brassell 1987, 279; Gabbard 1982, 78; Jenkins 1988, 55; Londré 1981, 120; Sammells 1988, 60 and Zeifman 1984, 90.

<sup>2</sup> *After Magritte*, 1978, 9. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

During the initial moments of the play the audience, just like Holmes outside the window, keep wondering what all this could possibly mean. As the dialogue of the characters progresses, however, all the mysteries are gradually explained to us but not to Holmes who cannot hear it and is thus completely unaware of all the explanations provided by it. The furniture has been removed to leave space for Thelma and Reginald's dance, the final rehearsal before a professional appearance. The fact that they are getting ready for a ball accounts for a number of other strange details: her evening dress, his naked torso and the ironing board (she is about to iron his shirt). The mother, who has just taken a bath, is lying on the ironing board waiting for a massage. She cannot be lying on the settee which is among the piled furniture. Reginald is wearing waders because he has just replaced a bulb in the bathroom while the tub was still full. Now he is replacing the one in the room. During this operation the counterbalance of the lamp, consisting of a porcelain container with slugs from a .22 calibre pistol, has been damaged and the slugs have scattered round the room. That is why Thelma is on her fours trying to find them and the fruit basket is hanging down from the ceiling acting as a replacement counterbalance. She is sniffing because, as she explains later, she has a cold and does not have time to wipe her nose (pp. 31–32). As the conversation progresses, providing information about the present situation and also about their earlier encounter in the street with a strange man, the bizarre elements slowly return to normal. Thelma quits her search and irons Reginald's shirt, he gets dressed and the furniture is put in its proper place. "*The only surviving oddity is the fruit basket*" (p. 24). It is no longer mysterious to the audience, though, as they have been given a logical explanation for its hanging down from the ceiling.

Just then Constable Holmes and Inspector Foot enter, pursuing the investigation of a crime supposedly committed at Victoria Palace earlier that day. As Harris's car was seen nearby they are suspected of having taken part in the afternoon's robbery, which, in turn, explains Holmes's earlier presence outside their window. The manner of the entrance of the two men deserves some attention here. Holmes has reported to his superior the earlier strange appearance of the room which makes the Inspector charge into it and attack the Harrises saying: "What is the meaning of this bizarre spectacle?!!" (p. 24) whereupon he is informed about the broken counterweight. Noticing that the room does not resemble the strange spectacle earlier described by Holmes, Foot seems to realise that there might be some kind of mistake and asks him whether it is the right house, accusing him of never having mentioned the fruit basket. Holmes, surprised by the changes which the room has undergone, insists that the address is correct. He also explains that the reason of his not having mentioned the

basket was that "there was so much else" (pp. 24–26). Both men enter the room expecting to face the bizarre reality of the initial stage image, which evoked their suspicion of something extraordinary going on. Facing the altered, normal state of affairs, they are unable to accept it as it is and still try to follow their earlier preconceptions which fitted their scheme of investigation. That is why Foot says:

I have reason to believe that within the last hour in this room you performed without anaesthetic an illegal operation on a bold nigger minstrel about five-foot-two or Pakistani and that is only the beginning. (p. 31)

This shocking accusation soon finds an explanation when both the Harrises and the audience gradually understand the mistakes committed first by Holmes in giving his account of what he had seen happening in the room and then by the Inspector in the process of providing his own explanation for the situation described to him by the Constable.

The absurdity of Inspector Foot's accusation springs from several sources. First of all it was difficult to make sense of what was going on in the room at the beginning of the play. The audience were soon provided with a logical explanation, yet Holmes did not hear it and did not get any additional information. When the Inspector was drawing his conclusions he based them on an eye-witness's account, in other words, not on the reality of the events themselves but on its description, distorted both by the individual perception of the witness (Holmes) and by the fact that visual sensations had been transformed into a verbal description. Furthermore, the Inspector's conclusions were also affected by another eye-witness's account (that of the elderly lady reporting the events in Ponsonby Place), as well as by his own prejudices, shortcomings and expectations. The presentation of Inspector Foot's investigation shows the ineptitude of the methods of detection applied by him. What results is a comedy of errors caused by differences between consecutive descriptions of the strange man in the street given by the characters. In each case the description is tinted by elements of individual perception, observation, interpretation and finally by description itself, by the use of an imprecise language. Each of these elements, or consecutive stages, creates a barrier between the original phenomenon and its image presented by means of the description.

All the misunderstandings concerning the hopping figure in Ponsonby Place are caused by an absurd incident yet find a logical explanation, discovered by Inspector Foot towards the end of the play. Earlier that day, he had left his car outside his house, hoping he would be able to move it to a parking meter before the traffic warden came round. Late in the evening, when he woke up and started shaving, he looked out of the window and saw Harris's "car pulling away from the only parking space

in the road". He then ran out into the street, taking his wife's "handbag containing the small change and her parasol to keep off the rain". Being in great haste he put both his feet into the same leg of his pyjamas trousers (pp. 45-46).

The spectacle which Inspector Foot made was so extraordinary that it attracted the attention of the Harrises and the elderly lady. To each of them, however, it represented something else. The elderly lady, according to Foot's account, saw

a bizarre and desperate figure. Being herself an old devotee of minstrel shows she recognised him at once for what he was. She was even able to glimpse his broken crutch, the sort of detail that speaks volumes to an experienced detective. (p. 34)

His own conclusion, however, is different, as he says:

I am now inclined to modify the details inasmuch as the culprit may have been a genuine coloured man impersonating a minstrel in order to insinuate himself into the side door to the box office. (p. 35)

The hopping figure is described and simultaneously interpreted in a number of different, contradictory ways in the course of the play. Some of the fun thus arising is due to our tendency to classify what we see according to our unconscious preconceptions and thus to delude ourselves.

The question concerning the man's identity causes a quarrel between Thelma and Reginald which takes place before the Inspector's arrival (pp. 12-14 and 18-21) and continues during Foot's investigation:

FOOT: Can you describe him?

MOTHER: Yes. He was playing hopscotch on the corner, a man in the loose-fitting striped gabardine of a convicted felon. He carried a handbag under one arm, and with the other he waved at me with a cricket bat.

(FOOT *reels*.)

FOOT: Would you know him again?

MOTHER: I doubt it. He was wearing dark glasses, and a surgical mask.

(HARRIS *comes forward to restore sanity*.)

HARRIS: My mother is a bit confused, Inspector. It was a tortoise under his arm and he wasn't so much playing hopscotch as one-legged.

THELMA: (*defly slipping the dress over HARRIS*.) A tortoise or a football - he was a young man in a football shirt -

HARRIS: *If* I might just stick my oar in here, he could hardly have been a young man since he had a full white beard, and, if I'm not mistaken, side-whiskers. ...

FOOT: So the best witness you can come up with is a blind, white-bearded, one-legged footballer with a tortoise. (pp. 39-40)

Inspector Foot's final summing up is a combination of the reports. It makes use of details chosen at random and does not take into account

that they are contradictory, presenting different descriptions of the event and that any of them (or none, as it appears in the end) might be correct. The differences in the descriptions result from a number of things. On the one hand, being faced with a bizarre, strange figure the spectators perceive it differently. The physical reality is tinted by subjective, personal elements. It is something different to individual people. On the other hand, while providing a description of it, the people try to interpret it, to find a logical explanation of the seemingly absurd elements. In doing so, they make use of their individual, subjective impressions and employ language as a means of describing them. Stoppard seems to prove that language can sometimes cause big misunderstandings. While reality is open to different interpretations (especially if it is such a strange, bizarre reality as the hopping figure), the language itself, too, is very often ambiguous and imprecise. Therefore a sentence may sometimes also be open to a number of different interpretations. In Stoppard's play, the ambiguity of the visual image is accompanied by the ambiguity of verbal images describing it, visual puns appear side by side with verbal ones.

The play's main interest, then, centres on endeavouring to give a logical explanation of the mysteries of the bizarre opening and the incident in Ponsonby Place. As the narrative of the drama develops, gradually all the mysteries are solved and provided with a convincing explanation. Towards the end of the play, Inspector Foot gives an excuse for his failure as an efficient detective: "But bear in mind that my error was merely one of interpretation" (p. 44). His justification is only partly true – he was also mistaken in drawing conclusions. The other characters were wrong as well when trying to interpret the perceived reality. This could mean, one might argue, that there is no possibility of defining reality at all. The conclusion of the play, however, seems to be different. The final stage image is explicable, logical and self-evident. The play ends with a bizarre scene, another version of the opening pose, yet the audience now understand the meaning of each detail. What might appear to be an absurd, bizarre spectacle is, in fact, an intelligible scene of domestic activity, or to put it in Reginald's words "The activities in this room today have broadly speaking been of a mundane and domestic nature bordering on cliché" (p. 44). Everything, also the interpretation of reality, depends on the amount and kind of information one is provided with. Things which seem to be irrational might have some rationale after all.

## Language's inefficiency in describing reality

Stoppard wittily employs language to create confusion, indicating that it is an imperfect tool for describing reality. Several critics have noticed the specific quality of language in the play, the use of puns and the fact

that language is an inadequate means of describing reality<sup>3</sup>. Twice in the play Thelma says: "There is no need to use language" (pp. 11 and 15). She may be referring to the coarse or abusive vocabulary she suspects is being used (not justifiably, though). She might also be warning against relying on language of any sort<sup>4</sup>. The play repeatedly makes the audience aware of the unreliability of language. Very often, instead of explaining reality, language creates a still greater confusion.

Sometimes the misunderstandings arise when a homophone pun is used as, for instance, in the sentence repeated twice by Reginald when he is talking about the strange man carrying a lute which is misunderstood first by Thelma and then by Inspector Foot as "loot" (pp. 20 and 40). A similar play on the sound quality of the words produces a comic effect when Harris asks: "Is something the matter with your foot, Foot? Inspector Foot. ... You wish to inspect your foot, Inspector?" (pp. 42-43). The names of the characters also serve as a means of bringing about humour and confusion. Brian Crossley (1977, 81) has written: "we have, in Foot of the Yard, a school-boy pun which nominally implies a 'flat-foot' and a smaller unit of measurement within a larger one". Police Constable's name, Holmes, through the evocation of the famous Sherlock Holmes, is also charged with comic overtones. And, finally, Thelma's mentioning of Maigret, the famous detective of George Simenon's novels instead of Magritte, the painter, adds to the general confusion as well (p. 36). The latter two names additionally contribute to the metatheatrical character of the drama, the first one referring to a figure on loan, while the second indicating an intertextual reference inherent in it.

On other occasions, a given word or sentence is understood by the characters as belonging to different contexts and thus it has different meanings. Such is the case with Mother's question: "Is it all right for me to practice?" and the answer given by Inspector Foot: "No, it is not all right! Ministry standards may be lax but we draw the line at Home Surgery to bring in the little luxuries of life" (p. 33). While she is following her own obsession with playing the tuba (she keeps asking for permission to do so several times in the course of the play: pp. 16, 25, 26, 27, 33 and 46), he is following his train of thought connected with the investigation and referring to the surgical operation he suspects took place in their house before his arrival. A similar situation occurs when the Inspector asks them about their alibis and hears Mother say: "It was rubbish" (p. 37). He jumps to the conclusion that he has finally cornered them. It soon appears,

<sup>3</sup> Zeifman 1984, 89-92; Sammells 1988, 61; Gabbard 1982, 3; Jenkins 1988, 56 and Kelly 1991, 88.

<sup>4</sup> For yet another interpretation, arguing that "there is in fact no need to use *language* because the same point has already been made *visually*", see: Zeifman 1984, 91.



however, that, again, they are talking about two different things and that her sentence does not refer to the alibi but is an evaluation of Magritte's paintings. In these cases, the two characters are speaking as if side by side. What we hear is not really a conversation but two parallel monologues with certain overlappings between them. The above dialogues are, in fact, examples of what the semiotician Keir Elam (1980, 151) calls the

flagrant contravention of co-referential rules which is a frequent source of comic business, as when two speakers believe themselves to be referring to a single object while the audience is aware that there are distinct referents in play.

Sometimes it appears that the choice of phrasing is of crucial importance for the meaning. This becomes evident when Harris insists that the man had "a white stick" and Thelma argues it was "an ivory cane" to which Harris shouts: "An ivory cane IS a white stick" (p. 19). Pursuing their own logic the characters try to convince themselves and the others that their own description and interpretation are the only correct ones. In this case, Reginald insists on the thing being a white stick because he has argued earlier that the man was blind. An ivory cane does not denote anything special while a white stick symbolically indicates the blindness of the person carrying it. As Inspector Foot's report of the events of the evening makes clear, the thing he had in his hand was really white but it was neither a stick nor a cane but his wife's umbrella. He was not blind, either. Reginald's attempt to apply logic when describing the perceived reality has brought about completely wrong conclusions.

A great many of the misunderstandings which occur in the play result from the characters being "victims of their own logical absolutism" (Elam 1984, 476), of their being "entrapped by their interpretative logic" (Kelly 1991, 90). As Inspector Foot continues his investigation he constantly draws wrong conclusions. Thelma, having noticed his incorrect resolution arising from his deductive method, says: "I am prepared to defend myself against any logician you care to produce" (p. 30). Logic may be useful yet it does not always provide a convincing account of reality. Thelma seems to have forgotten now her earlier appeal to logic when she argued that "there would be more footballs than tortoises in a built-up area" (p. 19), an argument she used while trying to persuade her husband that the man was carrying a football and not a tortoise<sup>5</sup>. Thus, then, the imprecision of the language as a tool of describing reality combined with the characters' faulty way of reasoning result in the play's becoming a hilariously funny farce.

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<sup>5</sup> Again both of them are mistaken because what he actually had was his wife's purse with change for the parking meter.

## The title

One thing more should be discussed here, namely the title of the drama. It may be interpreted in a number of different, yet not contradictory ways. Firstly, the events of the play take place after the Harrises's visit to an exhibition of René Magritte's paintings. In this sense, the word "after" has a strictly chronological meaning in connection with the events of the day. Secondly, the play comes "after Magritte" in an iconographic sense, "by the way of pseudo-painterly quotation (as in 'after Leonardo')" (Elam 1984, 471), which is visible in the opening stage image reminiscent of *L'assassin menacé* and also in the reproduction on the stage of certain motifs from Magritte's paintings<sup>6</sup>. Thirdly, the play may be also treated as a kind of response to surrealism. And finally, the drama was written after Magritte's work was established in the collective imagination. It could be argued, however, that while the play starts with a surrealistic stage image, later on all the surrealism dissolves while the audience is provided with a logical and reasonable explanation<sup>7</sup>.

René Magritte, a Belgian painter (1898–1967), whose work is characterised by fidelity of real detail but unreality of the scene depicted, kept questioning both the nature of reality and the possibility of its representation. He used everyday, familiar objects in such a way as to evoke something unfamiliar, mysterious. Suzi Gablik (1970, 12–13) writes:

For Magritte, painting was a means to evoke a meta-reality which would transcend our knowledge of the phenomenal world. He referred to it continually as "the mystery" about which it is impossible to speak, since one can be only seized by it.

The problem of reality is strictly connected with that of perception. If reality is a mystery in itself it is even more so while being perceived. Thus, Magritte tries to revise our sense of reality and the reliability of our perceptions concerning it. The objective reality can be perceived only in a subjective way. In the process of perception reality loses its objectivity and becomes dominated by our subjectivity. The impossibility of getting to know objective reality, the fact that it presents a different image to different people is a recurrent theme of Stoppard's plays. Also in *After Magritte* the fact that the characters give different descriptions and interpretations of perceived reality results from their individual, subjective bias, from the different perspective from which they view the surrounding world.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of these see: Elam 1984, 471; Goldstein 1975, 19 and Hu 1989, 77.

<sup>7</sup> The difference between the disorderly, illogical images presented in Magritte's paintings and the rationality of those in Stoppard's play has been stressed by: Corballis 1984, 57; Dean 1981, 51–53; Goldstein 1975, 20–21; Hu 1989, 69; Jenkins 1988, 54; Kelly 1991, 89–90; Sammells 1988, 60 and Whitaker 1986, 78.

Another set of problems discussed by Magritte concerns the question of representing the reality by means of iconic painting. One of his favourite themes is a picture within a picture expressing in visual terms the representational status of art and the tension between reality and its artistic illusion. In several paintings Magritte has explored the relationship between a real object and the painted illusion. *The Human Condition I*, for instance, is the painter's attempt to demonstrate the relationship between a three-dimensional space and its two-dimensional representation on a canvas. Magritte himself has commented on the picture (quoted in Gablik 1970, p. 97):

I placed in front of a window, seen from inside a room, a painting representing that part of the landscape which was hidden from view by the painting. Therefore, the tree represented in the painting hid from view the tree situated behind it, outside the room. It existed for the spectator, as it were, as both inside the room in the painting, and outside in the real landscape.

In another painting of the same kind, *The Waterfall*, the picture shows a forest with a canvas on an easel placed among the trees. In this case the representation is not superimposed on reality but is situated within it. The juxtaposition brings about the same notion: the image is not the same as the thing, an illusion of reality is different from the reality itself. In stressing the presentational character of his paintings, in making them self-reflexive by means of presenting a painting within a painting, Magritte's art is similar to that of Stoppard who constantly stresses the metatheatrical quality of his dramas by means of using a play within a play.

René Magritte has dealt with the representational character not only of iconic signs but also of linguistic ones. He has remarked that "No object is so attached to its name that another cannot be found which suits it better<sup>8</sup>. He has painted a series concerned with relationships between iconic and linguistic representations of objects, *The Key of Dreams*, which presents four pictures of objects accompanied by labels. The first three icons have incorrect labels beneath them, only in the case of the fourth one do the icon and the name correspond. In *The Use of Words I* Magritte presents an icon of a pipe under which there is an inscription saying: "This is not a pipe". This painting is doubly paradoxical – everyone looking at the picture sees that it presents a pipe so there is no need for labelling. Furthermore, the label denies that what the viewer perceives as a pipe is actually a pipe, pointing out that it is only an illusion, a representation of reality and not reality itself. In these oils Magritte has investigated the imperfect and imprecise attempts of rendering reality in both pictorial and

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<sup>8</sup> *The Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings by René Magritte*, the Arts Council and the Tate Gallery, 1969, pub.: The Arts Council, London, 1969, 28. Quoted in Goldstein 1975, 18.

linguistic terms. He has discussed the same problem in an essay dealing with problems of both pictorial and linguistic systems of representation, *Les mots et les images*<sup>9</sup>.

The question concerning the limitations of language as a means of representing reality is one of the main themes of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. The idea of language games presented there is the starting point of Stoppard's *Dogg's Our Pet*, *Dogg's Hamlet* and *Cahoot's Macbeth*. Thus, Magritte, Wittgenstein and Stoppard seem to share a common lack of belief in the possibility of language to represent a given reality in a satisfactory way<sup>10</sup>.

Summing up, one must admit that *After Magritte* fully deserves its title. Stoppard, just like Magritte, deals with reality as such, the viewer's perceptions of it, the confusion brought about by an improper understanding of an iconic or linguistic sign. John Fitzpatrick Dean (1981, 53) has argued the possibility of the play being a reaction against surrealism. It is true that while for Magritte the world is mysterious and inexplicable and the meaning of simple things is foreshadowed by their inherent mystery, for Stoppard, at least in this play, everything finds its logical and rational explanation. Yet for both of them, even though they look at the matter from opposite poles, things are not what they appear to be. Stoppard shares still another feature with Magritte. Both of them create specific visual and verbal jokes. Stoppard himself mentioned his fascination with the work of René Magritte when he said: "When I encountered his paintings I responded to their humour immediately and I enjoyed his jokes and I also liked the fact that he painted things very carefully" (Kuurman interview 1980, 55). He has also commented on the quality of Magritte's humour speaking about "his jokes about mirrors, his jokes about scale" (Ibid., 56). In October 1970, so a few months after the first production of *After Magritte*, he wrote a review of Suzi Gablik's monograph on the Belgian painter. In this review, entitled *Joker as Artist*, he wrote:

But the one omission which I find incomprehensible is any acknowledgement of the fact that the man's technically perfect execution is crucial to the impact of his ideas. ... [when

<sup>9</sup> Suzi Gablik (1970, 138–140) quotes the essay in full.

<sup>10</sup> An interesting question arises here concerning the possible links between Magritte, Wittgenstein and Stoppard. While Stoppard undoubtedly knew the works both of Wittgenstein and Magritte, it is not clear whether the latter two knew of each other's existence. Gablik (1970, 96) writes: "There is no evidence that Magritte ever read Wittgenstein, although he was well versed in philosophy. Yet the similarities between the preoccupations of both men are striking, to the point where even the images they use often correspond". It is not possible to argue that we have here what is called "direct influence" yet what remains certain is the fact that all the three share a similar outlook concerning the impossibility of creating an image (illusion) of reality (be it by means of language or of a painting).

Magritte] wished to remind us that you can't smoke a painting of a pipe, [he] was able to paint one so smooth, so woody, so rounded, so perfect that you could, as the say, smoke it; and thus made the idea work. (Stoppard, 1970b, 40)

Stoppard, then, perceives Magritte as an outstanding artist who plays with the rules of reality/illusion but can also be successfully mimetic. And this is finally where René Magritte and Tom Stoppard meet. Both of them are not only jokers but also great artists.

## V. *Where Are They Now?, Artist Descending a Staircase*

*Where Are They Now?* and *Artist Descending a Staircase*, though not forming a strict chronological sequence, will be discussed together for a number of reasons. The most obvious of these is that they were both written for the radio and make use of the specific qualities of this medium. Secondly, both of them are characterised by time jumps as they present, compare and juxtapose the past and the present. And finally, the two plays' interest centres on questions concerning identity of the characters and the image of reality as created by different visual and aural means.

### *Where Are They Now?*

This short 35-minute radio play (commissioned by BBC Schools Radio, transmitted on 28 January 1970) presents a Hove school reunion with three of those present becoming its central characters. Stoppard indicates in a note preceding the published text that "The play is set in two intercut locations, School Dinner (1945) and Old Boys' Dinner (1969). Part of the idea is to move between the two without using any of the familiar grammar of fading down or fading up; the action is continuous"<sup>1</sup>. Thus the play makes use of a specific experiment with time as a structure, providing a continuous rendering of two periods, separated by the passage of twenty-five years in real life. The structure of the play depicts the simultaneous existence of the characters on three levels, as it were – the past (scenes from 1945), the present (scenes from 1969) and the past as now remembered by the three friends (not necessarily as it actually was). We can, therefore, view the characters from at least three different perspectives.

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<sup>1</sup> *Where Are They Now?*, [in:] *Four Plays for Radio*, 1984, 63. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

## Reality of the past and its illusion created by memories

In this short drama, as in so many others, Stoppard sets up several ambushes for the audience, making them try to solve the mysteries and provide answers concerning the identity of the three men and the nature of their past. Part of the play's interest is due to the guessing game of the audience prompted by the fact that its main characters – Gale (a journalist), Brindley (a clergyman) and Marks (a successful businessman interested in good wine and silver), used to have nicknames, derived from the names of three of the Marx Brothers – Groucho, Chico and Harpo. Stoppard has set this ambush quite successfully for it is really difficult to answer which is which<sup>2</sup>. This confusion springs from the difficulty of establishing reality and identity as they are tinted by the subjective perception and individual evaluation of different onlookers.

The same years spent at school have left different impressions for Gale, Marks and Brindley. Describing similar experiences, they come up with different pictures of the past which becomes especially visible in their remarks concerning Mr Jenkins, the French master. Marks is the most jovial and jocular of the three and his view of the schooldays seems to be rosy-tinted and quite unreliable. When they start talking about the French master and Brindley says "My goodness ... the fearsome Jenkins and his Bruiser – I hope that sort of thing no longer exists, Mr Dobson?", Marks interrupts: "Nonsense, Brindley – never did us any harm – a few thumps with the end of a rope to keep us up to scratch. No good sending a bunch of ninnies into the world" (p. 68). He refers to the time spent at school as "the happiest days of [his] life", would "love to have them all over again" (pp. 74–75) and is proud and deeply satisfied to say that he has sent his son to the same school. Gale, however, is unable to say anything good about Jenkins even now, when the teacher is dead, and refuses to join the others and stand up in silence (p. 77). Gale makes it clear that his reason for coming to the reunion has been his wish to confront his memories of the past with the past and present actuality. Remembering Jenkins as a cruel and demanding master he wants to check if there was anything positive in the teacher which would make him change his opinion about him. Yet Gale's present opinion concerning the dead man remains the same as his earlier remembrances coined in the past. We are presented a wide range of different opinions about Jenkins. What was he really like? Was he a wonderful teacher and man, as the headmaster argues, or nearly

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<sup>2</sup> Most of the critics agree that Groucho is Gale, Chico is Brindley and Harpo is Marks (Gabbard 1982, 76; Hayman 1979b, 90; Hunter 1982, 69 and Kelly 1991, 37) yet some identify the characters differently (Billington, 1987, 75 and Jenkins 1988, 65).

a monster, as Gale has it, not to mention the opinions of Marks and Brindley about him which come in between these two extreme views? Or, maybe, depending on the perspective at which he was viewed then and is viewed now, or on the person speaking, he was all of these simultaneously?

There are many similar questions posed by the play which cannot be satisfactorily answered in a way unanimously agreed upon. One of these concerns Gale and whether he was really as unhappy as he recalls to have been. He speaks of a moment of happiness, though, but that one belongs to an earlier period in his life (p. 80). The play ends with yet another scene where he is happy: while the Old Boys are singing Hove's school anthem (p. 81). This scene is telling in a number of ways, the most important of these being that he is referred to by his present name. Each of the three protagonists has two names which are meant to indicate the difference between the past and the present. In all the scenes from the past the three men are referred to by their nicknames. This is the only exception to the rule. Even though undoubtedly surrounded by teenagers, his school friends in the past, Gale is called not by his nickname but by his real name. It would be possible to comment on the scene arguing that the real past as he lived it was very different from what he can now remember, that he was, after all, much happier at school than he now likes to believe. On the other hand, it seems that he was not able to show his real self during his time at school. When Brindley describes him at present as "a journalist of considerable repute – a crusading journalist", Dobson, their former Latin teacher says: "But your failure to contribute to the Magazine's 'Where Are They Now?' page does not leave you entirely blameless" (p. 68). It is difficult to imagine a would-be journalist not being interested in writing for the magazine or a now "crusading journalist" to have been so timid in the past. Again, however, there are quite a few possible explanations. Either, because of being unhappy at school, he might not have been interested in working for its magazine or he may not be a successful journalist at present (we have only Brindley's word for it as Gale remains silent throughout the conversation concerning his present occupation). Or, finally, he may have developed his interest in writing only after leaving the school, he may now be a person different from what he used to be in the past.

The last of the explanations is related to the fallacy of hoping to go back into the past on an occasion of the school reunion, a fallacy which is based on at least two reasons. While recalling the past everyone changes its image, alters it by selecting one's own moments to remember and also by being able to preserve only one's subjective perception of it. The Old Boys who gather in the present are never the same as they used to be (the passage of time has left its stamp on them) and still less like they remember one another as having been. This idea is brought into focus in the play



by the character of Jenkins, one of the men present during the celebration who is not remembered by anyone and whose recollections do not match those of the others. At one point Dobson notices that the man must be "an impostor", while Jenkins remarks that the old teacher must be "obviously mixing up this school with some other school he was at" and goes on to recall the wonderful time he used to have at the school (p. 74). As the play ends, at the moment when Hove's school anthem is being sung, Jenkins finally realises that he is at the wrong reunion and that his school is having their meeting downstairs. Part of his mistake is due to the contrast between the reality as it was and what he chooses to remember about it, a mistake common to all the characters of the play.

Lucina Paquet Gabbard (1982, 76) remarks that "The thematic ambiguity of the play comes thus into focus. Dobson cites 'Where Are They Now?', as the name of the alumni page in Hove's Magazine, asking the whereabouts of all those boys who have trod Hove's halls. Most are physically absent – disappeared into time and space. Those few who return are not totally the same". The title sentence of the play runs as a kind of leitmotif in the drama. First being mentioned by Dobson (p. 68), it is later repeated by Jenkins at the beginning of his long tirade about their happy schooldays: "Oh yes ... where are they now, the snows of yesteryear" (p. 74). The speech makes it clear that for him those days were the most wonderful period of his life which can never come back, yet a glimpse of which he may get during the successive school reunions. The fallacy of such an assumption becomes self evident when he discovers he is attending the wrong dinner. The phrase is also repeated twice by Gale; once in reference to the French master, "Jenkins, where are you now, now that I really need you?" (p. 77) and then in connection with the times spent at school: "Oh yes, the snows of yesteryear ... (*Agonized.*) Where were they *then*?" (p. 79). Dissatisfied with his schooldays, he reverses the question, stressing that the past years were not so happy at all. While usually the phrase "snows of yesteryear" expresses nostalgia, longing for something beautiful which belongs to the past and cannot be regained, in his phrase the longing is also connected with the past but for a different reason – the past could have been wonderful, unfortunately it was not. Yet, even though he seems to have forgotten, there were moments of real happiness for him then as the end of the play demonstrates. There is still another case when the phrase is uttered by Marks after an "Amen" following Grace: "for ten years of my life, three times a day, I thanked the Lord for what I was about to receive and thanked him again for what I had just received, and then we lost touch – and I suddenly thought, *Where is He now?*" (p. 80). Some people lose track of old friends, others stop being believers.

## Non-realistic blurring of the two phases of time

Jim Hunter (1982, 202) has noticed that *Where Are They Now?* is "basically realistic". At first sight this could seem to be true – if we discuss the consecutive scenes separately we really can argue it is a realistic drama. The scenes, however, do not exist separately. They form a unity. The use of a continuous action, which Stoppard demands, and the constant shifts from the past into the present and back again, prevent the play from creating a theatrical illusion of reality. The notion implicit in the blurring of the demarcation line between the different phases of time serves to create the impression that, even though time passes, things basically remain the same. The people present at the Old Boys' dinner in 1969 try to recall their old friends and wonder what has become of them, where they are now. They learn about the success of some of their old friends and about the death of their former masters. It has always been so. In 1945, even though there was no homecoming or a school reunion, the "Where Are They Now" page of their school magazine fulfilled a similar function.

The notion of the passage of time, of young boys becoming old ones, is evoked by means of the presentation of Groucho, Chico and Harpo in the scenes from the past and Gale, Brindley and Marks in the scenes from the present. Dobson, the Latin master, appears in both eras. In the scenes of 1969 there is also the headmaster, Jenkins – the outsider, young Crawford who left school last term as well as two pupils of the Junior School – Young Marks and Bellamy. Two successive scenes present the speeches of the headmaster. The first opens with his barking "Silence" and deals with "the deplorable state of the lockers" and the fact that after last Sunday's match "certain members of the Second Eleven were seen in the town without their caps and in the company of girls" (p. 78). The second speech, following immediately afterwards, opens with the sentence "But now for some happier news" and goes on to announce that one of the former graduates of the school has just been awarded the Order of the British Empire (p. 79). Both the speeches are delivered in 1969 (there is no Headmaster among the 1945 cast) yet undoubtedly they show different phases of the present, the first being addressed to the current pupils of the school, while the second to all those gathered at the dinner. The headmaster is a demanding person to his pupils yet presents a slightly different image of himself during times of festivity and celebration. The "happier news", he mentions at the beginning of the second speech, is undoubtedly happier as compared to the preceding instance of scolding his schoolchildren. There is also, however, a link with his earlier address to the Old Boys concerning the death of Jenkins, the French master. Thus, then, the speech is linked both to the situation inside the dining hall and the one outside it.

There is a still more elaborate link between three other, successive scenes which are connected by means of an audio bridge. The scene during the dinner, when those gathered discuss the importance of nicknames in school life, ends with Dobson telling Crawford that he was sometimes called Crackers to which Marks exclaims "Crackers!" (p. 75) The next scene shows Crawford and two younger boys – young Marks and Bellamy. The former demands to know who has called him by this name and gives Young Marks a spanking which is referred to in the stage directions: "*Thump. MARKS cries out*". What immediately follows is: "*Thump. Thump. The HEADMASTER's gavel. Silence overtakes the OLD BOYS' Dinner*" (p. 76). The first and second scene are connected by means of the nickname actually mentioned or only referred to and by a Marks taking part in them. Stoppard has set an ambush here for an inattentive listener. As all the other scenes in the play with pupils in them are set in the past, there is a possibility of mixing up the phases of time and assuming that the scene presents Marks – the "old boy" in the time of his youth. The scene understood in this way would indicate, then, that his schoolyears were not as happy as he claims they have been. If, however, one is attentive enough not to make such a mistake, one will realise that the young Marks taking part in it is the "old boy's" son. One can only wonder what his recollections will be like in the future. Will he, like his father, claim it has been the most wonderful period of his life or will he, like Gale, keep just this, unhappy moment in his mind and therefore argue the times were terrible? The question thus arises to what extent the image of the present situation will be altered by his attitude to it and the perspective he decides to choose while viewing it. To what extent he will be able to recall in the future the person he is at present and to what degree the image of reality and himself will become altered by the passage of time as well as by his own understanding and interpretation of reality.

The second and third scenes of the sequence are linked by means of a sound, identical in its quality, yet coming from a different source, and make full use of a specific ambiguity brought about by the radio medium. The interpretation of a concrete reality, Stoppard often argues, depends on a number of factors, the most important ones being the context as well as the individual, often subjective features of the onlooker (or listener, in this case), his ability to perceive all the elements and then to interpret them. The "thump" closing the second scene can be justifiably interpreted as Crawford's beating up young Marks. The sound is, however, simultaneously, the opening of the next scene, in the context of which it acquires a completely different meaning. Thus, the aural reality may be interpreted differently.

## *Artist Descending a Staircase*

The questions concerning the difficulty of interpreting a given reality, or its representation (be it aural, verbal or visual) are the core interests of Stoppard's next play – *Artist Descending a Staircase* (first transmitted on BBC Radio 3 on 14 November 1972). Only an artist of the scope of Tom Stoppard can write a play about visual art (painting and sculpture) which makes use solely of the aural medium. Aware of the fact that his two earlier short radio plays, *Albert's Bridge* and *If You're Glad I'll Be Frank* had been adapted for the stage and produced at the 1969 Edinburgh Festival, Stoppard set out to write a "pure", unstageable radio play. He recalls that the genesis of *The Artist Descending a Staircase* lay in a

tape gag where we play a tape at the beginning and 75 minutes later we'd peg it off by showing that the whole thing had been, as it were, misinterpreted. So there was the need for 74 minutes of padding or brilliant improvisation if you like or very carefully structured and meticulously built-up plot<sup>3</sup>.

### Misinterpreting a recorded representation of reality

Both in the "tape gag", which opens and closes the play, and in what comes in-between Stoppard makes full use of the possibilities offered by the radio medium, which more than any other appeals to the imagination – we see with the mind's eye, due to the workings of our imagination the aural is transformed into the visual. Radio is a very intimate form of drama deprived of any visual correlative and the listener, like a blind person, is very sensitive to aural nuances. Many sounds are so similar to one another that it may be difficult to decode them and thus to interpret them correctly. There are two ways a radio dramatist may use them: he may either make sure that the exact meaning of a given sound is easily decodable or he may do the opposite, make them indecipherable and first encourage one interpretation of them, later on to make "them come to dramatic life after the listener has been told what they represent"<sup>4</sup>. In his radio plays Tom Stoppard most often uses the second way of employing the specific quality of the medium.

Recorded sound and its impact on the listener is an obsession of one of the play's artists – Beauchamp, who for years now has been engaged

<sup>3</sup> Tom Stoppard, Interview with Richard Mayne from the BBC's *Arts Commentary*, BBC Radio Three, 10 November 1972. Quoted in Deloney 1991, 1171.

<sup>4</sup> M. Esslin, *Mediations: Essays on Brecht, Beckett and the Media*, London: 1980, 177. Quoted in Törnkvist 1991, 15.

in producing “tonal art”<sup>5</sup>. In the past he used to make recordings of “various games and pastimes” and, as he puts it, “trying to liberate the *visual* image from the limitations of visual *art*. The idea [was] to create images – pictures – which [were] purely *mental* ...” (pp. 38–39). At present he is engaged in producing two different kinds of tapes, one of which “*is a bubbling cauldron of squeaks, gurgles, crackles, and other unharmonious sounds*” (p. 21). The other one is a tape of silence: “These unheard sounds which are our silence stand as a metaphor – a correspondence between the limits of hearing and the limits of all knowledge: and whose silence is our hubbub?” (p. 56). The recordings are strongly criticised by Donner who says they “are the mechanical expression of a small intellectual idea, the kind of notion that might occur to a man in his bath and be forgotten in the business of drying between his toes” (p. 22). Donner’s criticism is followed by an argument between the two artists which seems worth quoting here:

DONNER: I see I’m wasting my breath.

BEAUCHAMP: I heard you. Clerks – bath-night – rubbish, and so on. But my tapes are not for clerks. They are for initiates, as all art is.

DONNER: My kind is for Everyman.

BEAUCHAMP: Only because every man is an initiate of that particular mystery. But your painting is not for dogs, parrots, bicycles ... You select your public. It is the same with me, but my tapes have greater mystery – they elude dogs, parrots, clerks and the greater part of mankind. If you played my tape on the radio, it would seem a meaningless noise, because it fulfils no expectations: people have been taught to expect certain insights but not others. The first duty of the artist is to capture the radio station. (pp. 22–23)

At the end of the argument Beauchamp argues that his tapes can be described as “horrible noise” only because people have not been taught what to listen for, or how to listen” (p. 23). His point is that there is nothing inherently significant in realism (in favour of which Donner is arguing). His own tonal art, however, is an attempt to deny that anything can speak for itself. Viewing art is not only a purely receptive activity, it also requires some creativity on the part of the receiver. The ambiguous relationship between the artist and his creation on the one hand, and the work of art and the receiver, on the other, is further underlined by the fact that any artistic representation, even the most abstract one, is in one way or another connected with the concrete world, with some kind of concrete reality. A work of art itself also acquires a meaning of a concrete reality in its own right. As an artistic creation Beauchamp’s tape appears

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<sup>5</sup> *Artist Descending a Staircase*, [in:] *Four Plays for Radio*, 1984, 18. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

to be a complete failure – he wanted to have a recording of “unheard sounds” which would be a metaphorical representation of “the limits of all knowledge”. One can only wonder whether he could ever be able to achieve his aim of making its listeners see it in this way. This point is made clear by Martello who says there is no truth in the tapes (p. 18).

Beauchamp’s enterprise was spoilt, however, and instead of a tape of silence (artistic creation) he got a recording which sounds like strong circumstantial evidence of murder (a mechanical, faithful representation of reality). He has ended up with a true to life record of reality. This point is made by Martello who argues: “the tape recorder speaks for itself. That is, of course, the point about tape recorders” (p. 18). Perceived in this way, the recording as a faithful representation of reality is as good as reality itself. Yet one important remark must be made here. Stoppard indicates in most of his works that reality does not present the same image to different perceivers, that there is always some element of individual interpretation involved. This aspect of the subjective quality of perception and interpretation of reality becomes the core of the ambush of the whodunit presented in the play, of the tape-gag mentioned by Stoppard and concerning the mystery of Donner’s death. The meaning of the tape-recorded evidence is created by the listeners, by the audience’s act of listening and perceiving and by their providing an interpretation of the sounds they hear. After all, the sound which is specified at the end of the play as a fly droning” (p. 58) could well be described differently, as it is at the beginning of the play: “DONNER *dozing: an irregular droning noise*” (p. 15). Thus at the end of the play the listeners of Stoppard’s play become aware that no murder has been committed: Donner fell down the stairs and killed himself while trying to kill a buzzing fly which interfered with Beauchamp’s tape of silence.

## Stoppard’s aural ambushes

Beauchamp is not successful in “capturing the radio station”, in becoming a renowned tonal artist. Tom Stoppard, on the other hand, keeps experimenting in his radio plays by checking for himself (and for the listeners) whether people have actually been taught “what to listen for, or how to listen” (p. 23) and in doing so he undoubtedly achieves astonishing and noteworthy results. In *Artist Descending a Staircase* part of the fun of the play arises at the expense of people’s tendency to classify what they hear according to certain preconceptions which brings about different kinds of misunderstandings, the most obvious of these being the case concerning Donner’s death. When the play starts we are misguided by Martello’s and Beauchamp’s

interpretations of the tape and we assume that he has been pushed and consequently killed by one of them. As the play progresses there are numerous references to a buzzing fly, either verbal (pp. 16, 22, 45, 47 and 58) or aural (the buzzing is actually heard – pp. 45, 57 and 58) or the fly is smacked by one of the characters (pp. 22, 24 – 3 times, 45 – twice, 47, 56 and 58). As the play ends, the listeners hear Beauchamp chasing and finally killing a fly. They realise that the sound sequence is a repetition of what was recorded on his tape. The purely aural, non-verbal sounds, just like the words actually uttered by the two men, are very similar or even identical. The mystery of Donner's death is therefore explained to the radio audience. Whether it is also explained to Beauchamp and Martello remains unclear.

Stoppard's play is a sequence of sounds which are constantly misinterpreted by the listeners who later on gradually notice the mistakes they have made. When the play opens the listeners get the impression that they are witnessing someone's fall and thus aurally participating in a concrete reality. They soon discover, however, that the sounds they heard were not real – this was merely a representation of a reality, a mechanical reproduction of events which occurred some time earlier. The play demonstrates that sounds are open to interpretation, that the same sound may denote different things in altered circumstances and therefore its proper interpretation depends on the listeners' ability to notice its present context. The audience continually become victims of numerous aural ambushes set up by Stoppard: the droning sound is a fly, not a snore; one of the numerous "smacks" which occur in the course of the play is not an attempt to kill a fly (as all the others are) but the sound of Donner hitting Beauchamp (p. 24). Similarly, the "thump" (page 24) is not connected with the fly but is an expression of Donner's irritation with the argument he is having with Beauchamp. "*Cliché Paris music, accordion*" is heard in the scene taking place in Lambeth and not in Paris (p. 32). The hooves of the horse in the scene of 1914 are not produced by a real horse but are made by Beauchamp who is not riding but walking and knocking coconut shells together, while involved in one of his artistic sound enterprises called "Beauchamp's Tenth Horse" (p. 47). And, finally, the ping-pong game is not a live game but a recording (p. 37). The last aural ambush is provided with an extra twist of irony. When Sophie, the blind girl, learns the game is not actually taking place, she starts distrusting other sounds in the reality surrounding her and, on hearing the kettle whistling, she asks: "Is that the gramophone again?" (p. 38). Commenting on the latter scene Hersch Zeifman (1984, 94) has written: "Sophie is meant to stand as a warning to the audience, for we share her dilemma: in a radio play we too are blind (literally in the dark), we too must rely on our faculty of hearing, and we too are constantly in

danger of being misled". What Stoppard keeps doing is what Beauchamp aimed at. He is not only trying but actually liberating "the visual image from the limitations of visual art". He is creating pictures "which are purely mental" (pp. 38-39).

In playing about with aural ambushes it was absolutely essential for Stoppard to have a radio audience which should not be able to see what was going on. In this respect the audience find their counterpart in blind Sophie, who, just like them, interprets the reality around her making use solely of sounds she hears. Her perception, like that of the radio listeners, is restricted to one sense only and therefore limited. This could provide an explanation of the mistakes both she and they make. In the past, however, she seems to have made a mistake which can in no way be explained by her later deficiency. Before she went blind, Sophie fell in love with one of the three artists at an exhibition of their work, "Frontiers in Art". Later on, when the four of them met, remembering that each of the men had been photographed with the picture he had painted, she identified her beloved as the one who had painted "black railings on a field of snow" (p. 41), that is as Beauchamp. It was, however, Donner who truly loved her and wanted to help her after Beauchamp's abandoning her which finally led her to committing suicide. When, in the conversation with Martello, Donner expresses his regrets and says "She would have been happy with me" Martello remarks: "To *us* it was Beauchamp, but which of us did she see in her mind's eye ...?" Speaking about the picture she remembered, he says: "she described it briefly, and it had an image of black vertical railings, like park railings, right across the canvas, as though one were looking at a field of snow through the bars of a cage; not like Beauchamp's snow scene at all" and "Thick white posts, top to bottom across the whole canvas, an inch or two apart, black in the gaps -" (pp. 55-56). Which man did she love, then? The one who had painted black railings against a white background or the one who had painted white posts against a black background? It could, perhaps, be argued that her mistake was due to the inefficiency of the two artists or to the fact that art, especially abstract art, is not really meant to be a reproduction of a concrete, objective reality. It could also be argued equally well that, in certain situations, the interpretation depends solely on the perceiver. In this case, it is he who chooses which of the colours functions as the background and which one as the foreground. If we support the latter argument, it becomes obvious that once more the interpretation of reality or of its representation depends on the onlooker. Whichever reading we accept, however, it is not certain whether she has actually erred in visual perception and has thus become a victim of love at first sight, that is blind love, a word especially appropriate in the context



of the play. The answer to the question is not really important to us, unlike to Donner who goes through a shock when he realises that he may have lost his love due to an optical illusion.

The aural ambushes set by Stoppard for the listeners and Sophie and the visual one set for her alone indicate that the interpretation of what one hears and sees depends to a great extent on one's abilities of perception and interpretation. The interpretation of verbal utterances is equally prone to misunderstandings, which Stoppard demonstrates by the use of puns, so typical of his dramaturgical technique. The play begins with the reproduction of the recording (as we soon learn, yet of which we are not aware while actually listening to the very opening of the play). What follows is a conversation between the two artists:

MARTELLO: I think this is where I came in.

(TAPE: *Ah! There you are ...*)

BEAUCHAMP: And there is where you hit him.

(TAPE: *THUMP!*)

(p. 15)

This short conversation contains two misunderstandings arising from the different contexts in which given sentences are placed while being uttered and while being understood. It is Stoppard's another example of "flagrant contravention of co-referential rules". When Martello speaks about "coming in", he means starting to listen to the tape. Beauchamp, on the other hand, connects the sentence with the scene recorded on the tape. The second sentence "There you are", uttered by Donner, refers to his having spotted the fly. Beauchamp sees it as referring to Donner's having noticed Martello and so the purely aural "Thump" is interpreted by him as the fight between the two men. Thus, in this scene the misunderstandings arise from two sources – the purely aural, non-verbal one and the other one connected with the inefficiency of the language in communicating the speaker's meaning.

Among other puns the play contains a number of misunderstandings springing from the double meaning of the word "see". When blind Sophie enters the artists' flat for the first time, she tells Beauchamp: "And please don't worry about saying 'you see' all the time. People do, and I don't mind a bit". In the following conversation the phrase is repeated twice in its sense of "Do you understand?" On the second occasion she says: "Oh – of course! Of course I see. What a very good joke, Mr. Beauchamp" (pp. 38–39). Having lost her sight she can really "see" better and understand more than the others. She can, for instance, distinguish between a brewer's dray and a landau by the sounds they make (p. 45). Sophie is able to view her blindness at a certain distance, to treat it as a kind of joke, as, for instance, when she says: "I have to sit by the window and be a look-out"

(p. 33) or, when she speaks about Beauchamp's leaving her: "Perhaps he was going to leave a note on the mantelpiece. As a sort of joke" (p. 36). There are situations, however, when she is completely at a loss, being in two kinds of darkness. In her touching soliloquy preceding her suicidal jump out of the window she says: "I am afraid of the dark; not *my* dark, the real dark" (p. 53). She has been able to cope with having lost her sight, she cannot, however, stand a situation in which she is unable to understand what is happening. Whereas most of Stoppard's puns are employed for comic purposes, the last one is charged with seriousness and evokes a touchingly tragic mood atypical of this playwright.

### Artistic representations of reality

On the thematic level, *Artist Descending a Staircase* deals with a number of problems related to reality and different ways of perceiving and representing it. It appears that neither the eye nor the ear can be trusted to bring an image of reality which is the same to all perceivers. A lot depends on their individual perception, understanding and interpretation of what they witness as well as on the context. The situation gets even more complicated when the thing perceived is not reality but its artistic illusion, be it a painting, a sculpture or a radio play. If it is not possible to define a concrete reality which is the same for all perceivers, how could it be possible to present its realistic image which would be unanimously accepted by all onlookers? Is realism possible? The artistic debate in the play centres on the problems of realism and abstract art and deals not only with art as such but also with the importance of perception both for the artist himself and for the viewer.

The principles of anti-art the three artists followed in the past were based on the assumption that art's aim was to shock the viewer and to make him participate in the creative process, using his own insight and interpretation. Beauchamp started experimenting with tapes, trying to create mental pictures in the minds of the listeners while using the aural medium only. In the past, in 1914, Martello made a sculpture of a figure called "the Cripple", "a wooden man with a real leg" which was made of "wood ... of course" (pp. 34-35) and a sculpture of "a beautiful woman, as described in the Song of Solomon", in which he literalised the figures of speech used in the Song (p. 51). At present, he is working on a project presenting a metaphorical bust of Sophie with ripe corn for hair, pearls for teeth and fruit for breasts (pp. 30-31). Last, but not least, Donner, who used to experiment with "ceramic food" (p. 28) and edible art – the Venus de Milo made of sugar (p. 24) and Le Penseur sculpted in salt

(p. 28) – has now rejected “the anti-art of lost faith” (p. 30) and “returned to traditional values” (p. 24). He comments on his conversion saying: “I very much enjoyed my years in that child’s garden of easy victories known as the avant garde, but I am now engaged in the infinitely more difficult task of painting what the eye sees” (p. 22). Beauchamp answers back with scorn: “Well, I’ve never seen a naked woman sitting about a garden with a unicorn eating roses” (Ibid.). What the latter seems to object to in a realistic picture is the unicorn – no such animal exists in reality. The idea of the unicorn evokes *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* where it was discussed in connection with transcendent reality which may or may not be accepted by people. The fact that Donner decides to include an image of a unicorn in a portrait of Sophie finds its explanation in a conversation which took place in the past, in 1920:

SOPHIE: Well, I hope you will paint beauty, Mr. Donner, and the subtlest beauty is in nature.

BEAUCHAMP: Oh, please, don’t think that I am against beauty, or nature, Miss Farthingale. Indeed, I especially enjoy the garden where you met Martello, a most delightful prospect across the river, isn’t it? – I mean –

SOPHIE: You are quite right, Mr. Beauchamp. It is a delightful prospect, for me too. It is only my sight I have lost. I enjoy the view just as much as anyone who sits there with eyes closed in the sun; more, I think, because I can improve on reality, like a painter, but without fear of contradiction. Indeed, if I hear hoofbeats I can put a unicorn in the garden and no one can open my eyes against it and say it isn’t true.

MARTELLO (returning): To the Incas, who had never seen a horse, unicorns had the same reality as horses – which is a very high degree of reality. (pp. 44-45)

In this conversation, Sophie argues that a painter can “improve on reality without the fear of contradiction”. Therefore, as Beauchamp assumes, she would have liked Donner’s present picture, which is “A real Academy picture!” (p. 25). Both for Sophie and for Donner in the present, true creative activity consists of two basic elements – imagination and skill. In this respect they are opposed to the ideas of abstract artists like Martello who says that what is most important is the technique which can be mastered by practice (p. 42). In his opinions Martello speaks against faithful representation of reality, he insists on moving away from it and focusing on imagination only. In a sense, he also looks contemptuously at the very idea of skill – it is not a gift of any kind, it can be mastered by practice.

Sophie, on the other hand, is fascinated by the paintings of Turner, the pre-Raphaelites and the ideas of Ruskin, and not very impressed by the exhibition “Frontiers in Art”, where the pictures presented “were all frivolous and not very difficult to do”. For her, a really good and truly artistic picture is the outcome of several elements – a certain kind of reality which is transformed by the imagination of the artist who experiences a creative impulse and is skilful in what he is doing: “I think every artist

willy-nilly is celebrating the impulse to paint in general, the imagination to paint something in particular, and the ability to make the painting in question" (p. 41). Similar opinions are also voiced by Donner in the present, despite the fact that he used to be an avantgardist himself. During a conversation with Beauchamp he criticises his tapes and argues that: "An artistic imagination coupled with skill is talent" and "Skill without imagination is craftsmanship and gives us many useful objects such as wickerwork picnic baskets. Imagination without skill gives us modern art" (pp. 23–24).

## Tom Stoppard and Marcel Duchamp

In *Artist Descending the Staircase* both Sophie and Donner argue that great art is a combination of imagination and skill. This is also the opinion of Stoppard who in an interview with Mel Gussow (1984, 18) said that he believed in the truth expressed in the last sentence of Donner and while being asked about the importance of imagination and skill answered that imagination is more important. He has affirmed that he was not interested in anarchic or unstructured art<sup>6</sup>:

What I can't take is an anarchic mind – not an anarchic spirit, which I admire, but a mind which has no formality to it when it comes to structuring and communicating its thoughts. And a great deal of modern art, I mean pictorial art, I look at it and what I don't get is what went in<sup>7</sup>.

Stoppard has not made any remarks on the work of Marcel Duchamp but it seems that he might enjoy his paintings which combine imagination and skill. The play indirectly refers to that painter through the name of one of the artists (Beauchamp's name conjures up Duchamp). The allusion is further reinforced by the unquestionable link between the play's title and Duchamp's most celebrated painting, *Nude Descending a Staircase*, a painting which was first presented at the Cubist exhibition at the Dalman Gallery in Barcelona in May 1912 (D'Harnoncourt, 1989, 13). The painting, "using the stroboscopic effect of chromatography<sup>8</sup> attempts to present on the canvas the movement of the nude, to achieve the impossible.

Duchamp once commented on the impossibility of discussing the art of painting by means of language: "You cannot find any language to speak about painting<sup>9</sup>. Duchamp himself (quoted in D'Harnoncourt 1989, 256,

<sup>6</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, 28 March 1977. Quoted in Deloney 1991, 1171.

<sup>7</sup> *Our Changing Theatre*, BBC, Radio Four, 23 November 1970. Quoted in Deloney 1991, 1171.

<sup>8</sup> Steefel. Quoted in D'Harnoncourt 1989, 72.

<sup>9</sup> A. Schwartz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, New York 1970, Abrams, 562. Quoted in Guralnick 1990, 296.

258), however, has made some remarks concerning *Nude Descending a Staircase*, discussing his being attracted by the problem of motion in painting. Looking at Duchamp's painting one can wonder what the picture actually shows – is it a series of ladies following one another down the stairs or rather the successive stages of a single one? Once more, the interpretation depends on the beholder.

Tom Stoppard and Marcel Duchamp, even though working in different media, seem to have much in common. Stoppard has often said that he enjoys writing plays “because dialogue is the most respectable way of contradicting [oneself]” (Gussow interview 1972, 54). Duchamp (quoted in Guralnick 1990, 293) made a similar remark in reference to his own art: “I have forced myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own taste”. This aspect of his painting has been noticed by art critics: “In [Duchamp's] capricious meta-reality ... everything can be read at least two ways at once. If there is a law informing the whole, it is Paradox, the resonance of apparently contradicting alternatives” (D'Harnoncourt 1989, 16). The idea of contradicting alternatives is one of the inventions of the cubists themselves. The cubists argued that the representational, realistic art depicted the actual reality only from the perspective of a single viewer. According to them, three-dimensional forms display an unlimited, as it were, number of angles. Therefore a picture should aim at pointing out the multiplicity of angles and points of view. For cubists, then, there is no single perspective, the reality which is perceived is split into a number of images presented from different perspectives which are then put together again to produce a specific effect. The aim of art is no longer to present a faithful representation of reality as understood by realism but to make the viewer aware of the limits both of art and of perception. In making the receiver of a work of art aware of art being not merely an objective representation of reality, those artists demanded their creative participation. Art does not speak for itself, its overall meaning is the result of the creative effort first on the part of the artist himself and then on the part of the spectators. Marcel Duchamp, who perceived himself as a cubist (D'Harnoncourt 1989, 256), made this point clear when he described the effect of “elementary parallelism: “[The] movement is in the eye of the spectator, who incorporates it into the painting”<sup>10</sup>.

Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* and Tom Stoppard's *Artist Descending a Staircase* deal with art and are thus to quite a great extent self-reflexive. They use repetition with slight variation to investigate the limits of their respective media. Duchamp tries to evoke the idea of

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<sup>10</sup> P. Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, transl. Ron Padgett, New York 1971, Viking Press, 29. Quoted in Kelly 1986, 193.

motion in a static medium. Stoppard toys around with the incorporeality of the recording. They invite their spectators and listeners to complete the artistic illusion with their own subjective interpretation which would take into account shifts in perspective which are of vital importance for both artists. It could also be argued that the shifting perspective, the splitting of the work of art into a number of elements, demonstrates the idea that neither reality nor its artistic representation have an independent existence of their own. They come into existence, as it were, only when they are perceived and interpreted by a viewer.

## **Disrupting the theatrical illusion**

Marcel Duchamp said that he split his nude into a sequence of "abstract lines of some twenty different static positions" and thus "discarded completely the naturalistic appearance of a nude" (Quoted in D'Harnoncourt 1989, 256). Stoppard, on the other hand, employs a specific kind of non-realistic structure of the piece, adequate for his own needs and proper for the radio medium he employs. The play begins and ends with the "tape gag", interpreted differently on each occasion. What comes in – between is a sequence of scenes following a precisely worked out time-pattern. The play consists of eleven scenes, "in the sequence ABCDEFEDCBA" where "A = here and now, B = a couple of hours ago, C = last week, D = 1922, E = 1920 and F = 1914" (p. 13). Thus, the chronological configuration has a V shape with its most distant moment being situated in the first year of the war.

This structure serves a number of purposes. The fact that each phase is repeated twice adds to the overall meaning of the play. The audience's response to the same event differs on the second occasion because of what they have learnt in the meantime. The point made by the play here is that the same reality can be interpreted quite differently by someone who has been provided with some extra information. Furthermore, the play's moving from one context in one phase of time to another in a different phase, enables Stoppard to demonstrate the fallacy of the listener's perception. The scenes are united by means of audio bridges so that each successive one opens with the noise being carried over from the previous one. At times, due to the audio bridge, the listeners make a time jump into the past and seem to forget that some time has passed in the meantime. Such is the case, for instance, with scene A finishing with Beauchamp's saying "I paid him the compliment of letting him hear how my master-tape was progressing" and scene B presenting Beauchamp and Donner actually listening to the tape (p. 21). On other occasions, there is a direct aural

link between one scene and another which momentarily misleads the audience and makes them experience the unreliability of the ear. It is so with the scene from 1914 presenting the three artists on the walking tour in France ignoring the threats of war, a scene which ends with explosions. When the successive scene starts we hear all three of them saying "Left! ... left ... right ... left ... right ... right ... turn ... right a bit ... left a bit ... turn ... left ... turn ... stop!" (p. 51). Still hearing the explosions in their ears, the listeners assume that they are witnessing what happened to the protagonists during the war and the words uttered by them are interpreted as military commands. It soon appears, however, that six years have passed, that it is 1920 and that they are playing a game with Sophie trying to check whether, despite being blind, she is still able to specify her position in the room.

Stoppard's play indicates that the sounds which create an aural reality are subject to different interpretations and the listeners are thus constantly reminded that their senses cannot be trusted. The sounds do not speak for themselves – their context and their individual interpretation are of vital importance. The situation becomes even more complicated when related to an artistic representation. The sounds the audience hear do not give them any cue whether they are overhearing an actual reality (be it only an illusion of reality as created by Stoppard's play) or only an illusion of reality (or representation of the representation, the tape). That is why they treat the tape they hear at the beginning of the play as reality itself and not as its mechanical representation. Throughout the play Stoppard indicates that the radio play is only an artistic representation and not reality itself. Setting up different ambushes for the audience he draws their attention to the fact that what they hear is an aural illusion of reality, and not reality as such.

The structure of the play functions as the fundamental means of disrupting the theatrical illusion. The subject matter of the play being the relationship between perceived and recorded experience, the drama deals with the relationship between reality (life) and its representation (art) and is therefore self-reflexive. Its self-consciousness can be interpreted on a number of different levels. Being a work of art it not only discusses art (paintings, sculptures and tapes) but also draws the listeners' attention to the fact that it is art and hence contains a metatheatrical dimension. Furthermore, making use of the radio medium it employs a tape within a radio play (a tape within a tape?) which seems to be the equivalent of a play within a play in the theatre. Katherine E. Kelly (1986, 194) has noticed: "We have ... a two-part radio play composed of a brief 'text', a series of ambiguous sounds occurring simultaneously with Donner's fall, and a longer meta-text, or commentary on that text". The question remains open, however, whether the scenes of "the meta-text" are really an attempt

to interpret the fatal fall of Donner by means of providing information about what happened in the past or not. It seems to be more convincing to say that it is not the actual information about the past which helps the audience to solve the mystery of Donner's death. Rather, due to the numerous aural ambushes set by Stoppard in this part of the play, they become sensitive to the fallacy of sensual perception and start distrusting their ears. They start paying more attention to the context of the event and eventually end up with a different interpretation of the tape.

Stoppard once more concentrates on questions concerning reality its perception, imitation and interpretation. Again he argues that experience is inseparable from interpretation and interpretation, in turn, may be grotesquely inaccurate: Sophie seems to have loved the wrong man, the two artists misinterpret the tape and the listeners also make many mistakes in the course of the play which are, fortunately, corrected as it progresses. In the play Stoppard maintains that transmission of information is never a fully objective process. The receiver of any message necessarily responds with a subjective understanding of it. In a sense, the play marks a return to the ideas discussed earlier by the artist in *After Magritte* and *Where Are They Now*. Whereas in the case of *After Magritte*, a play for the stage, the problems relate to the interpretation of visual images, in the case of *Artist Descending a Staircase*, a radio play, the misinterpretation of visual images (the painting Sophie remembers having seen at the exhibition) is of secondary importance. Aural images, also very significant in *Where Are They Now*, are of paramount interest here. The play demonstrates that we may be equally misguided by what we see as by what we hear. The perception of reality, just like its interpretation, are subjective to quite a great extent.



## VI. *Jumpers*

First produced on 2nd February 1972 by the National Theatre, at the Old Vic, *Jumpers* won two prizes: in 1972 it was voted the best play of the year both by the readers of *The Evening Standard* and by the critics of *Plays and Players* (Brassell 1987, 115, 280). This piece employs several motifs encountered earlier in the playwright's output. The germ of *Jumpers* lay in his 1967 short TV play – *Another Moon Called Earth*. In both plays there is an ailing wife, a busy husband, a doctor taking care of the wife, a detective coming to investigate a murder and a moon landing. Ronald Hayman (1979b, 4), in his first interview with the playwright, noticed the drama's link with a dialogue in Stoppard's first successful drama: "*Jumpers* seems to take its starting point from the moment in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* when Rosencrantz says, 'Shouldn't we be doing something constructive?' and Guildenstern asks him, 'What did you have in mind? A short blunt human pyramid?'" Stoppard answered with a straightforward affirmation. Later on, commenting on the process of writing the play, he said:

At the same time there's more than one point of origin for a play, and the only useful metaphor I can think of for the way I think I write my plays is convergences of different threads. Perhaps carpet-making would suggest something similar. One of the threads was the entirely visual image of the pyramid of acrobats, but while thinking of that pyramid I knew I wanted to write a play about a professor of moral philosophy, and it's the work of a moment to think that there was a metaphor at work in the play already between acrobatics, mental acrobatics and so on. Actually, it's not a bad way of getting excited about a play. (Hayman 1979b, 4–5)

The part of the interview concerning *Travesties* is interesting for at least two reasons. Stoppard stresses here the theatrical aspect of the performance. As a playwright fully aware of the theatrical aspects of the performance, of the play being a piece whose aim is to entertain and interest "a roomful of people", he pays great attention to the possibilities and limitations offered by the medium. At the same time, while wanting to write a funny play, he is also interested in presenting an intellectual argument coherently

through theatre. Stoppard has commented on this in another interview, whose title is very telling here – “Ambushes for the Audience: Towards a High Comedy of Ideas”. Having said that *After Magritte* was not “an intellectual play” but “a nuts-and-bolts comedy”, he added: “What I try to do, is to end up by contriving the perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce or perhaps even high comedy” (Hudson interview 1974, 7–8). He thinks that *Jumpers* is “fairly close to a play which works as a funny play and which makes coherent, in terms of theatre, a fairly complicated intellectual argument”.

It has become a habit on Stoppard's part to come up with many versions of his major plays, the changes reflecting not only his own corrections but also revisions introduced during consecutive productions. In “Author's Note” to the second edition of *Jumpers* he mentions the difficulties facing him while preparing his plays for publication. Later on in the “Note” he expresses his gratitude and indebtedness to Peter Wood (p. 11). In “Programme of the National Theatre Revival” the latter writes: “When I first asked [Stoppard] what the play was about [he] said, ‘It's about a man trying to write a lecture.’ But for me it was about a man trying to write a lecture *while his wife was stuck with a corpse in the next room*” (quoted in Page 1986, p. 37). While Stoppard stressed the philosophical content of the play, Wood also mentioned its affinities with the whodunit, a genre which often forms a part of the intricate web of Stoppard's drama.

Being a very complex play, *Jumpers* consists of a number of elements which cross and recross themselves, at times come to the foreground and at others remain in the background. The play comprises a number of basic motifs. Firstly, there is a whodunit concerning the murder of one of the *Jumpers*, the investigation which follows the collapse of the pyramid of acrobats at the beginning of the play. Secondly, there is the neurosis of Dotty Moore, the former singer and actress. Thirdly, there is the philosophical debate concerning morality and the existence of God presented by the two main opponents – George Moore and Archie Jumper. There is yet a fourth motif, the one of the possible marital triangle formed by Dotty, George and Archie yet it seems that this motif can be discussed in connection with the second one. The common element in all of them is the search for truth and the confusion between reality and appearance, no matter whether it concerns the reality close-at-hand (murder), the distant reality of the moon or the metaphysical reality of God and moral absolutes.

The bizarre, highly theatrical opening of the play, depicting the party taking place in the Moores' house which celebrates the take-over of power by the Rad-Liberal party, consists of a bravura theatrical collage of many theatrical forms. Lucina Paquet Gabbard (1982, 96) writes: “The swinging trapeze, the songs, the jokes, and the nudity mix together bits of vaudeville,

musical comedy, and burlesque into a legitimate stage drama". Watching the strange, hilarious events taking place in front of their eyes, the audience are in the dark and suspect that they might share Crouch's fate. While serving drinks at the party he fails to notice the secretary swinging on the trapeze and is finally knocked down, despite the warning shouts of the other onlookers on stage. The audience become aware that his collapse has been brought about by a failure of his perception. He was not looking in its direction and therefore was unaware of the trapeze swinging "*like a pendulum between darkness and darkness*" (p. 17). The scene presenting Crouch's fall becomes an apt metaphor for the entire play and also for the situation of the theatre audience. They try to grasp the overall meaning of what is happening on the stage, to provide logical explanations and justifications of the events yet they never arrive at fully satisfactory conclusions. Reality does not present an unambiguous image which could be agreed upon by all the observers, the subjective element in perception and interpretation making this impossible.

## The whodunit

The first mystery we are invited to solve and explain is the murder mystery. Thus we enter the realm of a whodunit. Towards the end of the Prologue (which is not stated in the printed text as a separate part but undoubtedly could be isolated as one), the Jumpers form a human pyramid. Suddenly a gun shot is heard, one Jumper from the bottom row is blown out of it "*leaving it intact*" for a few moments before "*it slowly collapses into the dark, imploding on the missing part*". The shot Jumper "*starts to move, dying, pulling himself up against DOTTY's legs*" and "*She looks at him with surprise as he crawls up her body. ... She holds him under his arms, and looks around in a bewildered way*". She then calls out to Archie who tells her to keep the body out of sight and promises to be back at eight the next morning (p. 21). Dotty's surprise and bewilderment might indicate that she is shocked by what has happened. At the same time, however, the stage directions indicate that "*it should be possible to believe that DOTTY is responsible*" for what has happened (pp. 20–21). What the audience see not only makes it "possible to believe" that Dotty has killed the man but, for most of the drama, leaves them and many of the characters of the play with no doubt that she actually did.

The suspicions are strengthened by her calls directed to George the next morning when it is already nine o'clock and Archie has not come yet, as he promised, to relieve her of the corpse. She starts with quiet and then slightly louder cries for help and then, "*in panic*" shouts: "Help! Murder!"

to go on: "Oh, horror, horror, horror! Confusion now hath made its masterpiece ... most sacrilegious murder! – (*Different voice.*) Woe, alas! What, in our house?" (p. 24). The sentences she utters are quotations from *Macbeth* – the first two are said in the original by Macduff on discovering King Duncan's body while the latter two belong to Lady Macbeth (II, iii, lines 61, 63 and 85 respectively). That Dotty quotes from *Macbeth* is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, two reactions of people to the same event are juxtaposed – the real horror of Macduff and Lady Macbeth's hypocritically pious shock<sup>1</sup>. The same event is thus classified differently by people whose perspective and values vary. The fact that Dotty uses both the characters' lines can be also treated as an indication of her mixed feelings in regard to the event.

Furthermore, the quotation of the lines of Shakespeare's tragedy might be considered in reference to Dotty's being the possible murderess of the Jumper. Lady Macbeth, being responsible for the killing of the king, utters these words in order to dispel any possible suspicion concerning her guilt. Taking into account that the dead Jumper's name is *Duncan* McFee, one could argue that Dotty's using Lady Macbeth's line suggests she may have had a hand in the murder of the Jumper<sup>2</sup>. The actual scene of the Jumper being shot, indicating Dotty's possible guilt, is, however, undermined by what follows in the play, by her own reactions and utterances as well as by the behaviour and opinions of other characters.

Dotty is undoubtedly in a shock. On the morning following the murder, she is all alone in her bedroom, trying to hide the body, waiting for Archie's arrival and his promised help. In a moment of despair she starts calling George for help, quoting the lines from *Macbeth*. George does not react, however, being busy preparing his lecture for the symposium. Even though Dotty's scream "*sounds in earnest*" he thinks that her consecutive shouts: "Murder – Rape – Wolves!" are a charade, a game they are both fond of playing. His reaction indicates that she has literally cried wolf too often and that George has ceased to attend to her. Later on he goes to her

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Hu (1989, 90) has similarly commented on the scene: "Stoppard notes the change of roles between her characters in a stage direction ('Different voice.'). Dotty presents the reactions of two characters of different sensibilities to the murder of Duncan. She realises that one character displays true surprise and outrage, while the other is a murderess practising deception through the display of false compassion. Personal points of reference determine emotional and ethical attitudes".

<sup>2</sup> Having mentioned such a possibility of reading the lines Richard Dutton (1986, 178) writes: "But the the very fact that these are quotations from *Macbeth*, rather than any other play, raises other possibilities. Everyone knows that the 'Scottish play' has attracted more superstition for bad luck than anything else in the theatre; many theatrical people will not quote from it at all, so we may take it that the old trouper, Dotty, has been profoundly shocked to break this taboo. (And so is innocent?)".

room, looking for his hare, Thumper. When he enters it, he does not see the corpse. Neither do the members of the audience, the body being nowhere in sight. She still wants to communicate the tragic news to her husband and that is why her “*nude body is sprawled face down and apparently lifeless on the bed*” when he enters the room. As soon as he learns she is “a book” he guesses the title at once – *The Naked and the Dead* (p. 30) and gets ready to go back to his study. When he does so and shuts the door behind him, the audience get a glimpse of the corpse which is hanging on it. They are entirely taken by surprise by the discovery. A kind of macabre, surrealistic effect is created for the audience when the body is revealed and then obscured again with each successive exit and entrance into the room<sup>3</sup>.

George changes his mind, however, and on his return, a long marital scene follows. The scene is introduced in a masterly way by the earlier charade, *The Naked and the Dead*, which works on two levels, as it were. The audience realise, while George does not, that it has a literal meaning. She is the naked one while the shot Jumper is the dead one. This point is further strengthened by her when, not seeming to be able to find any understanding on his part, she says:

Go on, get out and write your stupid speech for your dreamland debating society! I thought for once – I mean I seriously thought I might get a little – understanding – yes, finding myself in a bit of a spot, I seriously considered trusting you – for a little panache, without a lot of pedantic questions and hadn't-we-better-inform-the authorities. I mean we should be able to rise *above* that – but not *you*, oh no, do you wonder I turn to Archie? –  
(p. 32)

This speech of hers is indicative of two important things. Firstly, her words might indicate that she is the murderess or at least that she is involved in the murder (why else should she want to hide the event from the authorities?). Secondly, it becomes obvious that she is not able to find support or understanding in George, as her mentioning of Archie indicates.

When she tries to communicate the information concerning the murder, she is appealing to George for help and understanding. The scene may be taken as referring to the concrete situation connected with murder and the

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<sup>3</sup> Commenting on the National Theatre production Stoppard wrote in a note to the text: “In the event, the corpse was not hung on the back of the Bedroom door, in the original production, but on the inside of the door of a cupboard adjacent to the Bedroom door; the closing of the Bedroom door mysteriously caused the opening of the cupboard door, a device gratefully borrowed from the famous Robert Dhery sketch in *La Plume de ma Tante*” (p. 30). No matter, however, where the corpse is hung, it is of vital importance for the meaning of the play for George not to see it, while the audience are fully aware of its existence. Once more the difference between the understanding of what is going on by the audience and by a character (George, in this case) depends on the perspective at which the event is being watched.

corpse. Yet, it may also be understood in relationship with the situation in which their marriage has found itself where she feels vulnerable and lost. A conversation follows, full of sexual hints, and after Dotty's twice repeated plea "I'll let you" George says: "I don't want to be 'let'. Can't you see that it's an insult?" to which Dotty "*drops back on to the bed in a real despair, and perhaps a real contrition*" (p. 31). In depression brought about by her nervous breakdown and McFee's death, she desperately wants to achieve understanding between herself and her husband. There is none, however, left. She stopped having sex with him and he suspects her of having an affair with Archie:

We have on the one hand, that is to say in bed, an attractive married woman whose relationship with her husband stops short only of the issue of a ration book; we have on the other hand daily visits by a celebrated ladies' man who rings the doorbell, is admitted by Mrs. Thing who shows him into the bedroom, whence he emerges an hour later looking more than a little complacent and crying, "Don't worry, I'll let myself out!" (p. 32)

George's speech makes his suspicions concerning the relationship between Dotty and Archie quite clear (the pun on 'let out' being very indicative here). To his question "Does anything suggest itself?" Dotty calmly answers: "Sounds to me he's a doctor. (GEORGE *is staggered*)", (p. 32). Thus one of the motifs of reality and appearance is introduced. Is Archie a lover (as he seems to be, to George, at least) or is he a doctor?

The ending of the marital scene is a return to the beginning. Both of these include an emblematic scene of a charade displaying nude Dotty and both of them are connected with the corpse in the room. In the first case, however, Dotty seems to be using her attractiveness to draw George's attention to herself and make him help her out of the situation. In the second one, being aware that she can neither attract him sexually nor hope for his help with the dead Jumper, she can safely use her naked body to prevent George from seeing the corpse. As the scene closes, the audience can be certain of one thing only, namely of the marital crisis which cannot be overcome. Other questions remain open, the basic two being: the relationship between Archie and Dotty and the murder mystery. Has Dotty killed the Jumper? If not, why is she trying to conceal his body and why does she fear the authorities?

New light is shed on the whodunit motif after the entrance of the police inspector, Bones. He has been summoned by a mysterious telephone call from a stranger and has come to arrest Dotty. He is a great fan of show business so he is glad to have been called:

if the telephone call which set in motion this inquiry was the whim of a lunatic, as I myself suspect, then I will simply take the opportunity of presenting this token of tribute to a fine actress, a great singer and a true lady - (p. 45)

It is worth stressing here that Bones is, as it were, prepared to play different roles when entering the house. He will either act as a detective or as a devoted admirer of Dotty. In the course of the drama he will also play other roles – those of a psychiatrist (p. 58) and a waiter or servant (p. 61). Thus he is able to assume poses characteristic of theatricality in everyday life, no matter whether private or professional.

The conversation between Bones and George which follows is yet another example of Stoppard's use of contravention of co-referential rules. The play includes a number of double-entendres, puns and scenes where characters are talking at cross purposes which can be seen as yet another aspect of the general vulnerability of language or/and as a sign of a different way of perceiving and interpreting reality. In many cases the audience can enjoy the humour springing from the fact that the characters, even though seemingly talking about the same thing are, in fact, referring to different things. George supposes that Bones has come because of the anonymous telephone call he himself made the previous evening complaining about the noise at the party<sup>4</sup>. Bones' questions, however, indicate that the issue he has been called about is much more serious. He mentions the possibility of arresting Dotty, and makes enquiries about an acrobat and the scene of crime (pp. 47–49). He appears to know that a murder has been committed during the party and that Dotty is the culprit. The audience and George discover later that he has been informed about the murder by yet another anonymous telephone call to the police. It was Crouch who called and informed them of the murder of McFee and pointed to Dotty as the possible suspect (p. 77).

The Inspector, after yet another conversation with George about philosophy, decides to abandon the investigation concerning the murder: "so I tell my Sergeant to have a cup of tea and off I go thinking to myself, at last a chance to pay my respects in person, and blow me if it doesn't start to look straight up as soon as I put one foot in the door" (p. 52). Bones, who earlier warned George not to be "misled by appearances" (p. 45), now, making the same mistake himself, decides to stop being a detective and starts playing the part of Dotty's dedicated fan. When she greets him with "*a long slow smile ... from behind the closed curtains, the stiff dead JUMPER falls into the room like a too-hastily-leaned plank*" (p. 52). Bones goes out of Dotty's bedroom, the audience can see him talking to George, but they cannot know what they are talking about because the music coming from Dotty's room is too loud. The obvious conclusion

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<sup>4</sup> In 1976 and 1985 revivals of the play a sequence was included showing George making his phone call of complaint; to remain anonymous he claimed to be Mr. Wittgenstein (Jenkins 1988, 186).

would be that he has started pursuing his duty as a detective again. This is not the case, however, because when he enters from the kitchen entrance "*he is pushing a well-laden dinner trolley in front of him*" and, acting as a manservant, he is bringing lunch for Dotty (p. 57). On his way, he meets George and from the conversation that follows the audience learn that, even though still aware of his duty as a detective, as Dotty's admirer he wants to protect her. Therefore, speaking as a psychiatrist, he suggests that any "eminent psychiatrist expert witness would be prepared" to defend her. The conversation between the two is full of misunderstandings and confusion as George is still unaware of the murder and the corpse and the two men are referring to different things. Bones is speaking about the crime, while George is referring to his missing hare, Thumper, and his own telephone call to the police. More and more staggered, heated, angry and confused, Bones finally says forthrightly, in a way impossible to misconstrue, that there is a body lying on the floor of Dotty's bedroom. Understanding his meaning at last, George is still unwilling to believe him and thus they enter Dotty's bedroom.

There is no one in view in the room. Strange sounds are coming from behind the drapes hiding Dotty's bed from view. The stage directions tell us that "*these sounds are consistent with a proper doctor-patient relationship*", yet George's bitter remark indicates that something else might be taking place (p. 60). Archie might be examining Dotty but they might just as well be making love or quite close to doing so. Which is the reality and which only the appearance is not clear. The body of the dead Jumper is nowhere to be seen. The Inspector does not know what has happened during the time when he was out of the room. The audience, however, witnessed the events at the end of the first act: in an improvised choreography scene to the music of "Sentimental Journey", Archie, with the help of seven Jumpers, put the body into a big plastic bag which was then carried out. The visual images of the scene evoke an apparently nonsensical sentence uttered earlier by George concerning the Rad-Lib philosophy claim: "No problem is insoluble given a big enough plastic bag" (p. 40). The scene of removing McFee's body is a parody of funeral rites and the point which it makes is that nothing is sacred to people like Archie. McFee is no longer a man who was once alive and then was brutally killed. He has deteriorated to the status of an object, a disposable man, rubbish which can be placed in a plastic bag.

Inspector Bones, though unwillingly – because of his fascination with Dotty, pursues his investigation, after having, in the role of manservant, delivered lunch to Dotty and Archie<sup>5</sup>. When Archie says he is to blame,

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<sup>5</sup> Once more, the audience's and Bones', in this case, expectations are not gratified. It seemed he was getting the meal for himself and Dotty, the reality is different. He has been replaced, as it were, by Archie who has arrived in the meantime.



Bones, still assuming Dotty is the guilty one, thinks he is trying to protect her. Archie, however, argues that there are many people who could have killed McFee for different reasons and even mentions himself as a possible culprit:

McFee was the guardian and figurehead of philosophical orthodoxy, and if he threatened to start calling on his masters to return to the true path, then I'm a afraid it would certainly have been an ice-pick in the back of the skull. (p. 64)

The sentence may go unnoticed or at least remain unclear to Bones and the audience alike because it has not been revealed yet that McFee was thinking of withdrawing from politics and philosophy. Taking into account the information, coming later in the play, about his desire to enter a monastery, Archie may really have had good enough reasons to kill McFee, at least in his own mind. A prominent member of the Rad-Lib Party should not, even must not, express any interest in religious and moral matters which, according to its doctrine, are irrelevant<sup>6</sup>.

Bones still insists that Dotty is guilty. He thinks, however, that, when put on trial, she could get off with a light sentence if the court took into account her mental instability and nervous breakdown. Arguing that "a court appearance would be most embarrassing to [his] client and patient", Archie appears in the roles of a lawyer and a doctor. He comes up with yet another idea – the case is not one of murder:

What I had in mind is that McFee, suffering from nervous strain brought on by the appalling pressure of overwork – for which I blame myself entirely – left here last night in a mood of deep depression, and wandered into the park, where he crawled into a large plastic bag and shot himself. (p. 64)

This explanation, absurd as it is, provides an explanation as to why Archie earlier said he was to blame. Bones has some doubts left, yet far too few for an efficient detective. Archie could make him accept this interpretation, especially as he tempts him first with a bribe and then with possible personal profits he could give the Inspector. Their conversation is interrupted and no agreement is reached.

Archie does not abandon his explanation of McFee's death and tells George that McFee "shot himself this morning, in the park, in a plastic bag" (p. 68). The information concerning the Jumper's death seems to get

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<sup>6</sup> Hunter (1982, 233) in his study of Stoppard's plays, paying great attention to possible sources, allusions and references, notices: "'an ice-pick in the back of the skull' alludes to the murder in 1940 of Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of the Bolshevik revolution, who was dismissed from office after failing to persuade his colleagues back to what he thought was the true path".

through to George at last. His astonishment on hearing the news indicates that he has been completely unaware of the murder so far. The conversation between the two philosophers seems to indicate that Archie might be the murderer. Why else should he be interested in whether George has mentioned to the Inspector the "furious row" he had with McFee the previous night (p. 68)? Such a possibility is strengthened by the fact that it is he who removed the body, by his providing the suicide theory and then by trying to bribe the Inspector to make him accept this explanation. If he is really a murderer he escapes justice by cunningly using his own interpretation of a situation which takes place soon afterwards. When he enters Dotty's bedroom on hearing her shouts: "Rape! (*Pause.*) *Ra-!*" he sees her sobbing across the bed and Bones standing by as if paralysed. Treating it as an apparently compromising position, Archie makes Bones drop the case in return for his good name (pp. 70-71).

The official investigation thus ended, the whodunit has not been solved for the audience yet. The play provides us with some further insights into the matter, most of them given by Crouch. It is during the conversation with the porter that George finally realises that McFee was killed. He has been completely unaware of all the earlier hints and has evidently forgotten having heard about it from Archie. Shocked by the revelation he runs into Dotty's bedroom:

GEORGE: Crouch says McFee was shot! here – last night – He thinks Dorothy did it –  
 DOTTY: I thought Archie did it. You didn't do it, did you, Georgie? (*Disappears into Bathroom.*)

GEORGE: Crouch says – You can't hide! – Dorothy – it's not a game! Crouch says he *saw* – For God's sake – I don't know what to do –

ARCHIE: Crouch says he saw what, George?

GEORGE: Well, he didn't actually *see* ...

ARCHIE: Quite. We just don't *know*.

GEORGE: There are many things I know which are not verifiable but nobody can tell me I don't know them, and I think that I know that something happened to poor Dotty and she somehow killed McFee, as sure as she killed my poor Thumper.

(p. 78)

This conversation is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it appears that there are three possible culprits – Dotty, Archie and George. Secondly, the two philosophers' attitude to the murder marks their philosophical standpoints. Just as understanding of reality may differ depending on one's perception, it may also differ according to one's interpretation, a philosophical one, in this case. For Archie, a logical positivist, there is no possibility of establishing who has killed McFee. Nobody has seen the actual killer so his identity will never be known. For George, on the other hand, certain things do not have to be empirically proved. He knows that

Dotty killed the fish when she took it out from the bowl which she wanted to use for the charade "The Moon and Sixpence". If, then, she killed the fish, she could have killed McFee and Thumper as well. Thirdly, George's investigation concerning the killer of Thumper (even though the hare's body has not been found yet, he assumes the animal has been killed) is a parody of Bones' investigation concerning McFee<sup>7</sup>.

Later on, in a conversation with Archie, Crouch reveals some more information relevant to the question of McFee's death. It is then that the audience get to know about the dead Jumper's crisis after the moon landing, the events which took place on the satellite and after seeing the future which, according to him, was yellow (p. 80). If, then, McFee was really terrified by some aspects of the philosophy he had been following and decided to enter a monastery he could have been killed by Archie. Crouch indicates yet another possible culprit, though not directly – the Secretary. It appears that she had been secretly betrothed to McFee. The engagement was kept secret because he had a wife who knew about the affair while the Secretary did not know about the wife's existence. Soon before his death McFee "told her it was all off" because he was entering a monastery (p. 81). The possibility that the Secretary may have killed the Jumper is underlined by several visual and aural hints provided by Stoppard at the end of the play, during her exit. After Crouch has uttered the sentence "And now he's dead" the "SECRETARY *snaps her handbag shut with a sharp sound*" and her coat "*has a bright splash of blood on its back*" (p. 81). The sound is reminiscent of the shot which killed McFee. The blood may symbolise her being a murderess. Stoppard's visual and aural clues are subtle but may undoubtedly make one wonder whether it is not the Secretary who has killed McFee<sup>8</sup>.

While a seed of doubt is planted in the audience concerning the Secretary's possible guilt, George

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<sup>7</sup> In this context it is pertinent to notice that George and Bones are, in a sense, parodies of each other. On the one hand, George's investigation concerning Thumper is a parody of Bones' investigation concerning McFee. On the other hand, Bones can be interpreted as a mundane reflection of George. He reduces George's problems concerning discovering metaphysical truth to an everyday level of a murder mystery, to their bare bones, as it were. For neither of them, however, the establishing of the truth is possible.

<sup>8</sup> G. B. Crump (1979, 358), in connection with the blood on the secretary's coat makes a reference to A. J. Ayer's seminal work *Language, Truth and Logic*: "One of Ayer's illustrations in the revised introduction of 1946 may have supplied Stoppard with the seed of the idea for his play: 'The statement that I have blood on my coat may, in certain circumstances, confirm the hypothesis that I have committed a murder; but it is not part of the meaning of the statement that I have committed a murder that I should have blood upon my coat.' That is, a man may kill without getting bloody or have blood on his coat without being a murderer." (The quotation from Ayer comes from 1946 rpt., New York, Dover, 1952, 14).

*realises that the blood must have come from the top of the cupboard, i.e. wardrobe. He puts Pat, whom he had been holding, down now and climbs up to look into the top of the cupboard; and withdraws from the unseen depths his mis-fired arrow, on which is impaled Thumper.*

(p. 81)

Earlier in the play, on hearing Dotty's shout "Fire!" he misfired an arrow he was holding in his hand which was meant to be one of the proofs in his lecture for God's existence (p. 28). Now, broken down and sobbing, he steps down, right onto Pat. Seeing that he has accidentally killed both his pets he shouts: "Dotty! Help! Murder!" (p. 81). Thus, the end of the second act is a reversal of the situation from the beginning of the play when Dotty was shouting for help to the unresponding George. Unlike the mystery concerning the murderer of Thumper (which is solved) the whodunit in the case of McFee does not find a resolution, the three possible suspects being Dotty, Archie and the Secretary<sup>9</sup>. In this respect the play seems to be following Archie's argument:

The truth to us philosophers, Mr. Crouch, is always an interim judgement. We will never know for certain who did shoot McFee. Unlike mystery novels, life does not guarantee a denouement; and if it came, how would one know whether to believe it? (p. 81)

Stoppard himself has written: "I began *Jumpers* thinking that Dotty was going to be the murderer of McFee, but I got too fond of her and ended up by trying to make a virtue of not declaring who-dun-it"<sup>10</sup>. Some critics have found this solution quite disturbing<sup>11</sup>. It seems, however, that Stoppard does provide an answer, at least to an extent acceptable in a play whose concern is the difficulty of knowing. The answer appears to be provided in the Coda when Clegthorpe is shot out of the pyramid of *Jumpers* in a stage image which is a repetition of that from the beginning of the play. The killing of Clegthorpe is preceded by a conversation between

<sup>9</sup> Gordon (1991, 35–38) presents a list of four possible culprits also including George and provides a long list of motives each of them may have had to kill McFee.

<sup>10</sup> *Introduction*, [in:] *The Dog It Was That Died*, 1983, 8.

<sup>11</sup> See, especially, Dougald McMillan (1981, p. 69) and Ronald Hayman (interview 1974, 20). Barbara Kreps (1986, 191–192) reports on Kenneth Tynan's being worried with the ambiguity of the whodunit plot and having complained about it in numerous notes and letters sent to Sir Lawrence Olivier and the director – Peter Wood: "I know Tom's objection to this, but I still maintain that to set up a whodunit and not reveal whodidit is very confusing. The audience will feel cheated". His objections are fully specified in a memo dated 19 January 1972: "Even if Tom rejects the idea of saying who did it, I'm certain that there should be at least a statement to the effect that it doesn't *matter* who did it. As things stand, the question we've been asking all evening is simply ignored at the end. I don't think it can be set aside so lightly – not only for theatrical reasons, but also because murder is a crime against morality and one of our main themes is the validity of morality".

him and Archie in which the sentences uttered by the latter evoke Richard III's murder of Hastings, "My Lord Archbishop, when I was last in Lambeth I saw good strawberries in your garden" (p. 85) and Henry II's disposal of Thomas Becket, "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest" (p. 85)<sup>12</sup>. Even though we do not know the actual killer of Clegthorpe, the scene preceding the murder indicates that Archie is responsible for the crime. If we take into account that Clegthorpe, just like McFee earlier, has started questioning the values presented by the Rad-Liberal Party, that both of them have moved towards accepting spiritual and moral values and thus have become potential enemies of Archie, it is clear that Archie is the guilty one.

Dougald McMillan (1981, 69) criticises the drama for not supplying a solution of the murder mystery, yet he writes: "Murder is explained by the absence from the real world of the moral absolutes which George exposes in the abstract". The situation presented in the play may be viewed in the light of the totalitarian take-over which has occurred during the elections. What is happening in the country is an indication that the new government has its own rules, greatly different from the generally accepted principles of morality and justice. In a country like that political murders often remain unsolved. A whodunit implies a universe in which justice will operate, in which an acceptable code of rightness will prevail, so that it will be possible to prove who committed a crime and why. The form presupposes such ethical security. Stoppard, however, poses a different premise: what if such trust were misplaced and were itself a mere fiction, if power rather than right prevailed?

The ambiguity pertaining to the whodunit can be explained in yet another way if we look at it from the angle of epistemological uncertainty so characteristic of most of Stoppard's plays. If people tend to perceive and then interpret reality in a subjective way, can we ever say that we really know what it is really like, can we be absolutely certain that our interpretation of it is correct? One of the basic problems in *Jumpers* is the characters' attempt to discover the absolute truth. But does it exist? Isn't it rather that we take appearance for reality, that we are misled by a mere illusion which we have created? The discovery of the clash between illusion and reality becomes the reason for Dotty's nervous breakdown. It could also be argued that McFee's and Clegthorpe's deaths have the same cause. McFee, greatly depressed by the behaviour of the lunonauts decides to turn to religion and abandon the world ruled by the immoral Radical Liberals.

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<sup>12</sup> W. Shakespeare, *Richard III*, III, iv, 33-35. For a discussion of the validity of these sentences see, especially Hu 1989, 100; Hunter 1982, 85; Londré 1981, 63 and Rusinko 1986, 42.

Clegthorpe does not decide to enter a monastery yet realises that there is a great difference between the theoretical aspect of their philosophy and its application in real life. Both of them turn against Archie, representing the philosophical mainstream of the day and the new totalitarian power and have to pay for it.

### **Dotty's nervous breakdown**

The second motif of *Jumpers*, dealing with Dotty and her neurosis, is the one in which the clash between reality and illusion is most evident. Her nervous breakdown may have been brought about by many reasons – her husband's lack of understanding, the political, philosophical and moral debate going on around her and finally the moon-landing and the events which took place on the satellite. At the same time, this motif is related to the question of knowing which bothers the characters of the play and the audience alike. At one point in the play, trying to form a judgement about what he has just seen, George says: "How the hell does one know what to believe?" The secretary mistakenly puts it down in the notes for the lecture. At first George objects, after a moment's hesitation, however, he decides to include it, in a slightly changed version: "How does one know what it is one believes when it's so difficult to know what it is one knows" (p. 71). In George's lecture the question is posed with regard to the metaphysical reality, namely in connection with the issue of the existence of God. His first question, however, concerns the difficulty of interpreting the reality surrounding him. And in this context it could be treated as a motto or leitmotif of the entire play.

In the case of Dotty, questions may be asked by the audience with reference to two problems. Firstly, there is the murder mystery. The initial stage image and Crouch's reaction indicate "*it should be possible to believe*" that she is the murderess (pp. 20–21). As the play progresses, however, it becomes highly improbable that she is actually one. Secondly, there is the question of her relationship with Archie – is he her lover or is he merely her doctor? The issue is raised explicitly by two scenes in the play. On the first occasion, Archie is examining Dotty. Both of them are hidden from view. The only information provided to us and to George is of an aural type. The broken phrases which are uttered could be indicative that a meeting of lovers is taking place. The stage directions, however, indicate that: "*These sounds are consistent with a proper doctor-patient relationship*" (p. 60). What is actually going on – is it really just a case of a doctor examining a patient or a love scene between Archie and Dotty? George's reaction indicates that he suspects the latter. The second scene takes place

later on, when he re-enters the room. He notices Archie and Dotty watching the read-back of Dotty's naked body on the TV screen. On his inquiring what is happening this conversation follows:

ARCHIE: The dermatograph, you know. All kinds of disturbances under the skin show up on the surface, if we can learn to read it, and we –

GEORGE (*abruptly turning off the set, so that the Big Screen goes blank*): You must think I'm a bloody fool!

ARCHIE: What do you mean?

GEORGE: Well, everything you do makes it *look* like as if you're ...

(*Pause.*)

ARCHIE: Well, what would it have looked like if it had *looked* as if I were making a dermatographical examination? (p. 78)

On both occasions, George expresses his strong suspicions with regard to the situation he witnesses. It appears, also to the audience, that Archie and Dotty are sexually involved. But then, as they should realise by now, appearances can be deceptive, a fact which George himself acknowledged earlier in a sentence Archie now makes a comic reference to:

Meeting a friend in a corridor, Wittgenstein said: "Tell me, why do people always say it was *natural* for men to assume that the sun went round the earth rather than the earth was rotating?" His friend said, "Well, obviously, because it just looks as if the sun is going round the earth". To which the philosopher replied, "Well, what would it have looked like if it had looked as if earth was rotating?" (p. 75)

In many cases a given situation can be understood differently depending on the observer, the perspective from which he is observing the phenomenon, his individual perception and subjective interpretation. In such instances, it is just not possible to establish what is the reality and what is its mere illusion.

The interpretation of the thing perceived may also alter because of the distance between the object and the perceiver. Stoppard develops this theme by exploiting the deromanticising effect of close-ups. Dotty's skin, for instance, is celebrated by Archie who stresses its sensuality saying: "her skin as soft and warm as velvet – you think that when I run my hands over her back I am carried away by the delicate contours that flow like a sea-shore from shoulder to heel – " (p. 70). It ceases to be a pin up, however, and loses its glamour when it is magnified by the dermatograph to huge dimensions on the screen. In order to emphasise the point of the meaning of this scene, Stoppard has made several discreet references to skin blemishes at various points of the play – George squeezes a blackhead (p. 35) and Dotty has been shaving her legs with his razor (p. 35). Also people, on closer view do not look as we would have expected. The stripper

on the swing even though “*young and attractive*” is “*poker faced, almost grim*” (p. 14). Similarly, the Jumpers “*although they pass muster at first glance ... are not as universally youthful or athletic looking as one might expect*” (p. 15).

The most devastating effect of the close-up is to be noticed with regard to the moon. Just like Penelope in *Jumper's* predecessor, *Another Moon Called Earth*, Dotty breaks down after the moon landing. Her depression has been caused by two interrelated factors. Firstly, the moon-landing has had a de-romanticising effect: “When they first landed, it was as though I'd seen a unicorn on the television news ... It was very interesting, of course. But it certainly spoiled unicorns” (p. 38). Technological man has defiled Dotty's romantic ideal and her metaphysical world is left in fragments. Due to a close-up, illusion has become reality, the moon of poets has disappeared and the TV screen has presented the disillusioning bareness of the lunar landscape. For Dotty, the intrusion of reality defaces the ideal moon to the point where she cannot put the words of popular moon songs together any more to celebrate it and so her career comes to an end<sup>13</sup>.

Secondly, the romantic, mystical quality of the moon has been destroyed not only by the picture presented by the TV cameras but also by the behaviour of the first lunonauts. What happened on the moon was an inversion of ideal human behaviour, the idea being stressed by Stoppard when he gave the names of the members of Scott's expedition to the Antarctic (1910–1912) to his lunonauts. The historical Oates, incapacitated by frost-bite and not wishing to be a burden to his already hard-pressed companions, walked out into the snows and wilderness. Jim Hunter (1982, 230) writes: “Oates's death is often instanced as an example of human altruism<sup>14</sup>”. Oates's final words “I am going out now. I may be gone some time”, in a slightly changed form, are transferred in *Jumpers* to Captain Scott as he saves his own skin at his partner's expense (p. 23). By converting an archetype of heroic sacrifice into a case of selfishness and expediency Stoppard makes the moon events act as an illustration of the debate concerning morality as presented by George and Archie. Dotty, who thinks “things were in place” before the moon-landing (p. 41), wonders whether it “is ... *significant* that it's impossible to imagine anyone building a church on the moon?” (p. 39). Then, in her last speech about the moon, she tearfully reflects that the moon-landing has made the world seem little and local and thus has undermined the absolutes men previously took on trust: “and all our absolutes, the thou-shalts and the thou-shalt-nots that seemed to be the very condition of

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to notice here that both the close-up of the moon-surface and of Dotty's skin are presented on the huge screen. The pits and craters on both the surfaces are similar. Both kinds of “heavenly bodies” are shown to be flawed on a closer inspection.

<sup>14</sup> This point is raised by George in his lecture (p. 80).



our existence, how did *they* look to two moonmen with a single neck to save between them? Like the local customs of another place". Appalled by the vision of moral anarchy she fears will be unleashed, she finishes her speech by saying: "Because the truths that have been taken on trust, they've never had edges before, there was no vantage point to stand on and see where they stopped" (p. 75).

In her reactions with regard to the moon landing Dotty looks at the event from two perspectives, as it were. On the one hand, there is the romantic image of the moon as something ideal or even metaphysical (something similar to a unicorn). That this image can be ruined by an actual moon-landing is only too obvious as Stoppard argued in his interview when he compared it to a kind "of lobotomy performed on the human race" (Hudson interview 1974, 17). On the other hand, however, there is the behaviour of the two lunonauts which is not related to the moon but is undoubtedly linked with morality. Dotty's, and McFee's, shock and disgust are thus intrinsically bound not with the distant satellite but with the appalling prospect that the relativist morality of the Radical Liberals has started spreading. In this respect Dotty's reaction to the events on the moon is not so much connected with the planet as it is with the moral debate taking place on the earth<sup>15</sup>.

It can be argued, therefore, that her nervous breakdown is caused, partly, at least, by the clash of two systems of values. The behaviour of the two astronauts demonstrates what happens when absolute values are perceived as relative. Despite the fact that she takes Archie for her philosophical master (as the often repeated sentence "Archie says" may indicate) she is appalled when she sees how his moral principles work in reality when they are no longer only a philosophical theory. She thus shares George's belief in traditional moral rules, in the rightness of the Ten

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<sup>15</sup> In this context it seems relevant to recall the actual moon-landings. Undoubtedly for many of us they were a shock and for some they may have had the effect of destroying the romantic ideas and associations connected with it, so that many of us may have shared with Dotty one set of her feelings connected with the moon-landing. What actually happened on the surface of the moon, however, was diametrically different from the image presented in the play. Billington (1987, 91) has written: "*Time* revealed in November 1971 that one of the astronauts Buzz Aldrin's first actions on the moon was to practice a Communion ceremony with bread and wine. 'I poured the wine into the chalice which our church had given me', said Aldrin. 'In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine curled slowly and gracefully up the side of the cup. It was interesting to think that the very first liquid ever poured on the moon and the first food eaten there were Communion elements'. What with Communion on the one hand and the practising of golf-shots on the other, the moon-landings suggest is the transportation of earthly values to another place". Thus, both in Stoppard's play and in reality the behaviour of the lunonauts was consistent with the system of moral values dominant at the time.

Commandments, which unlike tennis rules, cannot be changed, an opinion opposed by the moral relativists (p. 49). The behaviour of the lunonauts would not have had any impact on her were it not that she still believes in the absolutes. Her nervous breakdown is brought about by the tension between the rational, empirically verifiable, as propagated by Archie and the philosophical mainstream, and the irrational and metaphysical, as supported by George defending the idea of the existence of God and moral absolutes. John Harry Lutterbie (1986, 121) makes precisely this point when he writes:

The relationship between Dotty and her changing feelings for the moon is a metaphor in *Jumpers* for the philosophical debate. The moon as an object of romance is equated with Moral Philosophy and the claims for absolute values; while the scientific moon is associated with Logical Positivists and the insistence on empirical fact as the basis of all knowledge. Dotty is caught between these two forces, as she is caught between George and Archie.

The same critic's opinion, however, that "By rejecting her life with George and accepting the universe according to Archie, Dotty can once again sing; but it is a song without emotion, without love" (Lutterbie 1986, 121) cannot be accepted. One could agree, perhaps, that her final song is less romantic, that it is different from her earlier, highly idealised love moon songs. At the same time, however, her "philosophy", as she calls it, is a combination of the trends represented by George and Archie, she is half-way between them, combining elements of their views: "two and two make roughly four"<sup>16</sup> (empiricism is not to be trusted completely), some men are "not bad and some are revelations" (there is a possibility of individual value judgements) and "heaven [is] a lying rhyme for seven" (purely metaphysical matters are not worth discussing) (p. 86).

Dotty has been criticised as a character by Michael Billington (1987, 92) who wrote that she "is an idea more than a real person: a broken down singer, a teasing sexpot, a woman actively concerned at moral decline, a possible murderess". According to this critic her successive images in the play present attitudes which are irreconcilable. One can only wonder whether this critic is right in what he is writing. It could be equally well argued that the very fact that Dotty is a mixture of opposites adds to the quality of characterisation and makes her convincing as a character. Reality as such, even a seemingly simple one, as Stoppard often argues, is difficult to define. The personality of a given person, hardly ever homogenous, is even more difficult to specify and any attempt at interpreting it may lead to confusion. If, then, we can never be certain who has killed McFee and

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<sup>16</sup> It seems worthwhile noticing that this phrase is taken from George Orwell's *1984*, where it is a slogan used in connection with individual freedom.

Clegthorpe, how could we be certain what Dotty is really like? The epistemological confusion characteristic of the whodunit, the interpretation both of Dotty as a person and of the reasons for her neurosis are thus related to the confusion concerning metaphysical issues as represented in the play by the two philosophical opponents – George Moore and Archie Jumper.

## The philosophical debate

The philosophical debate, which forms the third motif of the play, centres on two problems: the existence or non-existence of God and the relative or absolute character of morality. Kenneth Tynan (1981, 35) recalls Tom Stoppard telling him over lunch in 1970 that he could not agree with the logical positivists to whom value judgements “were meaningless” because they “could not be empirically verified”. Hence he thought of writing a play “whose entire first act would be a lecture in support of moral philosophy”. The conversation between the two men went on and led them to a discussion about morality as perceived in Judeo-Christian tradition, where it is strictly connected with God, and in Zen Buddhism, where it is a “man-made” convention. What followed was Stoppard’s period of research and a vast reading programme<sup>17</sup>.

The moral and philosophical debate in the play is conducted by two main opponents: George Moore, who believes both in the necessity of God’s existence and in absolute morality and Archie Jumper (the leader of the winning Radical Liberal Party) who follows the main philosophical claims of Logical Positivists. This philosophical school originated in Vienna in the early 1920’s with the establishing of the “Vienna Circle” by the University Professor of Philosophy, Moritz Schlick, and a group of his colleagues who propagated similar views. The foremost representatives of the group were, apart from Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, Ludwig Wittgenstein and A. J. Ayer. The philosophers sought to extract all mystery from philosophical investigation and to rationalise it in accordance with science. Starting from empirical and neopositivistic assumptions they stressed the importance of the verification principle which equalled to an insistence that observability was a predicate of all knowledge which could be argued as relevant. Only those assertions whose validity could be tested in practice were to be regarded as meaningful<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> See what Stoppard himself has said about this in two interviews with Hill (1973) and Hayman (1974, 15).

<sup>18</sup> This view was voiced, among others, by Otto Neurath when he wrote: “All the representatives of the Circle are in agreement that ‘philosophy’ does not exist as a discipline, alongside of science, with propositions of its own; the body of scientific propositions exhausts

A. J. Ayer's book, *Language, Truth and Logic*, is relevant for the vision presented in the play for a number of reasons. Even though Stoppard does not acknowledge any concrete sources, it seems most probable he has read this book. Such an opinion could be supported by the fact that George's collection of essays devoted to metaphysical subject matter teasingly employs a paraphrase of the original and is thus called *Language, Truth and God*. Furthermore, the arch villain of the piece, Archie Jumper, bears a name which consists of the famous philosopher's initials. Besides, the opinions expressed by Archie and other members of his philosophical school are highly reminiscent of those of A. J. Ayer. In his book, after having acknowledged his debt to Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein and the empiricism of Berkeley and David Hume, Ayer (1970, 31, 34, 106, 115, 117–118) goes on "to divide all genuine propositions into two classes: those which ... concern 'relations of ideas', and those which concern 'matters of fact'". In the first group of propositions "the a priori propositions of logic and pure mathematics" can be treated as "necessary and certain only because they are analytic". All the other propositions must be checked by means of "a verification principle" which will state whether they are true or false. Such a classification of propositions and the application of the verification principle to all the propositions which are not tautologies leads Ayer to distinguishing the field of metaphysics which is not to be investigated by philosophers. Any sentence which is metaphysical "is neither true nor false but literally senseless". The initial assumptions concerning the verification principle and its function in discovering the truth lead him to conclude that: firstly, "those who have striven to describe [metaphysical reality] have all been devoted to the production of nonsense"; secondly, "In admitting that normative ethical concepts are irreducible to empirical concepts ... we are justified in saying that on this theory ethical statements are held to be unverifiable"; and, thirdly, "there is no possibility of demonstrating the existence of God" and "there cannot be any transcendent truths of religion".

Logical Positivists set forth a twofold claim – that the statements of metaphysics are not either false or true but are, instead, pieces of literal nonsense and that the proper task of philosophy is the analysis, and perhaps a logical reform, of language. The philosophy of Logical Positivism, mainly under the influence of A. J. Ayer, became the new orthodoxy in British academic circles after the second World War. Some philosophers, C. E. M. Joad, among others, strongly objected to its premises, worrying about the possible effects it could have on practical living<sup>19</sup>. Whereas Joad decided

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the sum of all meaningful statements". (O. Neurath, *Sociology and Physicalism, Logical Positivism*, ed. Ayer, Allen & Unwin, 1959, 282. Quoted in Brassell 1981, 46).

<sup>19</sup> Joad writes at the beginning of his book: "I am concerned to enquire what effects are liable to be produced by Logical Positivism upon the minds of those who are brought into

to discuss Logical Positivism in the form of a critical study, Stoppard set out to achieve the same aim by means of an artistic presentation. Stoppard's endeavour is even more depressing as it presents a country where the power belongs to Radical Liberals (Logical Positivists?). Ruling the country they not only teach their philosophy in the peace and quiet of their university offices and lecture halls but make it work in reality.

The Radical Liberals who have won the elections quite possibly due to a manipulation ("It's not the voting that's democracy, it's the counting, Archie says", p. 35), do not bother with the question of God's existence but are, all the same, introducing changes in the Church as an institution. Dotty, quoting the opinions of Archie again, says: "The Church is going to be rationalised" (p. 37) which actually starts happening in the course of the play when Clegthorpe, a Radical Liberal spokesman for Agriculture becomes the Archbishop of Canterbury. Dotty tries to convince George that this nomination is justified "if you think of him as a sort of ... shepherd, ministering to his flock" but gives in when he argues the new Archbishop is an agnostic (p. 38). What happens to Clegthorpe in the Coda proves that you cannot rationalise the Church, that you cannot remain an agnostic when you become involved in religious matters. He starts defending the believers, irritates Archie, the leader of the new power, and, as a result, gets killed. In a state like that presented in the play citizens are not allowed either to contradict those in power or to defend values not appreciated by the authorities.

The Radical Liberals have also done away with any ethical or moral evaluations or judgements which, according to Ayer (1970, 108), "have no objective validity whatsoever" and "are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood". This opinion is voiced by Dotty, who follows Archie's opinions:

Things and actions, you understand, can have any number of real and verifiable properties. But good and bad, better and worse, these are not the real properties of things, they are just expressions of our feelings about them. (p. 41)

Stoppard is doing justice to Ayer when he has several characters of *Jumpers* support the ethical position defended by the philosopher and known as "emotivism". Such is also the case with a speech uttered by George when he discusses McFee's views on ethics and morality. According to the latter's views, good and bad cannot be discussed "in any absolute or metaphysical sense". They are "categories of our own making, social and psychological conventions", similar to "rules of tennis". People should

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contact with it and to consider whether these are such as are desirable". (C. E. M. Joad, *Critique of Logical Positivism*, Gollancz, 1950, 17. Quoted in Brassell 1981, 48).

follow moral rules because, otherwise, life would be unbearable and even impossible. Yet, according to McFee and the mainstream philosophy of the day, telling lies or committing murder is not sinful, either, but only anti-social (p. 48). After the moon-landing and the act of expediency there, McFee seems to abandon this philosophy, becomes a dangerous outsider and is murdered.

Logical Positivists also sought to reform the language, to make it a precise tool for expressing their empirically verifiable truths. This idea was expressed by Ludwig Wittgenstein who tried to define the limits of philosophical dispute and specify the kind of language used in the debate. In *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* the philosopher attempted "to set a limit to thought, or rather not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts". Arguing that a valid philosophical "proposition is a picture of reality", he thus negated any possibility of discussing anything which cannot be empirically checked and verified, so also, like other Logical Positivists, all metaphysical (moral, ethical or religious) problems: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (Wittgenstein 1961, 3 and propositions 4. 01, 7). In *Philosophical Investigations*, written some time later, he came to revise his view about the nature of factual propositions by suggesting that language itself determines what is real, because we perceive things through language. In consequence, an objective fact when described by means of language becomes an illusion.

The play deals with the problem of language as an inadequate tool for describing reality. George, while wondering whether to say "Is God?" or "Are God?", notices that "the words betray the thoughts they are supposed to express. Even the most generalised truth begins to look like special pleading as soon as you trap it in language" (p. 46). On another occasion, he says: "Language is a finite instrument crudely applied to an infinity of ideas, and one consequence of the failure to take account of this is that modern philosophy has made itself ridiculous by analysing such statements as, 'This is a good bacon sandwich,' or, 'Bedser had a good wicket'" (p. 63). In this respect, George seems to follow Logical Positivists. Language not only does not describe reality but brings about more confusion and misunderstanding. The specific use of puns and the numerous scenes characterised by the contravention of co-referential rules in the play prove that language cannot be trusted as a means of adequate communication.

George disagrees with the Logical Positivists' rejection of religious faith and absolute morality. What is happening in the country (and also on the moon) clearly demonstrates that, as Stoppard put it "all political acts have a moral basis to them" and "must be judged in moral terms, in terms of their consequences" (Hudson interview 1974, 12). Or, as he told Gussow (interview 1974): "if the status of goodness is a matter of convenience and

social evolution, then it is open to be changed into a reverse direction where casual murder might be deemed good". George cannot accept the idea that faith and morality are irrelevant, fictitious problems. In the play he paraphrases Ayer's opinion (1970, 67) that any problem Logical Positivism cannot solve is "a fictitious problem, since all genuine problems are at least theoretically capable of being solved" into "No problem is insoluble given a big enough plastic bag" (p. 40). In this context, the plastic bag, which actually appears on the stage and into which the body of dead McFee is put, acquires a metaphorical meaning and demonstrates that if one agrees morality is a mere fiction one must also accept crime as a case of no importance.

George Moore, the main spokesman for metaphysical issues, for the necessity of the existence of both religion and God as well as of absolute morality, is in strict opposition to the philosophical mainstream of the day. In this context it is not a coincidence that Stoppard's protagonist shares his name with another George Moore, a professor of moral philosophy at Cambridge. George mentions his predecessor twice in the course of the play. The first occasion is when he tells Bones that "there have not been so many philosophers, but *two* of them have been George Moore, and it tends to dissipate the impact of one's name" (p. 57). He thus expresses his dissatisfaction with the fact that, because of sharing a name with the noted philosopher of the first part of the twentieth century, he is condemned to live in the shadow of a brighter mind. The second reference is much longer and points out that the great philosopher's outlooks have been misunderstood by his successors (p. 137)<sup>20</sup>.

The analytical realists, Moore among others, assumed that certain truths speak for themselves. It is not possible nor necessary to justify or explain them. There are some propositions which are absolute, final, which are obvious and self evident because of their very nature. They are understandable yet cannot be explained. Not all the understanding demands explanation or, to put it differently, not all the propositions can or have to be explained by others (Tatarkiewicz 1978, vol. 3, 227). The problem with Moore's intuitionism is that, even though his theory postulates moral evaluation, due to such an imprecise and vague definition of goodness, it makes any final value judgements impossible. The Radical Liberal philosophers in the play seem, therefore, partly justified when they argue that goodness and

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<sup>20</sup> A. J. Ayer (1970, 32) mentions the impact George Moore had on Logical Positivism: "The view that philosophizing is an activity of an analysis is associated in England with the work of G. E. Moore and his disciples. But while I have learned a great deal from Professor Moore, I have reason to believe that he and his followers are not prepared to adopt such a thoroughgoing phenomenalism as I do, and that they take rather a different view of the nature of philosophical analysis".

badness are not absolute values and when they hold morality to be pragmatic and verifiable only by what the "I" experiences as good<sup>21</sup>. George, being much closer to the historical George Moore, is to quite a great extent an intuitionist philosopher. Yet, while he stresses that goodness is a matter of feeling, he also wants to prove his viewpoint.

George argues that "there is more in me than meets the microscope" (p. 68) and that "There are many things I know which are not verifiable but nobody can tell me I don't know them" (p. 78). He thus rejects the verification principle and purely empirical approach of Logical Positivists and sets out to present his opposite views during the symposium on the subject "Man – good, bad or indifferent?" (p. 46)<sup>22</sup>. The topic of the conference indicates that its participants are supposed to be dealing with the question of morality, yet George decides to start his discussion with the issue of God's existence. His attempts aimed at proving the existence of the God of Creation, an entirely different divinity, are, then, earnest but irrelevant. While combining the two concepts of God he is following the Judeo-Christian tradition according to which, as he puts it: "There is, first, the God of Creation to account for existence, and, second, the God of Goodness to account for moral values" (p. 26). In a conversation with Dotty George says: "If God exists, he certainly existed before religion. He is a philosophers God, logically inferred from self-evident premises" (pp. 39–40). While insisting that belief in God is *logical* he gives his enemies all the ammunition they need. Logic, namely, as appropriated by the Logical Positivists, is strictly connected with the verification principle. All metaphysical matters are, therefore, dismissed as nonsense. Hence, George's very starting point is a contradiction in itself: while rejecting the verification principle he appeals to logic which, according to Logical Positivists, is based on that very principle.

The part of George's lecture dealing with the God of Creation starts with his equating God with "the First Cause" (p. 27)<sup>23</sup>. He decides to

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<sup>21</sup> See, especially, the speech in which George explains to Bones the ideas of McFee (p. 48) and the speech of Dotty (p. 41).

<sup>22</sup> In this respect George's ideas are strictly juxtaposed with those of Archie who believes in the ability of the dermatograph "to detect all kinds of disturbances under the skin ... on the surface" (p. 62). It could be argued that Archie's insistence on the value of empirical examination conducted by means of the machine is an indication of his scientism being shallow, literally skin-deep. His shallowness is similarly indicated by the fact that two minutes will be enough for him to prepare a lecture (p. 69) while George is seen writing his throughout the whole of Stoppard's play.

<sup>23</sup> He is thus referring to natural theology, especially to the metaphysics of St Augustine and the five proofs of God's existence as given St Thomas Aquinas, who, in turn, developed Aristotle's idea of Unmoved Mover (mentioned by George, p. 29) into a Christian Divinity. For the numerous references to different philosophers and their ideas as they are opposed to



prove empirically the existence of God, making an experiment employing a hare and an arrow<sup>24</sup>. George's empirical demonstration proves only one thing: the arrows reach their targets. It does not, however, provide a convincing proof of God's existence. Despite failing to fulfil this aim, George's quasi-empirical demonstration still performs a very important function in the play. It is a moment charged with great theatrical impact. The success of the way in which the demonstration works, then, belongs not to a philosopher, George Moore, but to the playwright – Tom Stoppard.

Not realising yet that his arrow, aimed at a metaphysical target of God and moral absolutes, has killed his pet, Thumper, George goes on writing his lecture. He is preparing counter arguments to McFee's paper in which the latter discredits both moral and aesthetic absolutes. In order to clarify his point, George uses a tape with different sounds recorded on it: Mozart's music, the braying sound of an elephant and a sound made "*by a trumpet falling down a flight of stairs*" (pp. 53–54). These examples fulfil at least two functions in the play. While employed by George in the lecture, they

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or reflected in George's lecture see, especially: Hunter (1982, 230–234). George recalls that some philosophers and mathematicians "point out that they are familiar with many series which have no first term" (p. 27). Such an opinion has been expressed, among others, by Bertrand Russell (1937, 150), the thinker whom George mentioned earlier in connection with *The Theory of Descriptions* (p. 24). Our protagonist's knowledge of the writings of Russell makes him start discussing Zeno's paradoxes because, as Hunter (1982, 231) notices: "Russell deals with the fallacy of Zeno's paradox in *Our Knowledge of the External World*".

<sup>24</sup> He makes the mistake of mixing up Zeno the Eleate's paradoxes of infinite regress which were meant to prove the impossibility of movement (by means of using continually smaller distances, thus by means of a series of decreasing fractions) and the notion that there is no need of a series to have the first term. Furthermore, he also mixes up Zeno's two paradoxes (*The Achilles and the Tortoise* and *The Arrow*) and Aesop's fable concerning a hare and a tortoise. For a discussion of Zeno the Eleate's paradoxes see: Tatarkiewicz (1978, vol. I, 37). For a thorough analysis of George's confusion see the article of Elam (1984). It seems worthwhile to mention here that, as Elam (1984, 469) points out, it was Lewis Carroll, the "modern logician" who "fathered the Mock Turtle in his facetious but intriguing dialogue 'What the Tortoise said to Achilles' which deals with Zeno's second paradox. Carroll's article, originally published in 1894 edition of *Mind* is reprinted in Fisher (1973, 250–254). There is yet a possibility of another confusion on George's part, mentioned by Hayman (1979b, 104) who writes that Bertrand Russell in his *History of Western Philosophy* "introduces St Sebastian to illustrate the difference between the two attitudes" – that of Zeno who argued that there are things but not changes and that of Heraclitus and Henri Bergson, that there are changes but no things. It might seem interesting to indicate here that yet another playwright has made use of Zeno's paradoxes, employing the idea of the impossibility of reaching an end and presenting it not only in verbal but also in visual terms in the course of a theatrical production. The playwright meant here is Samuel Beckett who uses the idea of "the impossible heap". Just as separate grains of sand will never form a heap (as Clov argues in *Endgame* and Winnie seems to experience in *Happy Days*) so his characters' lives will never actually end in death which is (or seems to them to be) very slow in coming. For a discussion of the importance of the ideas of Zeno for Beckett see Uchman 1987, 46–47 and 89–90.

are meant to clarify his point in an empirical way. He agrees with McFee's opinion "that if the three sets of noises ... were playing in an empty room where no one could hear them, then it could not be said that within the room any one set of noises was in any way superior to either of the other two". He concludes saying: "It is not in fact a statement about value at all; it is a statement about language and how it is used in a particular society" (p. 54). Thus, again, he is trapped in an ambush. Wanting to prove the existence of aesthetic absolutes he confesses the arbitrary nature of aesthetic judgements, resulting, according to him, from the imprecise, relative use of the language.

When the scene is discussed in its relationship to the play, the point made here by Stoppard to an even greater extent indicates how relative things are. George argues that a witness, a perceiver, is necessary who would first listen to the sounds and then evaluate them and finally describe by means of language. The scene preceding this one indicates, however, that there is one more important factor George does not take into account, namely the context of the act of perception. In that scene, Bones decides to see Dotty not as an inspector but as a fan of a great star. When he is getting ready to enter the room, Mozart's music is heard. As they look at each other and he raises his head slightly "*a loud animal bray, a mating call*" is produced. When, finally, impressed with the moment of meeting the star, he drops the vase, "*There is a noise such as would have been made had he dropped it down a long flight of stone stairs*". While "*BONES is dumbstruck*" (p. 52), the audience associate the sounds with the situation presented in front of their eyes. They notice a close relationship between the visual and aural imagery of the scene. It is only a few moments later, during George's lecture, that they realise that the sounds have an ambiguous meaning. Stoppard makes it clear once more that it is really very difficult to interpret a concrete reality. Ronald Hayman (1979b, 108) has commented on these two scenes writing: "Stoppard's joke is essentially theatrical: its effect depends on the progressive reaction of the audience". In his earlier radio plays, Stoppard has already set aural ambushes for the audience, employing "sound puns" (Gussow interview 1995, 68) and making them interpret the auditory effects in a way different from their actual meaning. Here, he mixes up visual and aural elements, making full use of the possibilities of theatre medium, in order, once more, to make them realise that their perception of reality and its interpretation may lead to quite serious misunderstandings.

Towards the end of writing the lecture George dictates the following to his secretary:

There is in mathematics a concept known as limiting curve, that is the curve defined as the limit of a polygon with an infinite number of sides. For example, if I had never seen a circle and didn't know how to draw one, I could nevertheless postulate the existence

of circles by thinking of them as regular polygons with numberless edges, so that an old threepenny-bit would be a bumpy imperfect circle which would approach perfection if I kept doubling the number of its sides: at infinity the result would be the circle which I have never seen and do not know how to draw, and which is logically implied by the existence of polygons. ... it seems to me that life itself is the mundane figure which argues perfection at its limiting curve. And if I doubt it, the ability to doubt, to question, to *think*, seems to be the curve itself. *Cogito ergo deus est.* (p. 72)<sup>25</sup>

This speech is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it marks a return to the beginning of the lecture, God being perceived here as the necessity of perfection, not so much as the first cause, though these two interpretations do not preclude each other. Secondly, if we remember that Stoppard's plays present not a static world but a world of constant flux which presents the possibility of multiple interpretations then, as Hunter (1982, 181) puts it, "It isn't the dogmas, in fact, which imply absolutes, but the flux itself". Thirdly, in his muddled lecture, mixing up material which might constitute a philosophy course for freshmen, George is trying to achieve the impossible. God's existence, being a matter of belief, not of proof, cannot be proved by logic, just as His non-existence cannot also be proven. Fourthly, not everything has to have a rational basis to it. George argues in a conversation with Dotty: "if rationality were the criterion for things being allowed to exist, the world would be one gigantic field of soya beans!" (p. 40). So, fifthly, and finally, there must be a place left for some unexplainable, even irrational mystery, the idea again expressed verbatim by George at the end of "the limiting curve" speech:

The fact that I cut a ludicrous figure in the academic world is largely due to my aptitude for traducing a complex and logical thesis to a mysticism of staggering banality. McFee never made the mistake, never put himself at risk by finding mystery in the clockwork, never looked for trouble or over his shoulder, and I'm sorry he's gone but what can be his complaint? McFee jumped, and left nothing behind but a vacancy. (p. 72)

This speech, then, in the sentence "*Cogito ergo deus est*"<sup>26</sup> is not a proof of God's existence, as there is no possibility of proving this proposition, but an expression of the fact that the very trying to find an answer to the mystery presupposes its existence. Our real wisdom is, then, to be found in "not knowing", in our ignorance.

It could be argued that the most important issues raised by the play are those of the limits of human knowledge, of being unable to find answers

<sup>25</sup> The final sentence is an inretextual reference to the famous statement of Descartes: "*Cogito ergo sum*". For a discussion of the speech, "the metaphysical concepts of curves and the circles they imply" which "govern the network of interrelated visual and verbal images in Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers*" see: Thomson (1990).

<sup>26</sup> This sentence has been described by Bailey (1979, 41) as "George's finest statement".

to questions posed (no matter whether they concern the whodunit mystery or the mystery of God's existence) as well as that of the impossibility of distinguishing between reality and appearance. In this respect, George functions as a spokesman for the audience stressing that he does not know. He expresses the notion of the impossibility of knowing in several places in the play. He mentions in this context the already discussed Wittgenstein anecdote (p. 75) and the fact that "Copernicus cracked our confidence, and Einstein smashed it" with his relativity theory (p. 75). He also says: "Credibility is an expanding field ... Sheer disbelief hardly registers on the face before the head is nodding with all the wisdom of instant hindsight" (p. 38) and "How does one know what to believe? ... How does one know what it is one believes when it's so difficult to know what it is one knows" (p. 71).

George's lack of certainty reflects a similar lack of certainty on Stoppard's part. He has repeatedly argued that he "write[s] plays because writing dialogue is the only respectable way of contradicting oneself" (Gussow interview 1972). According to him his plays "are a lot to do with the fact that [he] just [doesn't] know" (Hudson interview 1974, 48)<sup>27</sup>. Ronald Hayman (1979, 25) has written: "Stoppard makes a virtue out of uncertainty – 'Tom Stoppard Doesn't Know' was the title chosen for his 1972 contribution to BBC Television's Series 'One Pair of Eyes'." Janet Watts quotes the artist saying: "A truth is always a compound of two half-truths and you never reach it because there is always something more to say". Stoppard has repeatedly stressed his lack of certainty and the impossibility of defining reality precisely. Yet he has also said; "Few statements remain unrebutted. ... One thing I feel sure about is that a materialistic view of history is an insult to the human race" (Hudson interview 1974, 13). Certain things, then, present not half truth but truth as such and are not relative.

George tries to prove the truths which are absolute to him. While doing this he is continuously faced with doubt and uncertainty. Towards the end of the play he argues, however, that he is certain he knows some things: "There are many things I know which are not verifiable but nobody can tell me I don't know them, and I think that I know that something happened to poor Dotty and she somehow killed McFee, as sure as she killed my poor Thumper" (p. 78). Trying to arrive at absolute metaphysical truths, he is yet unable to notice what is happening around him. He thus draws wrong conclusions concerning the reality surrounding him. The above statement of George has also got a special message for the audience, making them aware of the two issues which are of vital importance for the play. Firstly, there are truths which we simply know, even though we cannot

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<sup>27</sup> See also Kalem (1974) and Wetzsteon (1975).

prove them. Secondly, we often seem to be sure of something about which we are, in fact, mistaken.

George's final speech in the Coda, which was meant to prove the existence of God and the need for moral absolutes, is a complete disaster. Not only is he unable to provide a convincing proof of anything, but he also mixes up the names of the philosophers whose ideas were intended to support his views, including the hare, Thumper, among them:

.... some people will ... claim to *know* that life is better than death, that love is better than hate, and that the light shining through the east window of their bloody gymnasium is more beautiful than a rotting corpse! – In evidence of which I ask you, gentlemen of the jury, to consider the testimony of such witnesses as Zeno Evil, St. Thomas Augustine, Jesus Moore and my late friend Herr Thumper who was as innocent as a rainbow ...  
(p. 87)

Therefore, George seems to lose in the argument concerning morality. Does he really, however? It is true that he does not prove anything. Yet, while he "loses his argument intellectually" he "keeps us emotionally on his side" (Londré 1981, 48). Strangely enough, A. J. Ayer (1972), who was asked to write a review of the play for *The Sunday Times*, also "enormously enjoyed" the evening. The philosopher pointed out some mistakes in George's reasoning, yet, on the whole, admitted that if he identified with any of the characters, it was with George. He added that:

The moral of the play, in so far as it has one, seemed to be that George was humane, and therefore human, in a way the others were not. This could have been due to his beliefs, but it did not have to be. Whatever Kant may have said, morality is very largely founded on sympathy and affection, and for these one does not require religious sanctions. Even logical positivists are capable of love.  
(Ayer 1972)

A. J. Ayer's (1972) review demands consideration. Just like George's lecture, it does not demonstrate a consistent presentation of the philosopher's ideas. If Ayer argues that "The argument is between those who believe in absolute values, for which they seek a religious sanction, and those, more frequently to be found among contemporary philosophers, who are subjectivists or relativists in morals, utilitarians in politics, and atheists, or at least agnostics", he undoubtedly identifies himself with the second group. How is it possible, then, that, he could find "echoes of his own intonations" in what George is saying? The doubts raised at this point could be dispersed with by arguing that philosophy as a theory is one thing and the application of its propositions in reality is another<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> It might be interesting here to mention Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose ideas concerning the impossibility of discussing morality or metaphysical problems at large have affected Logical-

In his review of the play Ayer (1972) also commented on the Coda: "I found the actual ending, a trial scene with nobody much on trial, too farcical and scrappy". The Coda has been widely discussed, partly "because of its structural clumsiness" (Kreps 1986, 201). Due to criticism, especially that of Tynan, in the process of writing and then staging the play, Stoppard introduced quite a few changes into the original text<sup>29</sup>. Many critics point out that the Coda not only once more interweaves the different threads of the thematic plot and, in relationship with the beginning of the play, forms a frame for the whole play, but also functions perfectly in theatrical terms<sup>30</sup>. The audience can listen to Dotty singing at last, a new kind of song, devoid of the former romanticism and full of sadness and disillusionment. She seems to have come to terms, however painfully, with the reality surrounding her. They can also hear the final speeches of George, propagating moral absolutes and the existence of God, yet unable to support his views in a convincing way, and of Archie, sticking to his relativist, atheistic attitude. Finally, they get extra information pertaining to the whodunit. The murder of Cleghorpe is, to some extent, at least, an explanation of the earlier murder of McFee and thus it is implied that Archie is responsible for the killings.

Last, but not least, the Coda sheds more light on the moral issues discussed in the play. In this respect, it stresses that morality is not only a theoretical domain but, in order to be really valid, has to find an application in reality. The ethical discourse has little relevance unless it is translated into action. George, who theoretically argues for absolute values and sobs over his dead animals, is unable to respond to a cry for help uttered by the people in need surrounding him. In the course of play he did not help Dotty when she asked for it. In the Coda a cry is directed to George by Cleghorpe:

CLEGHORPE: Professor – it's not right. George – help.

CROUCH: Do you have any questions for this witness, Professor?

GEORGE: Er ... no, I don't think so.

CROUCH: Thank you.

*(The music goes louder.)*

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-Positivism. Mary R. Davidson (1982, 44) has written: "In describing Wittgenstein's religious attitudes, the philosopher Norman Malcolm says that the ideas of Divine judgement, forgiveness, and redemption were intelligible to him: 'But any cosmological conception of a Deity, derived from the notions of cause or of infinity, would be repugnant to him. He was impatient with 'proofs' of the existence of God and with attempts to give religion a rational foundation. When I once quoted to him a remark of Kierkegaard to this effect 'How can it be that Christ does not exist, since I know that he has saved me?', Wittgenstein exclaimed: 'You see! It isn't a question of proving anything!'" (The quotation comes from Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, London, Oxford University Press, 1958, 71).

<sup>29</sup> They are discussed by Brassell 1987, 123, Jenkins 1988, 95 and Kreps 1986, 201– 203.

<sup>30</sup> Cohn 1981, 115; Gordon 1991, 40; Jenkins 1988, 95; Kelly 1991, 103; Thomson 1990, 471 and Whitaker 1986, 98.

GEORGE: Well, this seems to be a political quarrel. ... Surely only a proper respect for absolute values ... universal truths – philosophy –  
*(A gunshot. It stops the music, and knocks CLEGTHORPE out of the pyramid, which disintegrates.)* (pp. 85–86)

The scene indicates that George is unable to react either in his role of professor or as a private individual. The substitution of “George” for “Professor” in Clegthorpe’s plea clearly indicates the personal and unacademic nature of his second appeal. Stoppard kept rewriting this scene, similarly as other passages of the Coda and the whole play. Barbara Kreps (1986, 204) quotes the 1976 version in which Clegthorpe uses the word “George” twice. Clegthorpe’s plea for help is there followed by George’s sentence: “Meeting a friend in a corridor the Good Samaritan said: ‘Surely this is a political argument ...’”

In the original version, ignoring the human world of reality surrounding him, George is unwilling to get involved, arguing that it is not an academic problem but a political one. Stoppard’s idea that “all political acts have a moral basis to them and are meaningless without it” (Hudson interview 1974, 12) should be recalled here. Furthermore, while noticing the politics/philosophy dichotomy, George forgets about reality and thus plunges into a mere representation, illusion of it. Philosophy, however, has sense only if it refers to a reality, be it actual or metaphysical. In the 1976 version the sentence using a combination of the Wittgenstein anecdote and a reference to the Good Samaritan could be understood as expressing the belief that moral values are characterised by relative quality<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> For another interpretation of this sentence see: Kreps (1986, 206–207). If we take into account that it is uttered by George who is fighting against the very notion of the relative character of moral standards it seems understandable that Stoppard went on rewriting the scene until finally, in the 1986 edition he cut “both Clegthorpe’s appeal and George’s rationalizations; George now speaks for the first time only *after* the murder” (Zeifman 1990b, 200, note 24). Interestingly enough the omission of the passage caused great dissatisfaction to an American professor “who had, in fact, written a major thesis, contorting on the line, and who had come to London especially to see the revival. As Stoppard tells the story, the professor seems to take the stature of a character in his play. It is as if George had stepped outside the text to protest at the alteration. Almost a subject for a Stoppard play” (Colvin 1986, 10). Stoppard cut the line because he thought “the line was unnecessary and made an obvious point of something that the audience would already have grasped.” (Ibid.). On another occasion, the playwright explained that he “cut it in rehearsals because it was getting in the way. One is unrepentantly pragmatic in the theatre” (Shakespeare 1986). The presence or absence of the passage seems to make quite a difference as far as the final impression left by the play is concerned. If the scene is preserved the stress is put on George’s inability to express his views both in theory and in practice. In an interview with Mel Gussow (1974), so at the time before the successive revisions, asked whether he conceived of philosophy as a balancing act, Stoppard replied: “I think that Wittgenstein said that philosophy was an

Stoppard has often commented on *Jumpers*. He has said that he identifies with George "the character of the play who believes that one's mode of behaviour has to be judged by absolute moral standards" (Gussow interview 1974) and considers Archie, the pragmatist, to be the villain of the piece (Gussow interview 1972). Being of the opinion that "our view of good behaviour *must* not be relativist", that "if our behaviour is open to absolute judgement, there must be an absolute judge" he set out "to write a theist" play (Kerensky interview 1977, 170) in which George Moore acts as his spokesman. One could argue that he has not achieved his aim because George's lecture does not succeed in convincing us of the necessity of God's existence and the need of absolute morality. Such an opinion could be easily opposed. While it is true that George does not supply any proofs, it is equally true that the arguments of the other side taking part in the philosophical dispute are no more convincing. Furthermore, the events depicted in the play to which one can apply moral evaluation (the moon-landing, the killing of McFee and Clegthorpe) demonstrate what can happen if morality becomes a relative issue. Last, but not least, no philosopher has really ever been able to prove the existence of God in a way which would be unanimously and undisputedly agreed upon.

## Theatricality

It must be remembered that Stoppard is not a philosopher but a playwright whose aim is not simply to present certain ideas but to do so in such a way as to entertain a room full of people. He has often stressed that what is important for him is not the text of the play but a text perceived in terms of its usefulness for theatrical performance. He has also commented in a similar way on this play while talking with Anthony Smith:

In *Jumpers*, I did have something to say, but I was equally concerned with creating a theatrical event. That's the thing, really, you see, it depends whether you think of a play as being a text (which I don't) or as an event which occurs inside a theatre (which

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activity. Most of the propositions I'm interested in have been kidnapped and dressed up by academic philosophy but they are in fact the kind of propositions that would occur to any intelligent person in his bath. They're not academic questions, simply questions which have been given academic status". If this sentence is taken into consideration one can easily notice that George in the play fails both as a philosopher and as a man. This, in turn, could denote that the audience would find it difficult to identify with the ideas expressed by a man who cannot live up to them in real life. If, however, the passage is omitted, even though the audience may still remember George's practical weakness at several points in the play, it is not stressed any longer and it is easier for us to identify with him as his "philosophical" side and not his personal one is now in the foreground as the curtain falls down.



I tend to do), and I think that it is true that the balance between a play's statement and a play's decorative theatricality is a very difficult balance to get right – and who knows what right is, anyway, in that particular equation? And in plays like *Jumpers*, the theatricality very often tends to overwhelm the statement, particularly when the statement itself, even when it is being said, tends to be said in a slightly artificial way, which is by personal tic. (Smith interview 1977, 2)

*Jumpers* is not a presentation of a philosophical debate but a wonderfully written piece which works in the theatre. The play is characterised by a rich texture in which different kinds of imagery, coming up fully in the theatre, play an important part. While discussing his imagery, and that of *Jumpers* in particular, Stoppard has noticed that his plays are not “giant metaphors”, but that “consciously or subconsciously layers of meaning build up under the surface action”<sup>32</sup>. Many critics have noticed the metaphorical, theatrical importance of the setting<sup>33</sup>, scenic images<sup>34</sup>, and music<sup>35</sup>.

Stoppard employs two stage props which add extra meaning to several issues tackled by the play: the mirror and the TV screen. According to the stage directions, part of the fourth wall is occupied by an imaginary mirror (p. 14). Stanley Kaufman (quoted in Bareham 1990, 122), in the review of the first N. Y. production of 1974 criticised its use, writing that it is “a metaphor not only superficial but stale”. Contrary to this critic's opinion, one could argue that the use of the mirror is fully justified and meaningful. At several moments, while preparing the lecture, George looks into the mirror, and thus at the audience (pp. 23, 27, 28, 45 and 67). On the first occasion the stage directions indicate that he “*assumes a suitable stance*” (p. 23). Two ideas are thus indicated. Firstly, while dictating the speech George is simultaneously preparing for a public appearance. He is putting on his public mask and thus employing theatricality in everyday life. Similarly, he assumes this role while preparing the demonstration with the hare and tortoise<sup>36</sup>. Secondly, the fact that George is looking at the audience, acknowledging their presence in the theatre works also as a means of disrupting the theatrical illusion.

Two more characters make use of a mirror in the course of the play. Dotty picks up her own mirror and brushes her hair (p. 33) and the “*grim, tense, unsmiling*” Secretary makes use of the imaginary mirror before her

<sup>32</sup> Peter Rosenwald's theatre column in *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 September 1972, 12. Quoted in Thomson 1990, 471.

<sup>33</sup> Bailey 1986, 39; Hunter 1982, 48–49; Jenkins 1988, 78–79; Londré 1981, 65 and Kreps 1986, 195.

<sup>34</sup> Gabbard 1988, 140; Gordon 1991, 86 and 94 and Londré 1981, 49 and 65.

<sup>35</sup> Hu 1989, 94 and Londré 1981, 65.

<sup>36</sup> Compare Bones' use of theatricality in everyday life, his playing of different roles discussed earlier.

exit (p. 80). These two scenes, as well as the scene presenting George's squeezing a blackhead (p. 25), indicate self-reflection on the part of the characters, their insistence on presenting an appealing image to the onlookers. They also indicate that, although the mirror does not present reality as such but only its reflection, the latter is true to life. If there is any discrepancy between the illusion reflected by mirror and the actual reality it is caused by people putting up certain poses or masks.

The TV screen, installed on the back wall of Dotty's room, fulfils two, seemingly contradictory roles. On the one hand, it presents a mirror-like image of reality. Such is the case with the transmission of the parade commemorating the victory of the Radical Liberal Party. When George enters Dotty's room the TV is on: "*Very loud: the jet planes scream and thunder on the sound track and scream and thunder across the SCREEN*" (p. 30). When George, because of the noise, turns the TV set off a few moments later, "*The jets come back, screaming over the house*" (p. 34). Later on George does not want to accept the newspaper and television information concerning Clegthorpe's becoming the Archbishop, yet when he looks out of the window, at the parade taking place in the street, he has to admit he "can actually *see* Clegthorpe! – marching along, attended by two chaplains in belted raincoats" (p. 38)<sup>37</sup>. In both cases the TV presentations are accurate images of the reality.

There are two instances when the image presented on the screen does not correspond to reality as perceived by the characters. When the moon landing is presented, the picture shows not a romantic lunar landscape but an act of expediency, the fight between the astronauts. Similarly, the close-up of Dotty's skin does not demonstrate its smoothness but something opposite. Does it mean that in these cases the representations differ from actuality? One could try to support an opposite opinion arguing that perception is never fully objective. What we are dealing with here is the idea that the object perceived presents a different image to varied perceivers depending on their individual features but also on the perspective (or distance, in this case). It is not, then, that the images presented on the screen really differ from reality. Yet, due to the close up, the audience realise that things are not really what they appear to be, that there is a great gap between reality and its appearance/illusion.

The introduction of the two stage props, the mirror and the TV set, and making them work as reminders for the audience of the fact that they are representations of reality evokes the notion of the play being a representation itself. These two objects not only stress the thematic notion

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<sup>37</sup> The image the chaplains present, with its similarity to the look of secret police agents in socialist totalitarian countries, underscores the nature of the present power in the state.

of the relationship between reality and illusion but also indicate that the play is a representation and so they emphasise its metatheatrical character. This quality of the drama is also achieved by a number of different factors already discussed in connection with other issues: the thematic importance of the reality/appearance dichotomy, the highly theatrical impact of the opening scene as well as of the coda, some of the characters' employment of theatricality in everyday life and the specific use of aural and visual ambushes (both for the characters and the audience). Last, but not least, the play is characterised by a high degree of intertextuality, which is one of the features of metadrama.

In many places of the play Stoppard makes use of direct or indirect references to other literary works. I have already discussed the use of quotations in the scenes concerning the murder of Duncan McFee and Samuel Cleghorpe. In the scene presenting George and Dotty reminiscing over the past there is a moment when George says (*softening*): "Oh, Dotty ... the first day you walked into my class ... I thought, '*That's better!*' ... It was a wet day ... your hair was wet ... and I thought, '*The hyacinth girl*' ... and '*How my hair is getting thin*'" (p. 33). The references to wet hair and the hyacinth girl are quotations from T. S. Eliot's (1970, 62, 14) *The Waste Land* (*The Burial of the Dead*) while the last sentence comes from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. The romantic image of their relationship (the hyacinth girl) has been replaced by his image of himself as of someone similar to Prufrock, "an attendant lord", a person of small stature and of hardly any importance. He himself could well say the words uttered by Eliot's hero (or perhaps, rather, anti-hero), Prufrock.

Some time later, while going to open the door, George says: "Now might I do it, Pat" (p. 43), a slightly altered version of a sentence uttered by Hamlet himself (III, iii, line 73) when he discovers Claudius at prayer and ponders about the possibility of killing him at this moment. The use of this line reverberates with quite many possible interpretations and thus enriches the play and George's portrait. It can be argued that George has changed from an attendant lord into Prince Hamlet. He has grown in stature. Simultaneously, however, if we take into account the fact that Hamlet's speech can be interpreted as a proof of his inability to act, the quotation becomes an expression of a similar trait of George's character. He is too devoted to meditation and thinking to be able to undertake any meaningful action which is demanded by the circumstances<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> G. B. Crump (1979, 368) has raised the possibility of such an interpretation when he wrote: "Like Hamlet George is guilty of thinking too much, and because he is so absorbed in resolving issues solely on the conceptual plane, he is never able to dispatch his rival Archie and regain Dorothy's affections". An even more elaborate discussion is provided by Jim Hunter (1982, 123): "The tortoise, Pat, is so called for the sake of two jokes – one about

Stoppard's making George quote first from Eliot's two poems and then from Shakespeare's play, just like other intertextual references in the play, adds to the richness of *Jumpers*' texture and increases the play's metatheatrical character. Some critics mention the possibility of the existence of other cases of intertextuality in the play<sup>39</sup>. Many critics also point out the similarity of the Coda to the Circe episode in *Ulysses*<sup>40</sup> and the indebtedness of Archie's final speech (p. 87) to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*<sup>41</sup>.

The speech is important for a number of reasons. If we interpret it in reference with the murders, its final sentence, "Wham, bam, thank you Sam", may be discussed in connection with Sam Cleghorpe<sup>42</sup>. It seems, however, that to a greater extent it is addressed to Samuel Beckett. Stoppard's indebtedness to Beckett, expressed by the final statement of the speech is visible in the passage in the echoing of two ideas from *Waiting for Godot*. Archie uses the sentence "Do not despair" twice. On both occasions it expresses his cynical misuse of stoicism. He has earlier used the phrase as a prelude to bribery (p. 71). Its present application can be understood as a cover to dismiss another killing. The sentence evokes St Augustine's statement which Beckett greatly admired:

I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. I wish I could remember it in Latin. "Do not despair, one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume, one of the thieves was damned." That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters. (Beckett quoted in Hobson 1957, 153)

the difficulty of discovering a tortoise's sex, and the other (p. 43) a splendidly awful pun-allusion to *Hamlet*: George thinks he is going to let in Archie; he carries a weapon and it occurs to him facetiously that he might use it to kill Archie – a similar thought to that of Hamlet when coming across Claudius praying – 'Now I might do it pat'. The hare, Thumper, seems first a victim of Cognomen Syndrome, second a rhyme to Jumper, and third the excuse for a glancing pun at a sad moment – the last page of the play: 'the late Herr Thumper who was innocent as a rainbow'. Each is an example of Stoppard's thriftiness, not missing opportunities".

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance: Gabbard (1982, 87) and Hu (1989, 78) for a comparison with Mrožek's play, *The Tango*. Morwood (1981, 139–140), having pointed out that "*Hamlet* is in fact the source for two texts that underlie much of the play's debate" goes on to analyse the possible relationships between *Jumpers* and two sentences from *Hamlet*: "S'blood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?" (III, ii) and "there's nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (II, ii).

<sup>40</sup> Hayman interview 1974, 21; Hu 1989, 97; Kelly 1991, 102 and Whitaker 1986, 98.

<sup>41</sup> Dutton 1986, 183; Gordon 1991, 41; Hayman interview 1974, 21; Jenkins 1988, 97 and Zeifman 1990b, 180–181.

<sup>42</sup> Hersh Zeifman (1990b, 180) aptly notices, "the saying is hideously apt, for Cleghorpe has indeed been screwed royally (note the coda's ironic allusions to the murders commissioned by Richard III and Henry II) and briskly".

St Augustine's sentence is referred to indirectly and discussed by the two tramps in *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett 1969, 12–13). While, however, both in St Augustine and in Beckett's play the sentence consists of two, contrasted assumptions (damned/saved), Archie dismisses the contrast and, not noticing the darker side of life, is able to enjoy his skin deep optimism.

Archie also paraphrases another sentence uttered in *Waiting for Godot*. Vladimir says: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries" (pp. 90–91) which is a paraphrase of a sentence uttered slightly earlier in the play by Pozzo: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (p. 89). In Beckett's play the sentences refer to the idea that birth, marking the beginning of life, is also connected with the inevitable death, life being perceived by Beckett as a process of dying<sup>43</sup>. In Archie's rendering the sentence becomes: "At the graveside the undertaker doffs his top hat and impregnates the prettiest mourner". The undertaker here is not associated with death and a burial ceremony. He throws away his hat, indicating his profession, and starts procreating. The stress is thus shifted from death towards life.

Another sentence uttered by Archie is worth discussing here, namely the one dealing with laughter and tears. One may not be willing to agree with his notion that "no laughter is sad" as sometimes it may be, yet undoubtedly "many tears are joyful". In this sentence he at last notices the opposites and at its end he is even able to unite notions which often seem incompatible. If we treat the sentence "Wham, bam, thank you Sam" as referring to Samuel Beckett then it belongs not so much to Archie as to Stoppard himself. And Tom Stoppard, undoubtedly can unite the seemingly incompatible. The following view of Kenneth Tynan (1981, 35) seems to be relevant here: "*Jumpers* turned out to be something impossible in theatre: a farce whose main purpose is to affirm the existence of God". Furthermore, he does so in a way which makes even those people who do not share his viewpoint highly praise his artistic achievement. A. J. Ayer (quoted in Tynan 1979, 102) has become both a close friend of Stoppard and a great admirer of his plays because, as he puts it "Tom plays with words and makes them dance". Geoffrey Reeves (quoted in Tynan 1981, 36), while not fully accepting the play's "message" notices, all the same: "But it's a measure of his brilliance that in the theater I suspend rational

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<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of the differences between the speeches of Pozzo and Vladimir concerning their attitude to life and death see: Uchman 1987, 19–20.

judgement. He simply takes my breath away. People sometimes say he has a purely literary mind. That's not true of *Jumpers*. It uses the stage as a stage, not as an extension of TV or the novel". And this is the most important thing. No matter whether the play will make the viewers accept the need for absolute morality defined by the existence of God or not, it will undoubtedly provide them with a wonderful evening in the theatre.

## VII. *Travesties*

Tom Stoppard started working on *Travesties* in 1973 and drafted the script during that and the successive year. The play was successfully produced in London on 10 June 1974. It went to New York in 1975 and was published by Faber & Faber early in the same year, between the two English productions. Philip Gaskell (1978, 246, 260), in his book entitled *From Writer to Reader. Studies in Editorial Method*, mentions several changes introduced in the course of the two London productions, the performance text which came into being during the rehearsals in which Stoppard actively participated, and also the company's prompt-book marked up with variants as the text developed. "The performance text of *Travesties*, which by this time differed considerably from the original script, continued to alter during the earlier performances as audience reaction suggested modifications, some of which returned to the original version, while others diverged further from it". This critic concludes that most of the changes "serve the purpose of making the play more effective in the theatre". Just as in the case of *Jumpers*, then, Tom Stoppard could argue in reference to *Travesties* that there is "no such animal" as a "definite text"<sup>1</sup> yet, until the next version of the text is published, the readers (and also directors) are bound, in most of the cases, at least, to use the Faber & Faber version of it, which, by the way, indicates possible variants of rendering the text on the stage. All of this seems to indicate to what a great extent Stoppard is a man thinking about his plays in terms of theatrical productions. The effort Stoppard put into the play was noticed by the critics in England where it was selected by *Time* the best play of the decade<sup>2</sup> and in America where it captured both the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and three Antoinette Perry (Tony) Awards: for Stoppard – Best Writer, for John Wood – Best Actor and for itself – Best Play (Hu 1989, 115 and Brassell 1987, 136).

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<sup>1</sup> "Authors Note" to *Jumpers*, 1973, 11.

<sup>2</sup> "Theatre: The Best of the Seventies", *Time*, (January 7, 1980), 97; after Londré 1981, 49.

The premiere was preceded by a long trial and error period of thinking, research and writing. As early as 1972, in an interview Tom Stoppard told Mel Gussow (1972): "I think it might be nice to do a two-act thing, with one act a Dadaist play on Communist ideology and the other an ideological functional drama about Dadaists". The original stimulus for the play came to him earlier, at the time when he was working on a newspaper in Bristol. He learnt then that Lenin and Tzara were in Zurich at the same time but never met (Marowitz interview 1975, 5). Stoppard never quite forgot the idea, yet when he started working on *Travesties* he "became dimly aware of James Joyce's part in all that", and so "it turned out to be a play about Joyce as well" (Marowitz interview 1975, 5). In the meantime, Stoppard managed to acquire John Wood as his leading actor. He found out, however, that the actor was physically suited to represent neither Lenin, nor Tzara nor Joyce (Gussow interview 1975). He then "came across Henry Carr as a role for Wood – later on [he] discovered that they even looked alike" (Kerensky interview 1977, 169). During an interview Stoppard said:

Once I had this group of people to manipulate, I used them to get various things off my chest. At first there was no narrative line, but then I discovered that Joyce and Carr were mixed up in a production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. That gave me the linking theme. I couldn't write an inconsequential Dadaist play.

(Kerensky interview 1977, 169)

Thus, the main characters of the play were successfully found and so was the frame of *Earnest* into which they were to be put by the artist.

*Travesties* is, in a sense, a return to certain issues presented earlier in *Artist Descending a Staircase*: Tristan Tzara, mentioned in *Artist*, becomes one of the main characters in the later, full-length play. Both dramas take place during the First World War and finally, most importantly, both of them discuss different art theories and the place of the artist within the society, one sentence being used in full in both of them<sup>3</sup>. When Ronald Hayman (1979b, 2) argued that the argument about the value of art in *Travesties* was almost identical to that in *Artist Descending the Staircase*, Stoppard replied: "If it's worth using once, it's worth using twice".

To some extent the play can be perceived as Stoppard's reply to accusations directed against him for not being an involved or political writer. He himself has commented on that issue on several occasions. In 1973, in an interview with Janet Watts (1973), he said that he was

<sup>3</sup> The sentence in question is the one uttered by Donner and then by Carr: "An artist is someone who is gifted in some way which enables him to do something more or less well which can only be done badly or not at all by someone who is not thus gifted", pp. 23 and 38, respectively.



embarrassed when claims were made for artists' political involvement. A year later, he told Ronald Hayman:

One of the impulses in *Travesties* is to try to sort out what my answer would in the end be if I was given enough time to think every time I'm asked why my plays aren't political, or ought they to be? Sometimes I have a complete comical reaction, and I think that in the future I must stop comprising my plays with this whiff of social application. They must be entirely untouched by any suspicion of usefulness. I should have the courage of my lack of convictions. (Hayman 1979b, 3)<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning, Stoppard, as it were, felt guilty about being an artist. His secret guilt was that he has never felt that art is important (Watts interview 1973). In 1977, however, he told another interviewer:

I used to have a slight guilt feeling about being an artist, but I don't any more. When I tried to visualize a completely technological world without culture, I realized that one does not have to apologize for being an artist. It took me years to reach that understanding. (Kerensky interview 1977, 169)

One can wonder whether Stoppard's guilt feelings were justified. After all, the plays he was writing *were* involved, even though not politically, tackling existential and moral issues of great importance. At the same time, however, one can only be pleased that the doubts concerning the role of an artist made him write the play. The hard polemic of *Travesties* concerns the relationship between the artist and the reality surrounding him. The play is trying to answer the question, as it has been put by *Theatre Quarterly* interviewers, whether "the terms artist and revolutionary are synonymous". Tom Stoppard answered: "The play puts the question in a more extreme form. It asks whether an artist has to justify himself in political terms at all" (Hudson interview 1974, 16).

*Travesties* presents four distinct views on art, with one of the main male characters as a spokesman for each: Lenin treats art as an instrument of the Marxist revolution, Tzara represents Dadaist anti-art, Joyce professes a belief in art for art's sake and, finally, Carr holds a relatively innocent bourgeois view of art. Lenin's ideas are also supported by his two disciples: Cecily and Nadya. At times, however, there are certain overlappings between the characters' views. And so, for instance, Carr seems to share some of

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<sup>4</sup> Several years later, in 1981, he once more raised the same issue: "It's actually true that I began writing at a time when the climate was such that theatre seemed to exist for the specific purpose of commenting on our society directly. Temperamentally this didn't suit me. ... And so, I took on a sort of 'travelling pose' which exaggerated my insecurity about not being able to fit into this scheme, and I tended to overcorrect, as though in some particular way *Earnest* was actually more important than a play which grappled, right?" (Gollob interview 1981, 10-11).

Joyce's statements about art (especially about Wilde) and uses them as his own in a conversation with Cecily in Act 2. Interestingly enough, realising that the truth is "always a compound of two half truths" (Watts interview 1973), Stoppard tries to present all the ideas of the main characters in an equally convincing way, an aspect of the play which has been praised by Ross Wetzeon. Stoppard only partly agreed, arguing that he finds "Joyce infinitely the most important"<sup>5</sup>. On another occasion, six years later, the artist came to the conclusion that the play resulted from a collision of various voices of his own:

Henry Carr's scepticism about the valuation which artists put on themselves is very much my own scepticism. But then Joyce's defence of art is mine, too. I mean, one doesn't think, as it were, with one mind on these matters. One has two or three minds battling with each other. And even in the case of Tristan Tzara in that play, who had to put the case for his particular form of anti-art, I went into that having as I thought to create his argument from nothing since I had no sympathy with them to start with. He wasn't speaking for me at all. But in the event I found some of the things Tristan Tzara had to say quite persuasive.

(Hardin interview 1981, 156)

One of the most obvious ways of discussing *Travesties* is to focus on the art debate which is of great importance in the play. There is one more issue which is of paramount importance for the drama namely the way in which Stoppard makes this historical fiction draw attention to its very nature. Or, to put it differently, the way in which Stoppard manipulates his material in order to destroy the illusion of reality and stress the play's fictional character. The printed text of the play acknowledges Stoppard's indebtedness to Lenin's *Collected Writings*, Nadezhda Krupskaya's *Memoirs of Lenin*, to six books about Lenin, an illustrated history of the First World War, two books on James Joyce and two on Dada which, while indicating Stoppard's having got much knowledge about the period and characters presented, simultaneously points to the importance of concrete historical material in the play<sup>6</sup>. Tom Stoppard's note in the programme of the original Royal Shakespeare Company production of 1974 mentions also the playwright's indebtedness "to Mr James Klugman for material relating to Lenin in Switzerland, particularly for a typescript translation of part of Fritz Platten's book *Lenin's Journey through Germany in the Sealed Train*" (quoted in Bareham 1990, 162). More importantly, however, the programme note includes the author's comment on the specific nature of the play:

<sup>5</sup> R. Wetzeon, "Tom Stoppard Eats Steak Tartare with Chocolate Sauce", *The Village Voice*, 10 November 1975, 121. Quoted in Zeifman 1984, 104.

<sup>6</sup> *Travesties*, 1976, 15. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

*Travesties* is a work of fiction which makes use, and misuse, of history. Scenes which are self-evidently documentary mingle with others which are just as evidently fantastical. People who were hardly aware of each other's existence are made to collide; real people and imaginary people are brought together without ceremony; and events which took place months, and even years, apart are presented as synchronous<sup>7</sup>.

*Travesties* recycles a concrete historical reality as well as some well known works of art and, as a result, is an artistic interpretation of both. The characters and the events alike come from different, distinct levels of actuality. They are a combination of actual history and fiction. The conflation of the historical and fictional element makes the play less probable on the one hand, but more real, on the other<sup>8</sup>.

Citing Paul Johnson's criticism concerning the fact that his plays reinforce "the view that reality is illusional" by "blurring the edge between illusion and reality", Stoppard (1977a, 677) argued that he subscribed "to objective truth and absolute morality". Yet art, he went on, is not the "child of pure intellect". Therefore "it must be distinguished from other human pursuits which can indeed be true or false and which deserved to be judged precisely as this book judges them, by the criteria of intellectual truth-statements which do not funk the possibility of refutation". Johnson's remarks concerning the blurring of illusion and reality in Stoppard's output are undoubtedly true, this resulting from the ontological and epistemological status of reality and the way the artist perceives this issue. Yet his accusations directed against *Travesties* can easily be dealt with. On the one hand, as Stoppard rightly observes, being a work of art, a play is always a combination of reality and fiction, it is not, and cannot be, an empirical description. On the other hand, as the drama itself demonstrates, it is not meant to be an illusionist representation of reality. Stoppard commented on this in an interview with Nancy Shields Hardin (1981, 163) when he said: "I tend to remove situations from reality. ... In *Travesties*, once you've decided that the whole thing is happening in an old man's head you are liberated from the somewhat tedious inconvenience of having to stick to any kind of historical truth".

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<sup>7</sup> Tom Stoppard, programme note to first London production; in: Page 1986, 45.

<sup>8</sup> Alice Rayner (1987, 138) has commented on this: "The cast bridges the gap between audience and play and world and says that the play is simultaneously an artifice and an actuality. Stoppard uses the fact that any fiction is neither completely in the world nor completely apart from it and makes visible the fact that fiction's ontological status is an element of our delight. The audience is thus brought into the play much as it would if a Vice character came forward and said 'This is a play and this is what I am going to create for you'".

## The opening stage image

The play opens with a stage image showing a library in which three out of four main male characters are seated. The fact that they occupy clearly separate spaces may become a symbolic indication of their representing three different beliefs concerning the purpose of art. Their "placement in the library, an institution that permanently stores literature and histories, symbolises the immortality of these figures whose works will survive the transient horrors of World War I and continue to exert influence on the worlds of art and politics" (Colby 1978, 15). The first impression the viewer gets is one of a quite simple, easily definable situation. This does not last for long, though. In the interview with Ronald Hayman Stoppard has defined the artistic method used in the play:

I just wanted to dislocate the audience's assumptions every now and again about what kind of style the play was to be in. Dislocation of the audience's assumptions is an important part of what I like to write. (Hayman 1979b, 143)

The audience's assumptions about the clarity of the meaning of what is happening on the stage are dislocated the very moment the first speech of the play is uttered by Tzara. For some time Tristan Tzara was cutting words out of a paper with a large pair of scissors, throwing them into a hat and now, having placed them in random lines, he is reading out aloud his new artistic creation:

Eel ate enormous appletzara  
key dairy chef's hat'lllearn comparah!  
Ill raced alas whispers kill later nut east,  
noon avuncular ill day Clara!

(p. 18)

Immediately afterwards a conversation between Joyce and Gwen is heard:

JOYCE (*dictating to GWEN*): Deshill holles eamus ...

GWEN (*writing*): Deshill holles eamus ...

JOYCE: Thrice.

GWEN: Uh-hum.

JOYCE: Send us bright one, light one, Horborn, quickening and wombfuit.

GWEN: Send us bright one, light one, Horborn, quickening and wombfuit.

JOYCE: Uh-hum.

JOYCE: Hoopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa!

GWEN: Hoopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa!

(Ibid.)

While Tzara keeps reading fragments of his poem, in another bay, Lenin and Nadya whisper in Russian. Their exchange is not translated into English

for the theatre audience yet a translation is provided in the printed text. Non-speakers of Russian, unable to grasp its meaning, will yet notice the repetition of numerous "Da!" "Da! Da! Da!". If they manage to arrive at any associations, bearing in mind the fact that one of the characters of the play, Tristan Tzara, is a Dadaist, they will most probably associate them with the artistic movement and not simply with Russian "Yes!". The characters are separated from one another, the only exchange between people belonging to different stage areas being that between Joyce and Lenin:

LENIN: Pardon! ... Entschuldigung! ... Scusi! ... Excuse me!

JOYCE (*handing him the paper*): Je vous en prie! Bitte! Prego! It's perfectly all right!

(p. 20)

The context of the last exchange being what it is, the audience are only too happy to understand the overall meaning of the conversation, which, again, is a combination of non-English phrases and expressions. Among the general linguistic chaos of the opening lines there is, however, one person on the stage whose behaviour and utterances are absolutely clear. It is Cecily, the librarian who, uttering "Ssssssh!" several times, desperately tries to hush all the talkative people present.

At first glance, the beginning of the play may seem a completely bizarre and chaotic mixture of words and phrases signifying nothing. While reading the play in the peace and quiet of home, however, less so during a theatre performance, it is possible to solve some of the mysteries presented by Stoppard and to notice several "ambushes for the audience" meant by him to "dislocate the audience's assumptions" by means of using the technique of defamiliarisation. Stoppard himself admits he did intend a small "anthology of styles-of-play, styles-of-language" in the drama (Marowitz interview 1975, 5). The play dealing with creation (be it artistic or ideological, as in the case of Lenin), it is only justified that it should start with the presentation of that process. And this is exactly what is happening in the initial moments of the drama. What the audience are actually watching is the creative process of the three men. Least is shown in this respect of Lenin, this being understandable as he is not involved in producing a work of art but, instead, writing a concrete, statistical thesis on the economic situation. In the case of Tristan Tzara, the basic assumptions of the Dadaists are demonstrated by means of a stage image – the deconstructive process of destroying the existing cultural heritage, followed by a new creation on its own, anti-art right. Interestingly enough, even though his poem may seem meaningless at first, if one listens to it carefully and tries to understand it (not in English, though, but in French) one arrives at the following meaning:

He's astonishing, the one called Tzara  
 Who rushes headlong once again! Peerless jokester!  
 He stays with the Swiss 'cause he's an artist  
 We have only art", he declares to us.

(Londré 1981, 168)

Kenneth Tynan (1979, 110) has criticised the passage, arguing that no translation is offered and therefore the linguistic joke seems to be "unadulterated junket". To some extent Tynan's remarks are undoubtedly true, yet it must be noticed that while Stoppard sets ambushes, it is not absolutely necessary for each member of the audience to provide his own explanation. Neil Sammells makes yet another observation about the scene:

The audience witnesses Tzara creating meaning and significance out of nothing and this process of "making" is paralleled by the audience's listening. It is clear that Stoppard's original intention in assembling this elaborate array of puns was to make the audience aware of the creative nature of their role as listeners as a prologue to the main concerns of the play. ... Carr, Tzara, Joyce, Lenin and the audience are, the play declares, makers all.  
 (Sammells 1986c, 183)

It can be only noticed that the play, as any reality, be it an artistic or non-artistic one, presents a different image to different onlookers, the process of perceiving and interpreting also demanding some creativity on the part of the receiver.

In the case of watching (or reading) a Stoppard play the process of perception and interpretation is really a very complex one because of the numerous ambushes, direct or indirect references, quotations or merely allusions. To a great extent it depends on the receiver's knowledge, his skill at detecting the divergent intertextual connections and finally interpreting them so as to grasp the complex meaning. Thus, the different interpretations of Joyce's initial image in the play may vary from the simplest ones perceiving him as creating a work of art, to the more complex ones which will point out that he is dictating the *Oxen of the Sun* episode of *Ulysses* (Londré 1981, 72 and Kelly 1991, 105). The literary cognoscenti will notice to a still greater extent that the technique used in the initial scenes of *Travesties* "has its counterpart in *Ulysses* in the chapter that Joyce sets in the Ormond Street Bar which begins with a phonetic rendering of all the sounds to be heard there by way of a prelude; the strange phrases then find a context of meaning as the chapter develops" (Cave 1987, 98).

## Henry Carr's image of the past

Even if an average playgoer, unskilled in intertextual practices, does not grasp much of the meaning of the prologue, he will yet be able to follow what

is happening in the play. As it progresses, a new stage image is revealed, described in the stage directions in the following way:

*The stage now belongs to OLD CARR. The LIBRARY must now be replaced by the ROOM. Needless to say, the change should occur with as little disruption as possible, and the use of music as a bridge is probably desirable. ... It is possible that CARR has been immobile on stage from the beginning, an old man remembering.* (p. 21)

It becomes clear now that what the audience have been witnessing so far is a scene of the past, reproduced in Carr's mind. Throughout the whole play, they are constantly reminded that they are not watching a representation of reality but only Carr's recollections of the past as he remembers it and not necessarily as it actually was. The very notion that the play is not a representation of reality but only a presentation of an old man's recollection of the past, adds to the overall impact of the play and to the specific relationship between fact and fiction, reality and its mere illusion. It also distances the history and destroys any possibility of treating the play as a traditional mimetic art presenting an illusion of reality.

The fact that the audience are placed, in a sense, inside Old Carr's mind governed by his erratic memory, explains possible historical inaccuracy or even the illogicality of the play. At first glimpse, the prologue and the whole play might seem "surrealistic", might resemble "a Cubist collage" (Hu 1989, 129). The drama might be perceived as "a Dadaist poem" as it is "a collection of fragments which have been re-arranged to form a new work of art" (Sales 1988, 11). Yet it could be equally well argued that the play "is as clearly constructed as a Swiss watch" (Whitford 1993, 19), the main organising element being the introduction of Carr. According to Peter Wood, history in the play is "seen prismatically through the view of Henry Carr. At one point Tom was thinking of calling it *Prism*"<sup>9</sup>. While constructing the play Stoppard took care to place the play realistically in the mind of Henry Carr, and, therefore, "Everything which seems to be illogical and irrational is a projection of a man's faulty memory" (quoted in Deloney 1990, 67-68).

*Travesties* may undoubtedly be called a memory play and in this respect it has certain affinities with other works belonging to this kind of literature. Richard Ellman (1974) mentions the similarities between the treatment of memory in *Travesties* and James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* and the *Circe* episode in *Ulysses*. Peter Wood notices the affinities with "Nabokov's *Pale*

<sup>9</sup> Peter Wood, Interview with Ronald Hayman, *The Times*, 8 June 1974, 9; quoted in Sammells 1986a, 381.

*Fire* in that it is narrated by an extraordinary erratic old gentleman who has (a) poor memory, (b) powerful reactionary prejudices, and (c) a high sense of fantasy"<sup>10</sup>.

Wood does not say whether Stoppard was familiar with Nabokov's work and we do not know for certain, either, whether he knew *Krapp's Last Tape*. In the latter case, we can suspect, however, that the artist, being undoubtedly an admirer of Samuel Beckett, did know this short piece. He may also have known Samuel Beckett's essay on Proust, an essay full of original and shrewd critical insights. Beckett (1970, 18, 4, 19) stresses in it the idea that habit, a shield protecting us from "the suffering of being", filters our perception and distorts our view of reality. Memory becomes conditioned through perception. Rather than having memory serve as a moment of discovery and contemplation of reality, the latter becomes distorted through perception. "Strictly speaking we can only remember what has been registered by our extreme inattention". This kind of memory is called by Beckett voluntary memory. It "is of no value as an instrument of evocation, and provides an image far removed from the real". Furthermore, it "presents the past in monochrome. The images it chooses are as arbitrary as those chosen by imagination, and are equally remote from reality".

An opinion similar to that voiced by Beckett in *Proust*, though put in much less sophisticated terms, is to be found in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a play which Stoppard undoubtedly knew very well, a play which, in fact, is an ur-text for *Travesties*. "Memory, my dear Cecily", says Miss Prism, "is the diary that we all carry about with us". Yes," comes the reply, "but it usually chronicles the things that have never happened, and couldn't possibly have happened" (Wilde 1990, 340). While still young, Cecily decides to write a diary in order to describe in it the emotions connected with the everyday experiences at once, before they become tinted by the workings of voluntary memory. The case of Henry Carr is much more complex. Only as an old man does he decide to write down his experiences, feelings and emotions. He cannot really remember what things were actually like in the past, when he was a young man. All he has preserved is not an image of the past as it actually was but only his own, distorted recollection of it.

The historical Henry Carr, a British consular official in Zurich would probably be remembered by family and friends only, were it not for the part he took in the production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and the law suits between Joyce and himself, mentioned by Stoppard in the

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Wood, Interview with Ronald Hayman, *The Times*, 8 June 1974; quoted in Hayman 1979b, 117.



"Henry Wilfred Carr, 1894–1962" introduction to the printed text<sup>11</sup>. Joyce did not fully win in court yet he took his revenge in the brothel sequence, the *Circe* episode, where Carr appears as the private and Bennett, the historical consul, as the sergeant major. Joyce's masterpiece has ensured immortality to an otherwise insignificant man. In a similar way, Tom Stoppard's play also makes him immortal, causes this petty figure to take on significance by the author's manipulation of him as a narrator.

The fact that Carr, a minor character in history, becomes the main hero of *Travesties* – a certain return to the idea of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* – brings about several consequences. Firstly, it distances the other characters and history, filtering them, as it were, through the complex process of Carr's reconstructing the past. Secondly, the play's main interests being the function and role of art and revolutionary, the three prominent historical characters are presented, as stressed above, in the discussion of the prologue, as artists, creators or makers, be it of a novel, a poem or an economic treatise. Thus *Travesties*, being a "psycho-drama of Carr's retrospection" (Billman 1980, 50), focuses its attention on the creative process itself. It could also be argued that Carr, presenting a specific subjective version of history, functions in the play as Stoppard's *alter ego*. The image of history in the play is not an objective account of historical events and figures, but a faulty reconstruction of these, a subjective travesty of history. Henry Carr, the story teller, narrator and creator of his own version of events, is trying to reconstruct the past. History, then, as presented in the play does have a pattern, yet this pattern is not one rising naturally from events under scrutiny but rather one imposed inevitably by the person recounting what happened. Finally, the introduction of Carr as a narrative frame for the entire play helps Stoppard to investigate the often thin line between history and fiction, reality and illusion.

When setting out to write his memoirs, Henry Carr is not quite certain what title to give to his work and mentions several possibilities: "My memoirs, is it, then? Life and times, friend of the famous. Memories of James Joyce. James Joyce As I Knew Him. The James Joyce I Knew. Through the Courts With James Joyce ..." (p. 22), "The Ups and Downs of Consular Life in Zurich During the Great War: A Sketch" (p. 23), "Lenin As I Knew Him. The Lenin I Knew. Halfway to the Finland Station with V. I. Lenin: A Sketch" (Ibid.), "*Street of Revolution! A Sketch*" (p. 24), "*Memories of Dada by a Consular Friend of the Famous in Old Zurich:*

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<sup>11</sup> "Joyce and Carr ended up going to law, in two separate actions, Carr claiming reimbursement for the cost of the trousers, etc., or alternatively a share of the profits, and Joyce counterclaiming for the price of five tickets sold by Carr, and also suing for slander. These matters were not settled until February 1919. Joyce won on the money and lost on the slander, but he reserved his full retribution for *Ulysses*" (p. 12).

*A Sketch*" (p. 25) "*Zurich By One Who Was There*" (p. 36). The difficulty of deciding which title to choose indicates the shift in stress in various versions, the main focus moving from Joyce to Lenin and finally to Tzara. What is important to notice here, however, is the presence of the word "I" in most of the versions, the word stressing the subjective character of the recollections. In the process of recounting the past Carr often points out the inefficiency of his memory: "But I digress. No apologies required, constant digression being the saving grace of senile reminiscence" (p. 22), "I hope memory serves" (*Ibid.*), "if memory serves" (p. 23), "I stand open to correction on all points" (p. 25) and "the cheap comedy of senile confusion" (p. 64). There are several points in his narrative which indicate that his account of the past cannot be trusted. For instance, he cannot, or does not want to remember correctly some points of his own biography. In his account of the past he changes places with his original superior. A. Percy Bennett, the actual Consul in Zurich becomes his servant, interestingly enough a servant who keeps him informed of the current events. He does not remember what part he was playing in the production of Wilde's play, either, which becomes a kind of leitmotif of *Travesties* coming up in the drama in the often repeated phrase: "Ernest, not Ernest, the other one" or its slight variants (pp. 21, 25, 51, 63, 64, 73 and 82).

In the stage directions Stoppard indicates to what a great extent the shape of the whole play, both as far as the form and content are concerned, is the result of Carr's functioning as a narrator:

... the scene (and most of the play) is under the erratic control of Old Carr's memory, which is not notably reliable, and also of his various prejudices and delusions. One result is that the story (like a toy train perhaps) occasionally jumps the rails and has to be restarted at the point where it goes wild. (p. 27)

There are several instances in the play of scenes being repeated (often many times) as a result of "time slips", as Stoppard calls them (p. 27). The first of these is the scene between Bennett and Carr starting with the former's sentence: "I have put the newspapers and telegrams on the sideboard, sir", a scene which is repeated six times (pp. 26, 27, 29 – twice, 31 and 95). It is followed by Tzara's entrance, again repeated, yet only four times (pp. 32, 36, 41 and 63). Another example of a "time slip" is the scene in the library between Carr and Cecily (pp. 71, 75 and 78)<sup>12</sup>. In all these cases the repeats serve at least two distinct purposes. On the one hand, they are meant to draw the spectator's attention to the fact that, while recalling the past, Old Carr is not only reconstructing but also partly

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed critical discussion of the last repeat, the travesty of Wilde in it and the "stripper" fantasy see: Hunter 1982, 50–51.

constructing it. On the other hand, being accompanied by specific light effects, music or sound effects – Stoppard suggests using the sound of a cuckoo-clock (p. 27)<sup>13</sup> – they are indicative of the fact that what is presented is not a faithful copy of the past reality but its image which Old Carr decides to present, thus a fusion of fact and fiction. The last point is further underlined by the end of the play, a scene presenting Old Carr and Old Cecily in conversation. Cecily stresses the inconsistencies in Carr's version of events: he never met either Lenin or Tzara, he was not the Consul, his chronology is incorrect as well<sup>14</sup>. To some extent the inconsistencies are due to the inefficiency of his memory, to some, however, to the way in which he himself decides to present the past. Unlike Cecily, who only remembers that Carr was not the Consul and who is not able to remember the real consul's name, he himself remembers that it was Bennett (p. 98).

The modifications of history in his account are done on purpose and are a sign of his vanity. This trait of his character is evident to the spectator from Carr's wardrobe and his often repeated remarks concerning clothing (pp. 26, 27, 28 and 52). Reminiscing about his military service, about his patriotic duty fulfilled during the war, he cannot prevent himself from describing the horrors of the war in terms of damage done to his clothing:

You forget that I was there, in the mud and blood of a foreign field, unmatched by anything in the whole history of human carnage. Ruined several pairs of trousers. ... until I was invalidated out with a bullet through the calf of an irreplaceable lambswool dyed khaki in the yarn to my own specification. (p. 37)

It is not surprising that Carr, paying so much attention to his own clothing (the damage done to his trousers is no less, if not more, important than his being wounded), is highly critical of Joyce's carelessness about clothes. The first mention of Joyce's mismatched trousers is made by Tzara which is not surprising, though, as it can be argued that, wanting to sound more persuasive, Carr, the author of the reconstruction of the past, puts his own opinions into another character's mouth (p. 42). Later on, however, Carr interrupts Joyce's sentence to make a remark concerning his mismatched

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Hu (1989, 120), focusing in his book, as its title suggests, on Stoppard's stagecraft, writes: "In the Peter Wood production to mark these recurrences, stage lights blinked as if a photographer were capturing a moment frozen in time, and a Swiss clock chanted 'Cuckoo', whimsically describing Stoppard's characters".

<sup>14</sup> The chronology of events presented in the play has been discussed by Richard Ellman (1974): "We seem to pass rapidly from 1916, when Tzara, according to his friend Hans or Jean Arp (the either/or name delights Stoppard), gave Dadaism its title, to 1917, when Lenin, train sealed went to Petrograd, to 1918 and 1919, when Joyce was business manager of a company called the English Players, and quarrelled with A. Percy Bennett, the British Consul General in Zurich, and with one of his employees. Four years are telescoped into one".

trousers (p. 96). So attentive himself as far as clothing is concerned, Carr cannot stand Joyce's negligence in this matter. In a similar way, being of the opinion that fighting during the war because of "love of freedom" is a duty" and a sign of "patriotism" (p. 40), he cannot forgive Joyce for not fulfilling his duty, as a quote of their conversation indicates: "I *flung* at him – 'And what did you do in the Great War?' 'I wrote *Ulysses*,' he said. 'What did you do?' Bloody nerve" (p. 65).

The end of the play, with "*most of the fading light*" centred on Carr, presents his last speech, his last recollection of the past:

Great days ... Zurich during the war. Refugees, spies, exiles, poets, writers, radicals of all kinds. I knew them all. Used to argue far into night ... at the Odeon, the Terrasse ... I learned three things in Zurich during the war. I wrote them down. Firstly, you're either a revolutionary or you're not, and if you're not you might as well be an artist as anything else. Secondly, if you can't be an artist, you might as well be a revolutionary ... I forgot the third thing.

(pp. 98–99)

While this speech marks a return to the main issue of the play – whether the terms artist and revolutionary are irreconcilable – it simultaneously draws our attention to Carr as the reconstructor of the past, which we thus perceive through his erratic memory. Carr as the creator of his recollection of the past in Zurich, as a maker and artist, is fully allowed to mix fact and fiction, this being the privilege of any artist. He can, therefore, promote himself to the status of Consul and look scornfully on Joyce who, instead of following his patriotic duty of fighting at the battlefields of the Great War, wrote *Ulysses*. In this respect, even though an average, simple man in comparison to the outstanding figures of Lenin, Tzara and Joyce, who have left their stamp on modern history and art, he can, in a sense, feel their superior. He is the one responsible for forming their images in his story. Yet, on the other hand, all of them are characters in a larger work of art than that of Carr's *Memoirs*, namely in Tom Stoppard's work, *Travesties*. In the latter all four of them function as "figures on loan", characters borrowed by Stoppard from two sources, history and literature. Stoppard, as it were, takes real historical characters and by means of artistic recycling makes them play the main parts in his version of Oscar Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest*.

## Figures on loan

Many characters in *Travesties* function as figures on loan, being borrowed by Stoppard from two sources, history and literature. Thus, in this drama we come across both types of figures on loan as defined by Ziolkowski (1983, 129–130). On the one hand, Lenin, Joyce, Tzara, Carr and Bennett

are historical figures put into a fictional context. On the other hand, the ur-text of *Travesties* being *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the characters replace, as it were, the characters of Wilde's comedy: Henry Carr is transformed into Algernon Moncrieff, Tristan Tzara into John Worthing, Lane into Bennett, James Joyce into Aunt Augusta (Lady Bracknell), Gwendolen Carr into Gwendolen Fairfax and Cecily Carruthers into Cecily Cardew, the only exception to this general transformation scheme being the Lenins. We can notice that even though the play uses two basic sources (history and Wilde's play) for its characters, their ontological status differs considerably because of the specific artistic recycling they have undergone in the process of Stoppard's writing the play. Henry Carr, being the narrator of the events from the past but also actively participating in their enactment on the stage, appears in two persons, as Old and Young Carr. In the final scene of the play, yet not earlier, we can also see Old Cecily. There are two basic ways in which the characters of *Travesties* are presented. Firstly, there is interaction of the characters, a typical dramatic technical device. Secondly, there is narration (mainly Carr's but not only). This technique is employed to evoke a special distancing effect, to stress the fictional character of the situation presented and thus to shatter theatrical illusion. It is worthwhile noticing that the use of these two techniques is differentiated for individual characters.

It must be recalled here that while presenting Lenin, Tzara and Joyce Stoppard (quoted in Deloney 1990, 62) tried to give just arguments to all of them yet also maintained his own personal preferences which undoubtedly affected their presentation in the play. In the art debate in the play, he "categorically", "absolutely" agrees with Joyce. "Lenin", Stoppard says, "keeps convincing himself out of his own mouth. It's absurd ... It's sheer nonsense". Talking about Tzara and his poem Stoppard notices: "What it isn't is art. I have no interest in anarchy or unstructured art. I have no sympathy at all with Tristan Tzara". By contrast, "Joyce is an artist I can respect".

Interestingly enough, Joyce, who was not even present in the original project of the play, becomes, in a sense, the most important character. Stoppard has commented on this on another occasion, once more stressing: "I happen to be on his side, which is why I've given Joyce the last word. Consciously or not I loaded the play for him"<sup>15</sup>. To a greater extent than any other leading character of the play, Joyce is presented not by means of narration but by what he says and does as well as by interaction with other characters. Joyce's figure dominates the first act of the play. At the very beginning of the piece he is seen in the library dictating passages from

<sup>15</sup> Tom Stoppard, *San Francisco Examiner*, 28 March 1977, 24; quoted in Deloney 1992, 355.

*Ulysses*. Then he appears again, reciting a limerick, and the whole next scene between Carr, Joyce and Tzara takes the form of limericks (pp. 33–35). Paying homage to Joyce and knowing that in real life he had some notoriety as a writer of limericks, Stoppard makes the form of the scene illustrate the importance of Joyce as an artist. When the scene is repeated, Carr trying desperately to reconstruct the past, Joyce is no longer “*an Irish nonsense*” (p. 33). He presents himself now “as the business manager of the English Players, a theatrical group” (p. 49) and then engages in a conversation with Tristan Tzara concerning the development of the Dada movement. This 12 minute conversation is drafted in the form of questions and answers and is charged with a high degree of intertextuality (pp. 56–61), which was commented upon by Stoppard himself:

A lot of people who've read the play like that scene best as a piece of writing. I almost like it best. It exists almost on three levels. On one it's Lady Bracknell quizzing Jack. Secondly, the whole thing is actually structured on [the eighth] chapter in *Ulysses*, and thirdly it's telling the audience what Dada is, and where it comes from. I worked extremely hard on it. (Hayman interview 1974, 21)<sup>16</sup>

After the catechism sequence Tzara accuses Joyce, saying “Your art has failed. . . . It's too late for geniuses!” to which Joyce utters a long monologue in defence of art. This speech did not exist in the text of *Travesties* which was given to Peter Wood and it was he who suggested its being necessary. Now Stoppard thinks “it's the most important speech in the play” (Hayman 1979b, 9). Joyce says that “An artist is the magician put among men to gratify – capriciously – their urge for immortality” (p. 62). He defines the artist as a magician and Stoppard identifies Joyce with that definition by two powerful stage images. Twice in the course of the drama Joyce is endowed with the concrete image of a magician. For the first time, slightly earlier in the play, when Tzara utters the word “conjure”, Joyce “*conjures from the hat a white carnation*” later on to “*pull silken hankies from the hat*” (p. 60). And now again, having finished his speech, he “*produces a rabbit out of his hat*” (p. 63) with which the scene ends. So does the first act after a short passage given to Old Carr. The meaning of the metaphor is self-evident: whereas Tzara's art is to cut to pieces the works of earlier artists, Joyce conjures wonders.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Tynan (1979, 109) criticises the scene and Stoppard's praise of it: “All of this is undeniable, and the well read playgoer will happily consume such a layer cake of pastiche. But cake, as Marie Antoinette discovered too late, is no substitute for bread. To change the metaphor, the scene resembles a triple-decker bus that isn't going anywhere. What it lacks, in common with the play as a whole, is the *sine qua non* of theatre; namely, a narrative thrust that impels the characters, whether farcically or tragically or in any intermediate mode, toward a credible state of crisis, anxiety, or desperation”.

Not much space is given to Joyce in the second act, the art debate being replaced here by the presentation of Lenin's political beliefs. When Joyce finally makes his short appearance at the end of the act, the short conversation between Joyce, Carr and Tzara about art, clothing and the court case finishes with Joyce's remarks concerning "Bloom's adventures [which] correspond to the Homeric episode of the Oxen of the Sun": "It is a chapter which by a miracle of compression, uses the gamut of English literature from Chaucer to Carlyle to describe events taking place in a lying-in hospital in Dublin" (pp. 96-97). Joyce is deliberately given the last word: literally, in his crucial argument with Tzara, and figuratively at the close of each act. Furthermore, in his speech ending the first act, Joyce argues that it is the artist who makes certain things immortal and mentions Homer and the Trojan war as an example. In the scene in which he is writing *Ulysses* (itself based on Homer's masterpiece) he himself is shown as a great artist. Stoppard has commented on this point: "And as far as James Joyce was concerned, the entire history of Ireland, and all its troubles, was justified ultimately because it produced *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*" (Rodway interview 1976, 66). The last image of the play proper, then, (the epilogue, presenting Old Carr and Old Cecily standing apart on its own right), presents Joyce and not any other of the main characters. What is even more important, he acquires here the status of an artist comparable to Homer. In presenting him in such a way Stoppard pays tribute to Joyce's outstanding artistic achievements<sup>17</sup>.

The second artist presented in *Travesties* is Tristan Tzara, the Dadaist. Stoppard had to overcome certain difficulties when providing convincing

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<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Tynan (1981, 38-39) has criticised the way in which Stoppard presents Joyce in his play: "The implication ... that Joyce was an apolitical dweller in an ivory tower is, unfortunately, untrue. He was a professed socialist. And this is where Stoppard's annexation of the right to alter history in the cause of art begins to try one's patience. ... The trouble with his portrait of Joyce is that it is neither one thing nor the other, neither pure fantasy, nor pure documentary, but is simply based on a false premise. When matters of high importance are being debated, it is not pedantic to object that the author has failed to do his homework". In defence of Stoppard it could be argued, however, that the artist does not claim directly anywhere in the play that Joyce was "apolitical", the question of Joyce's political involvement or non-involvement being of no importance for him. What difference would it have made for the play if it mentioned Joyce's political preferences? What matters for Stoppard is that even an artist who does not write clearly politically biased works propagating concrete political messages can rise to the status of a genius. Stoppard has commented on this in an interview with Allan Rodway (1976, 66-67): "I think that art is very much better at laying down inch-by-inch a matrix for the sensibilities which we ultimately use to make our value-judgements on society, than in making an immediate value-judgement on an immediate situation. Particularly much better than at changing a situation ..." Furthermore, Richard Ellman (1974), the author of a book on Joyce which Stoppard mentions in his acknowledgements, in his review highly praises the play, his academic approval of *Travesties* being comparable to A. J. Ayer's praise of *Jumpers*.

arguments for this propagator of anti-art (Tynan 1979, 117). Tzara is presented in the play by means of two techniques: direct presentation/interaction and narration/description, sometimes a mixture of these. On the one hand, we get information about him by means of what he himself says and does. He is twice presented as the anti-artist who creates his poems, the dadaist demolition man who deconstructs the artistic heritage of the past by means of cutting old poems with big scissors and then assembling the scraps at random. These scenes become a visual image of his artistic credo: Tzara denies the significance of both the artist and art and calls for an anti-art designed according to pure chance:

All poetry is a reshuffling of a pack of picture cards, and all poets are cheats. I offer you a Shakespeare sonnet, but it is no longer his. It comes from the wellspring where my atoms are uniquely organised, and my signature is written in the hand of chance.

(p. 53)

It can be noticed, however, that the artistic deconstruction as presented by Stoppard is not governed by chance to such a great extent as Tzara wants it to appear. On the first occasion, in the prologue, he arrives at a poem which is meaningless in English but does make sense in French (p. 18). On the second occasion, when Tzara decides to reconstruct Shakespeare's eighteenth sonnet, the scene is put into the frame of Wildean comedy. Tzara (John Worthing) is trying to woo Gwen, Joyce's secretary and admirer of traditional art (Gwendolen Fairfax). She first recites the entire sonnet, then has a heated argument with Tzara concerning art and finally agrees to deconstruct the poem by drawing scraps with its words from Tzara's hat. Katherine Kelly (1991, 108–109) aptly describes the passage: "Thus, the entire scene re-enacts in the terms of a Wildean romance the Dada intention of destroying traditional art and replacing it with poetry 'written in the hand of chance'".

It could be argued that it is not Tzara, in fact, who is the creator here. After all, it is Gwen who pulls the scraps of paper out of the hat and not he. It could equally well be argued that it is not an authentic Dada poem. The words fit too well to be a product of mere chance. Kinereth Meyer (1989, 111) in an intertextual analysis of the passage compares the use of travesty by Tzara and Stoppard himself. "For Tzara", she writes, "the negation of the artist is logically connected to the play of semiosis and the play of intertextuality". Even though Stoppard, in a sense, mirrors Tzara in using intertextual techniques, his conclusions are "significantly different. Stoppard, like Joyce, 'doubles' the text as a way of affirming the logocentric core of both history and theatrical play, while Tzara sees this logocentrism as an 'overripe corpse', the remnant of a religion of literature that must be destroyed". The use of intertextual techniques may be destructive, as in



the case of Tzara, or constructive, as Stoppard's output clearly demonstrates. The scene between Gwen and Tzara following the cutting up of the sonnet, is Stoppard's own exercise at "reshuffling the cards" as the lines uttered by the characters are a combination of Wilde, Shakespeare and Stoppard himself<sup>18</sup>.

There is still one more powerful stage image of Tzara in the play which occurs during his conversation with Joyce. Tzara argues: "It's too late for geniuses!" and then he "*starts to smash whatever crockery is at hand; which done, he strikes a satisfied pose*" (p. 62). Joyce, who remains motionless for the time being, later delivers his speech in defence of art and produces a rabbit out of his hat (p. 63). The scene indicates that Stoppard insists upon the sacred status of art and the artist. The on-stage violence of Tzara symbolises the destructive bent of the Dada movement which is contrasted with Joyce's acts of creative magic. Or, as Stephen Hu (1989, 125) has aptly put it: "Both characters offer emphatic, theatrical actions to reveal their aesthetic positions to the viewer".

Stoppard had problems not only with presenting Tzara's aesthetic views but also with finding a way of signalling his Rumanian origin. There are, in fact, two Tzaras in the play, "the early" one who appears only once, when he enters Carr's flat for the first time, the one who is specified in the stage directions as "*a Rumanian nonsense*" (p. 32). He utters Jack Worthing's speech taken exactly from Wilde, using a nonsensical Rumanian accent. Stoppard recalls how he arrived at the solution of fitting Tzara into the *Earnest* frame in an interview with Ronald Hayman (1979b, 3). He wanted to make the Rumanian Tzara compatible with the very British Jack without resorting to a "Maurice Chevalier accent". That is why in the first scene, signalling Tzara's nationality, he has him speak with a Rumanian accent which is later abandoned. This solution brought about an extra comic effect in the course of the play when the actor playing Tzara, John Hurt, "with his perfect, eternal English languor", is called by Carr "little Rumanian wog". "It's Magritte's labelling", Stoppard argues. He also says that "It's not intended to be point-making". Unconsciously, as it appears from the above statement, Stoppard is yet making a point, the same point which is made by Magritte's labelling. Tzara, the character reminiscent of the historical figure, is Rumanian, while the actor playing this part is not. The scene, then, underscores the fact that it depicts not a reality but its mere illusion, absurd and inconsistent at that.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Hu (1989, 124) has noticed that this conversation is a mixture of lines from *Hamlet* (I, v, 133; IV, iv, 36-39; V, ii, 95-96), *As You Like It* (III, iii, 15-18), *Much Ado About Nothing* (V, ii, 40), *Henry V* (V, ii, 40), *Henry IV* (Part One) (III, i, 133-134), *Othello* (II, iii, 247), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (I, i, 205) and the thirty second sonnet. Thomas R. Whitaker (1986, 116) mentions, apart from these, also another source of the conversation, namely *Julius Caesar*, yet he does not specify the concrete line.

The notion that the audience are watching only an illusion of reality is also created by means of narrative technique used in the drama. At the very beginning of the play, during his first appearance on the stage, Tzara utters a limerick. Even though dealing with himself Tzara uses the third person singular form<sup>19</sup>. Speaking about himself he is, in a sense, distancing his very person by means of using this grammatical form. The same may be noticed in the catechism episode. At the beginning of this question and answer passage, Tzara uses first person singular (p. 56). Then he starts quoting information concerning the Dada movement from Hugo Ball's diary. Justifiably enough, in the diary Tzara is referred to in the third person. Still later on in the conversation, no longer quoting from the diary, though, Tzara yet goes on using the same grammatical form: "Tzara remained to guide the Dada revolution into the next stage" (p. 60); "Tristan Tzara discovered the word Dada by accident in a Larousse Dictionary" (p. 61), etc. Later on in the play this technique of Tzara speaking about himself is not used any more, the focus changing from Tzara, the historical avantgardist, to Tzara, the fictitious character within Stoppard's piece.

While Tzara is presented in the play by means of both interaction and narration, in the case of the Lenins the latter mode predominates. There are, in fact, only two scenes in which we perceive these two characters involved in a conversation, and even then it is the same conversation. Furthermore, it is uttered in Russian. On the first occasion, in the prologue, there is no translation provided and, as discussed above, a special misunderstanding and confusion may arise from the numerous repetitions of the Russian affirmative "da" (pp. 19–20). The conversation is then repeated, also in Russian, in act two (the second appearance of the characters on the stage) but now Cecily translates it for the audience "*pedantically repeating each speech in English, even the simple 'No!' and 'Yes!'*" (p. 70). Even though, then, the characters are having a life-like exchange, it becomes distanced by means of the foreign language used and the need for a paraphrase. In all the other cases in the play, the Lenins are presented indirectly by means of narration – Cecily's or Nadya's (in which the latter uses the third person singular while speaking about herself) and Lenin's monologues (consisting to a great extent of quotations from historically documented correspondence).

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<sup>19</sup> It could be argued that there is nothing extraordinary about it as all limericks do. Yet, later on in the drama, Joyce composes three limericks (p. 35). The first two, which are about Tzara, employ the grammatical form typical of the genre. The third one, however, which is about himself, uses the first person singular. It becomes apparent that the grammatical form used in the limericks uttered by the individual characters follows the general design of the entire drama according to which narration and interaction of characters are means of underscoring the distinction between historical reality and its fictitious rendering.

The second act begins with Cecily, standing on the stage and waiting for the audience to come back and then delivering “a very long and very dry speech” (Stoppard 1984b, 61) on the history of revolution, the economic theory of Marx, about Lenin’s stay in Switzerland and his trip to Russia. Stoppard has commented on the way he originally perceived the function and meaning of this scene in the drama:

There are several levels going here, and one of them is that what I personally like is the theatre of audacity. I thought, “Right. We’ll have a rollicking first act, and they’ll all come back from the gin-and-tonics thinking: ‘Isn’t it fun? What a lot of lovely jokes!’ And they’ll sit down and this pretty girl will start talking about the theory of Marxism and the theory of capitalism and the theory of value. And the smiles, because they’re not prepared for it, will atrophy”. And that to me was like a joke in itself.

(Hayman 1979b, 9)

In the original version, then, even though not using the term, Stoppard intended to employ the technique of defamiliarisation. The speech makes its ambush intertextually, by being incongruously lifted from political discourse and inserted, contrary to the audience’s intertextual expectations, into a West End comedy. In the printed text, which followed the first production of the play, Stoppard makes a note: “*The performance of the whole of this lecture is not a requirement, but it is an option*” (p. 66). It turned out, however, as Stoppard says, that “the speech was far too long for its own good and, ever the pragmatist, I cut it down to its final paragraph” in the second production (Stoppard 1984b, 61)<sup>20</sup>.

Some critics have criticised Cecily’s lecture, treating it as a sign of “the failure to establish a structural principle of relevance” (Hayman interview 1974, 21) or arguing that “the lecture is not assimilated into the dramatic structure” (Brassell 1987, 155). Some, however, defend the scene. According to Jim Hunter (1982, 30–31), for instance, “Theatrically it is audacious,

<sup>20</sup> Philip Gaskell (1971, 260) has written: “Following the second production in which much more of the lecture was cut than had been suggested in the reading text, Stoppard wrote to me ‘Now I see less and less virtue in the inclusion of Cecily’s lecture either in performance or in print’”. Stoppard (1984b, 61–62) recalls what happened to the play when it was done in France and the “director insisted that he would like to use the whole speech”. The playwright tried to convince him that “he was making a mistake” but the director, nevertheless, did it his way and informed the author that “everything had gone very well”. Stoppard continues: “When I saw the production I immediately understood why. The pretty librarian spoke every word and the text was no more fascinating than before, but she spoke it naked. She began by getting out of bed and kept talking (about Marx and Lenin, as it happens) while she washed herself in a leisurely way and, towards the end of the speech, began putting on her stockings and underclothes. The equation had been maintained”. Stoppard makes it clear that he liked the French production because it kept the balance between frivolity and seriousness. However it is not certain whether he would accept such a change in other performances as a kind of norm.

though simple. ... It steps outside this comfortable structure, quite deliberately; partly for Brechtian reasons, and partly because the comfortable comedy may have been largely used up in Act One<sup>21</sup>.

It may be added here that, while it is probably advisable to cut a large part of the speech, as Stoppard suggested from the very beginning, it fully justifies itself in the structure of the play. In this context, however, it must be stressed that this monologue, like all the other scenes presenting the Lenins, has a special status in the play being placed to quite a great extent outside the realm of Carr's memory and completely outside the framework of Wilde's comedy. In an interview with Ronald Hayman (1979b, 10) Tom Stoppard spoke about his problem with the Lenin part of the play. In his original draft he "actually stopped the play and had actors coming down to read the entire passage from clipboards or lecterns", because he was certain he could not "integrate the Lenins into the *Importance* scheme". Besides, Stoppard, as mentioned earlier, intended the play to be "a small anthology of styles" (Marowitz interview 1975, 5) and thus was fully justified in using a specific kind of style for the presentation of these political figures, a style of narrating or "retelling"<sup>22</sup> and not of interaction of characters.

Stoppard indicates in the stage directions that both Nadya and Lenin do not belong to the same dramatic dimension as the other characters of the play. In order to make this point he shows them at a distance, simultaneously stressing the artificial, theatrical quality of the presentation. When Nadya makes her entrance in the second act, she "*comes down to address the audience, undramatically*" and starts talking about Lenin's "eagerness to go to Russia". When Tzara enters and expresses his incredibility, she does not seem to notice his presence and goes on talking "*out front, independent of Tzara*" (p. 79). The audience easily realise that, even though these two characters are presented simultaneously on the same stage, they belong to its different dimensions. Nadya is able to communicate only with Lenin, but even in this case, the communication is not a typical one. In most instances, Nadya narrates the events of the past and when she mentions a document its content is quoted by Lenin. There is, then, a direct

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<sup>21</sup> Alice Rayner (1987, 141) expressed similar views: "The intrusion of Cecily's lecture is audacious because it is dangerously tedious in the theater. It also says to the audience. 'If you want social reform in the theater, here is the real thing', and we realize that the style of political and social reform is not wholly appropriate to the style of theatrical delight and that it is probably impossible to accommodate political acts to artistic forms. The style of the political speech is one among many styles parodied in the play, but it stands in isolation; it cannot be wholly incorporated, yet it is a crucial dimension of the arena in which usefulness debates delight".

<sup>22</sup> An expression of Peter J. Rabinowitz (1980, 247).

link between what the two characters are saying, yet their exchange can hardly be called a conversation or dialogue. First she mentions a letter written by Lenin to Yakov Ganetsky and then quotes its the content. When, however, she mentions the second letter, one written to V. A. Karpinsky, Lenin enters the stage and starts quoting the content of the letter himself (pp. 79–80). The scene is interrupted by a travesty of Wilde's play in which the Lenins do not participate but remain as an on-stage audience and "*stare at these events*" (p. 80). When the other characters have left, Old Carr "*takes up on NADYA's words*" (p. 81) to be replaced again by Nadya and Lenin who continue their presentation of the historical events in the same way as earlier, the latter mainly quoting from telegrams, telephone messages and letters (pp 81–84). During their conversation Young Carr re-enters and is joined by Tzara. The stage directions are again telling:

*The corner of the Stage now occupied by TZARA and CARR is independent of the LENINS. It can no longer be said that the scene is taking place 'in the Library'. CARR and TZARA might be in a cafe, or anywhere.* (p. 82)

The stage is thus split into two distinctly separate acting areas: one part of it is occupied by Lenin and Nadya who go on narrating history, the other by Tzara and Carr who have a conversation about politics and art. The scene ends in a noteworthy way:

NADYA: On April 9th at 2.30 in the afternoon the travellers moved off from the Zahringer Hof Restaurant in true Russian style, loaded with pillows, blankets and a few personal belongings. Ilyich wore a bowler hat, a heavy overcoat and the thick-soled hobnailed boots that had been made for him by the cobbler Kammerer at number 14 Spielgasse. Telegram to his sister in St Petersburg:

LENIN: "Arriving Monday night, eleven. Tell *Pravda*."

(NADYA and LENIN leave.)

(*Distant sound of train setting off.*)

TZARA: The train left at 3.10, on time.

(p. 84)

Firstly, there is a kind of overlap between the two acting areas. There does not seem to be any justification for Tzara mentioning the train's departure in the context of his conversation. His remark, then, makes sense only in connection with the Lenins. Secondly, why does Stoppard make Tzara, and not Carr, the narrator, make this comment? One could answer this question by stating that it is a mistake on the playwright's part. But, then, if it is remembered what meticulous attention Stoppard pays to detail, this answer does not seem justifiable. It could be argued, therefore, that the artist makes Tzara (and not Carr) utter this remark in order to demonstrate that not only is Carr's reconstruction of the events faulty. The same is true of his own, Stoppard's reconstruction. Thirdly, the scene

presents simultaneously two different locations, as specified in the stage directions but also two different phases of time, as it were. Nadya narrates the Lenins' departure in the past tense and only after she has finished, do they leave and soon afterwards the train is heard setting off. The past tense of her narrative is replaced by the present tense of the stage and aural images. That is not all, because after the very short speech of the Young Carr who has decided that Lenin must be stopped, "*the train noise becomes very loud*" (p. 84). The next scene presents Lenin making a speech to the crowd. The increasingly loud sound of the offstage train, repeated twice, aurally defines a new spatial setting for the audience. As a result of a frantic rush of shifting impressions, a mixing up of different spatial and temporal locations, the audience are once more reminded that they are in theatre watching an artistic presentation of reality which may, or may not have been the same as the image presented to them.

In this respect, the final stage image of Lenin is very telling. The stage directions read:

*Everything black except a light on LENIN. He is bearded again. There is a much reproduced photograph of Lenin addressing the crowd in a public square in May 1920 – 'balding, bearded, in the three-piece suit' as Carr describes him; he stands as though leaning into a gale, his chin jutting, his hands gripping the edge of the rostrum which is waist-high, the right hand at the same time gripping a cloth cap ... a justly famous image. (This is the photo, incidentally, which Stalin had re-touched so as to expunge Kamenev and Trotsky who feature prominently in the original.) The image on stage now recalls this photograph.*

(pp. 84–85)

Stoppard's parenthetically added remark about Stalin's re-touching the photo is of vital importance. Neil Sammells (1988, 85) has commented on this writing: "History has frozen into a form and the form is a lie". The point which Stoppard seems to be making here is that even though the picture of Lenin as presented in the play has not been filtered through Carr's memory, factual data may often also be misleading, history being altered, and realtered by different people.

Many critics have perceived the presentation of the Lenins as a structural flaw of *Travesties* arguing that they are not incorporated into the Wildean framework and that they are treated in too serious terms<sup>23</sup>. Andrew Kennedy (1979, 54), for instance, has written that "the play's curious tension between the 'baroque farce' of the hyper-parodic language and the 'authentic speeches' of Lenin ... creates a collision of styles, more a problem than a solution". Lucina Paquet Gabbard (1982, 116), however, is of the opposite opinion, arguing that "Stoppard's form demonstrates symbolically that art and entertainment are not effective tools for revolution and serious politics".

<sup>23</sup> Bareham 1990, 165; James 1975, 75; Kelly 1991, 112; Londré 1981, 86 and Tynan 1979, 113.

A similar point has been made by Katherine E. Kelly (1991, 11): "The effect of retelling (rather than parodying) the Lenin's writings is to place our full attention on the narration itself rather than on the imaginative space between a source text and its copy". Accepting the opinions of the latter two critics it seems worthwhile stressing that the presentation of the Lenins by means of the narrative technique is consistent with the overall pattern of character presentation typical of this drama.

Looking at the play as a whole, it can be argued that the narrative technique is used in order to distance the people and events presented, to make the audience aware that what they are watching is not reality but merely its reconstruction. The variants of narrative techniques used in the play are differentiated and serve various purposes. Firstly, and most obviously, there is the narrative used by Carr, intended to bring out the notion that the play presents his own, personal view of history, a view necessarily tinted by personal prejudices and his erratic memory. Secondly, there is the narrative used by Tzara when he is discussing his own and also the Dadaists' theory of art. In these moments he appears to be closer to his historical prototype than in the moments when he is seen in interaction with other characters. It seems, then, that narrative is used when content leans towards fact and history while interaction is the technique used for fictional scenes. Such an interpretation may be supported by the fact that there are no narrative scenes with Joyce as the main character (unlike Tzara, he was an artist and not a theoretician of art); Tristan Tzara is presented by means of a mixture of the two types of scenes (narrative ones when his artistic theory is discussed), while Lenin is presented mainly by means of narrative scenes (his views being much more important than anything else). The specific use of narration and interaction, different for the main figures thus adds to the variety of the techniques and styles used in the play and not only stresses its being a fiction based on historical fact but also adds to the self-reflexive quality of the drama.

## Theatricality

The metatheatrical character of *Travesties* is achieved by a number of means. Firstly, Old Carr provides the play with a frame and, as a result, we are dealing with a variant of a play within a play, or a play-within-a-monologue, to be more precise<sup>24</sup>. Secondly, the play's subject being art, the

<sup>24</sup> Some critics use the term play-within-a-play in reference to *Travesties*: Brassell 1987, 140; Corballis 1984, 78; Hayman 1979b, 122; Hinden 1981, 3. Charles Marowitz (1975, 1) calls it "a play-within-a-monologue" and Lucina Paquet Gabbard (1982, 112) argues that "a more accurate name might be a debate-within-a-play-within-a-monologue".

drama presents not only an art debate but also incorporates stage images of the artistic process of creation, of the artistic reshaping of a given reality and thus becomes a representation of representation. Thirdly, the play is charged with a high degree of intertextuality, it refers to numerous works of literature, travesties some of them, quotes from others and so achieves the status of a travesty of history and literature.

The most obvious intertextual reference, as mentioned earlier, is to Oscar Wilde's, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The choice of this play was suggested by the fact that Henry Carr and James Joyce were involved in a production of this drama during their stay in Zurich. Kenneth Tynan (1979, 110) writes: "As for the arbitrary element in the play, I once asked Stoppard what he would have done if Joyce's company had chosen to present Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, instead of Wilde's comedy. He breezily replied that he would probably have based his plot on Gorky". It seems, however, that the use of *Importance* as the ur-text is not such an arbitrary element as Tynan argues and that this concrete play provided Stoppard with a perfect scheme for his own drama. Interestingly enough, as Weldon B. Durham (1988b, 206) has noticed: "In many respects *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a travesty of W. S. Gilbert's *Patience* (1881), itself a travesty of popular sentimental comedies such as T. W. Robertson's *Castle* (1867)".

Critics have paid attention to numerous similarities between the two plays; they have discussed the affinities between certain scenes in the two dramas<sup>25</sup> and Richard Allen Cave (1987, 97) has noticed that "each of Carr's memory episodes, his wish fulfilling fantasies, evolves out from a situation in *The Importance of Being Earnest*". It has also been pointed out that "manilla folders parallel Wilde's offending handbags" (Cohn 1991, 112) and the first class ticket to Worthing is replaced by a library ticket (Sammells 1988, 75). Ruby Cohn (1981, 119) writes that "over a dozen quotations from *The Importance of Being Earnest* are skilfully spliced into Stoppard's own text". Alice Rayner (1987, 147-148) provides a detailed analysis of the transformation of the sentence uttered by Algernon: "If I am occasionally over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated" into a sentence uttered by Carr concerning Wilde: "He may have occasionally overdressed but he made up for it by being immensely uncommitted". This sentence from Wilde's play is travestied twice in Stoppard's drama. Earlier Carr says: "He may have been a little overdressed but he made up for it by being immensely uncommitted" (p. 74). Neil Sammells (1988, 66, 81-82) argues that Wilde's play "is saturated by

<sup>25</sup> Corballis 1984, 81; Hunter 1982, 239; Kelly 1991, 106-107, 109; Sales, 1988, 119 and Whitaker 1986, 117.



fictions" and that "The fundamental lesson of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is that all writing is a lie". He also notices that "the structure of Wilde's play is that of travesty" and discusses a similar technique used by Stoppard.

The connections between *Travesties* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* are numerous and unquestionable, Stoppard's play being a travesty of that of Wilde. The playwright uses certain elements of form and content of Wilde's play, employs "interpretative and transformational" strategies (Sammells 1986a, 377) substituting an art and politics debate for the confusion concerning identity. As Stoppard's play is a rewrite of another drama the critics have also compared the status of the ur-text and Stoppard's achievement in using it for his own purposes in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and in *Travesties*. Roger Sales (1988, 105) writes: "*Travesties* differs from Stoppard's other parodies in that it is almost essential to know *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and to a lesser extent *Ulysses* very well in order to appreciate this metadrama". Allan Rodway (1976, 66) notices that "Stoppard's wild Wilde is greater than his domesticated Shakespeare".

Wilde's play is only one of the numerous intertextual references in *Travesties*, the second, most obvious one being James Joyce's *Ulysses*. As discussed earlier, Stoppard makes use of two Joyce chapters: the Oxen of the Sun episode and the catechising Ithaca sequence<sup>26</sup>. Richard Corballis (1984b, 93) has noticed yet another, though minor, reference to the end of *Ulysses*<sup>27</sup>. Apart from the passages of *Ulysses* travestied by Stoppard the interconnections between these two artistic creations can be discussed in three more aspects.

Firstly, Joyce's masterpiece is a travesty itself, a travesty of both Homer's *Odyssey*, and of life. It takes both real life and an earlier work of art and through artistic recycling presents them in a new way. Similarly, Stoppard's work also consists of these two basic elements. Secondly, in both *Ulysses* and *Travesties*, Henry Carr, a real, historical personage is placed within the frame of a work of art. In the case of *Ulysses* Carr is presented in the *Circe* episode – having lost the case of slander in court Joyce allotted punishment in his own, artistic way. In Stoppard's play, on the other hand, Carr, a minor character in history and real life, is cast in the role of the main protagonist who produces his own travesty of history. Thirdly, being linguistically a complex play, being a concatenation of styles, *Travesties* as Howard D. Pearce (1979, 1156), has aptly observed, "demonstrates Joyce's aesthetic"; it is Joycean in its very form.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the relevance of these chapters to the theme as well as character see: Rodway 1976, 70.

<sup>27</sup> He argues: "Old Cecily provides, for the literati, muted support for the endeavours of art early in the coda when she describes her betrothal to Carr in words which recall Molly Bloom's famous affirmative at the end of *Ulysses*: 'and yes, I said yes when you asked me ...'"

Critics have discussed *Travesties* from the point of view of the numerous styles used in the play, arguing that the play "becomes self-referential, as it is metadramatic in its catalogue of dramatic styles" (Simard 1988, 189). They have argued that it is "a litany of styles: the limericks and the narrative stream of consciousness of Joyce as well as form of liturgical responses in Joyce's dialogue, the epigrams of Oscar Wilde, the broken and interrupted sequences of Dada poetry, historical narrative from the memos of British consulate, the political discourse of Lenin, the patter of music hall (specifically the rhythms of *Mr Gallagher and Mr Shean*)" (Rayner 1987, 139). It could also be argued that Stoppard uses intertextuality for other purposes. Firstly, the mixing up of different literary styles, of historical reality, on the one hand, and of artistic reality, on the other, blurs the line between reality and fiction, reality and illusion. Secondly, the title of the drama is charged with numerous implications: Joyce presents his travesty version of Homer, Tzara of Shakespeare's sonnet, Carr of the events he tries to reconstruct and Stoppard himself of all the texts his metaplay makes use of but also of real, actual events and people. Finally, the intertextuality adds to the impact of the play and invites the audience to look for the ur-texts, and so it is one of the numerous ambushes set up for them.

It seems that it would be very difficult, if not even impossible, to trace all the direct quotations or merely allusions to other literary works in this drama. I would like to discuss a few of them to indicate to what an extent the tracing of the original source adds to the meaning of the play. When Carr says: "If Lenin did not exist it would be unnecessary to invent him. Or Marx, for that matter" (p. 83). The sentence sounds familiar and some members of the audience might know that it is a travesty of Voltaire's sentence concerning God: "If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent Him"<sup>28</sup>. Yet a knowledge of the original sentence of Voltaire, even though adding to the implications of Carr's utterance, is not necessary for the viewer to understand what the character is saying.

The situation is different when, talking about Switzerland, Carr says: "and the sense of sheer relief at arriving in a state of rest, namely Switzerland, the still centre of the wheel of war" (pp. 25–26). This sentence expresses Carr's belief in the neutrality of the country, a view which is underscored by Stoppard's presentation of what is happening there<sup>29</sup>. We may realise, however, that the sentence is a travesty of T. S. Eliot's "the still point of the turning world", mentioned twice in *Four Quartets*, and reappearing in different variants in other works by this great poet and

<sup>28</sup> My translation. For a discussion of the meaning of this sentence and the philosophy of Voltaire see: Tatarkiewicz (1978, vol. II, 130).

<sup>29</sup> This notion is analysed by Lutterbie (1986, 139–140).

playwright (Eliot 1970, 173 and 175). In Eliot's output the wheel and circle function symbolically to represent the relationship between timeless, religious values (the still point) and secular values connected with the physical world of change and movement (the moving rim)<sup>30</sup>. If we notice the intertextual relationship between Carr's sentence and Eliot's symbolic images, the former acquires extra meaning. Switzerland, the meeting place of the artists becomes associated with timelessness not because of its neutrality but because of the timeless character of their artistic creations. It may also be added, perhaps, that in this context the chronological imprecision acquires an extra explanation. It is not important that Joyce, Tzara and Lenin were not in Zurich at exactly the same moment. What is important is that, because of their artistic and political status, they belong to the same sphere of timeless art and thought.

Stoppard does not help his viewers to detect the intertextual references. He does not provide them with any cues in the text proper of the plays. Occasionally he makes some comments in his interviews, though. In *Travesties*, however, the author is apparently alluded to by the character quoting his line. It is when Bennett says: "if I may quote La Rochefoucauld, 'Quel pays sanguinaire, meme le fromage est plein des trous'" (p. 32). The viewer is justified in supposing that he is faced with a case of openly stated intertextuality. It appears that on the only occasion when in a drama Stoppard gives the original source, he does so only to play a trick on his audience. Many viewers will believe in what they hear, few, and only the ones knowing French, will discover the ambush, as Jim Hunter (1982, 241) does, pointing that the sentence "is simply a translation of Carr's earlier line 'What a bloody country even the cheese has got holes in it!'"

The intertextuality in *Travesties* concerns not only other works of literature but also proverbs<sup>31</sup> and songs, "My heart belongs to Dada" (p. 34) and "I was born under a rhyming planet" (p. 54) being the most obvious examples. The numerous cases of intertextuality result in the drama seeming to demand a great deal of literary and historical sophistication on the part of the audience. Even though Stoppard speaks of wanting "the man in seat J16 to understand it immediately without having to read it six times after the publication by Faber & Faber" (Hayman 1979b, 8), the play is undoubtedly too complex to be grasped on the first reading or viewing. Its complexity, however, is one of its very advantages. Despite the

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of the meaning of circle and wheel in Eliot's output see: Uchman 1982, 71-74.

<sup>31</sup> Felicia Londré (1981, 74) writes: "With reference to Lenin's apartments, he asks 'who'd have thought big oaks form a corner room on number 14 Spiegelgasse', a pun on the proverb 'big oaks from little acorns grow'".

fact that the play has sometimes been strongly criticised<sup>32</sup>, *Travesties* “celebrates the craft of comedy as no single Stoppard play” (Kelly 1991, 112). And, what is even more, it is both a play which can be studied in the quiet of the home and a play which can be enjoyed in the theatre, a drama which deals with the nature of art not only by means of the spokesmen but also by its own method of procedure, by presenting the very process of artistic creation.

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<sup>32</sup> See, for instance, Kenneth Tynan (1979, 108): “at the heart of the enterprise something is sterile and arbitrary; Ronald Hayman: (1974 interview, 21): “*Travesties* is more an artefact or a collage of pastiches than an organism. Except for the argument about art there is no internal dynamic, and the storyline is not a strong one”; Allan Rodway (1976, 66): “Though blatantly artificial it resembles reality by being ambiguous and multi-layered. In fact, Stoppard’s latest play is an onion: superficial at every level: profoundly superficial. Like the world of appearances it is heartless; no inner or more real truth is to be found by stripping off layers of appearance” or Ruby Cohn (1981, 120): “Failing to achieve ‘a perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce or perhaps even high comedy’, Stoppard belaboured ideas – aesthetics, politics, philosophy – until they resemble funeral baked meats that coldly furnish forth the marriage tables of farce or perhaps even high comedy”.

## VIII. *Dirty Linen and New-Found-Land*

*Dirty Linen*, a play in one act incorporating a short play *New-Found-Land*, first produced on 6 April 1976, “opened *The American Connection: Part I*, an Ambiance Lunch-Hour season at the Almost Free Theatre (55-seat capacity) in London consisting of specially commissioned new plays ... with any American connection of the writer’s choice – past, present or future”<sup>1</sup>. As is often the case with Tom Stoppard, there were several impulses which made him write the play. As far as the specific quality of the language in the play is concerned, in 1976 he said that he wanted to write a play consisting of foreign phrases which would be understood by an English audience (Kelly 1991, 95). The basic thematic idea which lies behind the play originally had a different shape, as the playwright recalls in an interview with John Leonard (1977, 1): “At first I wanted to write about Walter Winchell, but I did not know how to treat him. Then I thought of a high-powered commission, investigating something or other. Albert Einstein and the archbishop would be on that commission. There would be a staggering blonde who corrected the archbishop on theology and Einstein on physics”. Later on the archbishop and Einstein were replaced by MPs who formed a special, Select Committee of Parliament “sitting to report on rumours of sexual promiscuity by certain unspecified Members which, if substantiated, might bring into disrepute the House of Commons and possibly the Lords”<sup>2</sup>.

Stoppard himself was rather deprecating about the play. He also said: “My director thinks he’s got a profound comment on British society. What he really has is a knickers farce” (Semple interview 1976). The play has been criticised by some reviewers<sup>3</sup>, yet it seems that it is a small masterpiece

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<sup>1</sup> *Playbill*, John Golden Theatre, N. Y. American Theatre Press Inc., March 1977, no pagination; quoted in Hu 1989, 137.

<sup>2</sup> *Dirty Linen and New-Found-Land*, 1978, 19. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

<sup>3</sup> See, especially Walter Kerr (1977, 3): “Intellectually restless as a humming-bird, not just as incapable of lighting anywhere, the playwright has a gift for making the randomness of his flights funny. ... Busy as Mr Stoppard’s mind is, it is also very lazy; he will settle for

in its own right. It is true that it is not a play which comments profoundly on British society, it is not a play of ideas of the type he wrote earlier, one which would mix seriousness and comedy. It is not a play, either, which would follow the earlier scheme of "Firstly, A. Secondly, minus A" (Hayman 1979b, 10). In this drama Stoppard presents a clear, unequivocal point of view and employs his specific brand of humour (both verbal and visual) not so much to discuss certain important issues as to entertain. This does not mean, however, that the play is trivial, shallow or uninteresting. It should be stressed here that the piece works much better when watched in the theatre than when read at home<sup>4</sup>. Stoppard thus once more must be perceived as a man thinking about his plays in terms of their theatrical productions.

Even though *Dirty Linen* occupies a specific place within Stoppard's canon, it yet marks a return to his idea of "dislocating an audience's assumptions" [which] is an important part of what [he] likes to write". The artist has further commented on this point: "Even *Dirty Linen* was in my own mind really a play about presenting a stereotype dumb blonde and dislocating the assumptions about the stereotype. ... I'm fascinated by the correspondence between easy stereotypes and truth" (Hayman 1979b, 143-144). It could be argued that very few people in reality would accept the notion that a sexy blonde is by definition brainless, but it is such a stock character of literature that in a play it seems unnatural and surprising to have a sexpot with a brain. What Stoppard achieves by his treatment of this character is the frustration of his audience's intertextual expectations by means of the technique of defamiliarisation. The statement of Stoppard may be paraphrased and thus we may speak about the relationship between reality and appearance, a common theme characteristic of Stoppard's output.

## A knickers farce

The initial stage image of the play presents the originally empty meeting room, where the Select Committee of Members of Parliament is about to meet. Then Maddie enters and puts on "*a pair of silk, lace-trimmed French*

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the first thing that pops in his head. ... Wide-ranging as his antic interests are, delightful as his impish mismatches can occasionally be, his management of them is essentially slovenly" and Richard Allen Cave (1987, 83): "The parodist in Stoppard has fun with mimicking the various styles in which cant and hypocrisy are couched by the press and by Parliament; but *Dirty Linen* is a slight piece, pushing innuendo to wearing lengths. The satire is aimed at too obvious and hackneyed a target so that, like many of the sex-faces it is ridiculing, it is all surface and no substance".

<sup>4</sup> Felicia Hardison Londré (1981, 122) has commented on this aspect of the play: "Since much of the verbal humor depends upon timing and inflection, *Dirty Linen* can be a far better play when seen in production than the text would suggest".

*knickers*" which she has just taken out of her bag. Stoppard indicates in the stage directions that "*the knickers ought to be remembered for their colour – perhaps white silk with red lace trimmings*" (p. 15). Thus, her sexuality is established in the very first moments of the play by means of a potent stage image. This idea is further strengthened by the ensuing dialogues, by her saying that she "didn't get a wink of sleep all last night" (p. 18) and by the fact that, in a sense, the conversation moves along two separate trains of thought, a flagrant contravention of co-referential rules being used. The men make comments in connection with her work as the new secretary for the Committee while her remarks are charged with sexual overtones in keeping with someone who has been given the telling name of Miss Gotobed. The initial exchange reaches its climax when, asked by McTeazle whether she uses Gregg's or favours the Pitman method, not realising that the question refers to methods of shorthand, Maddie answers: "I'm on the pill" (p. 19). The beginning of the play, then, presents Maddie as a mindless blonde preoccupied with sex, an image complying with the typical stereotype of the sex-pot. This notion is strengthened by a remark of McTeazle directed to her: "don't try to take in more than you can" (p. 19).

Later on, however, when the members of the Committee try to explain to her the issues under scrutiny, her common sense becomes more and more self-evident (pp. 19–20). From now on the audience start to notice two sides of Maddie. On the one hand, there is Maddie-the-sex-symbol. She has had love affairs with all the members of the Committee, Mr French, the newcomer, being the only exception. Furthermore, she enjoys openly what others feel must be hidden and that is why she launches into a triumphant chant of the names of her lovers after Mr French has discovered she is the girl the MPs are accused of dating (p. 51). Finally, she seduces Mr French during the interval when the insert play, *New-Found-Land*, is presented. The off-stage sex is strongly evoked in visual terms towards the end of the drama when French wipes his forehead not with a handkerchief but with the pair of knickers Maddie put on at the beginning of the play (p. 73). Simultaneously, Maddie's sexuality is underscored by the fact that gradually, through bizarre accidents, she is undressed by different members of the Committee so that, towards the end of the first part of the play, her clothing is reduced to a bra and panties. Her sexuality is evoked by the visual images of both her wonderful body becoming more and more scantily clad and of pieces of her garments appearing amongst different MP's belongings. On the other hand, there is Maddie-the-voice-of-common-sense who, taking advantage of her sex-appeal, has convinced French to present "his", as he puts it, report (in fact her own), which states that the

Committee took as their guiding principle that it is the just and proper expectation of every Member of Parliament, no less than for every citizen of this country, that what they choose to do in their own time, and with whom, is between them and their conscience, provided they do not transgress the rights of others or the law of the land. (p. 72)

For Maddie, then, sex which does not transgress the borders of law is something which is one's private business and not a matter of any interest to the public to be discussed by the media. She does not feel ashamed of having had sex with different Members of Parliament and begins to conceal her numerous affairs only after being urged by them to do so. In this respect, she is contrasted with all the members of the Committee, including Mrs Ebury. The only exception is French at the beginning of the play, before she makes him discover how wonderful sex can be and he accepts her viewpoint on the matter. The initial stage image of Maddie putting on the bright-coloured knickers and then dropping her short skirt to conceal them is meaningful in this context. "This act of cautious concealment", Douglas Colby (1978, 16) has written, "prefigures the subterfuge of the play's seven members of Parliament who later employ every device they know – including the amusingly forced use of French phrases to maintain a lofty air – to block from view their base escapades with Maddie". Maddie, unlike the other members of the Committee (the only other exception being French), does not find it necessary to hide reality by putting on appearances, employing theatricality in everyday life.

The characters' attitude to sex is presented by means of visual imagery: the regular use of an action-freezing technique and the repeated motif of knickers and underpants. Early in the drama, Cocklebury-Smith is busy looking at a pin-up in *The Daily Mirror* and admiring it. Maddie is bending over to put her knickers into a drawer in her desk.

*This moment of the man reacting to the pin-up photograph, and the coincidental image of MADDIE in a pin-up pose is something which is repeated several times, so for brevity's sake it will be hereafter symbolized by the expletive 'Strewth!' It must be marked distinctly; a momentary freeze on the stage, and probably a flash of light like a camera flash. MADDIE should look straight out at the audience for that moment.* (pp. 16–17)

A variant of the scene is repeated several times (pp. 21, 27, 33 and 42). On all these occasions, the freeze fulfils several functions and signals certain important aspects of the play's theme and form. Above all, due to the employment of this technique, the self consciousness and dramatic contrivance emerges. The fact that Maddie establishes an eye contact with the audience, the self-reflexive quality of the scene, functions as a farcical Brechtian alienation device, calling attention to the play as a play, to its metatheatrical character. Secondly, the scenes underscore the visual aspect



of the play and suggest Maddie's sexuality. Simultaneously, they establish a strong visual contrast between Maddie and other characters present on the stage<sup>5</sup>. They are furthermore visually apt as they suggest the process of a photograph being taken of Maddie's motionless figure, a photograph of a semi-pornographic kind, one which would often appear in the popular press, which is in itself one of the themes of the play. Last, but not least, another contrast is established by these scenes. The audience observe Maddie, while the characters on the stage completely ignore her, leering at glamorous pin-ups in the newspapers. The reason why the latter do not notice Maddie may be interpreted in a number of ways. They might be only pretending not to pay any attention to her or even avoid looking at her because of their guilty feelings connected with their love affairs. They might be desperately trying to preserve the artificial masks of chastity demanded by the rules of theatricality governing political figures. Maybe, as Stephen Hu (1989, 148) suggests, these theatrical tableaux "stress the moral relationships between characters" and "reveal gross perceptual limitations in characters". This critic also argues that "the sensationalist press tempts readers away from the experience of reality. As Stoppard's audience can clearly see, all eyes should address the ravishing Maddie". In any case, it is shocking and funny that the characters react to a representation of reality (the newspapers pin-ups) while completely ignore the reality in front of their eyes (Maddie's presence in a state of increasing undress).

On pp. 50–51, however, the sixth time when the same technique is used, the situation is different as Maddie "*slams the Sun copy in front of FRENCH*", he recognises her in it, grabs her by the back of the blouse which remains in his hands and "*ALL (Looking at MADDIE) [say] Strewth!*" For the first time, but only after being prompted to do so by Maddie, who hands the paper to him and by French, who comments on its presenting the secretary, do the members of the Committee react to her actual nudity on the stage. Interestingly enough, it becomes quite clear that many (if not all) of the newspaper pin-ups depict Maddie but it is only now that they accept the fact that the newspaper representation is exactly the same as the actual reality in front of their eyes. They are forced to notice that reality is more important than its illusion. The moment, then, can be treated as a kind of illumination or awakening which will, later on,

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<sup>5</sup> Mary R. Davidson (1982, 51–52) thus commented on the importance of the stage image presenting Maddie: "Visually, she remains the center of life and color in the drab meeting room dominated by a chorus of men in dark city suits. Red-haired and voluptuous, she is larger than life, larger than Elizabeth Ray or Paula Parkinson, a kind of universal goddess of love whose generous ministrations soften the rigidity of the most upright Committee member. Her French knickers flesh emerald greens, shocking pink, and peacock blue across the stage. They are so briefly worn and so reverently returned that they can only be metaphorically dirty".

make it possible for them to throw away the mask of hypocrisy and artificiality and to accept French's (and Maddie's) report.

There are two more instances when a similar scene is presented. It also appears in *New-Found-Land* when the phrase is uttered by Arthur who, "*shuffling newspapers comes across something*" (p. 55). The last, eighth, case takes place in the second part of *Dirty Linen* when the Home Secretary takes the *Mirror* in his hands. In the last two cases, then, the uttering of the word "Strewth!" is not accompanied by a stage image of Maddie's continuing state of undress and all the other characters freezing for a moment. These two cases are significant, nevertheless, as they undoubtedly bring to the audience a recollection of the earlier instances and create vivid visual images in their minds, though not on the stage itself.

Stoppard's calling the play a "knickers farce" is not surprising given that the visual image of knickers or underpants reappears several times. Maddie views different, even the most intimate, pieces of clothing as simply clothes and not as sexual symbols. Her attitude to them, as well as the fact that she does not pay much attention to being accidentally undressed in the course of the play, is contrasted with the diametrically opposite reactions of the other members of the Committee. Nearly all the characters come across a pair of knickers, a sign of their promiscuity, and try to get rid of them (pp. 16, 20–21, 28 and 43). They keep up poses, appearances, not wanting the truth to be revealed.

On most of these occasions, the importance of the visual element is underscored by the comic use of the accompanying language. In all the cases, however, the scenes are meant to bring about the notion of the hypocrisy of the members of the Committee. It may be argued that the apparent hypocrisy of the MPs has been caused by their specific status imposed on them as Members of Parliament not so much by the public itself but by the scandal-hunting press, a point which is made clear in the play. As important figures in political life, they are expected to behave in a way adequate for a public persona. As a result, they strive to live up to the expectations and they employ theatricality in life. This idea could be stressed by the fact that all of them try to hide away their real sexual experiences with Maddie. Being under the pressure of public opinion they do not seem to realise that they have been deprived of any private lives. The final illumination comes at the end of the play when they accept Maddie's common sense and present their report. French's illumination comes a few moments earlier. When he joins the Committee he is the only one demanding a scrupulous investigation, the calling of witnesses and a consideration of all the accusations in detail. This could be an indication of his being the only puritanical member of the assembly, the only one of them who does not have any sexual secrets. He might comply with the

description given by Withenshaw before his first entrance "a sanctimonious busybody with an Energen roll where his balls ought to be" (p. 34). Later on, however, having been taught his lesson off-stage by Maddie, he realises that the whole thing is absurd. He will not put on the mask of a chaste public persona. His private life is, within certain limits, at least, his own business. In the course of the Committee's meeting, then, all of them (except Maddie and French for different reasons) learn the same lesson. It is really important not to pay attention to appearances and not to employ theatricality in everyday life.

### Intertextuality and self-reflexiveness

It is possible to discuss *Dirty Linen* from a number of different viewpoints apart from those already mentioned. Attention has been paid by the critics to the quality of its language, its specific kind of humour deriving from the use of numerous "puns, Freudian slips, malapropisms and simple wisecracks"<sup>6</sup>, special sound patterns (Hunter 1982, 100–101) and the use of foreign expressions (Colby 1978, 16 and Smith 1989, 166). I would like, however, to concentrate now on the relationship between *Dirty Linen* and *New-Found-Land* and the intertextual connections of these two short plays which add to the metatheatrical quality of the whole.

The play, as mentioned before, was written for the Ambiance Theatre Club, having been commissioned "to mark the American bicentennial and, coincidentally the British naturalization of the Ambiance's American-born director, Ed Berman". Stoppard says that *Dirty Linen* went off in another direction – in fact it has nothing to do with America. So he added a second playlet, *New-Found-Land*, about Berman's naturalisation, which is "buried" in the middle of *Dirty Linen* (Kerensky interview 1977, 164). The whole offering is known simply as *Dirty Linen* as in performance the two plays blend into one show which Lucina Paquet Gabbard (1982, 121) has called "a monologue-within-a-play". To quite a great extent this critic is right because the biggest part of *New-Found-Land* takes the form of a monologue delivered by Arthur in the presence of sleeping Bernard, yet the situation is not that simple.

*New-Found-Land* consists, in fact, of a dialogue between two Home Office Officials who now occupy the room earlier used by the Committee, all its members having left in a hurry. Most of them have done so because Maddie started revealing the names of her sexual partners. Maddie has left in order to try to seduce French off-stage. A very junior official (Arthur)

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<sup>6</sup> Smith 1989, 165; see also Brassell 1987, 231 and Hunter 1982, 77.

and a very senior one (Bernard) are now using the room to convene a meeting concerning the naturalisation of an American. John Peter argues that the applicant's "similarity to Ed Berman, director of the Almost Free and of the play, is probably accidental"<sup>7</sup>. This critic is wrong, however, as there are numerous similarities between the play's American and Ed Berman<sup>8</sup>. While the two officials should be dealing with the application, they soon start digressing. The senior one starts telling his version of *My Father Knew Lloyd George*<sup>9</sup>. The purpose of the story, although Bernard does not make a point of it, is for Stoppard to indicate that sexual promiscuity among politicians is not a new phenomenon at all. Later on, after some discussion concerning the naturalisation, Arthur launches into his monologue starting with the words "My America! – my new-found-land" (p. 60).

This speech is significant for a number of reasons. Typically for Stoppard, it starts and ends with quotations from other literary works. The line opening it, as Richard Corballis (1984b, 102) first noticed, is taken from John Donne's "Elegie XIX. To His Mistress Going to Bed". The line in Arthur's speech refers solely to America, in the original, however, it is incorporated in a highly sexual description employing geographical terms. In the context of *Dirty Linen* as a whole, it binds the inner and outer plays, reminding us of the meeting of Maddie and French off-stage, a meeting which, as we will learn later, is sexual in character. The link between the two plays is further strengthened in this context if we remember Withenshaw's phrase uttered in passing earlier in the play: "Yes, I once took a train journey right across America. ... but that's another story" (pp. 31–32). The speech, praising America, "emerges as a kind of idealized dream-sequence", and Arthur's "journey through America can only be a journey of the mind, its landmarks are drawn from myth and literature rather than from reality", as Richard Corballis (1984b, 102) has observed. The fact that it is delivered by Arthur to the audience, Bernard having fallen asleep on the stage in the meantime, causes that it functions as a means of shattering of theatrical illusion. The monologue in this respect is comparable to Maddie's provocative poses also aimed directly at the audience, both of them being charged with a high degree of theatricality. The speech ends with yet another quotation, the lines "with wondering eyes we stare at the Pacific, and all of us look at each other with wild surmise – silent" having been taken from John Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer", the intertextual connection detected by Susan Rusinko (1986, 77).

<sup>7</sup> J. Peter, "Members Only", *Sunday Times*, 18 April 1976, 37; quoted in Page 1986, 53.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of this issue see: Brassell 1987, 224–225.

<sup>9</sup> An intertextual reference to "an inconsequential British play", as Gabbard (1982, 122) points out.

When Arthur finishes the monologue the Committee start coming back to their meeting and for a short time the stage is occupied by the characters of both *Dirty Linen* and *New-Found-Land*. One more link between the two plays is established when it becomes clear that the Home Secretary, who has in the meantime appeared on the stage looking for the Home Office Officials in connection with the naturalisation case, is yet another person on the list of Maddie's conquests. This information is given to us only and not to the other characters on the stage. The scene makes use of the Home Secretary's asides to Maddie, a technique earlier employed by members of Committee who did not want their secrets revealed (p. 70). The Home Secretary, who has not had a moment of illumination in the course of the play, still wants to live up to his public persona status, to keep up appearances by employing theatricality in everyday life. Being upset by the awkward situation, he quickly signs the naturalisation paper and leaves.

The final note of the play, French's "Toujours l'amour" followed by Maddie's "Finita La Comedia" (p. 73), links its many strands. The use of foreign phrases characteristic of most of the play<sup>10</sup> seems to acquire another dimension here. Earlier Stoppard had his characters use Continental phrases in order to indicate a pose on their part, their employing theatricality in life. The foreign phrases uttered by the characters were a sign of a pretence resulting from their putting on a mask of a public persona in order to make appearance replace truth. These two sentences, however, seem to have a different purpose and are directly connected with the meaning of the entire play. French has learned a lesson about love and openly praises the need for it. Maddie, who has in the course of the play stressed its metatheatrical character, now does the same again, once more reminding the audience that what they have seen is a theatrical performance, an illusion of reality and not reality as such. The final words of the play, then, stress its being a metaplay.

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of this issue see, among others: Hunter 1982, 101.

## IX. *Dogg's Our Pet, The (15 Minute) Dogg's Troupe Hamlet, Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*

All these plays are included in one chapter despite the fact that they are separated by a certain span of time: *Dogg's Our Pet* was produced in 1971 (so before the first production of *Jumpers*) while the last of the dramas discussed here did not have its premiere before 1979. There are several reasons for such a treatment of them. *Dogg's Hamlet*, presented in double bill with *Cahoot's Macbeth*, is a specific combination of the two earlier plays, all of them being connected with Ed Berman and his Inter-Action Theatre. Three of them are a specific condensation of famous Shakespearean tragedies. Finally, with the exception of *The (15-Minute) Dogg's Troupe Hamlet*, they are rooted in Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophical investigation of language as a tool for describing reality.

### Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language

Ludwig Wittgenstein's early work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, dealing with the picture theory of language puts forward an opinion according to which there must be a similarity of structures between reality and the language which describes it<sup>1</sup>. The philosopher presents a pragmatic conception of language; "use" being the key term in his investigations. In his works he tries to set limits to language, to make it a logical and consistent tool of describing reality. In the "Preface" to *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* he writes:

Thus the aim of the book is to set a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to set a limit to thought we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Wittgenstein's picture theory of language see: Pitcher 1964, 77–100.

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein 1961, 3. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

Wittgenstein argues: "The world is a totality of facts, not of things" (1.1) and "We make to ourselves pictures of facts" (2.1). In the "Preface" to *Tractatus* Bertrand Russell, whose idea "that language is made up of simple elements – propositions; and that these linguistic elements 'mirror' the facts of the world" has influenced Wittgenstein (Hardwick 1971, 18), has written:

A picture, he says, is a model of reality, and to the objects in the reality correspond the elements of the picture: the picture itself is a fact. The fact that things have a certain relation to each other is represented by the fact that in the picture its elements have a certain relation to one another. (Russell in Wittgenstein 1961, XI)

Wittgenstein himself thus phrases this proposition:

In the picture and the pictured there must be something identical in order that the one can be a picture of the other at all. ... What the picture must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it after its manner – rightly or falsely – is its form of representation.

(2.161, 2.17)

At the end of his work Wittgenstein comes to the following conclusions:

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. (5.6)

The world is my world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of language (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of my world. (5.62)

There are indeed things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest.

They are what is mystical. (6.522)

What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence. (7)

Accordingly, *Tractatus* specifies precisely what can and what cannot be said and thus imposes logical limitations upon language as a tool for describing reality. Wittgenstein's division of all possible statements into tautologies, propositions and contradictions (4.1, 4.461, 4.464, 6, 6.1, 6.22), his exclusion of ethics, aesthetics and metaphysics from the realm of philosophical investigation (6.421, 6.431–6.4312) and his formulation of a theory of meaning for terms and propositions made him very influential among Logical-Positivists. *Tractatus* has been often criticised<sup>3</sup>, and Ludwig

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Carnap, one of the leading Logical-Positivists, after having praised Wittgenstein for his analysis of metaphysics, has written: "he seems to me to be inconsistent in what he does. He tells us that one cannot state philosophical propositions and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent, and instead of keeping silent, he writes a whole philosophical book" (R. Carnap, *Philosophy and Logical Syntax*, London 1935, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 37ff; quoted in Pitcher 1964, 156). George Pitcher (1964, 155), in his book on Wittgenstein, makes a similar comment: "The theory of what can and cannot be said is so basic to the entire system of *Tractatus*, that Wittgenstein could not possibly abandon it without

Wittgenstein himself started to be dissatisfied with it and set out to write a second work on language, namely *Philosophical Investigations*, a treatise first published only two years after the great philosopher's death. It begins with a quotation from St. Augustine's *Confessions* which suggests that a child acquires language when a grown-up points at an object and states its name, that is by means of an ostensive definition. Wittgenstein argues that Augustine's premise, assuming that "every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands"<sup>4</sup>, could only be true of very primitive language forms:

Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", "beam". A calls them out; – B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call. – Conceive this as a complete primitive language.

(3e)

The example given by St. Augustine is based on the idea that the process of language learning is equivalent to learning to correlate words with things by a simple process of association. The word is repeated in the presence of the thing to which it refers and by such a repetition the learner comes to see that the word means the thing. Wittgenstein, however, argues that the process of language learning is not as simple as that. He points out that one's earliest acquaintance with a word is through its use in a situation. It is through the situation and its extra-linguistic factors that the learner is able to make a correlation between a word and its object. The referential univocacy of language in its relation to the object holds good for primitive language acquisition only, and Wittgenstein proceeds to examine the far more complex fabric of modern language. Learning language by doing is central to what he calls the "language-game" – a verbal activity demonstrating the use of language in a particular situation (15e). One acquires knowledge of a language in a way similar to learning the rules of a game by watching others play (27e). Taking into account the variety and multiplicity of language games (11e–12e), meaning can have no *a priori* status: "the meaning of a word", Wittgenstein argues, "is in its use in the language" (20e). Learning a language means "giving names to objects," attaching

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abandoning the entire *Tractatus*. For a man with a system, this is an eminently good reason; but the fact that in order to preserve the system he had to adopt the paradoxical position of denying that what he had clearly said could be said, causes one to doubt whether the system is really sound and therefore worth preserving".

<sup>4</sup> Wittgenstein, 1974, 2e. All the references in the text will be to this edition.



a label" (12e–13e), while "naming is a preparation for description" (24e) and is carried out by means of a language-game, all of whose participants follow the same rules. Thus meanings stem from an activity: "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (8e), "the speaking of a language is a part of an activity, or a form of life" (11e). *Philosophical Investigations*, then, as Christopher Norris has noticed, repudiate

the notion that meaning must entail some one-to-one link or 'picturing' relationship between word and referent. Language is now conceived of as a repertoire of 'games' or enabling conventions, as diverse in nature as the jobs they are required to do. The nagging problems of philosophy most often resulted, Wittgenstein thought, from the failure to recognize this multiplicity of language games. (Norris 1991, 129–130)

Furthermore, the meaning of the utterance depends not only on the concrete meaning of words as they are applied in a given language-game but also on other non-verbal elements. Wittgenstein writes:

What is the difference between the report or statement 'Five slabs' and the other "Five slabs!?" – Well, it is the part which uttering these words plays in the language-game. No doubt the tone of the voice and the look with which they are uttered, and much else besides, will also be different. (10e)

It is not surprising that Wittgenstein's ideas appeal to Stoppard. The philosopher has apparently exerted considerable influence on the playwright which is visible already in the latter's earlier output<sup>5</sup>. Stoppard himself (1971, 10) has acknowledged that he derived the idea for the Dogg language from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* which "is about the correspondence between language and reality". The ideas of Wittgenstein have attracted the playwright who has often dealt with the relationship between reality and its representation, who has been fascinated with the specific treatment of this issue by René Magritte and who himself experimented with the ability of sound, language and visual image to represent reality.

<sup>5</sup> This study discusses the use of the Wittgenstein anecdote in *Jumpers* (p. 153) and the possible influence of Wittgenstein on Stoppard's use of language in that play (p. 144). Furthermore, the sentence uttered by George in *Jumpers*: "Language is a finite instrument crudely applied to an infinity of ideas, and one consequence of the failure to take account of this is that modern philosophy has made itself ridiculous by analysing such statements as 'This is a good bacon sandwich', or 'Bedser had a good wicket'" (p. 63) is clearly evocative of the great philosopher's ideas. Similarly, professor Anderson in *Professional Foul* says: "Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we are by no means silent". His sentence is a paraphrase of the final proposition of *Tractatus*. Anthony Jenkins (1988, 72) mentions other cases of similarities between the outlook of these two men discussing *Enter a Free Man* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

The philosopher insists that meaning derives not only from the words actually spoken but also from the multiplicity of the forms which language-games take, their ends and the circumstances of the playing, the non-verbal elements and the objects involved. This is parallel, in terms of drama, to stressing the function of the non-literary, theatrical elements of performances which play such an important part in Stoppard's creative output. Language functions as an instrument to describe reality; in a similar way drama and art aim at representing it. It can be said, therefore, that Wittgenstein's interest in language as a tool of representing reality is similar to Stoppard's interest in the illusion of reality created by drama, radio play and painting, which is one of the main subject matters of his three earlier plays: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *Artist Descending a Staircase* and *After Magritte*<sup>6</sup>.

There are two more similarities between Wittgenstein and Stoppard which seem worth mentioning. In the *Preface to Philosophical Investigations*, the philosopher writes:

Four years ago I had occasion to re-read my first book [*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*] and to explain its ideas to someone. It suddenly seemed to me that I should publish those old thoughts and the new ones together; that the latter could be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking.

(p. VI)

The philosopher's statement of intentionally self-contradictive positions mirrors Stoppard's similar opinions concerning his playwriting:

I write plays because writing dialogue is the only respectable way of contradicting yourself. ... I put a position, rebut it, refute the rebuttal, and rebut the refutation. Forever. Endlessly. ... I like people who repudiate everything they've written every five years.

(Gussow interview 1972)

And, finally, both Wittgenstein and Stoppard are masters of mixing the serious and comic. *Philosophical Investigations*, even though a philosophical treatise, undoubtedly contains comic elements, and Wittgenstein is reported as claiming that it would be possible to write a serious philosophical work consisting entirely of jokes<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> It seems significant to point out that there are certain similarities in the attitude concerning the possibility (or impossibility?) of arriving at a representation of reality in the outlooks of Ludwig Wittgenstein and René Magritte. For a discussion of the latter's ideas concerning the relationship between pictorial or linguistic representations of reality and the reality as such, see pp. 100–102 of this study.

<sup>7</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *A Memoir*, London 1968, 29; quoted in Roy W. Perret 1990, 94. Stoppard, as he himself has argued, tries "to end up by contriving the perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce or perhaps even high comedy" (Hudson interview 1974, 7).

## Ed Berman's and his Inter-Action language games

Before passing to an analysis of the plays, it seems necessary to devote some time to another figure, besides Wittgenstein, who seems to have his share in the plays discussed in this chapter, namely Ed Berman, one of the prominent figures of Inter-Action, a group characterised by its off-beat taste, improvisatory techniques and energetic community involvement. The history of Inter-Action is briefly discussed by Ed Berman (1979, IX) in his *Preface to Ten of the Best British Plays*, Inter-Action Imprint, where he recalls producing the premiere of Stoppard's *After Magritte* in 1970 in the Green Banana Restaurant and writes: "Tom was attracted to us, I think, by the whole idea of Inter-Action – both the theatre and community sides". The group used the Inter-Action Game method which, as Ed Berman told Robert Berkvist in September 1979, "postulates that children's games are inherited capacities and that the universality of those games is a keystone of human development – and, most important, the basic instrument by which we learn to create" (quoted in Whitaker 1986, 153).

It is not, however, the Inter-Action Game but Wittgenstein's language-game which is the direct inspiration for *Dogg's Our Pet*. The reading of *Philosophical Investigations*, which seemed to Stoppard (1971, 10) to be "about the correspondence between language and reality", evoked an image in his mind of a man building first a wall of bricks and then steps, "the whole thing [being] a kind of opening ceremony"<sup>8</sup>. The initial stage image thus developed which includes the two basic components of the play – Wittgenstein's language-game and the opening of Ed Berman's new drama centre called The Almost Free Theatre in December 1971. The latter component provides the explanation of the title of the play, which is "an anagram of Dogg's Troupe, [in] itself an imperfect homonym", derived from [Berman's] pseudonym as a writer for children, Prof. R. L. Dogg" (Berman 1979, X–XI). The imaginary language, invented by Stoppard under the influence of Wittgenstein, is called Dogg language<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> It is worthwhile to mention in this context that Edward Bond's *Lear* whose premiere took place in September 1971 (so a month earlier than that of *Dogg's Our Pet*) also opens with an image of a man building a wall. In both plays the activity is very important and acquires metaphorical, symbolic meaning. It is difficult to say, though, whether the similarities between the two plays are a proof of direct influence or merely a case of coincidence.

<sup>9</sup> Stoppard is not the first playwright to use an imaginary language in his play. This was done earlier successfully, for instance, by Stanisław Witkiewicz (Witkacy) in *Szewcy* (*Shoemakers*) and Vaclav Havel in *The Memorandum*. It is rather doubtful whether Stoppard knew Witkacy's drama. It might be well the case, however, if we consider the Polish playwright's popularity. He *did* know Havel's play, though, as the printed text is provided with an Introduction written by Stoppard himself in which he discusses the fictitious official languages, Ptydepe and Chorukov, invented by Havel (Havel 1981, VII).

## *Dogg's Our Pet*

### Constructing a language and a platform

The beginning of the play presents Charlie, "some kind of worker or caretaker", building a platform<sup>10</sup>. Charlie starts by calling "Plank!" and is thrown a long flat piece. This is repeated four times. Then the order is changed to "Slab!", "Block!", "Brick!" and finally "Cube!" At each command which is repeated several times, pieces of different sizes and shapes are delivered. When the audience watch the play, they assume that the words Charlie uses refer to different pieces of wood he needs at a given moment. "But this is not the only interpretation", Stoppard argues in the "Preface":

Suppose, for example, the second man knows in advance which pieces Charlie needs, and in what order. In such a case there would be no need for Charlie to "name" the pieces he wants, but only to indicate when he is ready for the next one. So the calls might translate thus:

Plank = Here!

Slab = Ready!

Block = Next!

Brick = The thrower's name.

Cube = Thank you!

(p. 81)

The assumption behind the opening scene of *Dogg's Our Pet* is that Charlie is using one language – English, in which words describe the pieces of wood, while his helper, Brick, uses the invented, imaginary Dogg language. Thus the two speakers use the same word (phonemic signifier) to indicate different meanings. If the action of the play were limited to the building of the platform only, they might never discover they are using different languages. This, however, is not the case.

While Charlie is building the platform and ordering different pieces of wood, Able and Baker, two schoolboys, come on the stage and, using the same words (plank, slab) begin to play ball. In their language the words do not refer to pieces of wood, but to the orders given while playing. The two kinds of language are relevant for different actions the characters are performing, so that when Charlie cries "Block!", even though the boys react by putting "*their hands up into receiving position the block whizzes past them and is caught by Charlie*" (p. 83). Despite being phonetically identical with the other, the specific meaning of each language is derived from the concrete action to which it is related.

<sup>10</sup> *Dogg's Our Pet*, 1979, 82. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

Then Dogg, the headmaster, enters and starts distributing flags "*beginning in the front row of the audience*". This scene is important for two reasons. Firstly, it is an obvious example of the shattering of the theatrical illusion. Secondly, it adds to the presentation of the Dogg language as a short lesson of its use in mathematics follows: "Sun, dock, trog, slack, pan, sock, slight, bright, nun, tun, what, dunce" (p. 84). An amusing dialogue between Charlie (to whom the word "dunce" is directed) and Dogg issues, when Charlie asks "What?", meaning in English "What do you mean?" Answering the question Dogg repeats the twelve words again, making it clear that his counting is correct and that "dunce" follows "what", twelve coming after eleven. The counting (verbal expression) is explained by means of an accompanying visual act: Dogg takes the flags back and then distributes them again, pointing to each while counting.

Later on, Dogg starts distributing paper flowers and saying "Block!" ("next" in Dogg language). When Charlie hears the word uttered, he expects a block to be thrown to him, but the piece of wood does not appear. It becomes evident that they are now in the world of Dogg language and actions. When, not realising clearly what is happening, Charlie says ("*sarcastically*") "Block!", referring to the strange actions and language of the other characters, he again enters the reality of English language and the actions performed there and thus the next block is thrown to him.

Gradually, the two kinds of language and activities begin to overlap and to Dogg's order "Brick!" (a call to the thrower of wood) a brick is thrown to Charlie who is not expecting it (p. 86). Different pieces of wood start coming at random, Able and Baker begin participating in the building of the platform and the original plan of the construction is not followed. Two worlds become confused, the different, concrete rules of the games, actions and languages overlap and, as a result, a certain chaos can be noticed.

This is evident in the scene with the radio, which belongs to Charlie and which used to broadcast in English. When Charlie now turns it on, "*The radio emits the familiar pips, and then a voice says, 'Check mumble hardly out' in a particular inflection consistent with an announcer saying 'Here are the football results'*" (p. 89). Stoppard explains in the stage directions that the message delivered in Dogg refers to football results because of the speech rhythms and inflections which are characteristic of this kind of message. The different reactions of the characters indicate this as well – Able (who knows Dogg) is surprised with the results, while Charlie (who does not) throws the football pool coupon away and turns the radio off.

Towards the end of the play, a Lady comes onto the stage, followed by Dogg who carries a cushion with a pair of golden scissors to be used during the opening ceremony for cutting the ribbon. When she "*sees the steps of the platform she is taken a back*", as Charlie, due to the interferences

of Able and Baker, "*has not done a very good job*" and the whole thing is a little "*wobbly*" (p. 92). Then she delivers a speech consisting of onomatopoeic syllables which, due to the phonetic similarity to insults in the English language, point to a meaning diametrically opposed to the one she intends. Finally, she cuts the ribbon, while saying, "Sod the pudding club" (p. 93).

The building of the platform by Charlie is parallel to the construction of a language, the units used in the construction of the platform (planks, slabs, blocks, bricks and cubes) being analogous to the units of language (words and sentences). A change in arrangement leads to different signifying constructions, but the players of the distinct games also construe the same constructions differently. When the boys, Able and Baker, help Charlie to build the platform, they do not know the rules of the construction, thus the result is not fully satisfactory and the thing is "rather wobbly". In a similar way, Charlie's attempts to learn Dogg language are often unsatisfactory and lead to misunderstandings and the punishment of the uncomprehending builder by Dogg, the headmaster. This is partly due to the malicious tricks the boys play on him as a school caretaker. When they help him with the building of the platform, they are unconscious of the names given to the different pieces of wood, yet fully conscious of the meaning of words in Dogg. To make the parallel between the constructing of the platform and the constructing of a language more obvious, Stoppard introduces pieces of wood which "*have been scrawled on all sides with indecipherable signs. When the wall is completed these signs spill into each other over the cracks in the wall*" (p. 90). The inscriptions become thus visible. When the boys help with the building, they pay attention not to the shape of the pieces (the thing most important to Charlie) but to the signs on them (which make inscriptions meaningless to Charlie as he does not know Dogg). The following inscriptions appear in vertical arrangement, each word occupying one level:

DOGG POUT THERE ENDS  
SHOUT DOGG PERT NEED  
DON'T UPSET DOGG HERE

(pp. 90-91)  
(p. 90)  
(p. 92)

Each time they appear, Charlie, the platform-builder, is made responsible for the text, which seems obscene to Dogg, the headmaster, and is driven by him through the wall, which then disintegrates. On the last occasion, it is Charlie himself who produces the inscription: "DOGG TROUPE THE END" (p. 94), this being an indication of his having mastered the rules of the game.

It is significant to note in this context that Stoppard has paid meticulous attention to the shape and size of concrete building elements:

*The combined width of three slabs is equal to the width of four planks.* (p. 83)

*The combined width of the five blocks is equal to five-sixth of the length of a slab.* (p. 85)

*A brick is equal in cross-section to a block, but shorter. A brick is twice as long as it is wide, like to cubes stuck together.* (p. 86)

The same shape can be achieved by means of using different building blocks. Similarly, the same letters appearing in all the inscriptions form a different result on each occasion. In the context of the play, the visual image of constructing the same shape by means of different elements (the wall) and different shapes by means of the same elements (the inscription) is parallel to the comparison between the two languages – Dogg and English – where the same words denote different things because of appearing in a different context of different language-games. The visual and verbal components of the play are intrinsically bound and cannot be separated.

## Theatricality

The basic interest of the play, Wittgenstein's language games, is introduced in the drama not by means of language but by means of other, non-verbal means of communication. Different games are utilised – building with blocks, playing ball, counting out flags, trading compliments and insults, making enquiries and announcements and delivering speeches, which are filled with easily graspable meanings regardless of the meaninglessness of the words actually spoken. The theatrical element of the performance thus becomes prominent – the actions, gestures and intonation. The nonsensical language makes sense only due to the participation of the actors and the audience alike, all of whom build meanings out of the non-verbal, physical communication of the theatrical production<sup>11</sup>. The very fact that what is significant is not the initial script but the actual theatrical production is stressed by Stoppard in the "Preface" when he describes the printed text as being "as much a description of an event collectively arrived at as an author's script" and when he expresses his gratitude to Dogg's Troupe for their collaboration (p. 80).

*Dogg's Our Pet* demands the audience's active participation – they are invited to fill in the numerous fields of indeterminacy and, just like Charlie,

<sup>11</sup> A similar opinion is voiced by Whitaker (1986, 83–84) who writes: "We can fully understand *Dogg's Our Pet* only in performance, not just because its physical actions are metaphorically significant but also because its real logic is that of pre-linguistic or trans-linguistic play. ... *Dogg's Our Pet* is admirably designed as participatory theatre for all ages and its playful logic shows Stoppard again to be, even when most obviously 'verbal', a surprisingly non-verbal playwright.

to acquire some basic knowledge of the Dogg language. The latter's function in the play is quite complex. He is one of the characters of the piece. Yet, while being the only character who uses the same language as the audience, he becomes their confused interlocutor. The viewers share his surprise and bewilderment at the meaning of words and actions in the Dogg world; they participate with him in the slow process of the acquisition of the unknown language. When he addresses them directly at the end of the play, they assume they will be able to follow his meaning. It appears, however, that even though the language he now uses is English, he does not quite speak the same language as they do. Unlike them, Charlie is not only an observer of the other characters' actions, he is also the school caretaker in the world of the play. Thus his remarks on kicking balls through windows and using language refer to two planes of fictitious reality. He speaks about himself as a man confronted with the strangeness of the Dogg world and its language; simultaneously he utters words any school caretaker would use when addressing his pupils.

The play ends with a moment of the shattering of the theatrical illusion. Charlie delivers his own speech in English, after he has climbed "*up the steps and surveys the audience*". Then he "*rapidly puts the wall up*" in the process forming an inscription on it which is meaningful in English, and leaves. "*For a curtain call, the cast marches on stage in single file, to music, and collect the flags from the audience. They line up*". Charlie asks "Slab?" meaning "Ready?" in Dogg, all answer "Slab!", bow and say "Cube!" (Thank you!) (p. 94). The end of the play is indicative of two things. Firstly, Charlie has learnt his lesson in Dogg and is able to understand and also to use this language successfully. Secondly, the audience's presence in the theatre is acknowledged by Charlie's addressing them directly and by all the characters/actors in the process of collecting the flags. Furthermore, the cast, while making a bow and thanking the audience for their participation in the evening's entertainment, destroy any remains of theatrical illusion and indicate that the play has been merely a play and not reality itself.

### *The (15 Minute) Dogg's Troupe Hamlet*

Stoppard's connections with Ed Berman and Dogg's Troupe continued and in 1972 he wrote *The (15 Minute) Dogg's Troupe Hamlet* commissioned by the group and intended for production on the Fun Art Bus. The play, however, was left lying around for four years both by Berman and Stoppard and was finally produced "on the grey parapets of the National Theatre" in 1976 (Berman 1979, X). This drama, which has been described as "an



early joke that in ... brevity satirized the lengthiness of Shakespeare's work" (Hu 1989, 160), presents a thirteen minute condensation of the original, followed by a two-minute condensation of the condensation as an encore. The play also contains an interlude presenting Hamlet at sea and in this respect is reminiscent of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* whose third act is set on the deck of a ship. The two main characters of Stoppard's earlier play, however, are not even mentioned in this short piece.

The play opens with a prologue uttered by Shakespeare which is a compilation of lines which belong to different characters of the drama (mainly Hamlet) and are repeated by them in their proper places as the play progresses. The speech is interrupted by a lady in the audience shouting "Rotten" to which Shakespeare says: "The lady doth protest too much./ Cat will mew, and Dogg will have his day!"<sup>12</sup> The very beginning of the play stresses its metatheatrical character. Before being uttered by the characters their lines are first delivered by the author of the great masterpiece – Shakespeare himself (whose part is, obviously played by an actor). While taking abow after entering the stage, he acknowledges the presence of the audience, drawing attention to being an actor in the evening's performance. Furthermore, there is a direct interaction between him and a lady in the audience. It could be presumed that the sentences uttered by him to her do not belong to the great play but are added on the spot to suit the circumstances – they are an answer to her protest and refer to Ed Berman (the latter could be supported by the fact that the word "Dogg" is spelled in such a way). Later on, however, they are repeated in their original context of Shakespearean drama (pp. 143, 147. *Hamlet* III, iii, lines 124–125 and V, i, line 286). And, finally, the play's predecessor is of paramount importance – one can enjoy this short piece only if one knows the original – *Hamlet*, the intertextual status of the short piece being unquestionable.

## *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*

The last play to be discussed in this chapter, *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* was also written for Ed Berman. Stoppard recalls the process of writing it in an interview with Nancy Shields Hardin (1981, 165): "I promised to come up with some sort of new piece that he could use in his repertory company for a tour – a double bill consisting of *Dogg's Our Pet* and *Hamlet* as the first half, and the second half to be a new piece". The play was first produced on 21 May 1979 and consists of two parts

<sup>12</sup> *The (15 Minute) Dogg's Troupe Hamlet* 1979, 138. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

which combine to form a united whole and cannot be performed separately. The first part is dedicated to Professor Dogg and the Dogg Troupe of Inter-Action. The second one to Pavel Kohout, a playwright, a non-person for the authorities of Czechoslovakian "normalisation", who together with some other dissidents organised a theatrical group called a Living-Room Theatre. They performed at people's houses, one of their productions being Kohout's seventy-five minute version of *Macbeth*.

*Dogg's Hamlet* and *Cahoot's Macbeth* have a lot in common: both use Shakespeare's masterpieces in an abbreviated and altered form, both are dedicated to men of the theatre, both follow Wittgenstein's idea of the language-game and use Dogg language of a more complex form than that used in *Dogg's Our Pet*. As Stoppard writes in the "Preface", Wittgenstein's ideas appealed to him because of "the possibility of writing a play which had to teach the audience the language the play was written in"<sup>13</sup>. The fact that the imaginary language was now more complicated made Stoppard introduce translations of Dogg into English in the printed text<sup>14</sup> and put stress on the meaning arising from the non-verbal, theatrical communication during the production of the play. When Stoppard participated in the San Diego State University production of *Dogg's Hamlet*, *Cahoot's Macbeth*, he insisted on correct delivery, with Dogg words and phrases being inflected and accentuated in perfect accord with their English equivalents; he emphasised that the meaning should be conveyed to the audience through inflection and body language which, accordingly, had to be made "about thirteen times more important" than usual. He also stressed the importance of the narrative, of "telling the story"<sup>15</sup>.

In the "Preface" (p. 7) Stoppard states that the two plays should be treated as a whole and the second part cannot be understood without the first one which is devoted to teaching Easy and the audience to understand and use the Dogg language. Even though both parts use Dogg language, its function in them is different. In *Dogg's Hamlet* just as in *Dogg's Our Pet*, it is the language of the majority and both Charlie/Easy and the audience have to pick it up by exercising their intellect and catching the meaning contained in the non-verbal communication. In *Cahoot's Macbeth* the same method of learning Dogg is described verbatim by Cahoot when he tells the astonished Inspector: "You don't learn it, you catch it" (p. 74).

<sup>13</sup> *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*, 1980, 8. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

<sup>14</sup> Hu (1989, 245-248) in Appendix 2, "A Guide to Minor Allusions, Foreign Phrases, and Localisms", gives a list of translations of Dogg words and phrases into English.

<sup>15</sup> Stoppard's participation in the San Diego State University production of *Dogg's Hamlet*, *Cahoot's Macbeth* and his remarks concerning the acting are discussed in: Ruskin 1983.

Yet in this play Dogg becomes the language of a minority revolt, a metaphor for subversion, something that is accessible to the dissidents and unattainable for their oppressors.

### *Dogg's Hamlet*

*Dogg's Hamlet* opens with the boys playing ball and using Dogg phrases. A lorry arrives – Easy has brought building materials to erect a stage for a school ceremony and a production of *Hamlet*. The image of a lorry appearing during the production of the play may have come to Stoppard's mind in connection with the period of time when his earlier play, *After Magritte*, was produced in the Green Banana Restaurant<sup>16</sup>. Although Stoppard has not mentioned his experiences connected with that staging of *After Magritte* and the importance of the lorry, it is reasonable to suppose that this image was introduced under the influence of the past experiences. It is only justifiable that the events presented in the play may be connected with the real-life artistic activity of Ed Berman to whom the play is dedicated.

Gradually, in a way similar to that in *Dogg's Our Pet*, Easy acquires a knowledge of the Dogg language which is no more difficult for him than English is for the schoolboys who are preparing a production of a truncated form of *Hamlet*. The play ends with Easy addressing the audience with a single word "Cube ..." ("Thank you" in Dogg). It is assumed that the audience, just like Easy, have acquired some basic knowledge of Dogg in the course of the play.

Just as in *Dogg's Our Pet*, this is achieved by a combination of verbal and visual elements so that the lessons of the acquisition of the foreign language take place within the context of a concrete situation: building the wall, counting out the flags, listening to football results and playing ball. Again, Easy's initially unsuccessful attempts, visually represented by the

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<sup>16</sup> Ed Berman (1979, IX–X) thus recalls what happened during that period of time: "Every morning at 5.00 during the run of *After Magritte* a removal lorry would pull outside the restaurant in the empty Frith Street of Soho. ... The pieces of the box set of *After Magritte* would emerge from the lorry. Stacked on the pavement, the pieces waited. Then the entire contents of the Green Banana, basement night club extraordinaire, were carried up to the street and loaded into the lorry. Next the pieces of the set were carried down the narrow winding stair by two dedicated Stage Managers. These tortuous acrobatics completed, the set was ensconced for lunch by 11.00 a.m." The lorry would then wait in a free parking zone to return the restaurant props by 2.15, after the lunch time performance had ended. "This would guarantee that the reverse transformation back to the night club-restaurant could take place in time for the small select dinner clientele. After this production, a slight change seemed to creep into Stoppard's demeanour whenever we met. It might have meant, 'Do you own shares in lorry companies?'"

mysterious and meaningless inscriptions on the wall: "MATHS, OLD, EGG" (p. 26), "MEG, SHOT, GLAD" (p. 27) and "GOD, SLAG, THEM" (p. 29), finally result in "DOGG'S, HAM, LET" (p. 31), this being indicative of his having learnt the lesson.

While Easy acquires Dogg gradually, the schoolboys are never able to get any knowledge of English. That is one of the reasons why they are not successful in their production of Shakespeare's play. The stage directions, describing their rehearsal of the play, make this clear: "*They are not acting these lines at all, merely uttering them, tonelessly*" and "*ABLE and BAKER don't always structure their sentences correctly*" (p. 18). The performance of *Hamlet* taking place toward the end of the play, charged with a high degree of theatricality, never allows the audience (either the on-stage Lady, or one in the theatre watching the performance of Stoppard's play) to accept an illusion of reality<sup>17</sup>. The play produced by the schoolboys remains too artificial to become an illusionist representation of reality. Apart from the inefficiency of the boys as actors this effect is also achieved by means of a variety of theatrical techniques. The dual function of the boys as schoolboys and actors in a performance is underscored by a specific use of costume. At the beginning of the play, when we first see Charlie, he "*is wearing a dress, but schoolboy's shorts, shoes and socks and no wig*" (p. 16). Later on, during the performance, the situation is reversed, yet a similar comic effect is achieved: the boys "*are costumed for a typical Shakespeare play except that they have short trousers*" (p. 32). The amateurish quality of the production is further stressed by the use of two-dimensional stage props and setting – "*a cut-out sun, moon and crown*" and "*a two-dimensional cut-out grave for OPHELIA*" (p. 31). Besides, all the props keep swinging up and down rapidly, their sudden movements being parallel to the frenetic movement of the whole production of *Hamlet*. The play within the play in Shakespeare's drama is presented by the boys by means of puppets (p. 35). Furthermore, the lack of experience makes the young actors incapable of using the stage props properly. Hamlet, after having killed Polonius, on being asked about his whereabouts is trying to hide "*his sword clumsily*" (p. 37). Stephen Hu (1989, 183) describes a passage included in the Inter-Action production text: "Arriving at Ophelia's grave, Laertes confronts the gravedigger somewhat too roughly and accidentally 'pulls him by the arm, thus exposing the 'dummy' spade (a short handle without a blade)'".

<sup>17</sup> Roger Sales (1988, 129) has commented on this: "Members of the on-stage audience for the Lady's speech now become actors in *Hamlet*. Theatricality is increased by the presence of an on-stage audience for the play. The Lady becomes a spectator instead of an actress. ... On-stage reactions to the play are part of the spectacle for the theatre audience. Like *Hound, Dogg's Hamlet* shows its audience a reflection of itself".

Stoppard also seems to be returning to the discussion presented earlier in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, namely to the question of whether death can be successfully enacted on the stage. However, whereas the Player in the previous play, a real craftsman in the art of acting, while creating a perfect theatrical illusion, was able to provide a positive answer to the question, the schoolboys demonstrate the opposite conclusion. Ophelia, who is first presented as falling to the ground, dead, a few moments later “*sits up to reach gravestone which she swings down to conceal her*” (p. 38). No matter how hard they try (and they do not really seem to be trying hard) the boys never achieve the status of professional actors and thus their performance constantly reminds the audience that they are not watching a reality but only its representation and, what is more, a very clumsy and thus comic one. This impression is further strengthened by Easy’s final “Cube . . .” (“Thank you”) directed straight to the theatre audience, this being one of the numerous instances in the play where the theatre audience’s presence is acknowledged by the characters/actors on the stage (e.g. pp. 23, 29 and 30).

### *Cahoot’s Macbeth*

Whereas in *Dogg’s Hamlet* the actors producing the inner play do not succeed in creating a theatrical illusion of reality, the case with its counterpart, *Cahoot’s Macbeth*, is different. When the play opens, the initial lines of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* are uttered in English and the audience tend to accept the illusion of reality created in front of their eyes. Then, however, after the disappearance of the witches, the lights go up “*to reveal living room*” (p. 48). The sounds of bell, owls and crickets, so important for the murder scene, are evoked verbally and also aurally (p. 51–52). Macbeth enters, carrying two blood stained daggers and the following scene follows:

MACBETH: I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?

LADY MACBETH: I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.

(*A police siren is heard approaching the house. During the following dialogue the car arrives and the car doors are heard to slam.*) (p. 52)

The following lines, uttered by the two characters, are taken from Shakespeare’s original. So are the references to the knocking, yet the aural image identified twice by the stage directions is slightly different – it is

*Sharp rapping.*

(p. 52)

*They leave. The knocking off-stage continues. A door, off-stage, opens and closes. The door into the room opens and the INSPECTOR enters an empty room. He seems surprised to find himself where he is. He affects a sarcastic politeness.*

(p. 53)

The audience soon discover that two realities become overlapping: a play within a play, *Macbeth*, is produced in the Czechoslovakia of the “normalisation” period by the Living-Room Theatre, two of the actual, historical participants of which, Landovsky and Kohout, are soon mentioned. The outer play is a representation of the concrete situation in Czechoslovakia in the seventies and bears much resemblance to the situation presented in *Macbeth*, a fact which is initially indicated by Stoppard by means of an indirect comparison of the Inspector to the forces of darkness and evil through the usage of aural images. The following scenes are, in fact, quite a specific mixture of life and theatre, reality and illusion/appearance. The Inspector, the only character not directly involved in the production of a theatrical performance, the character who, in fact, pierces the fourth wall entering the room/stage and disrupting the performance of *Macbeth*, is the most “theatrical” character in the play, a man who employs theatricality in every-day life to impose his importance on the listeners. Being a regime functionary, knowing that the room is bugged, having come to warn the dissidents of the dangers they are running by disobeying the rules of the totalitarian state, conducting conversations with his henchmen and superiors by means of a walkie-talkie and a telephone, he simultaneously assumes a patronising pose. This gives rise to certain comic effects, as, for instance, in the following conversation:

INSPECTOR: (*To LADY MACBETH.*) Darling, you were marvellous.

‘LADY MACBETH’: I’m not your darling.

INSPECTOR: I know, and you weren’t marvellous either, but when in Rome *parlevous* as the natives do. Actually, I thought you were better on the radio.

‘LADY MACBETH’: I haven’t been on the radio.

INSPECTOR: You’ve been on mine.

(p. 58)

The conversation is a specific blend of divergent threads. Firstly, while praising the actress’s acting, he is speaking as her fan in the audience. It is not, however, her competence which has impressed him when he was watching it as a member of the audience in the room but only the earlier one, when he was outside, listening to the radio as an investigator and hearing the sounds coming from the bugged room, conducting an investigation on “subversion” and “incitement” committed by the dissidents. Secondly, when his patronising her does not bring the expected result, he tries to impress her with a foreign phrase, using a French phrase to explain how to behave in Italy and failing to recognise the inappropriateness of the language choice.

Commenting on the Inspector’s behaviour, Roger Sales (1988, 132) writes: “Stoppard suggests that totalitarianism is a form of overacting. The Inspector attempts to steal the show, metaphorically as well as literally”.

The Inspector, concentrating on keeping up the pose, is strongly contrasted with the actors who, after his entrance, maintain a sharp distinction between themselves and their roles. Not wanting to accept the rules of his game imposed on them, they step out of their roles and speak in *propriis personis*. This gives rise to yet another comic situation when the Inspector, not being able to perceive the difference between the two types of existence, mentions the jobs of characters impersonated by Landovsky in theatrical performances side by side with his occupations in real life (pp. 54–55). For the Inspector the distinction between reality of actual life and illusion of theatrical performance becomes completely blurred.

This distinction, however, is blurred not only for the Inspector, because the words “rough night” uttered by him “*operate as a cue for the entrance of the actor playing MACDUFF*” and he appears in the room/on the stage, uttering the appropriate lines from *Macbeth* (p. 55). Soon the other actors enter the stage, yet they are “*unco-operative*”, reluctant to go on performing in front of the Inspector, who is now seated among the audience, waiting for the show to begin. This leads to the latter’s outburst and threat directed to Macbeth/Landovsky:

Now listen, you stupid bastard, you’d better get rid of the idea that there’s a special *Macbeth* which you do when I’m not around, and some other *Macbeth* for when I *am* around which isn’t worth doing. You’ve only got one *Macbeth*. (p. 56)

Speaking as a representative of the regime, of the one-party system, he does not seem to realise that *Macbeth* can be understood by the dissidents in a way different from his. For them, the great play of Shakespeare is an adequate description of what tyranny can do, be it the tyranny of the fictitious Macbeth or of a real-life totalitarian power. Also for the theatre audience, the production of the piece by the actors explicitly demonstrates the analogy between Macbeth’s usurpation and the “normalisation” in Czechoslovakia. Shakespeare’s masterpiece is so universal that it can be perceived as an adequate description of what is happening in a modern totalitarian state.

The performance is resumed again. The Inspector, who highly appreciated the scene of Macbeth’s coronation, arguing it is “so nice to have a play with a happy ending” (p. 58), becomes disillusioned with what happens to Shakespeare’s monarch afterwards. In a lengthy exchange of views which takes place in the outer play now, the Inspector argues that “this performance of yours goes against the spirit of normalization” (p. 62) and just before exiting says: “Things are normalizing nicely. I expect this place will be back to normal in five minutes ...” (p. 63). Before this happens, however, Landovsky tries to make references to constitution and argues that producing

*Macbeth* is not against it (p. 61). Cahoot pokes fun at the Inspector reacting in a literal way to his "metaphorical" argument that, due to their own actions, "intellectuals" are now "in the doghouse: "BANQUO, henceforth CAHOOT, howls like a dog, barks, falls silent on his hands and knees" (p. 61). Being a case of verbal humour and an act of changing the metaphorical into the literal, this scene abounds in varied allusions. It can be interpreted in reference to Cahoot's status as an underdog, a non-person for the totalitarian authorities, an idea which is underlined by the Inspector's phrase "Nice dog", uttered just before his departure (p. 63). Thomas Whitaker (1986, 157) has noticed: "Cahoot's howling and barking repeat the lucidly lunatic behaviour of Kohout's own *Hamlet* actor, Kerzhentsev, in *Poor Murderer* (1972), who says: 'Why should a human being without conventional scruples – that is, a normal human being – if he suffers like a dog, not howl like a dog?' " Furthermore, it may also evoke a reference to "dog drama", a 19th century type of drama in which dogs appeared on stage as part of the cast<sup>18</sup>. And finally, the dissidents will soon perform their own underdog/Dogg version of *Macbeth*.

After the departure of the Inspector, the actors continue their performance of Shakespeare's play, yet the theatrical illusion characteristic of the beginning of the drama is absent. Now the audience know that they are watching a production of the inner play performed by the Living-Room Theatre. Furthermore, their performance keeps being interrupted by the repeated appearances of Easy, a lorry driver. His first appearance in the scene presenting the two murderers of Banquo seems to place him in the position of the missing third murderer. His sudden intrusion into the world of the production of *Macbeth* naturally causes some bewilderment on the stage and the hostess (Lady Macbeth) leads him off (pp. 65–66). He soon re-enters, however, accompanying the first Murderer to exit with him a few moments later. During the banquet scene, Easy's five appearances either at window or at stage door produce confusion among actors described in the stage directions (pp. 66, 67 and 68) and finally occasion the disruption of the production of the play. Then it is resumed again, after a short exchange in which Easy uses Dogg and the actors use English. Upon Macduff's words, "Bleed, bleed, poor country", "Police siren is heard in distance" and soon afterwards the Inspector again interrupts the performance (p. 72). Once more the reality of totalitarian Czechoslovakia is adequately described by words taken from Shakespeare's masterpiece.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Whitaker (1986, 160), again, writes: "A popular entertainment in the nineteenth-century England was the 'dog-drama', for which plays of all kinds were adapted to include canine protagonists. There was even a 'dog-Hamlet', in which Hamlet's dog, always at his side, listens to the ghost, observes the king, watches the duel with Laertes, and at Hamlet's dying command leaps at Claudius' throat and kills him".



The Inspector's appearance not only disrupts the theatrical illusion of the inner play but also that of the outer play as well. A similar direct address to the audience could have been noticed earlier, when, on his first appearance, he initially apologised for interrupting the performance (p. 56). Later on he started being threatening and, acting his part of the regime functionary, he said: "Please don't leave the building. You may use the lavatory but leave the door open" (p. 58). Now he starts pointing his torch at different people in the audience (pp. 59–60) and his orders become more threatening: "Stay where you are and nobody use the lavatory ..." (p. 72). Getting more and more bewildered with the situation which he cannot comprehend as both the actors and Easy have started communicating in Dogg which he is not able to grasp, not being able to control them, he again directs his commands to the theatre audience: "Put your hands on your heads. Put your – placay manos – per capita ... nix toileto!" (p. 75). The fact that he has started using foreign phrases, indicative of his putting on a pose adequate for a representative of the authorities, adds to the general language confusion. It is characteristic of the scene that certain words are often used in their Dogg and English meanings simultaneously, as it were.

Meantime, the production of *Macbeth* resumes, the actors now uttering their lines in Dogg. In the general confusion the actors continue performing. The Inspector keeps consulting his superiors on the phone. With Easy's help, the Czech dissidents start building a platform on the stage. When the Inspector says down the phone: "How the hell do I know? But if it's not free expression, I don't know what is!" (p. 75), he specifies in verbal terms what we can see happening on the stage. Despite the strict regulations of the totalitarian regime, people can yet communicate and express their dissatisfaction with the situation by means of their own language. Its construction is visually represented by the building of the platform.

This facility, however, is short-lived. Nearly in panic, the Inspector wants to speak to the chief yet when he gets through to him he does not tell him what is happening: "Yes, chief! I think everything's more or less under control chief ..." (p. 77). It could be guessed that, wanting to keep up the pose of an efficient police inspector, unwilling to let his superior know about his helplessness, he has in the meantime found his own solution to the problem. He then calls his two helpers, Maurice and Boris, and with their help starts erecting a wall round the actors, a wall which blocks up the proscenium and behind which the Living Room Theatre actors disappear.

The end of the play can be interpreted in two different ways. It may be argued that the play ends pessimistically, the victory belonging to the police who now occupy the acting space ( Kelly 1991, 133). A similar opinion has been voiced by Phyllis Ruskin and John H. Lutterbie (1983,

553) who also remark that Stoppard “directed one of the actors to place a bunch of flowers on the wall, so that the final tableau was a theatrical image of the well-known picture of flowers on the Berlin wall”. It seems, however, that even though the ending is pessimistic to quite a great extent, there is some hope left. It can be found in Easy’s last words, which close the play: “Well, it’s been a funny sort of week. But I should be back by Tuesday” (p. 79). His words seem to indicate that he might be willing to teach yet another lesson of the Dogg language as a means of free expression.

*Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth* has been described as “Stoppard’s most non-illusionistic stage-play to date” (Hu 1989, 194). The audience are constantly reminded of the play being a play. In both parts the playwright makes use of an inner play, in both parts the actors play triple roles: as characters of a play, as actors performing their parts in a production and as themselves in “real” life. In both dramas the illusion of reality of the inner play is shattered by the actors’ inefficiency and their acknowledging the audience’s presence. Furthermore, the theatrical illusion of the outer play is similarly destroyed at numerous moments when a direct verbal and physical contact between the actors and the audience is established. In both parts most of the meaning arises from non-verbal sources: gestures, movements, intonation. The audience, like Charlie and Easy, find themselves in the world of Dogg language, a language which can only be acquired by means of language-games. The viewer is – to return to Wittgenstein’s ideas expressed in *Philosophical Investigations* – “Someone coming into a strange country [learning] the language of the inhabitants from ostensive definitions that they give him; and he will often have to *guess* the meaning of these definitions; and he will guess sometimes right, sometimes wrong” (p. 15e). Thanks to Stoppard’s excellent command of the non-verbal, theatrical elements of production, the audience hope that their guess has been the right one.

## X. *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour, Professional Foul*

*Every Good Boy Deserves Favour and Professional Foul* were both written and performed before *Dogg's Hamlet*, *Cahoot's Macbeth*, discussed for obvious reasons in the previous chapter. All these plays have certain features in common: all of them are set in socialist countries and deal with the limitations of basic human freedoms in totalitarian states. All of them make clear, univocal statements and demonstrate Stoppard's views concerning the situation in the Eastern block. From the mid-seventies Stoppard became increasingly concerned about the denial of civil rights in socialistic countries. In 1975, as a member of the Committee Against Psychiatric Abuse, an arm of Amnesty International, he marched in protest against the treatment of Soviet dissidents. In 1976 he met Victor Fainberg, who had been exiled from the USSR after five years in a prison hospital for having protested against the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The playwright spoke in Trafalgar Square for the Committee Against Psychiatric Abuse and marched to the Soviet Embassy to deliver a petition on dissidents. In February 1977, as a member of the International Committee for the support of the Principles of Charter 77, he wrote to *The New York Times* about the harassment of Vaclav Havel (Stoppard 1977b). Also in February, accompanying the assistant director of Amnesty International, he visited Moscow and Leningrad, reporting on the visit in *The Sunday Times* (Stoppard 1977c). Then, in July, he went to Czechoslovakia, where he met Vaclav Havel and Pavel Kohout, and became acquainted first hand with the political situation which he described in *The New York Review of Books* (Stoppard 1977f). He has written a number of articles and letters to the editor of *The Times* concerning Czechoslovakia, the situation of the Soviet Jews or concrete individuals, and an open letter to president Husak<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> "Letter to the Editor: Czech Human Rights", *The Times*, 7 February 1977, 15; "Letter to the Editor: Human Rights in Prague", *The Times*, 17 October 1977, 13; "Letter to the Editor: Arrests in Prague", *The Times*, 4 October 1986, 9; "Tom Stoppard Puts a Case for Soviet Jews", *The Times*, 12 July 1978, 7; "Letter to the Editor: Human Rights", *The Times*, 13 February 1987, 17; "Letter to the Editor: A 15 Year Wait for Nureyev's Mother", *The*

Some critics noticed that "history has lately been forcing Stoppard into the areas of commitment" (Tynan 1981, 22), that "he has gradually moved from stylish apolitical disengagement towards an active involvement with current issues", becoming "an entertainer with a definable ideal" (Billington 1987, 180), that "lately Tom's work seems to have modulated away from the glitter of Wildean disengagement, biting into the more meaty domains of freedom of expression in Czechoslovakia and freedom of the press" and that "Stoppard has moved from withdrawal into involvement" (Tynan 1981, 41). These opinions, even though seemingly true, need some qualifiers<sup>2</sup>. Stoppard himself says: "There was no sudden conversion on the road to Damascus. I know human rights have been around for a long time and I have always been concerned with the daily horrors that I read in the daily newspapers. But it was really a coincidence that both the plays about human rights should have been written about the same time" (Shulman interview 1978, 3). The playwright argues that even in his earlier plays an emphasis on the ethical always had political implications and that he was "always morally, if not politically involved" (Shulman interview 1978, 3). He also denies any fundamental transformation within his plays: "*Jumpers* has got the same subject as *Professional Foul*" (Berkvist interview 1979, 5). He insists: "Both are about the way human beings are supposed to behave towards each other" (Hebert interview 1979). Up till 1979 Stoppard expressed his political involvement in his activities with organisations and letters to the editor. His plays were "about certain obvious situations" which declared themselves "very openly" (Kuurman interview 1980, 50), yet were not political. The case with the dramas discussed in this chapter, however, is different. The situations in *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* and *Professional Foul*, like those in *Dogg's Hamlet*, *Cahoot's Macbeth* and *Squaring the Circle* (a film script, discussed in chapter 13) are very specific and the declaration they offer is strictly anti-totalitarian.

### *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*

The drama, whose subtitle is *A Play for Actors and Orchestra*, which is dedicated to Victor Fainberg and Vladimir Bukovsky, was first performed at the Royal Festival Hall on 1 July 1977 by the Royal Shakespeare

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*Daily Telegraph*, 17 March 1979, 20; "Letter to the Editor: Borisov's Brief Freedom", *The Sunday Times*, 15 June 1980, 12; "On KGB Olympic Trials", *The Sunday Times*, 6 April 1980, 16; the open letter to Husak was published as "Prague Wall of Silence", *The Times*, 18 November 1981, 10.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of this issue see Uchman 1994c, 77–79.

Company. Stoppard recalls his work on the play in the "Introduction" to the printed text. In 1974, the principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, André Previn, invited Stoppard to "write something which had the need of a full-size orchestra on stage"<sup>3</sup>. Having gone through different versions of the play-to-be, he assumed it would be about a "lunatic triangle player who thought he had an orchestra". What was missing, however, was the motif for writing the play. And then, in April 1976, he met Victor Fainberg, one of the group arrested in Red Square in August 1968 during a peaceful demonstration against the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Stoppard writes: "He was not a man to be broken or silenced; an insistent, discordant note, one might say, in an orchestrated society".

*Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* is characterised by a triangular structure. There are three acting areas – the prison, the office and the school. In prison, there are two Alexander Ivanovs: (Alexander) IVANOV, a lunatic obsessed with the idea that he has a symphony orchestra, in which he plays triangle, and ALEXANDER (Ivanov), a sane man put into a mental hospital for saying that sane people are, for political reasons, put into mental hospitals. At school, Sacha, (the third Alexander Ivanov), Alexander's son, plays triangle in the school band and is victimised by the Teacher. The only three named characters, the three Ivanovs, are counterparted by the three functionaries, who have generic names only – the Teacher, the Doctor and the Colonel. In the office, the Doctor has occasional interviews with Alexander and Ivanov, trying to persuade the first one to recant and the second that there is no orchestra (even though he himself plays in one). Alexander's release is eventually contrived by the Colonel deliberately confusing him with Ivanov, who is also released. The play ends with the Doctor, the Teacher and the Colonel joining the orchestra.

## Reality and appearance

The simultaneous set, presenting three distinctly separate acting areas, the presence of an orchestra on the platform and the initial moments of the play make the audience suspect that, as the case with Stoppard's plays so often is, they will again have to do with a specific treatment of the relationship between reality and theatrical illusion. Stephen Hu (1989, 161) writes: "The most non-illusionistic feature of *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* is the dramatist's use of music without realistic justification with regard to the plot". While one can undoubtedly agree with this critic's

<sup>3</sup> *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour and Professional Foul*, 1978, 5–7. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

opinion that the play is the most “artificial” work Stoppard has ever written, one must, at the same time, disagree with his opinions concerning the role of music in the overall meaning of the piece. The very first moments of the play indicate the great importance of the orchestra, a point which Stoppard himself has stressed in the printed text, writing that *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* consists of words and music, and is incomplete without the score composed by André Previn, its co-author (p. 13). This aspect of the play was noticed by Neil Sammells who wrote:

As in *Travesties*, the play opens with a prologue which not only insists that listening is creative but which makes the audience aware of their own creative role as listeners. We see Alexander's cell-mate striking a triangle and the orchestra miming a performance. Very slowly the audience is allowed to hear what he can hear: the orchestra becomes audible and the triangle begins to fit into the context which makes sense of it. So Stoppard teaches the audience to listen in a certain way, to construct significance where there had seemed to be none.

(Sammells 1986c, 185)

The introductory tableau depicts the discrepancy between reality and illusion in the play. On the one hand, as a theatre audience, we see a real orchestra on the stage. On the other hand, the initial behaviour of both the orchestra members and Ivanov and the ensuing dialogue between the two cell-mates indicate that the orchestra Ivanov hears is merely an illusion created by his lunatic hallucinations. As the play progresses, however, we become aware of the fact that there is a real orchestra after all, the one to which the Doctor belongs and which becomes the stage metaphor for the highly orchestrated Soviet society.

The existence of two orchestras (the imaginary and the real one) gives rise to certain comic situations in the play as, for instance, when, to Ivanov's surprise, the Doctor, arguing that there is no orchestra, slaps his own violin (p. 21) or when the patient goes on repeating “There is no orchestra” and “*The orchestra takes off in triumph*” (p. 22). Later on in the play, Ivanov seems to have been cured but goes back into his hallucinations again, this time under the influence of the Doctor himself:

DOCTOR: Next!

(IVANOV enters immediately, with his triangle, almost crossing ALEXANDER.

IVANOV is transformed, triumphant, awe-struck.)

Hello, Ivanov. Did the pills help at all?

(IVANOV strikes his triangle.)

IVANOV: I have no orchestra!

(Silence.

IVANOV indicates the silence with a raised finger. He strikes his triangle again)

DOCTOR: (Suddenly.) Wait a minute! – what day is it?

IVANOV: I have never had an orchestra!

(Silence.

The DOCTOR, however, has become preoccupied and misses the significance of this.)

DOCTOR: *What day is it? Tuesday?*

*(IVANOV strikes the triangle.)*

IVANOV: I do not want an orchestra!

*(Silence.)*

DOCTOR: *(Horried.)* What time is it? I'm going to be late for the orchestra!

*(The DOCTOR grabs his violin and starts to leave. IVANOV strikes his triangle.)*

IVANOV: *There is no orchestra!*

DOCTOR: *(Leaving.)* Of course there's a bloody orchestra!

*(Music – one chord. IVANOV hears it and is mortified. More chords. The DOCTOR has left.)*

IVANOV: *(Bewildered.)* I have an orchestra.

*(Music.)*

I have always had an orchestra.

*(Music.)*

I always knew I had an orchestra.

(pp. 32–33)

The comic yet at the same time sinister quality of the above scene results from the fact that the two men are talking about two different orchestras. The patient means his imaginary, phantom orchestra which is merely an illusion created by his obsessed mind, while the Doctor is referring to the actual orchestra he plays in. The Doctor's orchestra is simultaneously, as mentioned earlier, a symbolic representation of the totalitarian state. The moment we take this aspect into consideration another three-fold structure becomes discernible. If music and orchestra in the play symbolically represent the Soviet orthodoxy, and the initial moments of the play (through the inclusion of Ivanov and his phantom orchestra) equate orchestra with the symptom of lunacy, the Soviet system becomes associated with madness. It must be noticed that the Doctor does not seem capable of distinguishing between the phantom orchestra of Ivanov and his own real one which leads to numerous misunderstandings and which makes the audience start suspecting that he himself should undergo psychiatric treatment.

If, then, the orchestra, following its musical score, represents the Soviet society regulated by strict totalitarian rules, anyone who does not accept the regime and starts acting against it, a dissident, is seen as a discordant note in the highly orchestrated society. This notion is evoked by means of the scenes taking place at school where the Teacher insists on Sacha joining the school band. He is supposed to play the triangle whose part is marked by the yellow colour in the score, the colour which was associated in *Jumpers* with the Radical Liberals. Sacha objects: "I don't want to be in the orchestra" and a lesson in geometry follows, during which definitions of different figures, the triangle included, are given (p. 19). The two-fold meaning of the triangle as a geometrical figure and as a musical instrument led Stoppard (1978, 66), as he himself recalls, "into punning diversion based on Euclid's axioms" which adds to the comedy of confused levels. The

association of geometry, just as of music, with the totalitarian system is indicated in the conversation taking place between Sacha and the Teacher:

SACHA: (*Writing*) "A triangle is the polygon bounded by the fewest possible sides". Is this what they make papa do?

TEACHER: Yes. They make him copy, "I'm a member of an orchestra and we must play together". (p. 20)

Later on, mad Ivanov, posing as the Doctor, terrifies Sacha with raving axioms which travesty Euclid, the Declaration of Independence and the Gospel according to Matthew: "Everyone is equal to the triangle", "It is easier for a sick man to play the triangle than for a camel to play the triangle", to reach the climax with "A line *must be drawn!*" (p. 34). The madman's sentence must be considered in the context of its predecessors which it travesties. The sentence originally appears as a geometrical definition, or, to be precise, two of them: "A straight line is the shortest distance between two points" and "A triangle is the polygon bounded by the fewest possible lines" (pp. 19 and 20). Later on Sacha gives his own, distorted definition: "A triangle is the shortest distance between three points" (p. 25). These sentences can be understood not only in reference to mathematics but also in connection with the situation presented in the play which is characterised by a triangular structure. Sacha, Alexander's son, appears as the third element of the triangle representing the conflict between the dissident and the regime. In his article *Prague: The Story of Chartists*, Stoppard reports on the pressures exerted upon dissidents to make them conform. Children of the chartists were denied educational advantages and not accepted by universities, no matter how gifted they might have been. Stoppard (1977f, 14) quotes Pavel Kohout saying "I did it for the children' is the Czech problem". One of the issues raised by the play is a proposition that the exploitation of concerns for the loved ones is the state's most effective means of coercion. Using Sacha as their tool in the emotional fight against Alexander the authorities want to force him to recant. This idea is stressed by the play's title, whose initials EGBDF constitute a mnemonic aid used in teaching children the lines of the treble clef. It is in this musical context that Ivanov says: "every good boy deserves favour" (p. 17). The true meaning of the title, however, becomes clear in the scene between the Doctor and Alexander:

(*Doctor picks up his violin.*)

DOCTOR: What about your son? He is turning into delinquent.

(*Doctor plucks the violin. EGBDF.*)

He's a good boy. He deserves a father.

(*Doctor plucks the violin ...*)

(p. 29)



The scene indicates that the Doctor is tempting Alexander with a possibility of release, using Sacha as a tool. If Alexander is "good" (recants), he will "deserve favour" from the state. And, similarly, if Sacha is "good" (joins the orchestra and convinces his father to recant), he will "deserve a father" back from hospital/prison. The title, then, in its unabbreviated form, refers to the two individuals (Alexander and Sacha) imprisoned within the strict rules of the totalitarian system. This meaning is further strengthened by its abbreviated form bearing references both to music (treble clef) and geometry (where diagrams are labelled by means of letters), both of which are used in the play as symbolic representations of the system. It is also underscored by the fact that in Alexander's speech letters of alphabet are used to describe his friends, the dissidents. If we recall mad Ivanov's sentence ("The line must be drawn!") it may be treated as expressing the main worry of the authorities concerning their difficulties connected with the solving of the "problem" of Alexander, their being aware that they must make him be able to join the son. That Ivanov, the insane patient, expresses the main problem facing the authorities in connection with Alexander, and thus, in a sense, speaks for them, further stresses the notion that the Soviet system is insane.

The insanity of the system is presented in the play by means of a specific interplay of reality and illusion/appearance. The authorities make use of a special kind of pretence, pose, artificiality in order to hide their real face. They use theatricality in everyday life, attempting to confuse the seeming and the real. To make things even worse, levels of reality have become a matter of arbitrary definition by the state. Once more Stoppard argues that the same reality may present a different image to individual people. In this case, however, it is not caused by differences in perception but by a purposeful manipulation, achieved, among others, by a specific use of language. This notion is evoked by the fact that the Doctor's superior "Colonel – or rather Doctor – Rozinsky" is a Doctor of Philology, specialising in semantics (pp. 27–28). The representatives of the regime employ the language in such a way as to hide the real nature of the totalitarian reality and to create an image of a law-abiding regime. That is why the Teacher insists that the place where Alexander is is "not a prison but a hospital" (p. 20) and the Doctor distinguishes between "wards" and "cells", giving the definitions of both (p. 27). He himself, however, often undermines his own definitions by mistaking their usage (pp. 27, 32). The imprecise use of the language by the authorities is noticed by Sacha, who insists on calling things what they really are: "A plane area bordered by high walls is a prison not a hospital" (p. 26).

The discrepancy between theory and practice is also clearly visible in reference to the Constitution. The Teacher says: "The Constitution guarantees

freedom of conscience, freedom of press, freedom of speech, of assembly, of worship, and many other freedoms. The Soviet Constitution has always been the most liberal in the world, ever since the first Constitution was written after the Revolution". When, however, Sacha enquires if they could ask its author about papa, she answers: "Unfortunately he was shot soon after he wrote the Constitution" (pp. 29–30). In this conversation the Teacher unwittingly and unconsciously comments on the gap between theory (illusion) and practice (reality) in the totalitarian states. Bukharin, the author of the Constitution, guaranteed numerous freedoms, soon afterwards, however, being denied freedom of thought, he became a victim of the system. No written rules and laws are valid in the Soviet state. Even if they are in accordance with the Constitution they will not be paid any attention to if they are used by dissidents attacking the system. When the Doctor tells Alexander: "Your opinions are your symptoms. Your disease is dissent" (p. 30)<sup>4</sup>, his statement acquires a grim irony. In a system like the Soviet one, a mad system of totalitarian power, due to a specific inversion, any kind of generally accepted logic can be treated by the authorities as insanity.

The authorities, however, fear the possible repercussions of their totalitarian actions which could arise if the news about them should reach western opinion. That is why they try to make Alexander abandon his hunger strike. They would not be against his starving himself to death, were it not for the fear of the West, the idea expressed verbatim by Alexander: "They don't like you to die unless you die anonymously" (p. 24). The situation between Alexander and the state has reached a stalemate. The authorities want him to recant, to accept lies for truth, illusion for reality. Sacha seems at a certain point to follow their train of thought. If the official newspaper *Pravda* (meaning "truth" in Russian) desecrates its name through distortions, converse statements or lies are morally legitimate: "Papa, don't be rigid! Be brave and tell them lies!" (p. 35). Alexander, however, sticks to his rules and tells his son always to abide by the principle: "To thine own self be true/one and one is always two" (p. 36)<sup>5</sup>. The situation having reached "a logical impasse" (p. 36), the Colonel makes his entrance and provides a solution which is unexpected even to the Doctor. In the end Alexander wins, but it is only a partial victory – he is released not on his but on the Colonel's terms, thus the ending is ambivalent and, as Stoppard says, "not particularly optimistic" (Kuurman interview 1980, 53).

<sup>4</sup> While commenting on the borrowings from real life, Stoppard mentioned this sentence uttered by the Doctor (Stoppard 1978b, 67).

<sup>5</sup> The phrase "to thine own self be true" is one of the numerous instances of Stoppard using a quotation from Shakespeare. In this case, the line is taken from Hamlet where the words are uttered by Polonius engaged in a conversation with Laertes (I, iii, line 78).

## Historical reality and its artistic representation

The story of Alexander is rooted in factual material. Setting out to write *Every Good Boy Deserves a Favour*, "a play with a message", and one which puts forward questions answers to which he believes not to be ambivalent (Gollob interview 1981, 17), Stoppard created a drama which, being based on fact, is not a fabrication. Stoppard has admitted that a lot of *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* is based on conversations with Victor Fainberg (Hardin interview 1981, 161). In *Nothing in Mind* (Stoppard 1978b, 67) the playwright writes that Alexander's speech concerning the treatment he received in the Leningrad Special Psychiatric Hospital is taken from the article in *Index*<sup>6</sup> and that there are other borrowings from real life. "Victor Fainberg in his own identity makes an appearance in the text as one of the group 'M to S' in the speech where Alexander identifies people by letters of alphabet. Stoppard also specifies in the same article that "the off-stage hero of *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, referred to as 'my friend C', is Vladimir Bukovsky".

Most of the factual material in the play is contained in the two speeches of Alexander (Stoppard 1978b) addressed in frontal style to the audience and thus shattering the theatrical illusion. They are written in the form of documentary reporting and are distinguished by their factual content and sober delivery from the rest of the play in that they do not contain any comic elements. For a moment, as it were, the audience may have the impression that they are listening to a living dissident expressing his views and not to an artistic recycling of these. In this context, however, it seems interesting to quote what Stoppard has written about Vladimir Bukovsky coming to the rehearsal of the play by the Royal Shakespeare Company:

He was diffident, friendly, and helpful on points of detail in the production, but his presence was disturbing. For people working on a piece of theatre, terra firma is a self-contained world even while it mimics the real one. That is the necessary condition of making theatre and it is also our luxury. There was a sense of worlds colliding. I began to feel embarrassed. One of the actors seized up in the middle of a speech which touched on the experiences of our visitor and found it impossible to continue.

(Stoppard 1978b, 67)

On another occasion, he commented on the same event saying:

So the feeling of unease which I got – which Ian [McKellen, the actor] got – as far as I remember he couldn't carry on – wasn't to do with the discrepancy between the mood of the art and the mood of the real situation which this man represented. No, it was to do with the discrepancy between art and life full stop. And I think one would have felt

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<sup>6</sup> The article by Fainberg was published in *Index on Censorship*, vol. 4, No 2.

the same thing if *King Lear* had been based on fact and Gloucester had wandered in – the same sort of embarrassment would have ensued. You know, what we were engaged in was a sort of artifice, and one knows that's an artifice, I mean the whole point of it is that it is an artifice, not the point of the piece but the point of us being there together, was to simulate something, not to live to it. And it was that discordance which suddenly went 'bang!'  
(Gollob interview 1981, 7)

I have included these two lengthy quotations of what Stoppard has said about Bukovsky's visit because they are a direct comment of the people involved in a theatrical production on the relationship between reality and theatrical illusion created by the artistic representation. On the one hand, Stoppard employs in the play a number of non-illusionistic means which stress the theatrical, presentational character of the performance. On the other hand, however, in the presence of the real-life hero who took an active part in these events, the discrepancy between reality and its illusion became too great to be borne. Life can be imitated, it can be even stressed that the imitation is not a precise reproduction, yet the two – life and reality will always occupy distinctly separate planes.

## *Professional Foul*

Stoppard's next play was a venture which he undertook to mark Amnesty International's "Prisoner-of-Conscience Year", 1977 (Introduction", 8). He did not have any idea, however, what the play should be about. And then, in January 1977, three men were arrested for trying to deliver the document "Charter 77". The play, which was finally written, is dedicated to Vaclav Havel "not just the Charterist but ... a fellow writer" (p. 9)<sup>7</sup>. While the play is characterised by the inclusion of factual data coming from the most recent past, it is at the same time a return to Stoppard's earlier interests, the questions concerning both the adequacy of language for describing reality and the basic issues of morality. Speaking on the latter aspect of the play Stoppard has indicated the similarities between *Professional Foul* and *Jumpers*: each of them can be "described as a play about a moral philosopher preoccupied with the true nature of absolute morality, trying to separate absolute values from local ones and local situations" (Gollob interview 1981, 7, 8). Whereas, however, George in the former play is not able to act on his principles, Anderson starts acting and thus the play depicts "a man being educated by experience beyond the education he's received from thinking".

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<sup>7</sup> On another occasion, Stoppard has remarked: "I'm as Czech as Czech can be. So you can see that with my desire to write something about human rights, the combination of my birth, my trips to Russia, my interest in Havel and his arrest, the appearance of Charter 77 were the linking threads that gave me the idea for *Professional Foul*" (Shulman interview 1978, 3).

## Professor Anderson

The main character of *Professional Foul*, Professor Anderson, a moral philosopher, comes to a totalitarian society, brushes against it, and gets "a little soiled and a little wiser" (Gollob interview 1981, 9). Going to a Colloquium Philosophicum in Prague, he meets two other philosophers: Chetwyn, who affirms that ethical principles possess objective transcendent reality, and McKendrick who, being a moral relativist, denies the existence of both moral principles and the transcendent, "reliable signposts on the yellow brick road to rainbowland" (p. 85). Two philosophers seem to be interested in coming to Prague for other reasons than the Congress: Chetwyn, who has been writing "letters to *The Times* about persecuted professors with unpronounceable names" (p. 46), and Anderson, who wants to go to a football match between England and Czechoslovakia. On arriving at the hotel, Anderson is approached by Pavel Hollar, his former student, whose doctorate studies were interrupted in 1969, when, due to political offences, he lost his job, started working in a bakery, later on built houses, and is now a lavatory cleaner under police surveillance. Hollar's political position is, as he says, that "an individual possesses inherent rights" and that "the ethics of the State must be judged against the fundamental ethic of the individual. The human being, not the citizen. I conclude there is an obligation, a human responsibility to fight against the state correctness. Unfortunately that is not a safe conclusion" (p. 55). Hollar has written a thesis expressing his views and hopes Anderson will smuggle it to England where it will be translated and published by Peter Volinsky, Hollar's friend from his studies, who "didn't come back. He was a realist" (p. 54). Anderson, however, refuses, arguing that acting against the rules of those who have invited him to Prague would just not be "ethical" (p. 82). Yet he agrees to keep the manuscript and bring it to Hollar's flat the next day, in case the dissident might be searched on his way back home.

On the next day, Anderson misses the match as he is detained in Hollar's flat, which is being searched by plain-clothes policemen, Hollar himself having been arrested. As the Czechs "do not have laws against philosophy", as one of the policemen says, the police plant and "find" hard currency in Hollar's place and accuse him of being "an ordinary criminal" (p. 70). The police, then, by choosing to apply the rules in accordance with their own needs, commit one of the numerous "professional fouls" in the play, a term which, in the context of the drama, refers to pragmatic, ethically questionable actions committed in pursuit of a goal. While the search of Hollar's flat is still in progress, Anderson is allowed to listen to the radio transmission of the match and guesses, the report being broadcast in Czech, that the first goal was scored by the Czechs from a penalty after a "professional foul" by an English player when a goal was otherwise certain.

After the skirmish with the police and a talk with Hollar's wife and son, in which they warn him it is dangerous for him to try to smuggle the manuscript out of the country, Anderson rewrites his own paper for the next day's Colloquium, pointing out the concordance of the American and Czech constitution on certain fundamental human rights and developing the idea of an innate sense of freedom and justice: "There is a sense of right and wrong which precedes utterance" (p. 90). Next day, during the symposium, not being able to stop Anderson delivering the paper, the Chairman commits a "professional foul" of his own. A fire alarm is sounded and the Colloquium breaks up. In the final scene, at the airport, the two philosophers are searched thoroughly. While Anderson is let free (he has committed another foul – knowing the authorities will keep an eye on him, he put the manuscript into McKendrick's case), Chetwyn, who would not stoop to a foul of any kind, is stopped at the customs, found to be smuggling out some dissident papers.

It could be said that Anderson commits two "professional fouls" in the play – the first, when he refuses Hollar's request and thus excuses himself from hazardous involvement by keeping to the letter, not the spirit, of the rules he works by, and the second one, at the end of the play, a foul of a different order, breaking the letter to follow the spirit. Thus he acts differently on these two occasions. Having learnt his lesson and having abandoned his dispassionate academic detachment, he has moved towards the implementation of moral rules in practice. The change which Anderson undergoes in course of the play is caused largely by the fact that, as Stoppard says: "he brushes up against the specific reality of the mother and the child, especially the child" (Gollob interview 1981, 8)<sup>8</sup>.

## Differences in individual perception of reality

There are several references in the play to the inborn sense of morality, based on logic, by which small children are characterised and which is sometimes lost by grown-ups (Hollar, p. 55, Chetwyn, p. 79 and Anderson, p. 90), and Sacha, Hollar's son, is a good example here<sup>9</sup>. The notion of

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<sup>8</sup> It is worthwhile mentioning here Neil Bennison's article in which the critic discusses at length the growth of Anderson as a dramatic character. In his analysis he employs discourse analysis and pragmatics in order to demonstrate how "Anderson's vagueness, loquacity, urbanity and pomposity are evinced in his linguistic performance" (Bennison 1993, 97).

<sup>9</sup> Stoppard commented on this: I'm finding it hard to keep little boys out of my plays – my four sons may or may not be relevant – but something which has preoccupied me for a long time is the desire to simplify questions and take the sophistication out. A fairly simple question about morality, if debated by highly sophisticated people, can lead to almost any

a child's perception and understanding of reality being different from that of a sophisticated adult brings us back to Stoppard's familiar themes: the alteration of appearance by shifting perspective, the trickery of perception and the ambiguity of language. The play presents several cases of a discrepancy between reality as it actually is and its mere illusion, a discrepancy which is caused either by the faulty perception of the viewer or by his mistaken preconceptions. It is not coincidental that the main characters of the play are philosophers who in their theories try to define and describe reality. When Anderson justifies himself to Hollar for not wanting to take his thesis out of the country his arguments, put in the form of a philosophical debate, seem justified. At this moment, however, he does not seem to be aware that following the ethical propositions in relationships with the authorities which are completely anti-ethical is a nonsense. Yet soon he discovers what the situation is really like and thus decides to help Hollar, this being much more risky now as the authorities, aware of his contacts with Hollar, are bound to suspect him. Anderson has learnt his lesson, he has discovered that absolute morality is not always the best one. There are certain "test situations", during which a rational person will abandon a moral principle when it is inadequate in the given circumstances, when he will adjust theory (description, and thus only a representation of reality) to a concrete reality. Anderson uses the term "test situations" while involved into a philosophical discussion with McKendrick, who propagates the "catastrophe theory" in reference to ethics. The theory states that "morality" and "immorality" do not represent two opposite planes but rather two lines running along at the same plane until at a certain point, the catastrophe, or breaking point, "your progress along one line of behaviour jumps into the opposite line; the principle reverses itself at the point where a rational man would abandon it" (p. 78). It could be supposed that McKendrick, who allows for a certain relativity of morality, who propagates the "catastrophe theory", would praise Anderson for his "professional foul". This, however, is not the case. McKendrick's gets furious when he learns that Anderson put Hollar's thesis into his case which indicates that he is capable of propagating a theory yet unable to withstand its first practical test. It could be argued, then, that while Anderson has discovered how to distinguish between reality and theory concerning it (which is only a conceptual description of it), to adapt the theory to a concrete situation, McKendrick

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conclusion. If somebody came out of East Germany through the gate in the wall and wished to communicate the idea that life inside the wall was admirable or indeed platonically good, he'd have a reasonable chance of succeeding in this if he were addressing himself to a sophisticated person. But if you tried to do this to a child, he'd blow it to smithereens, A child would say – 'But the wall is there to keep people in, so there must be some reason why people want to go out' " (Gollob interview 1981, 16–17).

is still moving in the realm of theory separated from any objective reality. For him, even though he might not realise it, theory is still merely an illusion which has no connection with reality.

The play also demonstrates some cases of faulty perception. Some of them are connected with Anderson who employs some theatricality in everyday life. The first of these has to do with "*a sex magazine of the Penthouse type*" which Anderson notices on the plane, cautiously picks up, observing whether anyone is watching and starts looking through, "*holding the brochure [the programme of the Colloquium] in such a way as to provide a shield for the magazine*" (p. 44). It is evident that he is trying to conceal his interest in such magazines, maybe thinking they are not a proper kind of interest for philosophers. Later on, when the magazine is revealed by the hostess who takes away the tray under which Anderson has hidden it, he is clearly embarrassed. McKendrick's remark, who is cheered by the incident, is worth noticing here: "They won't let you in with that you know. You'll have to hide it" (p. 48). Watching Anderson in his hotel room, the audience notice that he has taken the magazine with him and now, hearing a knock on the door, he tries to conceal it (p. 51). The magazine reappears again in the scene at the airport when Anderson's luggage is searched:

*We find that the customs MAN has discovered a suspicious bulge in the zipped compartment on the underside of the lid of ANDERSON's suitcase. ANDERSON's face tells us that he has a spasm of anxiety. The bulge suggests something about the size of HOLLAR's envelope.*  
(p. 92)

Stoppard's plays have taught us again and again, however, not to trust our perception completely and not to jump to conclusions too quickly. The playwright has set another ambush for the audience because what the customs officer takes out is the girly magazine. It is not clear whether Anderson has forgotten about the magazine or whether he has put it there on purpose to play about with the authorities and thus is now only acting out his anxiety. Yet, in either case, the scene undoubtedly has an impact, elaborating on the idea of perception.

There is another case in the play of a misunderstanding caused by misinterpreting one's perception when both the characters and the audience jump to the wrong conclusions. When Hollar and Anderson, fearing that the rooms are bugged, are talking in the hotel corridor

*the room next to ANDERSON's opens and a MAN comes out. He is about forty and wears a dark rather shapeless suit. He glances at ANDERSON and HOLLAR. And then walks off in the opposite direction towards the lifts and passes out of light. HOLLAR and ANDERSON instinctively pause until the MAN has gone.*  
(p. 53)



The audience's suspicion concerning the Man's being a plain clothes policeman spying on Anderson (or Hollar, maybe) is strengthened when the latter asks Anderson: "The man next door, is he one of your group?" and gets a negative answer (p. 56). The suspicion is strengthened when, alone in his room, Anderson

*hears footsteps down the corridor. The footsteps appear to stop outside his room. But then the door to the next room is opened and the unseen man enters the room next door and loudly closes the door behind him.* (p. 58)

The ambush, created by means of the contrast between appearance and reality, is explained some time later when Anderson and the audience alike discover that the "mysterious" man is not a plain clothes policeman but a sports reporter covering the football match in Prague.

### **Inefficiency of language in describing reality**

The mistakes concerning the improper evaluation of a given situation result not only from the fact that sometimes we misinterpret certain things but also from the imprecision of the language we employ when describing a given reality. The ambiguous quality of language is discernible in the very first moments of the play, when the conversation between the two philosophers starts:

MCKENDRICK: I wasn't sure it was you. Not a very good likeness.

ANDERSON: I assure you this is how I look.

MCKENDRICK: I mean photograph. (*He flips his brochure open. It contains small photographs and penportraits of various men and women who are in fact to be speakers at colloquium.*)

The photograph is younger.

ANDERSON: It must be an old photograph.

(*MCKENDRICK gets up and comes to sit in the empty seat across aisle from ANDERSON.*)

MCKENDRICK: (*Changing seats.*) Bill McKendrick.

ANDERSON: How odd.

MCKENDRICK: Is it?

ANDERSON: Young therefore old. Old therefore young. Only odd at first glance.

MCKENDRICK: Oh yes. (p. 44)

The two men do not seem to understand each other, the misunderstanding arising from the fact that they are switching between two areas – the real, living Anderson and his representation (the picture). It is not the language which is faulty here but their imprecision in using it. The conversation makes Anderson utter a general remark concerning language: "The second

glance is known as linguistic analysis. A lot of chaps pointing out that we don't always mean what we say, even when we manage to say what we mean" (p. 44). The remark made by Anderson indicates his interest in language but also makes the audience pay attention to it. As the conversation between the two men progresses, we notice that each of them is following his own train of thought, not paying much attention to what the other one is saying. This gives rise to numerous misunderstandings, like, for instance, the one concerning the name of McKendrick (pp. 45 and 47), McKendrick's assuming that Anderson is writing articles for the sexy magazine (p. 48), Anderson's not catching the ordinary meaning of the word "cleaner" (p. 52) or the scene in the lift when McKendrick, on being introduced to the football-players by Anderson, presents himself as "a left-winger at Stoke" (p. 60). McKendrick is speaking about his Marxist preferences and about his university yet the footballers regard his utterance in the context of their sport and are surprised by his mentioning "Stoke" as they have never heard of such a team.

In all these cases a contravention of co-referential rules can be noticed, signs belonging to different codes being mixed up or, to use Wittgenstein's terminology, different language-games being played. This point is made clear during the colloquium when a paper is delivered by an American, Stone. Discussing "the ambiguity of ordinary language" raising "special problems for a logical language", he stresses that "the intent is clear in each application" (p. 61), in other words, it is the context which makes the meaning self-evident. Having given numerous examples to illustrate the ambiguity characteristic of the way in which language operates, Stone comes to the following conclusion: "And here I think the idea of a logical language which can *only* be unambiguous breaks down" (p. 63). Stone's argument on the ambiguity of language is stressed by Stoppard dramatically demonstrating the untranslatability of various concepts by means of presenting the interpreters' failure to render the English examples in French, German or Czech (pp. 61 and 62). Stone's point could seem correct enough to be taken, especially as it is underlined by the growing chaos among the interpreters. It is, however, soon abolished. Anderson, trying to sneak out to attend the football match, "*is caught like a rabbit in the headlights*" and is made, unexpectedly, to make his comment:

Ah ... I would like to offer Professor Stone the observation that language is not the only level of human communication, and perhaps not the most important level. Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we are by no means silent.

(MCKENDRICK *smiles 'Bravo'.*)

Verbal language is a technical refinement of our capacity for communication, rather than the *fons et origo* of that capacity. The likelihood is that language develops in an *ad hoc* way, so there is no reason to expect its development to be logical. (*A thought strikes*

him.) The importance of language is overrated. It allows me and Professor Stone to show off a bit, and it is very useful for communicating detail – but the important truths are simple and monolithic. The essentials of a given situation speak for themselves, and language is as capable of obscuring the truth as of revealing it. Thank you. (p. 63)

The speech of Anderson is of vital importance for the play. On the one hand, Anderson uses an inversion of Wittgenstein's proposition 7, ending *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent"<sup>10</sup>. He thus negates both the proposition and the basic premise of this philosophical treatise on the limits of language in philosophy. On the other hand, however, the play seems to accept the position of Wittgenstein, as expressed in *Tractatus*: logic concerns natural science, what is in the world, while "value must lie outside the world" (6.41); "ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental" (6.421) and "There are indeed things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical" (6.522). The seeming contradiction contained in Anderson's speech (Is he rejecting Wittgenstein's ideas or accepting them?) can be explained by the fact that the philosopher himself reversed his position taken in *Tractatus* and in *Philosophical Investigations* he argued that language is not restricted to verbal utterances and that the meaning of the words does not reside in their referents but in the uses to which they are put. He also stressed the importance of non-verbal elements of the utterance for its meaning.

The very next scene is a dramatic presentation of the idea that "the essentials of a given situation speak for themselves" and "make themselves manifest". Scene 6, taking place outside and then inside Hollar's flat, is characterised by the general language confusion caused, unlike the earlier one during the colloquium, not by the untranslatability of certain concepts but by the fact that Anderson does not understand Czech and neither the police searching the flat nor Mrs Hollar know any English. Even though they are using different languages, Anderson gradually starts understanding what is actually happening. The point the scene is making is stressed by the conversation between Anderson and Man 6 – a policeman who has been sent for and who knows English. They are talking about the taxi driver who has brought Anderson to the flat:

MAN 6: ... My officer told him to go.

ANDERSON: Yes, that's right.

MAN 6: Still, he was very unhappy. You told him you would be five minutes you were delivering something –

ANDERSON: How could I have told him that? I don't speak Czech.

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<sup>10</sup> This phrasing of the proposition is provided by the translation of C. K. Ogden in the London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922 edition of the work of the great philosopher.

MAN 6: You showed him five on your watch, and you did all the things people do when they talk to each other without a language. He was certain you were delivering something in your briefcase. (p. 72)

Anderson is now able to communicate without words as the situation speaks for itself. It should be stressed that, as Sammells aptly notices (1986c, 191), "the scene is an ironic reversal of that in the hotel room when he had consistently misheard Hollar despite the fact that both were speaking the same language". Later on in the play, Stoppard introduces some other examples of how efficient or inefficient language may be. Anderson and Sacha are able to understand each other, even though Sacha's English is far from perfect. The sport reporters' coverage of the match, on the other hand, even though in English, becomes both funny and nearly meaningless because of the specific hack prose employed.

The paper Anderson delivers at the colloquium<sup>11</sup> binds together the ideas of language, ethics and politics. The professor says: "There is a sense of right and wrong which precedes utterance" (p. 90), arguing that moral truths are prelinguistic and thus prior to societal rules. His argument remains unambiguous, and "bears an uncanny resemblance to an argument ... in a Havel play", *Conspirators*, as Gollob has noticed. In answer to the suggestion put by Gollob (1981 interview, 9), Stoppard said that he had never seen the play but noticed: "it's not that curious that somebody like Havel would have a similar argument". This brings us back to the origin of the play, as it was written for Amnesty International and was dedicated to the dissident and "fellow artist", Vaclav Havel.

## A naturalistic TV play

Stoppard recalls starting the work on the play:

but I know that I just thought – without even having to bother to think about it, that *Professional Foul* ought to be naturalistic and that TV is best for that sort of play, and that its impact should be to do with human relationships and the way things are said and to whom they're said and not to do with the sort of ambushes I like to or did like to set up on the stage. (Gollob interview 1981, 6)

<sup>11</sup> R. Scruton (1983, 45) refers to Anderson's appearance there as "a lecture within a play" while R. Corballis (1984, 24) writes: "Stone and McKendrick are in effect contained by a play-within-a-play (the Colloquium Philosophicum) and their attitudes are as rigid and artificial as those of all Stoppard's players".

One could argue that Stoppard does not avoid setting ambushes for the audience in the play but, at the same time, one can only praise his conscious choice of the medium<sup>12</sup>. Selecting TV brought as a consequence the realistic quality of the play, whose immediate effect is that of documentary directness. As he recalls in *The Face at the Window* (Stoppard 1977c), he makes use in the play of several case histories, especially of the arrest of Vaclav Havel<sup>13</sup>. In the play Stoppard mentions all the three causes to which Havel attributed his arrest: his participation in Charter 77, his open letter to Husak and his handing over the memoirs of a former Czech minister to the press. Some of the details of the scene taking place at Hollar's flat were provided by the wife of a Russian dissident. The playwright also drew on his own experiences and responses during the Amnesty trip to Russia. Unlike Anderson, he did not need the experience of "brushing up against" the totalitarian reality in order to know what this system means, yet, like his protagonist, he must have felt fright and discomfort in the face of these events. In Leningrad he met a man who had graduated in English Literature but had to work as a part-time lift-operator. And finally, his trip to Russia was an endeavour, among others, to collect signatures protesting against the Soviet treatment of dissidents. When he was going back to England the Amnesty petition was stolen at the airport by the Soviet customs officers who committed their "professional foul" on Stoppard himself (Stoppard 1977c).

In *Professional Foul* Stoppard makes full use of the factual material, the TV medium and his own talent. The play combines serious philosophy, linguistic ambiguity, ethical double standards in many areas, an anti-totalitarian protest and humour. The use of the TV medium enables the playwright to move between different locations quickly and easily without disrupting the continuity of action. During the colloquium, for instance, we first see and hear Anderson delivering his speech and then, while still hearing his words uttered in the background, we watch the otherwise mute picture presenting the chairman trying to solve the problem of how to stop him (p. 90). The play became Stoppard's success in working for the medium and was awarded

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<sup>12</sup> Stoppard says: "I thought a play on TV might help the cause. ... On a subject like this a TV play would have more impact than a play for the stage. After all, on TV you would get a large audience on a single night. In a theater, the impact would spread over weeks and months" (Shulman interview 1978, 3). See also Stoppard's comments in Hebert interview 1979, 10.

<sup>13</sup> V. Havel and two men tried "to deliver a document to their own government. This document turned out to be a request that the government should implement its own laws. It pointed out that the Czechoslovak people had been deprived of rights guaranteed by an agreement made between nations at Helsinki, and that anyone who tried to claim these rights was victimised by the government which had put its name to the agreement. The document, initially signed by 241 people, was headed 'Charter 77'" (Introduction", 9).

the British TV Critics' Award for the best play of 1977 (Corballis 1984, 17). The great success of the piece, the fact that in three showings it was seen by nearly six million people in England, made Stoppard decide to also have *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* transferred to this medium, which was done in 1979, yet, in this case, "there was a considerable loss ... especially in the interaction of the areas" (Hunter 1982, 73). This once more proves that Stoppard is a great master of the text meant for production: while writing he is thinking in terms of a concrete medium and pays attention to the specific qualities of the performance. What matters to him is not the text but the production.

## XI. *Night and Day*

*Night and Day*, premiered in the Phoenix Theatre on 8 November 1978, won the *Evening Standard* Award as the Best Play of the Year (Hu 1989, 162). As early as in 1977 the playwright spoke about the next play to come: "I'd like to write a play about journalism, but I don't want to write about what it's like to be a journalist, I don't want to write about Life in a Newspaper Office"<sup>1</sup>. The play originated, as Stoppard argued in an unpublished interview, from his years as a reporter<sup>2</sup> and was a dramatic realisation of his journalistic dream "to lie on the floor of an African airport while machine gun bullets zoomed over [his] typewriter" (Stoppard 1967a). Years later he wrote a play dedicated to his friend, the journalist Paul Johnson, which raises the issues of freedom of expression and of the press in a way which leads us to "think about journalism on the level of social philosophy", as he himself has put it (Berkvist interview 1979, 5). At the same time, however, he wanted to write a play about love "and finally the arcs intersected". Both threads, that dealing with the journalists and that pertaining to Ruth, tackle the basic question of freedom, an issue which the play discusses in its political, social, journalistic and personal aspects.

*Night and Day*, which Stoppard himself has labelled a "naturalistic play" (Gollob interview 1981, 6), is set in Kambawe, a fictitious former British colony in Africa. Stephen Hu (1989, 162) mentions that the theatre programme for the Wood production contained a map of the country "generating for playgoers a sense of geographical realism about the setting before the dimming of the house-lights"<sup>3</sup>. The country is divided due to a civil war between President Mageeba and Colonel Shimbu of the Adoma Liberation Front. The latter never makes an appearance on the stage and is presented as a puppet of Russian imperialism who can win a war "for

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Penelope Mortimer, *Cosmopolitan*, January 1978, 39; quoted in Brassell 1987, 207.

<sup>2</sup> San Diego, 4 November 1981; quoted in Lutterbie 1986, 9.

<sup>3</sup> The map can be found in: *Stagebill*, The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Vol. IX, No. 2, October 1979, 18B.

the people" only by importing military aid and seems to be getting more support from abroad than from his countrymen for whom he argues to be fighting. President Mageeba, on the other hand, is given some stage time and some traits of his character are successfully sketched by the playwright. Educated at Charterhouse and the London School of Economics, he knows how to impress people with intelligent talk and putting on poses, employing theatricality in everyday life. Being a ruthless, cruel dictator, who can make "journalists here get hung up by their thumbs for getting his medals wrong"<sup>4</sup>, he is capable of making impressive shows whose aim is to create a completely different image of himself. Such is his entrance presented in the play:

*MAGEEBA is in uniform, open-necked shirt, informal but well-laundered and wearing metal ribbon. He carries a short cane with a metal knob. He is holding a convincing machine-gun, which he fires a burst. It is a toy.*  
(p. 74)

The stage image depicting Mageeba is a combination of opposites which become the basic principle of the following conversation between Mageeba, Ruth, Carson and Wagner. Mageeba is carrying a gun, which, symbolically representing the state of war in the country, is only a toy gun, thus the prop is used to replace the reality of war by the illusion of game<sup>5</sup>. Offering a present to the hosts' son, Mageeba wants to create the image of himself as a polite, well-bred guest who knows the rules of etiquette. He goes on to strengthen this image while getting involved in an exchange with all those present trying to produce an impression that his coming to the Carsons' house is just a social visit. The audience, however, due to the information received earlier, realise that he is just pretending to be a good and noble man who, as he argues, is "like a father to all citizens of Kambawe" (pp. 75-76) and "a man of peace. When a man strikes [him] without a cause or warning, [he] invite[s] him to breakfast" (p. 79). He really has invited Colonel Shimbu for a meeting ("a breakfast") but his aim is different from that openly stated. He does not want a real compromise, as he himself argued earlier, and is only ready to offer an ultimatum.

The scene with President Mageeba takes place on two levels. On the surface, it is a polite social visit, while on the deep level violence and threat are the dominant factors. This fact is stressed by Ruth when, at the beginning, after Mageeba's remark that he sleeps little, she says: "Well

<sup>4</sup> *Night and Day*, 1979, 71. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Hu (1989, 169) argues that "the fake weapon visually echoes the Player's collapsible dagger in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*" and discusses numerous references to games and playthings in the drama.



– uneasy lies the head that –” and quickly blames herself for having said this (p. 75). Felicia H. Londré (1981, 160), while discussing the line, traces the source to *King Henry IV, Part 2*<sup>6</sup>. In Shakespeare’s play, the sentence, “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown”, is uttered by King Henry IV (III, i, line 31). It refers to his being unable to sleep well because of the worries concerning the rebellion of Archbishop Scroop, Mowbray and Hastings. The similarity between the rulers is noticed in the fact that both of them are faced with a rebellion. Simultaneously, however, they are clearly contrasted. Neither sleeps much, yet for different reasons: King Henry because of the psychological stress and Mageeba because he has to attend the meeting. King Henry is presented in *Part I* as a person who has a moral sense and who suffers because of pricks of conscience (I, ii, lines 9–11). Mageeba, however, does not seem to have any scruples and is presented as a ruthless dictator.

Another case of intertextual reference occurs when Wagner, having promised that the President’s interview will be given equal space to that of Colonel Shimbu, says: “And some space is more equal than others” (p. 78). This statement is a direct reference to George Orwell’s presentation of a totalitarian state in *The Animal Farm*<sup>7</sup>. As the conversation progresses, all those participating in it (with the possible exception of Geoffrey Carson) get more involved in the discussion and less capable of keeping up the pose and pretence and not saying what they actually think. The scene reaches its climax when Mageeba explains what he understands by the phrase “relatively free press”: “I mean a free press which is edited by one of my relatives” (p. 85). Infuriated by Wagner, the President hits him on the head with the weighted end of his stick. Wagner is bleeding and Mageeba is finishing his outburst directed against both Wagner and Shimbu: “I’ll give him equal space. Six foot long and six foot deep, just like any other traitor and communist jackal” (p. 86). The linguistic joke contained in the expression “relatively free press” gives way to a sober reflection: the press is either totally free or not free at all as the on-stage violence indicates. The phrase used by Mageeba is just a semantic obfuscation for totalitarian control of the press, for censorship which is a tool used not only against the freedom of the press but also against political freedom.

<sup>6</sup> She writes: “A reference to – or a phrase from – Shakespeare appears in almost every play, like a ‘signature’, the way Alfred Hitchcock pops up in each of his own films”.

<sup>7</sup> The animals on the farm set up the principles of Animalism in the form of Seven Commandments written on the wall. Later on, the last of these “All animals are equal”, is the only Commandment left. Furthermore, it now appears in an altered form:

“ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL

BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS” (Orwell, 1953, 33, 123).

The scene with President Mageeba indicates that neither what the audience see nor what they hear can be taken literally. The machine gun appears to be a toy, while the short cane, which could originally have been treated as a kind of sceptre, a symbol of power – Mageeba might be carrying it in order to demonstrate his status in the country and thus to impress people – becomes a tool symbolising his abuse of power. Similarly, the sentences uttered by most of the characters are not to be taken at their face value. What counts is not what is actually said but what is evoked by the subtextual stream of images formed by successive utterances. Under the surface of politeness, characteristic of a social visit, hypocrisy, pretence, threat and violence are hidden.

## The journalism debate

President Mageeba and the African war are less important in their own right than as an opportunity to highlight the rules governing totalitarian states and as a background against which Stoppard presents the plot which concerns the more general problem of the freedom of the press from all possible limitations and restrictions. During a luncheon in the National Press Club in Washington D.C. (11 October 1979), Stoppard said:

I don't respond to the real situation outside my windows; that isn't really what inspires me to write. You see, I'm really not good on character. My plays are entirely plays of ideas, which is to say, I am interested in a particular debate and thereafter I'm in a desperate search for some people who will speak in this debate. Furthermore, they all have to speak like me, regardless. If I need an African president and I need him to enter a debate about British journalism, then I just must have to make sure my African president was educated at an English public school. (quoted in Dean 1981, 9)

Some of the playwright's opinions expressed in this speech may be argued with. Stoppard, for instance, does succeed in creating fully shaped, convincing characters in this play. Mageeba, Wagner, Milne, Guthrie and Ruth are not only spokespeople taking part in a debate but also concrete individuals. Similarly, even though the play is set in a non-existent country, the ideas discussed in it are a direct response to what is happening outside the windows, in the real world. What one must agree with, however, is that the play presents a particular debate concerning the freedom of the press.

The central argument of the freedom of press concerns two journalists, Milne (the idealist) and Wagner (the pragmatist) and the photographer – Guthrie. Once again, Stoppard has written a play of ideas presenting a debate of an important issue. And, again, the playwright's preferences are quite obvious. In interviews he has made comments concerning the

characters of the play: "My feelings about Wagner in particular and about journalism are rather ambivalent, but I admire Wagner rather a lot as a character. I would admire him if he existed. I admire good professionals" (Gollob interview 1981, 15). He fully identifies with Milne, though, especially with what he says about free press: "No matter how imperfect things are, if you've got a free press everything is correctable, and without it everything is concealable" (p. 60). Milne's idealism, his willingness to act and to put his own life on the line "in a sense confirms", Stoppard insists, "the truth which he becomes a martyr to" (Gollob interview 1981, 15). The playwright has repeatedly made clear that Milne's defence of free journalism and Guthrie's affirmation that "information is light" "utterly speak for [him]" (Berkvist interview 1979, 5; Hardin interview 1981, 159 and Hebert interview 1979, 10).

The restrictions imposed on the freedom of the press are varied. Its suppression by totalitarian censorship is evident and clearly indicated in the play by what the ruthless dictator, President Mageeba, says and does. Stoppard, however, deals as well with other limitations of the freedom of the press caused by such factors as ownerships and profits, the function of unions, local versus international news, the choice of news fit to print and its placement in a concrete issue of the newspaper, articles designed to attract readers and sell newspapers versus really important news (both of national and international import), privacy of the individual versus the public's right to know. The play also tackles the problem of objective fact gathering responsibilities, that is the journalists' and newspapers' obligation to give equal weight to events and issues in an unbiased manner. And finally, the drama presents Stoppard's opinion concerning "the closed shop" issue. Katherine E. Kelly (1988b, 286) has written that the emotional heat of the exchange of arguments presented in the play "has another source in Britain's scrutiny of its press in the 1970s. At the center of this scrutiny lies the controversy over the closed shop"<sup>8</sup>. An extreme case of closed-shop membership policy is presented in *Night and Day* when Wagner, a staunch union man, intervenes against the publishing of an interview with Colonel Shimbu sent by Milne, a freelance journalist who has lost his earlier job in a local newspaper for objecting to a closed shop. Wagner's intervention brings about his own defeat: in the final moments of the play he gets

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<sup>8</sup> She goes on to write that the advocates of the closed shop "favored the line adopted by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), most of whose members had long favored 100% membership agreements to strengthen their negotiating position against employers. In the NUJ's view, the application of this membership policy was to be purely industrial. However, opponents of the closed shop feared that under such 100% membership conditions, the NUJ could use its strength to limit access to the press by people other than union members, and, in extreme instances, could result in controlling editors and in censoring the news".

a telex from London informing him that a full strike will take place at the paper in London as a result of the information provided by him concerning Milne's being a "scab". This evokes the final grim irony because it means that Wagner's "scoop" interview with Mageeba cannot be printed. The public's right to free access to information has become less important than the union's rights.

## The private and public Ruth

The second plot of *Night and Day*, that dealing with love, centres round Ruth, the only female character in the play. What is most important here is the presentation of a psychological, fully developed portrait of a woman torn by conflicting feelings. Earlier critics found that Stoppard could not create convincing women (Tynan 1979, 63). The criticism was basically true until, in 1978, Stoppard created Ruth, a woman of flesh and blood, charged with sexuality and wisdom. Furthermore, she is also a character "to carry Stoppard's experimentation with theatrical conventions into a new dimension of psychological exploration" (Brassell 1987, 222). The critics have highly praised the creation, arguing that "Stoppard's presentation of Ruth is vivid, amusing, insightful and wholly convincing" (Hayman 1979b, 148), that "Stoppard has at last written a female character from her own point of view rather than as a part of a moral scheme" (Billington 1987, 128) and that "She is an invented goddess in a real world and her artificiality colours the surrounding action" (Wardle 1978).

The printed text provides a note on 'Ruth', stating that this name is given to Ruth at the moments when her thoughts are audible (p. 12). In creating two Ruths, the one perceived by the audience and the other characters alike, and the other one which is heard by the audience only, Stoppard seems once more to be coming to his recurrent question concerning reality. This point has been noticed by Nancy Shields Hardin (interview 1981, 159) who has said: "Yet it seems to me that Ruth's fantasy heightens our sense of the way reality works more than the superficially accepted reality". Stoppard has answered her comment: "I like doing that a lot. The rationale is always rational, if you see what I mean. I don't think that it can be done for the sake of its own effect; ultimately it has to justify itself in rational terms for me".

Therefore, the way in which Ruth is presented in the play combines two of Stoppard's interests: the epistemological notion of reality and an adequate mode of presenting the concept on the stage. This brings us to the question of realism. Seen from the epistemological point of view, reality is often difficult to define, the image it presents to different perceivers depending on a number of factors. Modern psychology, stressing the

importance of the subconscious, has stated beyond any doubt that there is often a great difference between what one seems to be and what one actually is. In this respect, while presenting the “public” and “private” sides of Ruth, Stoppard creates a full portrait of the heroine and sticks to the principles of psychological realism. Simultaneously, he shatters the convention of realism as a literary technique, an aside or a soliloquy being an instance of non-illusionist presentation. A strange paradox arises – while Stoppard is a “realist” as far as psychology is concerned, he is not a “realist” when the technique he employs is taken into consideration, or, to put it differently, psychological realism is achieved not by means of a realistic representation but by employing theatricality. It can be only wondered whether psychological realism could be equally convincing while achieved by means of a realistic representation, a point which has been raised in another context by June Schlueter (1979, 4), when she argued: “Whether self-conscious art is closer to ‘reality’ than mimetic art is probably an unanswerable question”.

Ruth Carson is trying to be a good wife and mother yet she seems to be carried away by her dreams and fantasies, springing mainly from her unfulfilled sexuality and also from the dull and boring life of a colonial wife. On her recent visit to London, she had a love affair with a complete stranger, Dick Wagner, who is now coming to stay in their house. When she learns from Guthrie about Wagner’s coming, her inner self, ‘Ruth’, speaks for the first time, saying: “Just what you needed, Ruth, and serve you right. Nothing is for free, you always pay, and Guthrie has brought the bill. Silly woman!” (p. 18). Her inner monologue starts with the single word “Help” and ends with “I need somebody-help-”. It is set against the background of the song by the Beatles: “Not just anybody – He-e-elp” (pp. 18 and 19). The intertextual context of the first appearance of ‘Ruth’, its connection with a well known song, bears on the meaning of the scene and indicates that, even though bored and maybe dissatisfied with her marital situation, she still loves her husband and hopes to get some help and support not “from just anybody” but from him<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> The lyrics of the Beatles’ song adequately express her feeling down, the lack of self-assurance and a sense of insecurity:

Help! I need somebody,  
 help! not just anybody,  
 help! You know I need someone,  
 help!

When I was younger, so much younger than today,  
 I never needed anybody’s help in any way,  
 but now these days are gone I’m not so self-assured,  
 now I find I’ve changed my mind I’ve  
 opened up the doors.

The next scene in which 'Ruth' appears is that when the Carsons are introduced to Wagner and when she fears he might reveal their London secret to her husband (pp. 43–46). When the couple are left alone on stage it seems that the conversation which ensues will bring them together. When, however, Geoffrey notices that Ruth is riding Wagner a little hard and asks her what the matter is, the telephone rings and their conversation is interrupted. While Carson is talking on the phone 'Ruth' tries to tell him what happened in London: "Geoffrey, darling, when I was in London I did something rather silly" and "This is going to amuse you terribly, Geoffrey-" (p. 49). The telephone talk being over, they continue their interrupted conversation, and Ruth, having expressed her dissatisfaction with herself and the feeling of a sense of failure finally admits she "had a bad moment in London" (p. 50). The audience might be suspecting that the confession will follow, yet she changes the subject and mentions that she has been blamed by her son's school Matron for not providing him with name tapes. Then, however, she notices that she is not speaking to the point and the following conversation follows:

RUTH: (*Pause.*) I'm in the wrong movie, I think, I should be in *Ruth Carson*. Speakeasy queen.

CARSON: I really don't know what you're talking about half the time.

RUTH: And that's the half I do out loud.

CARSON: (*Confirmation.*) There you are. (*Pause.*) Do you want a change? (*Pause. The phone rings in his hands.*) Sorry. (*Apologetically.*) Got to save the country. (*Into phone.*) Carson. (p. 51)

The conversation brings out the Carsons' problem. Ruth is so involved in her fantasising that she loses touch with reality. Even at the rare moments when she might have a real, meaningful conversation with her husband she is unable to speak in a precise and clear way. This seems to have become a rule yet in this concrete case the situation is even more difficult because of the highly embarrassing subject of adultery. It may be guessed, however, that Ruth is not the only person to blame. It is clear that she suffers from an inferiority complex living by the side of the man who speaks (even though jokingly, maybe) about his part in "saving the country", who is

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Help me if you can, I'm feeling down,  
and I do appreciate you being around,  
help me get my feet back on the ground,  
won't you please please, help me?  
And now my life is changed in oh so many ways,  
my independence seems to vanish in the haze,  
but ev'ry now and then I feel so insecure,  
I know that I just need you like I've never done before.

(*The Beatles Lyrics*, 1979, 73).

often away on business and even when at home cannot be spoken to because the conversation gets interrupted by numerous business calls.

While Carson is talking on the phone again, another internal monologue of Ruth follows:

Yes, I wouldn't mind a change, actually, Geoffrey darling. Just a thought, you know. I had this cowardly idea – delusion, I mean – that I might change everything in one go by the pointless confession of an unimportant adultery. (p. 51)

Later on she goes on rephrasing the sentence, as if probing which way of putting it is the best and most adequate one: "I have brought shame on the house of Carson! ... He took advantage of me", "I let Wagner take me to bed in London" and "I believe it's called de-briefing" (pp. 51–52). Stephen Hu (1989, 170) comments on the scene: "In considering different verbal approaches to reveal her act of infidelity to Carson, Ruth realizes that even language systems free of personal linguistic devices contain stylistic traits that affect communication". This scene is also an example of how the description of the same reality may be differentiated due to the kind of language employed<sup>10</sup>.

By presenting Ruth's internal monologues during Carson's talk on the phone, Stoppard succeeds in showing two different planes of reality simultaneously: Carson belongs to the objective-point-of-view of stage reality and Ruth is placed on the level of her own inner, subjective reality. The playwright combines the two levels by means of contravention of co-referential rules concerning not only the language but also gestures. The sentences Carson utters during the telephone conversation would make sense if he used them while talking to Ruth as, for instance when he says: "Nothing wrong, is there?" to which 'Ruth' answers: "Wrong? How do you mean, wrong? Why should anything be -" (p. 49). When, towards the end of Carson's second telephone conversation, after Ruth in her internal monologue has already confessed the adultery, he "*half turns with his free hand stretched towards her*" 'Ruth' says: "Don't shoot, Geoffrey!" and "*puts her cigarette between his fingers*" (p. 51). His gesture may be interpreted in a different way depending on the context. Realising that he is asking for a cigarette Ruth gives him one. Her plea, however, indicates what his gesture could mean were he really able to hear her confession.

The last appearance of 'Ruth' in Act One takes place towards its end when, getting drunk, she notices her growing attraction to Milne (pp.

<sup>10</sup> Another example of the reality being described in a number of different ways is provided earlier in the play when Wagner quotes extracts from the papers on the Kambawe story (pp. 28–29). In this case, however, the difference between the reports results not only from the kind of language used but also from the way the events/reality are perceived and interpreted by different journalists/onlookers.

59–61). Act Two, set on the following evening, begins with ‘Ruth’ having an imaginary conversation with Milne (p. 64). Then Milne appears and a “real”, it seems, conversation between them follows in which Ruth is trying to seduce him, first as ‘Ruth’ and then as Ruth. She manages to make him confess that he finds her attractive and has even had some “lewd thoughts” about her, yet she is incapable of making him show this attraction. Then she says: “No. Fresh start. Hello! – had a good trip?” (p. 68). Another conversation follows, they kiss, but Milne does not want to go any further and leaves. Ruth who

*stands up with her back to the audience looking towards where MILNE disappeared, undoes her dress and steps out of it (she has nothing on underneath) holding on to the dress with one hand and trailing it after her as she follows MILNE into the dark.* (pp. 69–70)

As the play progresses, it becomes evident that the beginning of Act Two is not set in reality but is a presentation of Ruth’s inner thoughts, it is only a fantasy of hers. She appears in it in her two roles, as Ruth and ‘Ruth’. In this respect her split personality remains split also in her fantasy. Being responsible for what the scene actually is, she rises to the status of the author and possibly also the director of the show, as some of the lines uttered by her indicate: “Fresh start” (p. 68) “You say something” (p. 69). The scene is an explicit example of an overt kind of theatricality. What we have to do with, then, is a short play within a play, a short piece which follows rules similar to those obeyed by the whole drama.

This point is made clear by a speech uttered by ‘Ruth’ later in the play, the only speech in the second act in which ‘Ruth’ makes personal comments on herself, all the others being remarks connected with the political and journalistic debate:

On a packet of salt used in my grandmother’s kitchen there was a label showing a girl holding a packet of salt with the label showing, and so on. It is said, with what authority I do not know, that this was the inspiration of Whistler’s famous painting of my grandmother painting her self-portrait, the one he was painting. A different school holds that it was in fact the inspiration of Turner’s painting of a packet of salt. During a storm at sea. Sorry. I was miles away. Come and sit down. I talk to myself in the middle of a conversation. In fact I talk to myself in the middle of an imaginary conversation, which is itself a refuge from some other conversation altogether, frequently imaginary. I hope you don’t mind me telling you all this. (p. 80)

The question arises who the “you” in the passage, its addressee is Jim Hunter (1982, 62) argues: “The ‘you’ is herself”. While such an interpretation is justifiable, another one is also possible. It seems that the speech is uttered directly to the audience. It is not merely an aside but a conscious expression of her awareness of being a character of a play.



Why else should she be speaking about the conversation going around her as “*imaginary*”. If we accept this interpretation, her speech stresses the self-conscious, theatrical quality of the play and is a reminder that the whole drama, even though seemingly realistic, is also an illusion, a device often used by Stoppard. The whole play, even though obeying the rules of objective stage reality is no closer to reality than the scenes presenting her fantasies, dreams, her inner reality. Therefore the drama is compared to the label on the packet of salt, both of them being artistic representations of reality. The scenes presenting ‘Ruth’ are a painting within a painting, or a play within a play, and thus a representation of a representation of reality. Sometimes we may perceive a convincing representation as being equal to reality, we may forget that we are in the theatre and that what is actually happening in front of our eyes is merely a picture of reality, a theatrical illusion. Such might be the case with a great deal of what is happening in *Night and Day*. Stoppard, however, even though setting out to write a naturalistic play, keeps reminding us occasionally, at least, that the play is just a play. He thus stresses its presentational, non-illusionist character.

Ruth often perceives herself in terms of intertextual references. It may be noticed at various points in the course of the play and comes fully to light in the final scene. The private Ruth inhabits an artificial world of films, plays, painting and music. At various times she transforms herself into famous actresses or cinema seductresses played by them. Such is the case when she mentions “Elizabeth Taylor in *Elephant Walk*” (p. 46) or when, during the dream scene with Milne, she says: “I loved him [Carson] – loved Africa. Just like Deborah Kerr in *King Solomon’s Mines* before the tarantula got into her petticoat” (p. 68). In another scene, that with Geoffrey, she says she is in the wrong movie and tries to recall the correct title (p. 51). On other occasions, while speaking to herself she uses different names: “Clarissa”, “Tallulah” and “Gracie” (pp. 59 and 75). It is not important whether these names refer to famous actresses<sup>11</sup> or other fictitious or real characters. What is significant is that she perceives herself in terms of intertextual references. If, for a moment, we forget about the play as a play and have a close look at Ruth as a “real” person, it becomes clear that reality and illusion or fantasy are not separate but are mixed up to form a complex texture of psychological complexity of the conscious and the subconscious. If we look at Ruth and the entire play from this point of view, the end of the drama becomes quite complex and can be interpreted in a number of ways:

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Corballis (1984, 123), Stephen Hu (1989, 173) and Katherine E. Kelly (1988b, 288) argue that the name Tallulah indicates Tallulah Bankhead, while the name Gracie could be connected with Grace Kelly, perhaps.

RUTH: Well, it was a very elevated, intellectual sort of thing. I wanted to undress him with my teeth.

Oh God, I'm tired as hell and I'm going to get to sleep.

WAGNER: Don't you have a pill for that?

RUTH: There *are* no pills for that. I want to be hammered out, disjoined, folded up and put away like linen in a drawer. *(She goes back to the whisky bottle and holds it upside down over her glass, and examines the label.)* You can use the phone upstairs if you like.

WAGNER: I thought you didn't want to be a tart. ...

RUTH: How do I know until I've tried it? I name this bottle "Cutty Sark".

*(She breaks the bottle against the marble shelf and drops the remainder into the bin. She looks at WAGNER: he's at the keyboard, tie loose, cigarette in mouth, whisky on the 'piano lid'. It looks like a familiar piano-player-plus-singer scene. We hear the piano. 'The Lady is a Tramp'.)*

'RUTH': *(Sings)* She gets too hungry for dinner at eight,

Loves the theatre but never comes late,

She doesn't bother with people she hates,

That's why the lady –

WAGNER *disrupts this by tearing the paper out of the machine. He leaves the telex and stands next to RUTH.*

RUTH: Is that it?

WAGNER: That's it.

*(Blackout.)*

(pp. 94–95)

Critics have given different comments concerning the end of the play. John Harry Lutterbie (1986, 192–193) has written that it marks "her movement from dependency on others to self-acceptance". Ruby Cohn (1991, 142) has noticed that "After learning of Jake Milne's death, Ruth's conscious self offers her body to Dick Wagner, but by this time her unconscious self has vanished from Stoppard's play". While it is true that Ruth seems to be offering her body to Wagner, it is not so clear, though, whether this is done by her conscious self because the private self of Ruth is still present in this scene as the line introducing the song clearly indicates<sup>12</sup>. It remains ambiguous whether it is Ruth or 'Ruth' who appears in the final scene. It seems that each reader or viewer of the play must provide his own answer. What is true, however, is that she has undoubtedly

<sup>12</sup> This point was noticed by Katherine E. Kelly (1988b, 294): "With the death of idealist Milne, Ruth further relaxes her moral rules in favor of standards more finely tuned to the contingencies of the real world. The fidelity debate ends ambiguously with Ruth christening both the scotch and herself 'Cutty Sark', Cutty punning on the Scottish colloquial for immoral woman. ... Evoking this traditional association between scotch, lust and regret, Stoppard closes the play with an ambiguously artificial tableau – the piano-player-plus-singer scene – that looks both like one of Ruth's cinematic hallucinations and like an uninterrupted continuation of the frame play. Either of the two Ruths could be directing this scene, or the two may have merged in the closing parody of the torch singer drowning her sorrows in music and booze".

undergone a change in the course of the play. Whereas at the beginning she was crying for help, now she is, or tries to be, a lady tramp.

The evolution of Ruth is stressed by a comparison with a scene which takes place earlier in the drama, when, in a conversation with Wagner, she “*smashes the neck of the empty bottle on the marble shelf*”, saying that she names the ship *Titanic* (p. 53). It is obvious that in both scenes, while giving names to the bottles, she makes a connection with herself. On the first occasion, fearing the possibility of her adultery being revealed, she refers to the impending doom of the ship and of herself. On the second occasion, the name might refer, as Kelly (1988b, 294) argues, to the Scottish colloquial expression used in connection with an immoral woman. If this interpretation is accepted, her mentioning “Cutty Sark” is an indication of the fact that she has decided to commit adultery. The difficulty concerning the interpretation of the last scene arises, among other factors, from the fact that Ruth is difficult to define as a person. I have discussed her private and public selves as separate entities to quite a great extent. The separation is indicated by Stoppard by providing quotes for the private Ruth. The case, however, is not as simple as that. The fantasy scene opening the Second Act indicates that the two identities blur, mix and at times form a unity. Psychological reality cannot be defined any more easily than a concrete external reality.

## Realism and non-illusionism

*Night and Day* has been described as “a drama, rather than a comedy, of ideas” (Rusinko 1986, 61) and as Stoppard’s piece which is more obviously than any other work of his “a play with a message” (Innes 1992, 336). Some critics, like Bernard Levin (1978, 37), have found the play “deeply disappointing”, arguing that Stoppard “has put his view point before his drama, and thus sacrificed the effect of both”<sup>13</sup>. Others, like Ronald Hayman (1979b, 157), have highly praised it. The fact that the play is a success is due to a number of reasons and above all to Stoppard’s ability to use a theatrical form fully adequate for the demands of the theme.

Many critics have stressed that *Night and Day* is a realistic (Cohn, 1991 141 and Corballis 1984, 113), or even naturalistic play (Jenkins 1988, 142; Kelly 1988b, 294; Levin 1978 and Rusinko 1986, 61). In his review after the premiere at the Phoenix Theatre, Irving Wardle (1978) has written: “Stoppard has always excelled in inventing theatrical forms for whatever he wants to talk about; but even for him it is a signal of triumph to have

<sup>13</sup> See also: Nightingale 1978.

related to such remote subjects within the discipline of nuts-and-bolts naturalistic play". In the interview with David Roper and David Gollob (1981, 6, 15) Stoppard also describes the play as a naturalistic one, explaining that there was "a very mundane explanation for that", the play being written for Michael Codron and his cast and set considerations. The second reason mentioned by the playwright was that the drama is a play about journalism and he wanted to draw on "his own experience". Besides, "The press is a *real thing*, you know, papers are *real things* which you can read".

It is true that to quite a great extent, especially in respect to the journalists plot, Stoppard follows the principles of a realistic or naturalistic presentation. The theatre programme contains, apart from the already mentioned detailed map of Kambawe, an exceptionally long list of credits which is an indication of a great concern for the realistic quality of costumes and furnishings<sup>14</sup>. The surface realism is unquestionable. It must be stated, however, that the play is not a fully realistic representation of reality. The point has been noticed by John Harry Lutterbie (1986, 172): "*Night and Day* signifies a new direction in Stoppard's writing. In his earlier plays realistic elements were used in non-realistic forms, while his latest work is an inversion of this style as he introduces non-realistic structures into a realistic situation". The inversion mentioned by Lutterbie is best visible if we compare the opening stage image of *Travesties*, *Jumpers* and *After Magritte* with that of *Night and Day*. In the case of the first three plays, the initial bizarre, even surrealistic image is soon given a convincing, logical and realistic explanation. The initial situation of the beginning of Act One of *Night and Day* seems to be wholly realistic and easily definable:

*African sunset. An open, empty stage, the frame perhaps broken by the branch of a tree. ... The 'cyc' looks very beautiful. The sun is nearly down. The sky goes through rapid changes towards darkness. A distant helicopter is heard approaching. By the time it reaches 'overhead', darkness has fallen and there is moonlight.* (p. 15)

The helicopter is very loud, its blades cast a shadow on the floor of the stage and make the foliage shake. Before it disappears its spotlight traverses

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Hu (1989, 162) wrote: "The detailed description of real properties, particularly those whose presence or authenticity no one in the audience can perceive, plants information in spectator's mind. The list of credits encourages the playgoer to imagine man's toiletries that never appear onstage, and to realise the presence of wristwatches and knives that appear in no significant stage actions. When Guthrie identifies his camera as F2 Nikon, the audience understands that the prop he handles is genuine. Information about the tasteful furniture and handsome articles of silver confirms the illusion of the Carsons' opulent life". The list can be found in *Stagebill*, The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Vol. IX, No. 2, October 1 props 979, 40A.

the stage. Immediately a jeep drives on to the stage. The stage is in darkness, the only light coming from the headlights of the jeep. Two or three people are inside the jeep, Guthrie, a photographer, being one of them. The jeep's headlights are now turned straight at the audience. Meantime, a machine-gun has started up so that the combined noise of the machine-gun and the helicopter is very loud. Someone shouts and the jeep's headlights are turned off while it keeps turning in a circle. Guthrie jumps out of the jeep and runs out of the light yet does not leave the stage.

*The light loses the jeep. GUTHRIE crouches in a down-stage corner. He is shouting but it is hard to catch. He is shouting 'Press! Press! You stupid fuckers!' Then the spotlight catches him. He stands up into the light his arms spread out, shouting. The gun is firing bursts. He moves away from the corner. A burst catches him and knocks him over.*

(p. 15)

While watching the initial moments of the play the audience are justified to suppose that what they see is a theatrical illusion of reality, circumstances familiar since the Vietnam War. The scene introduces the basic constituents of the situation: a war is going on and there are press members involved. The killing of Guthrie creates a feeling of tension based on expectation of violence. The audience, just as Guthrie on the stage, are exposed to a great stress. They can notice the movement of the air caused by the moving blades of the helicopter, they are blinded by the headlights of the jeep and deafened by the noises<sup>15</sup>. The presence of a real jeep, the introduction of all the powerful aural and visual effects and the audience being exposed to so many sensory stimuli cause that they accept the stage reality as something real, assume that what they are witnessing is an illusionist representation of reality. This is not the case, however. They soon discover that what they have taken to be "real" has been only a representation of representation or an illusion of an illusion. It transpires that the initial moments of the play present not reality but a dream of Guthrie, a mere illusion. As the play progresses, we see him stretched on a garden chair, asleep. It is still late evening which so rapidly changed into night in his dream. Sounds similar to the ones heard in the dream sequence can be detected: "*the telex is visible and chattering in bursts like the machine gun*", an approaching car is heard (p. 16). Stoppard has skilfully joined the two scenes – that of the dream or the staged interior, subjective narrative and that of the staged reality perceived from the objective point of view – by means of an audio bridge, where the same sounds have different meanings

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Hu (1989, 163) has remarked: "The unusual onstage appearances of a working jeep further the drama's realistic direction. The vehicle produces authentic sounds and exhaust fume, and charges the stage with extraordinary kinetic energy".

in the two contexts. There is yet another link between the dream sequence and the otherwise realistic presentation of the journalists plot. The prologue, even though presenting a dream, dramatises a violent shooting nearly identical to the one narrated by Guthrie at the play's end and referring to Milne.

In *Night and Day* Stoppard skilfully mixes illusionist representation and non-illusionist presentation. Both the acts start with scenes which, at first sight, might seem to follow the rules of realistic representationalism. It soon appears, however, that what the audience watched was not a theatrical illusion of a concrete reality but only a presentation of the dreams of Guthrie and Ruth. In both cases, then, we have to do with a dream within a play or a variant of a play within a play, a device which adds to the theatricality of the piece. It must be stressed, however, that Ruth's fantasy scene is characterised by a greater degree of theatricality than the presentation of Guthrie's dream, mainly because she acts as its author and director. The difference in the explicitness of the non-illusionist technique follows the rules governing the form of the entire play. The play consists of two thematic threads each of which has been given an adequate form. The plot concerning journalists basically follows the principles of realistic illusionism and the plot of Ruth is presented mainly in non-illusionist terms.

## Interplay of opposites

It seems worthwhile to discuss briefly the title of the play and the song of Cole Porter which has provided it. In the original version of the play Ruth sang Cole Porter's "Night and Day" and "I've Got You under my Skin" (Corballis 1984, 123) and there was a note in the theatre programme which said that "in providing Cole Porter's immortal tune as incidental background music, Peter Wood identified an aural reference in the title of the production" (Hu 1989, 167)<sup>16</sup>. Cole Porter's song is an adequate

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Hu (1989, 167) goes on to say: "If the aural allusion to the musical theme occasions the theatre patron to recall Porter's lyrics, both the songwriter's opening simile and theme of infatuation anticipate Stoppard's African setting and romantic theme in the drama:

Like the beat, beat, beat of the tom-tom,  
When the jungle shadows fall,  
Like the tick, tick tock of the stately clock,  
As it stands against the wall,  
Like the drip, drip, drip of the raindrops,  
When the summer show'r is through;  
So a voice within me keeps repeating,  
You - you - you.

background for a play set in an African country and also for a play dealing with Ruth's longing for true love. Furthermore, it adds to the meaning of the play as a whole.

The title refers to the dichotomy of the opposites, the most obvious of these being reality versus dream and Ruth versus 'Ruth'. Thomas Whitaker (1986, 149) mentions some other "interlocking dualities: day and night, man and woman, 'work' and 'love', life and death, realism and fantasy, the spoken and the unspoken, politics and business, pragmatism and idealism, deception and honesty". The notions of night and day are underscored in the play by means of verbal and stage imagery. The play relates the title to the temporal changes of the situation presented, to the passage of time. Such is the case at the beginning of the play when the sun is going down and the sky is going "*through rapid changes towards darkness*" (p. 15) or, at the end of Act One, when the stage directions read: "*Night into day*" (p. 62). Yet the notion of physical, objective time, whose passage marks the different parts of the day, is disrupted by the overall vision of the play. In the two worlds presented in the drama two different notions of time seem to dominate. In the world of journalism and also of business and politics, the normal distinction between night and day is abolished as people plunge into their specific "night and day" of 24-hours of duty and sharp conflicts. This notion, expressed verbatim by Milne (p. 61), is exemplified in the play by Guthrie, who sleeps during the day, by the Carsons, Wagner and President Mageeba, who have their meeting late at night, and also by Milne and Guthrie who, paying no attention to the time of the day, set off at night to meet Colonel Shimbu. The play also presents the dream world, where the distinction between night and day no longer exists. This idea is evoked in the conversation between Milne and Ruth in the dream sequence, when she asks him: "Was it dark or daylight?" to which he answers: "No, it wasn't. It was in a parallel world. No day or night, no responsibilities, no friction, almost no gravity" (p. 67). The idea is strengthened by the way in which the dream scenes in the play are presented: Guthrie's daytime nightmare takes place at night, in the darkness. Similarly, at the opening of Act Two, Milne comes out of the darkness to disappear into the darkness again (pp. 64 and 69). Milne's description of the parallel world, in which the normally accepted distinctions are no longer

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Night and day you are the one,  
Only you beneath the moon and under the sun.  
Whether near to me or far,  
It's no matter, darling, where you are,  
I think of you night and day".

(The lyrics quoted after: Nat Shapiro, *Popular Music: An Annotated Index of American Popular Songs*, New York 1965, vol. 4, Adrian Press, 78.)

valid, refers to the world of dreams and fantasy which is characterised by different rules than the objective world of concrete physical reality. In that world the reality is governed by subjective feelings and rules, and objectivity is no longer valid, everything is relative.

The generally accepted distinction between night and day is thus no longer valid in the workaday world of "night and day" or the dream world of "no day or night". It might seem that Stoppard introduces the distinction between night and day only to destroy it and to stress that the image thus arrived at is absolutely relative. This is not the case, however. Certain things are not relative, they must not be. This notion is brought forth when Guthrie objects to Ruth's argument that Milne "died for the product" and says:

I've been around a lot of places. People do awful things to each other. But it's worse in places where everybody is kept in the dark. It really is. Information is light. That's all you can say, really. (p. 92)

The motif of night (the dark) and day (the light) has a slightly altered form here. In this case, however, Stoppard's point is clear: the difference between absolute freedom and limited freedom is not relative – the difference is night and day.

Stoppard's treatment of the notion of night and day is subordinated to the same rules as is the play as a whole. At certain moments the playwright might blur the distinction between what is real and what illusory, he may be arguing that reality (especially psychological reality) is difficult to define. At others, however, he makes his point absolutely straightforward. The differences in the way the varied kinds of reality are perceived have found their expression in an adequate technique of presentation. That is why the plot concerning the freedom of press, whose assumptions are not relative (despite the presence of a debate presenting different viewpoints) employs realistic representation. Creating the Ruth plot and concentrating on the mysteries of human psyche, the relationship between the subconscious and conscious aspects of the heroine's ego, Stoppard has successfully employed a non-illusionist technique. He has often blurred the distinction between reality and illusion and employed intertextual and metatheatrical techniques. He has, in a sense, shown by his own drama that night and day are not antithetical but interdependent and often united, that, in other words, some theatricality is fully justifiable and even advisable in a "naturalistic play".



## XII. *The Real Thing*

*Combined with this was another perversity – an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation. I liked things that appeared; then one was sure.*

*They had bowed their heads in bewilderment to the perverse and cruel law in virtue of which the real thing could be so much less precarious than the unreal ...*

Henry James, *The Real Thing* (James 1963, 124 and 143)

The mottoes taken from Henry James's short story *The Real Thing* provide an apt description of one of the main issues tackled by Tom Stoppard's play under the same title. It had its premiere in Strand Theatre, London, 16 November 1982. Although Stoppard has never acknowledged his indebtedness to James's work, the similarities between the two appear to be too numerous and too obvious to be merely a matter of coincidence, a point which has been discussed by a number of critics<sup>1</sup>. Both pieces present artists at work, a playwright and a painter, respectively. Both of them refer to the relationship between reality and its artistic representation, arguing that we seem to prefer the represented subject over its real-life model. Finally, they both seem to argue that an artistic creation which is true to life may not be aesthetically satisfying. C. B. Crump (1988, 319) has stressed yet another affinity between them: "Both affirm that one function of art is representation and that art is rooted in experience, but both also attest to the prodigious gulf separating the actual from the represented". Writing about the relationship between life and art, Anne Ubersfeld (1982, 128) posed the theoretical question, asking why artistic reproductions of reality "give pleasure rather than seem like the tedious repetition of what exists". Stoppard's viewers find pleasure both in what Ubersfeld has called "the psychological reassurance of observing at a safe distance life being portrayed by art" and in the uncanniness of dramatic illusion. What the audience see on the stage is both real and not real. On the one hand, the characters of a play, due to the workings of the theatrical illusion seem real. On the other hand, they are simultaneously unreal – the people on the stage are not real people but only actors impersonating them.

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<sup>1</sup> Crump 1988, 319; Hu 1989, 4; Kelly 1991, 144; Meyer 1989, 118; Scruton 1983, 46 and Zeifman 1983, 148.

Stoppard further complicates the situation by means of stressing the self-reflexive, metatheatrical quality of his play. This point has been underscored by the Faber and Faber London and Boston 1986 edition of *The Real Thing* whose cover presents a stage within a stage within a stage and also by the original production. Similarly, in the London production, a painting of Henry was hung up on the back wall of his living room. The portrait reproduced the characteristically stooped-shouldered stance of Roger Rees who played the part. "When he stood in front of it, there was an actor whose own mannerisms described Henry, who was then reflected in the picture behind him" (Jenkins 1988, 159). At first glimpse, it could seem that the picture was a realistic representation of a real man – Henry. On second thoughts, however, one was bound to realise that it was a representation of a representation. The man depicted on it was not Henry but only an actor embodying a fictitious character. This chain of mirrors seems to refer to two, seemingly contradictory notions: one of strengthening of the theatrical illusion, of a tendency to take a representation for reality, and the one of shattering it. It could be also argued that what this image provided was a stage rendering of the picture on the label of salt mentioned by Ruth in *Night and Day* (p. 80). The picture on the wall "provoked a kind of Chinese-boxes meditation on levels of representation" (Gordon 1991, 95), on the relationship between reality and art and added to the self-referential quality of the play<sup>2</sup>.

The self-referential, metatheatrical character of the play is achieved by a number of means, the most obvious one being the fact that it presents artists involved in the process of artistic creation, be it as playwrights or actors. As a result, many scenes of Stoppard's drama are representations not of reality but of earlier representations. This, in turn, brings about the question of intertextuality concerning not only dramatic genre but also literature in general as well as music and film. All of these are used in order to investigate the complex epistemological and aesthetic questions of what is real both in life and art and what kind of art can be considered true to life. The play provides answers to some of the questions it poses but not to all of them – in some cases ambiguity and relativity cannot be dispensed with. It demonstrates, for instance, that it is extremely difficult to establish a rigid line between art and life. It is not only that art imitates

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<sup>2</sup> A similar effect is achieved in *Tiny Alice* by Edward Albee. In this play, first produced in 1964, in the library, a doll's house model of the house of which the room is a part is placed. This visual image of a castle within a castle functions metaphorically stressing the idea of the characters' delusions and of the blurred dividing line between appearance and reality. Some of the themes and the visual metaphor employed by the two playwrights reveal close resemblance. It is not clear, however, whether this is a case of intertextuality or a mere coincidence.

life but sometimes the opposite case is equally true, life imitating art. Similarly, an artistic rendering of a situation, seemingly quite convincing and true to life, does not stand the test when contrasted with an actual event. Furthermore, in real life people sometimes do and say things which we would not accept as true to life, were they presented in a drama.

The overall effect of the play, resulting from its incessant repetitions and recurrent intertextual references, is that of a dramatic commentary by the playwright (both Henry and Stoppard himself, another sequence of mirrors in the drama) on writing plays. The play incorporates two fictitious plays within the play: Henry's *House of Cards*, which forms the first scene of *The Real Thing* and the one written by Brodie. It also contains two familiar plays within the play: John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*. The constant shifting between planes of reality is used simultaneously to stress the difference between life and art and to present the numerous overlappings between these two.

### The first fictitious play within the play

When the play opens, it could be assumed that it will be a realistic presentation of a marital breakdown. The stage presents an architect, Max, building a pyramidal, tiered viaduct out of a pack of playing cards. A few moments later his wife, Charlotte, enters through the front door and slams it which makes the viaduct of cards collapse. From the ensuing conversation we learn that Charlotte is supposed to have been on a business trip in Switzerland. Max keeps asking her about the details of her stay there, his jealousy and her irritation becoming more and more evident. Charlotte and the audience alike soon learn that when she was away, he checked her belongings and found out that she had left her passport in the recipe drawer. Furthermore, the passport does not contain a proper stamp indicating that she actually went to Amsterdam some time earlier. All this, as well as the fact that she brought Rembrandt place mats for her mother from her previous trip, make Max suspect that she has been unfaithful to him for some time. Being very ironic and witty at the same time, Max argues: "It's those little touches that lift adultery out of the moral arena and make it a matter of style"<sup>3</sup>. Finally, Charlotte cannot stand it any longer and leaves. After her departure

*he reaches down for the airport bag, puts it back on his lap and looks inside it. He starts to laugh. He withdraws from the bag a miniature Alp in a glass bowl. He gives the bowl a shake and creates a snowstorm within it. Then the snowstorm envelops the stage. Music – a pop record – makes a bridge into the next scene.* (p. 15)

<sup>3</sup> *The Real Thing*, 1986, 13. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

Considering the opening scene alone, it could be argued that Stoppard has moved towards mimetic representation and away from his earlier plays of ideas. It is undoubtedly true that this drama opens with a fully realistic presentation of human feelings. His earlier pieces are, what he himself calls "a pig's breakfast" (Hayman 1979b, 12) and he says they are "plays that make serious points by flinging a custard pie around the stage for a couple of hours"<sup>4</sup>. Yet, as the second scene follows, and then the whole play progresses, the audience are able to discover that Stoppard still pursues his earlier interest in such important issues as the epistemological question of reality versus appearance or the aesthetic one concerning the relationship between life and art. His play is characterised by a high level of self-reflexiveness and theatricality.

Scene 1 of *The Real Thing* is the first of the numerous ambushes set up by Stoppard for his audience. The ambush is revealed already in the second scene which makes it clear that what we have been watching so far was not the real thing but only a play within a play, not a slice of life but merely a theatrical piece: Henry's *House of Cards*, performed by his wife Charlotte, and their friend, Max. The second scene presents the two couples, Max and Annie, Henry and Charlotte, the "real" characters of Stoppard's play. It must be noted that they are not real people but only their representations, so a kind of theatrical illusion, yet, for the sake of avoiding misunderstandings they will be from now on referred to as "real".

The second scene introduces the two basic preoccupations of the play, adultery and art. The heated dialogue refers to art imitating life, to Henry's play, which is criticised both by Max and even more strongly by Charlotte, who drinks "To the collapse of *House of Cards*" (p. 20). In an outburst she tells Max who wants to stop her bitter criticism:

Well, you try playing the feed one night instead of acting Henry after a buck's fizz and two rewrites. All *his* laughs are in place all right. So's my groan. Groan, groan, they all go when they find out. Oh, *groan*, so she hasn't got a lover after all, eh? And they lose interest in me totally. I'm a victim of Henry's fantasy – a quiet, faithful bird with an interesting job, a recipe drawer, and a stiff upper lip, and two semi-stiff lower ones all trembling for him – .... If he had given her a lover instead of a temporary passport, we'd be in a play. (pp. 20–21)

Slightly later on, she argues that there is a difference between life and art and says:

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<sup>4</sup> J. Bradshaw, "Tom Stoppard Nonstop", *New York*, 10 January 1977, 50; quoted in Londré 1988a, 351.

You don't really think that if Henry caught me out with a lover, he'd sit around being witty about place mats? Like hell he would. He'd come apart like a pick-a-sticks. His sentence structure would go to pot, closely followed by his sphincter. (p. 22)

The real life of the main four characters is reminiscent of the scene from Henry's play. Henry, just as the character of his play, is jealous of Charlotte and implies she might have a lover. He uses a sentence from his own play: "Is it anyone I know?" (p. 22 and 15, respectively), at which Max is about to leave and is stopped by Charlotte who tells him to sit down or else Henry might think the two of them are having a love affair. Whether Charlotte and Max are having a romance, what is a reality and what only appearance, remains unclear, nevertheless a shadow of doubt is cast, a shadow which is still strengthened by a remark made later on in the play by Henry. He says then: "If Charlotte made it legal with that architect she's shackled up with, I'd be writing the real stuff" (p. 54). An interesting thing can be noticed here. On the one hand, Max and Charlotte are characters in the play within the play (Scene 1). On the other, they are people who happen to be actors and it is here that the ambiguity concerning their relationship in real life is discernible (Scene 2). When we listen to Henry's statement, we might think of Max as an architect, a fictitious character in the play. In this sentence Henry is mixing up two kinds of reality speaking of Charlotte simultaneously as a character in his play and a real person and in the case of the architect substituting a real man for the character in the piece played by Max. Uttering this sentence Henry blurs the dividing line between life as it is and his own representation of it in *House of Cards*. While the relationship between real Charlotte and Max remains ambiguous, it is clear that Henry and Annie are lovers. Henry does not want to tell their partners about it, insisting that he does not steal other men's wives, even though this is what he is actually doing (p. 28). The scene ends with their arranging a love meeting and the sound of Herman's Hermits "I'm Into Something Good". The second scene, then, establishes the differences and similarities between actual reality and represented reality. It also introduces the idea that reality and illusion are, on the one hand, continuous and, on the other, opposed.

The scene from *House of Cards*, a typical West-end comedy of adulterous alliances, reminiscent of Noël Coward's type of drama<sup>5</sup>, which opens the play and is discussed in its second scene, the first of fictitious plays within *The Real Thing*, is later on deconstructed by Stoppard in several repeats presenting the discovery of infidelity in real life. In two cases Stoppard indicates clearly that the scenes are "immediately reminiscent of the beginning

<sup>5</sup> For the intertextual relationships between the two see: Gordon 1991, 47; Hu 1989, 203-204 and Sheridan Morley, "Shooting Stars", London, 1983, 339, quoted in Page 1986, 72.

of scene 1" (Scene 3 and Scene 9, pp. 35 and 68, respectively). In Scene Three, having discovered Henry's blood-stained handkerchief in their car and being told by Annie that she is really having a love affair with Henry, unlike the main character in *House of Cards*, Max, cannot control his feelings. He first starts swearing, then has doubts, gets furious and finally, to the sound of

*the Righteous Brothers singing 'You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin', [he] flings himself upon ANNIE in something like an assault which turns immediately into an embrace. ANNIE does no more than suffer the embrace, looking over MAX's shoulder, her face blank.*

(p. 37)

Max's behaviour can be discussed in comparison not only with that of the main character of the fictitious play within the play but also in connection with *Othello*, an intertextual reference noticed by Stephen Hu (1989, 211)<sup>6</sup>. The reactions of the three characters can be viewed from the point of view of the interplay between reality and illusion. Othello, a fictitious character, takes appearance for reality and proceeds to take revenge. Max, a fictitious character in *House of Cards*, also takes appearance for reality, but does not react. And finally, Max, the "real" man, at first does not want to accept reality for what it really is and would be only too willing to welcome any excuse on Annie's part. On being told by her that her infidelity is a fact, he still wants to forgive her but is not allowed to do so.

In Act Two, when Annie and Henry have been married for two years already, it is in turn Henry whose behaviour is reminiscent of that of the husband from the play within the play. On the surface, he seems to be detached and makes witty remarks concerning Annie's stay in Glasgow; "I thought you were committing incest in Glasgow", referring to her part in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (p. 47) but still containing an allusion to her possible infidelity. When, speaking about his criticism of Brodie's play, she says "You're jealous", he immediately jumps at the conclusion that she means he is jealous of Brodie. Annie, however, means "jealous of the idea of the writer" (p. 51).

Some time later, the audience become aware of the growing attraction between Annie and Billy, an actor with whom she went to Glasgow and the second repeat of the opening scene takes place. In Scene Nine, Annie comes back from Glasgow and finds the flat ransacked by Henry who insists on her telling him the truth (p. 71). She is unwilling to give an

<sup>6</sup> The critic writes: "After considering a black protagonist for the drama, Stoppard decided to employ a handkerchief as evidence of betrayal, as in *Othello*". The reference given is Michael Coveney, "Step by Step with Stoppard", *Financial Times*, (London), 27 November 1982, 16.

answer and he tells her that “not caring doesn’t seem much different from not loving” (p. 72). Therefore, he insists on her telling him what exactly has happened. Henry now starts discovering that the image he presented in his *House of Cards* is not a true one, that, in moments of crisis, one gets too involved to remain witty and detached. Stephen Hu (1989, 203) has noticed that the speech contains direct allusions to a character in Noël Coward’s *Private Lives*. Henry, then, in criticising his own play and also the kind of West End drama it is an example of, perceives the difference between the dramatic representation and reality. As the curtain falls, we see Henry taking a present Annie has brought for him – it is a tartan scarf. The audience are not able to watch his reaction, though, the curtain is already down. They may only wonder what his reaction is but it is highly improbable that he will start laughing as the fictitious husband did on getting the miniature Alp in a glass bowl. Furthermore, in Scene Eleven, Annie confesses having an affair with Billy and they can see Henry actually breaking down. As Charlotte predicted in Scene Two, he really comes “apart like a pick-a-sticks” (p. 22). When the play ends, however, in the following scene, we can witness a touching scene of reconciliation between Henry and Annie. Despite the fact that she has had an affair with Billy they reach a compromise. Strange as it might seem, her real adultery has strengthened their relationship and made them aware that their love is, after all, the real thing.

The scene of *House of Cards* is repeated at length in Scene 3 and Scene 9 when Max and Henry replace the fictitious husband. Max’s discovery leads to a divorce. Henry’s reaction, as mentioned before, is much more complex. In this case a reconciliation follows. The behaviour of which of the three husbands, one fictitious and two “real” ones is most life-like, probable and real? If the characters of Stoppard’s play are justified in criticising Henry’s play as not convincing, the audience could, perhaps, have a similar right to blame *The Real Thing* for presenting Henry whose behaviour as a cuckolded husband may not seem fully convincing, either. But, then, one could only wonder about how complex real life is and argue that sometimes real people do not follow the generally accepted kind of behaviour. Besides, is it possible to state what the generally accepted norm of behaviour in such a situation really is?

It seems that one of the reasons for introducing *House of Cards* was to focus attention on the relationship between art and life. It must be noticed that this relationship, as presented in *The Real Thing*, works in both directions. Max and Charlotte criticise the play as not being true to life, too artificial and unreal. Stoppard’s play demonstrates that life also imitates art, the twice repeated replay of the fictitious scene being the most obvious example. It is not only Max and Henry who replay variations of

the opening scene. The fictitious husband ransacks his wife's belongings, an action which is presented in a slightly altered version three more times now in the life of the "real" people of Stoppard's play. At the end of Scene One Annie goes "*methodically and unhurriedly*" through a pile of Henry's papers (p. 44). In Scene Seven Charlotte tells Henry that her affair with the architect ended when he discovered that she had taken her diaphragm with her on a brief out-of-town trip (p. 66). And finally, in Scene Nine, after coming back home from Glasgow, Annie discovers the mess in the bedroom and learns it was not burglars but Henry who did it. In all the three cases the generally accepted order is reversed: "real" people imitate a scene of the fictitious *House of Cards*.

### The second fictitious play within the play

Stoppard, as already stated, makes use in his drama of two fictitious plays within the play. The way in which they are incorporated into *The Real Thing* is differentiated for each of them. In the case of Henry's play, Stoppard sets an initial ambush and makes the audience take fiction for reality, or the inner play for the play proper. Brodie's play, on the other hand, is first introduced into the drama in the form of a script from which Henry starts reading (p. 48). The fragment shows Annie and Brodie meeting on the train, a piece of fiction based on a real encounter earlier described by her (p. 31-33). The scene is then repeated (Scene Six) and the audience is caught again in one of Stoppard's ambushes. We assume we are watching the play within the play (or, at least a rehearsal of it) while what we witness is a scene taking place between Annie and Billy, the real people. We are ambushed because when Billy enters the compartment he starts quoting fragments of Brodie's play, later on to move on to fragments of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Wanting to communicate with Annie in real life, Billy is making use of fictional texts which suit the situation. The scene is repeated again (Scene Ten) and we start wondering what we are watching: is it a fiction (Brodie's script enacted) or reality (real Annie and Billy)? We soon discover that none of our guesses has been correct. What we have been watching was the shooting of the play in a TV studio, so the process of creating theatrical illusion, a rehearsal not being a "real" performance. And finally, there is yet another ambush at the beginning of Scene Twelve, when, in darkness, we hear a dialogue between Annie and Billy. The two kinds of reality are blurred again and we are uncertain who we are listening to: is it Billy and Annie who have become attracted to each other in the meantime or the fictitious characters of Brodie's



play? The light goes up and we discover that neither of our guesses was right. Brodie has been watching a video recording of his play in which Annie and Billy were performing.

In all the scenes in which fragments of Brodie's play are introduced a specific blurring of the border between reality and its artistic representation is noticed and the concrete realm of reality to which they belong is specified only when the wider context is specified. This fictitious play within the play is employed for two main purposes. Firstly, it evokes the idea of epistemological notion of perception so important in Stoppard's output. What is real and what is merely an illusion? Is it always possible to distinguish between reality and appearance? The answer given seems to be that the interpretation of the thing perceived depends to quite a great extent not only on individual associations and feelings but also on the concrete information concerning the exact context, or, to put it differently, on the knowledge of the perceiver. Shifting from one level of reality to another and withholding necessary information for some time, Stoppard keeps ambushing us, makes us mistake reality for fiction or, conversely, appearance for reality.

Secondly, the introduction of this inner play enables Stoppard to discuss art and the question of its relevance to life. Before Henry decides to recycle it, Brodie's play is a failure because the young soldier is not a writer and does not understand that an artistic creation is not merely a faithful copy of life. Brodie's play is based on his own experiences as an anti-nuclear protester arrested and sent to prison. His dramatisation of real events lacks any credibility because it is too one-sided and his unsophisticated language of a semi-literate reduces the description of society to slogans<sup>7</sup>. Brodie's play is an example of propagandist art in which the message is all and the form is irrelevant, the kind of art whose only value resides in what it says about the world and in its attempt to change it.

Henry, on the other hand, propagates art as a kind of artistic recycling in which form seems most important. While discussing Brodie's play Henry tells Annie: "It's not literary, and it's no good. He can't write" (p. 49), an argument repeated also by Billy (p. 56). During the same conversation he says:

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<sup>7</sup> Roger Scruton (1983, p. 47) has commented on this: "In the end, we are to understand, the fault of Brodie's language is not that it is crude, heavy, gratuitous – although it is all of these – but that it is unreal. Nothing speaks from it, nothing comes out of it, besides itself. By posturing as the real thing, the thing outside art, it loses the aid which art can bring. It too becomes self-referential. But unlike art, which strives always to make room in its centre for the individual experience, the jargon-ridden language of revolution makes room only for itself. Its self-reference is of a more deadly kind; it is like a blind drawn down on our only window on the world, where we stand hopelessly looking for that elusive thing, the self".

[Words are] innocent, neutral, precise, standing for this, describing that, meaning the other, so if you look after them you can build bridges across incomprehension and chaos. ... I don't think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little or make a poem which children will speak for you when you're dead. (p. 54)

Art, then, not only makes a great artist immortal, but can also change the world. To achieve this the artist must be aware of both what he is doing and of how he is doing it. This notion is expressed by Henry by means of comparing artists to cricket players: "What we're trying to do is to write cricket bats, so that when we throw up an idea and give it a little knock, it might ... *travel*" (p. 52). The writer (a cricket player) has to make efficient use both of the form (the bat) and the content (the ball). Brodie's play, however, as Henry argues, is "balls" (p. 53). The phrase refers to the soldier's being interested in ideas only and not in the form, the slang connotations of it evoking the inability of the protester to master the form.

It could be wondered why Henry, who appears to be a theoretical expert on what makes great art, has not been successful in his *House of Cards*. The most obvious answer could be that very often there is a great gap between theory and practice. The play supplies also another answer to this question. Henry is fully aware of his own failure to write about love: "I don't know how to write love. I try to write it properly, and it just comes out embarrassing" (p. 40). His creative problems might result from the fact that love is difficult to define. In several moments in the play, during conversations with Debbie, Charlotte and Annie, he tries to specify what the word means (pp. 63–64, 66–67, 72 and 76). The problem which Henry encounters while writing about love is only partly an artistic issue. To a great extent it is related to an ontological and epistemological question of what is real and what is not. In objective reality no one can point at a concrete object and say: "This is love". Love as such is not an object but an abstract idea and one's understanding of it cannot be verified by means of referring to a concrete reality, it remains forever a subjective notion. What is even more, while trying to speak or write about love, trying to define and describe it, one has to employ language. According to Leslie Thomson (1987, 535), in this play Stoppard "focuses on language: on what it can and cannot do, both in the theatre and in real life. While he demonstrates the importance and value of words as representations of 'real things', he also examines the limitations of language and the possibilities of its misuse. He is particularly interested with the difficulty of finding words adequate to express ideas or emotions – especially love – 'things' that are not 'real' the way a coffee mug is".

Henry comments on this idea in the following way:

There is, I suppose, a world of objects which have a certain form, like this coffee mug. I turn it, and it has no handle. I tilt it, and it has no cavity. But there is something real here which is always a mug with a handle. I suppose. But politics, justice, patriotism – they aren't even coffee mugs. There's nothing real there separate from our perception of them. So if you try to change them as though there were something there to change, you'll get frustrated, and frustration will finally make you violent. If you know this and proceed with humility, you may perhaps alter people's perceptions so that they behave a little differently at that axis of behaviour where we locate politics and justice; but if you don't know this, then you're acting on a mistake. Prejudice is the expression of this mistake. (p. 53–54)

This speech is important because it tackles the two basic issues of this play and also of Stoppard's whole output. On the one hand, there is the epistemological question of what reality actually is: even such concrete, "real" objects as a coffee mug can be, depending on the perspective, perceived differently. Ideas, notions and feelings do not possess any objective correlatives. This does not mean, however, that people should not discuss and artists should not write about abstract things which are not easy to define. Henry argues that the only possible way to alter the world is not to write directly about abstract notions (which is impossible, as simplistic propagandist art demonstrates) but to change people's perceptions, to make them more aware and sensitive. In this respect Stoppard seems to be using Henry as his own mouthpiece: both of them propagate the idea that plays which are not directly politically involved can yet provide a "moral matrix" (Hudson interview 1974, 14) which will enable viewers to reach their own conclusions and, ultimately, change the world for the better.

It might be said that Stoppard introduces the two fictitious plays within the play in order to demonstrate that neither propagandist art (Brodie's piece), which focuses on ideas only, nor purely artistic enterprises, in which form is more important than ideas (Henry's *House of Cards*) are successful as works of art. The real value of art is, then, located neither in the objective world it imitates, nor in the technique it employs. It is to be found in the internal operations of the artistic structure, in the interplay between the liveliness and loftiness of the language and the precision of adequately putting the proper words together in order to express concrete ideas. It seems that one of the reasons for incorporating two fictitious inner plays into *The Real Thing* is to demonstrate what good art is and simultaneously to put them side by side with both the two familiar inner plays and Stoppard's own piece.

## The first familiar play within the play

The first familiar play within the play is August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, which is introduced in Scene Four when Henry helps Annie to memorise the lines for her rehearsal. The scene they are reading out is a presentation of a highly passionate discourse between a well-born young woman and a servant. It seems that Stoppard's choice of this concrete scene is nothing but accidental. It not only deals with the theme of love but is also self-referential, metatheatrical so it shares two important features with *The Real Thing*. Jean's language strikes us with its artificiality: not only does he use French but the sentences he utters are so stagy that they make Miss Julie ask him where he learned to talk like that and enquire whether he spends a lot of time at the theatre (p. 40). What we meet here is another of Stoppard's halls of mirrors in which art and life reflect each other endlessly, as it were: we are watching a play (*The Real Thing*) in which two "real" people are playing the part of actors rehearsing an inner play (*Miss Julie*) whose characters ("real" people) imitate art. The artificiality of Strindberg's dialogue is strengthened by Henry and Annie's rendering of it – as the stage directions specify Annie: "'reads' without inflection" (p. 39). The rehearsal makes Henry wonder why he cannot "write love" and say: "Loving and being loved is unliterary. It's happiness expressed in banality and lust. It makes me nervous to see three-quarters of a page and no *writing* on it. I mean, I *talk* better than this". Annie's answer clearly states what good art is: "You'll learn to do the sub-text. My Strindberg is steaming with lust, but there is nothing rude on the page" (p. 40).

## The second familiar play within the play

John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* also has been chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, it deals with the subject of love and what is more, despite the blank verse it employs, it seems to present "the real thing". Secondly, the sentence the scene includes: "Music as well consists in the ear as in the playing", though used in a different context, is relevant for the idea concerning the notion of reality being to some extent shaped by the perceiver. This notion is evoked in *The Real Thing* partly by means of blurring the borderline between reality (Annie and Billy as real people who happen to be actors) and illusion, fiction (Annie and Billy playing the parts of Annabella and Giovanni, respectively). The distinction between or the fusion of the two is brought about for the first time when Henry tells Annie: "I thought you were committing incest in Glasgow" (p. 47). A long fragment of Ford's drama is introduced in Scene Six which presents Annie

and Billy going by train to Glasgow. The scene begins, as mentioned above, with Billy quoting from Brodie's play. What follows is a mixture of Brodie's play and a "real" conversation between the two. Towards the end Billy switches to Ford's play and both of them act out the scene in which the lovers declare their mutual passion for the first time (I, ii, lines 180–213). At first glance, it could be presumed that they are just rehearsing when they speak these words. As the scene progresses, however, "*His 'reading' has been getting less discreet*" (p. 59) and it becomes more and more clear that Billy is turning Giovanni's plea to Annabella into an expression of his own love for Annie. Thus, the lines of the fictitious Caroline characters start ironically revealing a real-life affair between Annie and Billy. Annie is aware that the two kinds of reality, the real and fictitious situations, have begun overlapping and blurring and she finally stops him speaking, undoubtedly as both Giovanni and himself, by using his real name "Billy". It could be assumed that in this scene it is Billy who uses Ford's words as his own while Annie, even though uttering Annabella's, perceives them as not her own. Earlier, in their real-life conversation, she seemed to be aware of his infatuation yet tried to stop his flirting as she actually does at the end of the scene.

The situation presented in Scene Eight demonstrates a progress in the relationship of both Giovanni and Annabella and Billy and Annie. Ford's lines come from Act II scene I (lines 1–16) and present Giovanni and Annabella who have just consummated their love. When the scene ends, the two planes of reality merge completely, as the two lovers Annie/Annabella and Billy/Giovanni kiss and embrace. On the one hand, the two characters of Stoppard are enacting a scene presenting two fictitious lovers. On the other hand, however, while doing so, they enact their own real love which has grown in the meantime. This is made clear when Annie moves away from the fiction of the performance to their own reality and addresses her partner with his real name, Billy, and "*returns the kiss in earnest*" (p. 68). Stephen Hu (1989, 217), commenting on this scene, has written: "her gesture is one of actual arousal during an imaginary run-through of a drama that itself simulates reality". It is evident that both the lines and actions of the two people on the stage belong simultaneously to two planes of reality. The fiction of the inner play and the "reality" of the outer play have merged and formed a unity. A similar conflation of actor and character has been alluded to by Henry slightly earlier, when he asked Charlotte: "Does it really matter who played Giovanni to your Annabella in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore?*" (p. 60). While asking the question, he did not mean her role and the answer he was hoping to get was not the name of her theatrical partner but the name of her first lover.

## Intertextuality

All the plays within the play, both familiar and fictitious, add to the richness of *The Real Thing* both as far as its form and content are concerned. They create the texture of Stoppard's drama which thus becomes a mixture of romantic comedy (*House of Cards*), political TV docudrama (Brodie's play), Caroline tragedy of incest (*'Tis Pity She's a Whore*), a naturalistic piece (*Miss Julie*) and Henry's science fiction film script (a fragment of it being read by Annie, p. 54). Shifting among these numerous intertexts the play is simultaneously shifting from one plane of reality to another: starting from text which is merely a text, moving through rehearsals and actual performances, and finally arriving at the level of "reality" of the characters of Stoppard's drama. As mentioned earlier, these shifts are not always specified, different levels of reality are not only juxtaposed but also blurred. As a result, the very structure of the play evokes the notion of a very specific relationship between reality and fiction. The use of the inner plays also adds to the development of the main theme of the drama which concerns the question what is real both in art and in life. If we look at *The Real Thing* as "a love play", for instance, the plays within the play help to analyse a variety of amorous relationships which thus comprise an infatuation between political sympathisers, an incestuous relationship, an impulsive union across class lines, a flirtation between youth and an older woman and a marriage of untrusting sophisticates.

The play may be viewed from different perspectives and consequently different aspects of it may become most important. This becomes clear when we compare the two images presented on the book cover of the printed text and in the theatre programme, respectively. The Faber and Faber edition shows the receding proscenium arch, an image of a stage within a stage and thus draws attention to the relationship between reality and art and to the play's meta-theatrical character. The theatre programme uses an image of "a man and a woman kissing" (Deloney 1990, 140), thus focusing on the emotional aspect of the drama. Or, to put it differently, the book cover stresses what is important and "real" (despite theatrical illusion) in art, while the programme focuses on what "real" love is, no matter whether it concerns "real" people (Henry and Annie in Stoppard's play) or fictitious characters (of all the inner plays included in Stoppard's drama).

The use of the plays within the play also adds to the self-reflexive quality of the drama. The meta-theatrical character of *The Real Thing*, its intertextual quality, is achieved not only by means of references to other plays – no matter whether fictitious or familiar, but is also due to its relationships with other artistic creations, to its numerous links with both

music and film. Stephen Hu (1989, 9 and 206) has described the piece as “an intelligent romantic comedy with a rock soundtrack” and has noticed that “The variety of musical styles in *The Real Thing* mirrors the range of dramatic forms in the play. Stoppard’s selections include Continental waltzes, rock numbers from the sixties, Bach’s famous ‘Air on the G String’ and passages from the operas”. The music in the play fulfils many functions. Firstly, it helps to elaborate the distinction between what is real art and what is merely sham. Secondly, it is used to form audio bridges between scene One and Two, Scene Two and Three and Scene Eleven and Twelve. Thirdly, Henry’s preferences concerning music reflect the discrepancy between what his tastes really are and what he would like them to appear to be. And finally, at certain moments of the play concrete songs are chosen in order to add to the overall meaning of a given scene. Such is the case with Herman’s Hermits’ ‘I’m into Something Good’ which ends Scene Two when Annie and Henry have arranged a love meeting, with the Righteous Brothers’ ‘You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feelin’” which accompanies Max’s breakdown at the end of Scene Three and with the Monkees’ ‘I’m a Believer” which closes the play<sup>8</sup>.

The play contains numerous references to writers and works of literature of different kinds. *Finnegan’s Wake* (p. 16), a Sartre play (p. 16), *Three Sisters* (p. 47), *Das Kapital* (p. 51) and an Elizabethan heroine (p. 65) are mentioned. Similarly, there are many direct references to film: Max in *House of Cards* enquires whether his wife’s lovers “work together, like the Marx Brothers” (p. 14), Annie compares the situation of Henry and herself to that of “Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid jumping off the cliff” (p. 28), a neighbour’s child is compared by Charlotte to “the Last of the Mohicans” (p. 30) and Henry tells Annie: “There was a tribe, wasn’t there, which worshipped Charlie Chaplin. It worked just as well as any other theology, apparently. They loved Charlie Chaplin. I love you” (p. 76)<sup>9</sup>.

## Theatricality as a social convention

While speaking about their aspirations, preferences or achievements the characters of Stoppard’s play often make references to artistic representations, so to fictions, illusions. Thus, the numerous intertextual references not only add to the meta-theatrical quality of the play by means of pointing out

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Hu (1989, 205) mentions the musical allusion present in *House of Cards* which appears when the husband sings the title line of *Let’s Call It Off*.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Hu (1989, 210 and 213–214) discusses the similarities between *The Real Thing* and Luis Bunuel’s *The Exterminating Angel*, Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane* and slapstick comedy of silent movies thus referring to other intertextual references in the play.

the inter-dependence between reality and fiction but also evoke the notion that its very characters often employ theatricality in everyday life. Stoppard himself traces the genesis of *The Real Thing* to a quotation of W. H. Auden which he includes, in a paraphrased form, in the play: "Public postures have the configuration of private derangement" (p. 33) (Gussow interview 1984, 23). Theatricality is employed especially by Brodie and Henry in order to make appearances be taken for reality.

Brodie, even though often spoken about in the course of the play, makes his first appearance only in its last scene. After he has watched the video recording of his play, he gets involved in an argument with Henry and the following conversation follows:

ANNIE: (*To HENRY.*) No, this isn't him.

BRODIE: Yes, it bloody is. That was me on the train, and this is me again, and I don't think you're that different either.

ANNIE: And *that* wasn't him. (*She points at the TV.*) (p. 80)

The scene, even though simple, is yet complicated, binding numerous threads together. The first sentence uttered by Annie refers to Brodie at present – his behaviour does not suit her recollection of him as she remembers him from their meeting on the train. Not only has he changed in the course of time but he was not in the past what he seemed to be, either. It soon appears that when they first met he recognised her as an actress taking part in a children's serial and was attracted to her. One can only wonder who he directed his feelings to: the real woman he met on the train, an actress he saw on TV or maybe the character from the serial? The real person, the fictitious character and the role are mixed up again. Because of his attraction to her, he decided to join her and go to the demonstration. It thus becomes clear that his setting fire to memorial wreaths at the Cenotaph was neither an act of "a pacifist hooligan", as Henry argues (p. 34), nor a "symbolic act", as Annie describes it (p. 43), but a theatrical act whose aim was to attract Annie. And finally, while in prison, he was still trying to impress Annie. He wrote a play, featuring in it as a dedicated protester and started living up to this fictitious image in reality. When the play ends, Annie cannot stand the artificial, theatrical Brodie any longer and smashes the bowl of dip into his face (p. 81)<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Katherine E. Kelly (1991, 150) has commented on this character in the following way: "As long as Brodie was an abstract symbol of a cause, as long as he was represented by others but never directly on stage, he had the magic suggestiveness of artifice. But once he appears repeating the clichés of his play, having 'become' the Committee's image of a working-class victim-hero, he loses the appeal of both the real and the fictional and descends to the merely actual".



Henry, too, employs theatricality in everyday life, trying to be different from what he actually is. This is most visible in the scene when we see him preparing for an appearance on the TV show *Desert Island Discs*. He is trying to select eight records for the programme and finds the task extremely difficult as he is "supposed to be one of . . . intellectual playwrights" (p. 17). Wanting to live up to the standard of a sophisticated person, he is not able to confess that his taste is very lowbrow indeed, his preference being for pop music. Later on, when he is already with Annie, he starts pretending for her sake that he has begun to enjoy serious music (Scene Five). Scene Eleven presents him listening "*to the radio, which is playing Bach's Air on a G String*" (p. 74). When, however, Annie specifies that it is Bach he starts arguing that the composer stole it: "Note for note. Practically a straight lift from Procol Harum. And he can't even get it right. Hang on. I'll play you the original" (p. 75). Ann is in a hurry so she either does not follow what he is saying or does not have time to react to his mistake. Stoppard, however, makes sure that the audience notice it and as the scene closes "*the record starts playing – Procol Harum's 'A Whiter Shade of Pale', which is indeed a version of Air on a G String*" (p. 77). Not only, then, are Henry's music tastes very banal but his general knowledge is very limited too – he really should know that Bach preceded the Procol Harum.

When presenting the husband in his play, an architect, so supposedly a man with a good taste and some sophistication, Henry makes him give a long speech against digital watches which "have no class" (p. 12). Later, on the speech is criticised by Max who suggests cutting it (p. 20). It appears, however, that even though Henry is most probably sure that digital watches are inferior to traditional ones, he himself uses one. The aural effect of his wristwatch going off, which disrupts the love scene between Annie and Henry (p. 44), provides a convincing theatrical effect drawing our attention to the discrepancy between what Henry considers to be proper and his own individual preferences. It could be argued, perhaps, that the architect from the play is a presentation of Henry as he might want others to perceive him, so his theatrical, artificial alter ego. The character is detached, witty, sophisticated and unemotional. Henry, on the other hand, argues that "Everything should be romantic" (p. 67) and, unlike his hero, breaks down when he learns about Annie's infidelity. In Scene Nine, discussed earlier, Henry insists on knowing whether she has a lover. She says to him: "Don't be like this, Hen. You're not like this" to which he answers: "I am" (p. 69). The Henry she is speaking about is the Henry people know, so the one wearing a mask. Henry, on the other hand, is speaking about himself as he actually is. It seems that in the course of the play he has undergone a change. At the beginning of the love affair with Annie he was still trying to keep up the pose, to make appearance stand for reality. Now, having started to love her, he makes his mask drop and wants to know what the reality is. Roger Rees, who played the part in the original production has made the following

comment on Henry: "He starts out over confident ... but in the end he has to learn to deal with the true nature of a relationship"<sup>11</sup>.

## The real thing

One could wonder whether what is happening between Annie and Henry is "the real" thing. On being asked by an interviewer whether the fragility of this relationship is deliberate, Stoppard answered that the answer to that question was subjective<sup>12</sup>. He added that the thing that keeps them together is "Love. They're right for each other. They love each other". The end of the play makes it clear that their love is "the real thing". As the drama closes Henry and Annie leave the stage to make love and, in the background, the song of the Monkees, "I'm a Believer", is heard. The opening lines of the lyrics are: "I thought love was only true in fairy tales/ Meant for someone else but not for me"<sup>13</sup>. It seems also worth while mentioning that the play is dedicated to Miriam who, just like Annie, is the second wife of the playwright (Stoppard and Henry, respectively).

Irving Wardle has argued that "the play produces the cumulative effect of 'cleverness with its back to the wall' [and] found the performance, especially between the two central characters 'full of mischief, erotic hunger, and human generosity, and ... did not believe a word of it'" (Rusinko 1986, 135)<sup>14</sup>. It is impossible to accept this criticism. As the case with the evaluation of Stoppard's plays often is, another critic has voiced just an opposite opinion: "But *The Real Thing* has a heart – warm and throbbing with the domestic passion to which anyone, even an intellectual playwright, can happily succumb" (Corliss 1984, 50). Michael Billington (1987, 146), too, has argued that "This is one of the finest British plays since the war". The American production, directed by Mike Nichols won the 1984 Tony Award for Best Play, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, the Drama Desk Award and the Outer Circle Critics' Circle Award (Hu 1989, 203). It is up to every viewer or reader of the play, then, to decide whether *The Real Thing* is an authentically "real thing", a truly artistic achievement.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Rees, quoted by Patrick Ensor, "An Actor at the Sheepdog Trials", *The Guardian*, 12 November 1982, 9, in Page 1986, 69.

<sup>12</sup> Joan Juliet Buck, *Vogue*, March 1984, 514; quoted in Thomson 1987, 536. The playwright went on: "Some people think that their relationship suggests that fundamentally everything is okay. That the right two people found each other and will sort of survive. ... There is always a precipice, but some couples know it's there. It's just what keeps them together is stronger than what tends to separate them".

<sup>13</sup> Music and lyrics by Neil Diamond; quoted in Thomson 1987, 548.

<sup>14</sup> The quotation comes from I. Wardle, "Cleverness with its Back to the Wall", *Times*, London, 18 November 1982.

### XIII. *Squaring the Circle*

At the beginning of 1982, about a month after the imposition of martial law in Poland, a suggestion was made that Stoppard could write a film script about that country. While setting to the task, Stoppard recalls in the introduction to the printed text, all those involved in the making of the film realised they “were going to address a particular question. It was the question to which the whole conflict between Solidarity and the Polish State was continually reduced; was freedom as defined by the free trade union Solidarity reconcilable with socialism as defined by the Eastern European Communist block?”<sup>1</sup> The work on the script of *Squaring the Circle* started with taking a professional researcher and soon Stoppard was “in possession of thousands of facts about Poland but it was far from clear what had to be done with them” (p. 9). In February 1982 he gave up the documentary reconstruction job as he realised that the people involved in the making of the film “simply didn’t *know* what happened and what was said” (p. 9). Stoppard was worried by the quasi-documentary nature of the project, an anxiety rooted in the British debate over the potential dangers of ‘faction’. His friend, the distinguished journalist Paul Johnson, in an article published in March 1981, (1981, 362–363) wrote that “‘faction’ television programme, even though called a documentary, is not a documentary at all. It mixes authentic documents and fiction. Furthermore, the producer of a TV “‘faction” blurs the distinction between these two types of “evidence”. He concluded, arguing that “The introduction of genuine material makes the programme more, or less, dishonest, for the mingling of truth and fiction is the very essence of propaganda”.

Paul Johnson’s remarks seem to be especially valid in reference with the presentation of the Polish situation of the early eighties. The average Pole at that time did not know precisely what was actually happening, suffering under the great impact of the socialist regime’s propaganda which, still flourishing, was bringing about more confusion than concrete information.

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<sup>1</sup> *Squaring the Circle*, 1990, 10. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

Furthermore, even if one asked those actively participating in the political life about their evaluation of the events, one would get a variety of divergent opinions. The political reality was so complex that it could not be unanimously interpreted: facts mingled with wishful thinking, reality with illusion, the same events and statements presented a different image to individual people.

Realising the dangers resulting from the very nature of "faction", Stoppard undertook the task of making the viewers recognise their role in distinguishing fact from fiction, opinion from fact. He introduced five Witnesses who, according to his own words "served the crucial function of distancing the film from the conventional kind of which (falsely) purports to reconstruct history" (Stoppard 1984a, 14). Also a "narrator with *acknowledged fallibility*" (p. 10) was introduced. Stoppard indicated that the Narrator was himself by means of an asterisk put next to "Narrator" and supplying a note at the bottom of the page of the script stating it was "the Author" (p. 11). The Americans shooting the film wanted the Narrator to be an average American and dispensed with the Witnesses. They also altered the script, adding or cutting some scenes without Stoppard's knowledge or approval. After quite a long time of friction with Metromedia, Stoppard withdrew his name from the American version. The English version of *Squaring the Circle*, following Stoppard's ideas concerning "faction", was finally transmitted on Channel 4 in May 1984. Interestingly enough, it "was the English version that won a gold award at the International Film and Television Festival in New York" (Rusinko 1986, 94).

The film can be discussed from the point of view of its documentary quality. It provides the viewer with information concerning the situation of Poland as a member of the Soviet socialist block, its political, economic and social condition both in the eighties and earlier (for instance, the partitions of Poland are mentioned). It presents a chronological reconstruction of the events between the end of July 1980 and the summer of 1982 and concrete people taking part in them, some of whose biographies are briefly discussed. The conflict is presented not as a clear cut one between Solidarity and the regime but also the frictions within the two sides of it are demonstrated. The setting and general atmosphere of the film are based on thorough research work. Certain peculiarities of everyday life in Poland are well observed and indicate a meticulous attention to detail on the part of Stoppard and other people shooting the film. One of them, Voytek, a Pole, whose full name is not specified, was responsible for the setting.

This study will concentrate on the fictional side of the film, the imagination of Stoppard and his ability to use the medium in such a way as to keep the audience's interest in Poland's recent history and not only to provide them with factual information but also to amuse them. The latter aspect of the film was discussed by one of the critics in the following

way: "It takes daring to be funny about the crushing of Solidarity and the suppression of the nation, especially to audiences who expect serious subjects to have straight faces and forget that one of the ways to discomfit a devil is to laugh at him" (Jenkins 1988, 179). Stoppard uses a number of means to keep the audience at a distance to what they are watching. He makes them become aware that it is not a reconstruction of reality but only a quasi-documentary. The illusion of reality is shattered, among other means, by such devices as the above mentioned Narrator, five Witnesses and a specific use of metaphors and repetitions.

## The Narrator

The function of the Narrator is to introduce the scenes, provide links between them, give comments and explanations but also to produce an alienation effect, a technique propagated by Bertolt Brecht. While using the *Entfremdungs* effect, Stoppard follows one of the traits of post-modernism which "often tends to use its political commitment in conjunction with both distancing irony ... and technical innovation, in order both to illustrate and to incarnate its teachings" (Hutcheon 1991, 181). The Narrator's presence and comments indicate that what the audience are watching is a reconstruction, a mixture of reality and fiction. He also provides a frame within which his own vision of what happened is presented. In this respect, the effect achieved is yet another variation of play within a play, the technique Stoppard uses in most of his plays. To some extent the variant used in *Squaring the Circle* (a play within a narration) is reminiscent of *Travesties* where the events in Switzerland were viewed through the eyes of old Carr. In both pieces, too, Stoppard introduces real historical characters and makes them work as "figures on loan". He also incorporates various kinds of pre-texts (the *Pravda* editorial language used by Brezhnev, for instance). All of these result in a high level of intertextuality in the play, a permanent shattering of illusion and the film's outstanding theatricality<sup>2</sup>.

*Squaring the Circle* begins with a short introduction uttered by the Narrator which precedes a meeting of Brezhnev and Gierek by the Black Sea in July 1980. Two versions of their conversation are presented. In the first one, introduced by the Narrator's sentence: "In an atmosphere of cordiality and complete mutual understanding the two leaders had a frank exchange of views", Brezhnev greets Gierek: "Comrade! As your friends

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of various intertextual practices in the script see: Wiszniowska 1994. In her article the critic deals with "figures on loan", pre-texts, the use of theatre in the theatre, the function of the frame, the intertextual function of the Narrator and the Witnesses and the parody resulting from interaction between texts.

and allies in the progress towards the inevitable triumph of Marxism-Leninism, we are concerned, deeply concerned, by recent departures from Leninist norms by Polish workers manipulated by a revisionist element of the Polish intelligentsia" (p. 27). Then, however, the Narrator indicates that this is not the presentation of the real meeting: the people on the screen are only actors, the landscape is not real, either. Yet, as he puts it, "Everything is true except the words and pictures" (p. 27). He argues that if the meeting took place in summer at the sea they could not have been wearing coats and hats. They probably did not use *Pravda* editorial language, either. A second version of the meeting is presented. Now the two leaders are dressed in "*brightly coloured Hawaiian shirts and slacks*" and "*wear sunglasses*". In this scene Brezhnev starts shouting "*like a gangster*": "What the hell is going on with you guys? Who's running the country? You or the engine drivers?" (p. 28).

After the second version of the meeting, the Narrator, having observed that nobody really knows what the meeting looked like, says:

All the same, there was something going on which remains true even when the words and pictures are mostly made up. Between August 1980 and December 1981 an attempt was made in Poland to put together two ideas which wouldn't fit, the idea of freedom as it is understood in the West, and the idea of socialism as it is understood in the Soviet empire. The attempt failed because it was impossible, in the same sense as it is impossible in geometry to turn a circle into a square with the same area – not because no one has found out how to do it, but because there is no way in which it can be done. What happened in Poland was that a number of people tried for sixteen months to change the shape of the system without changing the area covered by the original shape. (p. 29)

Already at the very beginning of the script, it is indicated that the Narrator's fallibility must be acknowledged, that the facts are basically true yet the scenes and conversations are fictitious. The viewer is not allowed to forget about this in the course of the film. There are a number of scenes which are coupled in a similar way. One of them presents another meeting of two leaders. Brezhnev still occupies the position of the Soviet Union Party leader and, on the Polish side, Kania has replaced Gierek (p. 76). Similarly, the meeting of Jaruzelski, Wałęsa and Głomp is repeated but not two yet three times. On the first two occasions, the leaders are playing cards with an unconventional deck, "*their designs, in red and white, show variously, the Polish Eagle, a Church Symbol, the Solidarity symbol, the hammer and sickle*" (pp. 88–89). The cards symbolise the main arguments in the discussion – the wealth and future of Poland, the role of the Church and of Free Trade Union and the possibility of the Soviet intervention. On these two occasions, the same sentences are attributed to different

characters. For instance, the complaint "We can't even agree on language", is uttered first by Wałęsa and then by Glemp. It is Jaruzelski who speaks first about the Polish Church being unique, in the second version these lines being attributed to Wałęsa. In the first version, fearing the Russian invasion, Glemp supports Jaruzelski, in the second one he backs Wałęsa because, as the Narrator argues again – "no one knows how little help Wałęsa got from Archbishop Glemp. Or how much" (pp. 89–90). Then he notices once more that "everything is true except the words and pictures" (p. 90) and, having rejected the possibility of the meeting resembling a card game, presents its third version which indicates that neither Wałęsa nor Jaruzelski can make decisions on their own. They are representatives of the Union and the Party, members neither of which are unanimous in their opinions. It is a question not only of a compromise between the two leaders – compromises must also be reached within each of the groups.

The notion that the Narrator does not know precisely what happened is evoked by means of his repeated efforts to reconstruct the conversations. Not only does he contradict himself, presenting different versions of the events, but he is further contradicted by the five Witnesses who often question his reliability or argue that the picture presented by him is either imprecise or untrue. When, for instance, he comments on the Polish-Soviet relationships after the Second World War he is told by a Witness that to be able to understand Poland's attitude to Russia one has to understand some Polish history and details concerning the partitions are presented (p. 35). When, on another occasion, the Narrator witnesses Kuroń being arrested, another Witness tells him why, in order to satisfy the growing Russian demands and unable to pacify the workers, Gierek has decided to have some intellectuals detained (p. 41). The Witnesses, obviously Poles living under the grave circumstances of everyday Polish reality, can make sense of the absurd events taking place in the totalitarian system and can also supply additional information concerning Poland's past and present situation.

## The Witnesses

The Witnesses also sometimes object to the Narrator's way of presenting the events. The first Witness criticises the scene in which Babiuch is shown carrying Gierek's bag: "A cheap shot, in my opinion. These people are not doormen. These are people with big responsibilities" (p. 31). In the English film version (A TVS Production for Channel Four, 1984), though not in the printed script, he further criticises the Narrator for mispronouncing the word "złoty". The question of the Westerners having problems with the

pronunciation of Polish words and names is raised again in the film slightly later on, in scene 35 presenting a Solidarity meeting and introducing the most prominent members of the Free Trade Unions (p. 51). Again the Faber & Faber text differs slightly from the scene as it is presented in the film. When the actor playing the part of Modzelewski introduces him self he badly mispronounces his own name and is corrected by the Narrator who later on adds: "and there were others like these whose names the outside world would never get right" (p. 52). Apart from the comic overtones, adding to the overall impact of the film, this scene is also important for another reason. It stresses once more that what the viewers are watching is not a reproduction of reality but a "faction", a combination of fact and fiction.

## The metaphors

Wanting to indicate the para-documentary character of his presentation, the Narrator often makes use of different metaphors. Such is the case with the scene when Wałęsa's children, playing ball in the yard, make apt comments about Kuroń to which the Witness says: "A cheap trick, in my opinion ... Out of the mouths of children ..." He adds slightly later on, however: "Theories don't guarantee social justice, social justice tells you if a theory is good. Right and wrong are not complicated – when a child cries, 'That's not fair!' the child can be believed. Children are always right. But it was still a cheap trick" to which the Narrator concludes: "I'll take it back" (p. 84). The Witness' remark and the Narrator's reaction underscore the fictitious status of the faction which, being a mixture of fiction and fact, can be altered to make its point clearer.

Some metaphors are employed in the presentation of the fight going on between the Government and Solidarity. At a certain moment in the play Wałęsa refers to the conflict as "a game" (p. 59) and, while presenting the situation, the Narrator makes use of two game metaphors – chess and cards. In scene 41 the Narrator and a Witness are playing chess in a cafe. A conversation follows:

WITNESS: Why is it always *chess*?

NARRATOR: Ugh, well, you know, it symbolizes ...

WITNESS: These ones with horse's heads, are they the ones which can jump over things?

NARRATOR: You're ruining it.

WITNESS: Sorry.

(p. 57)

Stoppard repeatedly has the Narrator present a metaphor only to have it destroyed a moment later by an objecting Witness. Such exchanges between the two commentators concerning the travestied version of events distance the viewers from the presented image of history. This estrangement



effect is one of the basic means by which Stoppard presents his own version of the events. The Narrator makes use of the metaphor to underscore his point. The Witness demolishes its impact by overexposing it, making it too literal. While doing so he draws the attention to the film being not reality but its artistic image and thus stresses the self-reflexive quality of the script<sup>3</sup>. In the next scene, the Narrator and a Witness are playing cards. The remarks which they make ("twist", "bluff", "bust", p. 58) may refer equally well to their card game and to the behaviour and speeches of Kania which are presented just before it. Later on, towards the end of the script, the two men play cards once more (p. 88), introducing the already discussed scene presenting the meeting of Glemp, Wałęsa and Jaruzelski.

In a scene following the card and chess games

*we see a line-up of the Party Bosses, just heads and shoulders above the parapet. They are dressed like gangsters. They look out front, possibly reviewing a parade, and talk among themselves out of the sides of their mouths.* (p. 60)

Watching the scene presented in such a way by the Narrator, a Witness wonders "What's all this gangster stuff?". He is not satisfied with the Narrator's answer: "It is a metaphor" and protests, saying that it is a distortion of truth and his point seems to be taken (p. 60). Neil Sammells (1986c, 193) argues: "Yet the effect is that Stoppard has it both ways: he couples reliance on a stereotype with the declaration that it is inadequate as genuine analysis". Even though the gangster joke is exposed as "a metaphor", it reappears throughout the script. The party bosses are often presented in this way. Such is the case with the already mentioned versions of Brezhnev meeting Gierek and Kania. Also Gwiazda says twice that the Party leaders are gangsters (pp. 54, 60). Moreover, a few moments later, it is the Party Secretary himself, Kania, who complains:

*There are people who think that the Party boss can run the operation like a Chicago gangster. ... As First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party, Al Capone wouldn't have lasted out the week.* (p. 64)

## Illusion and reality

The Witnesses' insistence that the picture presented by the Narrator be as close to reality as possible is evident. Equally obvious is the

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<sup>3</sup> Katherine E. Kelly (1991, 61) comments on the scene: "But ruining the precious metaphor is exactly the point. Artiness in the 'faction' is suspect if it disguises weak facts. The Witness conditions our credibility through his ironical detachment from the film's content and style".

Narrator's/Stoppard's recurrent use of various means of shattering the illusion of reality. Furthermore, the way in which the artist employs theatricality can be justified in at least two ways. Firstly, it is a means of underscoring that the audience are watching "a faction" and not a documentary<sup>4</sup>. Secondly, the establishing of the truth of what the true Polish reality was is impossible not only because of the lack of sufficient data but also because of the fact that quite often in those times reality could not be successfully separated from its mere illusion. In the film there are two sets of scenes demonstrating this point. In scene 14 Gierek making a speech to the nation is presented. "*He is apparently in his office, sitting at a desk, the office bookcase behind him*". As the scene progresses, we realise he is not in his office but in a television studio, with an audience of two electricians standing on a gantry and looking down at him and Maciej Szczepański watching him on the monitor. When the speech ends, Szczepański asks Gierek what he thinks of the bookcase and the latter one, looking at it being carried out by two prop men, answers: "Nice. Very nice" (pp. 38–39). The Polish TV viewers for whom this programme is shot are to assume that what is being presented to them is Gierek in his own, real office – an illusion of reality is created for them. A few moments later we watch a similar situation:

*For the moment we don't know if we are in the television studio or Gierek's actual office. GIEREK sits at his desk, the bookcase behind him. He has evidently just finished addressing the camera. He looks shattered. Abruptly he moves his chair back. It hits the bookcase, which topples over.* (p. 45)

In the very next scene, however, "GIEREK is at his 'real' desk with the 'real' bookcase behind him" (p. 45). What is real and what is not? No one can judge on the basis of what is seen, additional information must be received. The scenes may indicate that sometimes it is very difficult to separate fact from fiction, reality from its mere illusion. It may also be discussed as a part of the Government's permanent cheating of the nation. There is yet another scene in the play which demonstrates that in those times not only simple citizens were cheated but that even Jaruzelski himself was not able to see reality as it actually was:

NARRATOR: (*Voice over*) The new Prime Minister liked to make unannounced visits ... sometimes to shops.

(*There is busy activity in the shop. Groceries of all kinds are busily unpacked from boxes and placed on empty shelves. When the shelves look fairly full, the PRIME*

<sup>4</sup> When the film was presented on Polish television the translators – Joanna Skoczylas and Andrzej Stempkowski – did not manage to grasp Stoppard's main point and subtitled it "a documentary film".

MINISTER and his ENTOURAGE are seen to enter the shop. There is much handshaking and smiling as the GENERAL passes through.)

JARUZELSKI: And how is the food distribution?

PARTY OFFICIAL: It is working very well, Comrade.

JARUZELSKI: Good, good.

*(He passes rapidly through. As soon as he has gone all the groceries are quickly removed and repacked.)* (p. 69)

In the above scenes regime officials try to present a convincing image of reality whereas what the TV audience and the General get is a mere illusion, a fake. The viewers watching Stoppard's film, on the other hand, can notice that its setting is quite specific, its aim being to make them aware that what they see is not reality but merely an illusion. In "Introduction" Stoppard recalls the original setting. The designer, Voytek, "built a structure of steel gantries squaring off a huge red circular carpet on a steel floor. ... This space served as an airport, a street, a dockyard, the Polish parliament, the meeting rooms of the Politburo and Solidarity, and anywhere else we needed. The result perfectly expressed the qualified reality which I had been worrying about creating since starting to write" (p. 11). The setting with its symbolic elements and visual images of square and circle in the film's title is anything but realistic and is characterised by purposeful artificiality. Its theatrical impact is further strengthened by the fact that in some places in the film the elements of the setting and certain props are removed while the action is still continuing. Such is the case, for instance, with scene 95, which presents the sleeping Wałęsa, the props being cleared round him while the Narrator's voice commenting on Solidarity elections is heard (p. 80). The scene, because of presence of the Narrator and prop men, underscores the fact that the audience are watching an artistic reconstruction and not true reality.

## The frame

The end of the film is a return to its beginning and thus the notion of the circular frame into which the film is put is further underlined. The Narrator's words introducing the scene of the meeting of Brezhnev with Jaruzelski at the Black Sea are the same as in the case of his meetings with Gierek and Kania: "In an atmosphere of cordiality and complete mutual understanding the two leaders had a frank exchange of views" (p. 96). The visual image presented on the screen makes the audience assume, as indicated by the Narrator in the earlier Black Sea scenes, that the scene cannot have looked like this in reality – it is again summer and the two men are wearing hats and coats. Yet the second, gangster version is missing

now. Maybe it is not included because now that Jaruzelski has imposed martial law in Poland there is no reason for Brezhnev to be angry and make demands and so he can ask politely about Mrs Jaruzelski's health. It has been proved that Solidarity cannot survive, that, in other words, squaring a circle is impossible. Maybe the omission of the repeat is an expression of Stoppard's being uncertain whether the night of the 13th December was a mistake and crime on the part of Jaruzelski or the only possible solution. The answer to these questions remains open. What is clear is the existence of a frame into which the script is put. Different things may happen, the First Secretaries of the Polish United Workers' Party may change but the basic geopolitical situation of Poland remains the same. At the time when the film was shot its ending was sad and ironic and evoked the notion of the hopelessness of the situation of Poland in the Soviet bloc. This, however, belongs to the past. The period of Polish history presented in the film ended with the imposition of the martial law and the defeat of the Free Trade Union Solidarity but the final victory of its ideals and freedom, as known in the West, were to come still within the same decade.

## XIV. *The Dog It Was That Died, Hapgood*

### *The Dog It Was That Died*

This 65-minute radio play, was first transmitted on BBC Radio Three on 9 December 1982, so before the first showing of *Squaring the Circle*. It will be discussed in this chapter, however, because, as the case with Stoppard often is, it seems to be a kind of a finger exercise for the full length theatre play, *Hapgood*. Both plays “parody the double agent plot of *Le Carr*” (Rusinko 1986, 110), employ Stoppard’s familiar technique of “dislocation of the audience’s assumptions” (Hayman 1979b, 143), and deal with the themes of deceptiveness of appearances and “the maddening relative nature of human perception and understanding” (Kelly 1989, 451). Working in the radio medium, being “one of the writers who use the medium most imaginatively” (Hayman 1982), Stoppard makes a direct reference to architecture, so a visual, and not an aural medium, to clarify his point. In Scene Four, Blair is having an obelisk lowered on the tower in his garden:

BLAIR: The crane has to swing it over slightly to the right.

SLACK: No, sir, it’s centred on top of the tower.

BLAIR: But its lop-sided.

SLACK: Only from where you are standing.

BLAIR: But surely, Mr Slack, if it’s centred on top of the tower, it should look centred from everywhere.

SLACK: That would be all right with a round Norman tower, sir, but with your octagonal Gothic tower the angles of the parapet throw the middle out.

BLAIR: Throw the middle out-?

SLACK: The obelisk will look centred from the terrace, sir.

BLAIR: But it has to look centred from my study window as well.

SLACK: Can’t be done now – you’d have had to have one side of the tower squared up with the window<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Dog It Was That Died*, in: *The Dog It Was That Died and Other Plays*, 1983, 19. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

The notion that perception depends on the perspective of the onlooker is further underscored by a remark uttered by Blair to his wife in the following scene: "It's going to look lop-sided depending on where one is standing, even though it's in the middle" (p. 21). The theme of the clash between appearance and reality is brought to focus in the espionage context of the play. The main character of the play, Purvis, tries to commit suicide because, as he puts it in his letter to Blair, his superior, he has "had enough of this game" (p. 11). His decision is caused by his inability to stand his situation any longer. Being a double agent he has doubled and redoubled so often that he has lost track of whether or not he is a traitor. He comments on this in a dialogue with Blair (pp. 33-34). The remarks uttered here by Purvis are important for at least two reasons. Firstly, putting on appearances to deceive his enemies, he is no longer able to distinguish between reality and the mask. The metaphor of Russian dolls employed by him in this context is evocative of the label on the packet of salt mentioned by Ruth in *The Real Thing*. Yet, while in the case of the earlier play, there was an endless succession of girls holding a pack of salt, here there is an end, a core – a hollow man. Secondly, it is not only Purvis who does not know what his real position is. The audience never hear any comment from the Russian side but it is indicated that the British themselves are uncertain who he is working for: the Russians, the British, Q6 or Q9 division of their own service (pp. 15, 21 and 43).

The overall effect of the play is one of the futility of espionage which has long lost sight of its purpose. The poor man tried to kill himself in the past yet his suicidal jump off Chelsea Bridge was to no avail: "In fact he landed on a barge dog. The dog broke Purvis's fall. Purvis broke the dog's back" (p. 14), "It was the dog that died" (p. 18). Ronald Hayman (1982) was the first to trace the intertextual reference behind the play's title to Goldsmith's poem, yet was disappointed with the fact that no sufficient links were established between the two. It could be said, however, that Stoppard introduces the reference as a part of his favourite hide and seek game pertaining to quotations and intertextual references incorporated in his plays. Besides, the dog, the main "hero" of Goldsmith's poem, provides the title for Stoppard's drama and adds to its overall meaning. The play ends with Purvis's funeral after his second, this time successful, suicidal attempt. As the play closes, the audience listen to a scene presenting Purvis's three superiors discussing the case. Their basic problem concerns the question of who will pay the bargee for the dog which was killed. In the absurd world of espionage the dead dog is more important than the man who has just been buried. The Chief makes this point clear when he says:

In other words, Purvis was acting in effect, as a genuine Russian spy in order to maintain his usefulness as a bogus Russian spy. ... In other words, if Purvis's mother had got kicked by a horse things would be more or less exactly as they are now. If I were Purvis I'd drown myself. (pp. 44–45)

No matter how hard Purvis tried to be an effective agent, it would not have made much difference had he never existed at all. Purvis has killed himself because of “a bit of *crise*”, as he described his first suicidal attempt (p. 16). The basic reason, as specified by the overall impression left by the play, is the crisis inside the Intelligence Service itself. This idea is evoked by the sentence closing the drama and coming from dead Purvis's second letter written from the mental hospital for secret agents and addressed to Blair: “PS – Incidentally, Dr Seddon thinks that you ought to be in here yourself, but I'll leave you to field that one” (p. 45). Purvis's superior, Blair, is equally “mad”, both of them recognise the futility and senselessness of their espionage game.

## *Hapgood*

Premiered at the Aldwych Theatre on 8 March 1988, the play takes up several motifs sketched only in *The Dog It Was That Died*. Like its radio predecessor, *Hapgood* is, on the surface level, a play about espionage. In both cases we encounter double (or even triple) agents, a situation of which the Chief in *The Dog It Was That Died* complained saying: “These double and triple bluffs can get to be a bit of a headache” (p. 43). Both plays focus on the struggle to distinguish lies from truth, loyalty to oneself and one's closest from loyalty to one's agency. The final scene of *The Dog It Was That Died*, presenting the top figures of intelligence service, evokes the notion of the futility and senselessness of espionage. The same idea is again voiced in *Hapgood* when, on being told by her superior, Blair, that they have to carry on, this being a matter of whether “It's them or us, isn't it?”, the heroine cries out: “Who? Us and the KGB? The opposition! We're just keeping each other in business, we should send each other Christmas cards – oh, f-f-fuck it, Paul!”<sup>2</sup>. Finally, both of them deal with the epistemological question of what constitutes reality and the notion of the difficulty of separating it from its mere illusion.

## The opening stage image

*Hapgood* starts with a bizarre stage image, so that what Stoppard once said about *Jumpers* and *Travesties*, “You start with a prologue which is

<sup>2</sup> *Hapgood*, 1988, 87. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

slightly strange" (Hayman 1979b, 12), is also relevant of this play. In the original London production the play opened with a red dot moving about the map of London projected onto panels which filled the stage (Billington 1988a). The winking red light moving along the streets thus represented a car under surveillance. Hapgood, talking to someone on a short-wave radio, provided a verbal commentary to this visual image. By the time the first person comes through the doors of the changing room of the swimming baths which form the set of this scene, the audience know that agents have been following someone all over London. What follows is a sequence of entrances into and exits out of the room and changing cubicles placed in it and a smart switching of attaché cases.

In his note Stoppard says: "*In the first production, all the foregoing action was done to music and lightly choreographed*" (p. 4). The audience watching this "ballet" become aware that it is impossible to make sense of what is actually happening<sup>3</sup>. The opening stage image, just as the entire play, bring about confusion and the impossibility of distinguishing what is real and what is a mere illusion. Stoppard has commented on this aspect of the drama saying:

The play has been written about as though it were incomprehensibly baffling. It does not seem to me to be borne out by experience. After all these years one thing you learn is what's going on in an audience and by God you know when you're losing them. It's like getting a temperature, you can't miss it. My impression is that your ordinary punter has less trouble with it than some critics.  
(Billington 1988a)

It is undoubtedly true that, while most probably finding it difficult to understand what is actually happening, "the ordinary punter" will find this spy thriller thrilling. On the other hand, the fact that some uncertainty remains concerning the question of what is taking place, adds to the overall impact of the play which is about uncertainty, about the difficulty of defining reality and about the prevailing relativity.

The scene at the pool opening the play foreshadows the main thematic and structural interests of the play. Christopher Innes (1989, 316) argues that "the whole play is structured on game-playing, using the Kiplingesque image of spying as 'the Great Game', but taking the metaphor literally". In his article he discusses the numerous game strategies employed in the drama and argues that the very initial stage picture in the original presentation was evocative of "a recently issued cops-and-robbers board game called

<sup>3</sup> Hersh Zeifman (1990b, 182) has written: "The confusion of this opening scene is deliberate; there is no way an audience can possibly follow all those comings and goings, and Stoppard knows that. We are thus immediately made to experience, structurally, what the play's characters are suffering from thematically: an inability to figure out what's going on, to determine precisely who is the traitor in their midst".



*Scotland Yard*". It may be said that one of the games introduced in the course of the play is the game of interpretation played both by the characters and the audience. One can wonder whether the theatre audience watching the production are aware that the very first scene presents two pairs of twins – there are two Ridleys and two Russians taking part in it. Even if the theatre audience do not immediately realise that a special doubling effect is employed, they discover it as the play progresses. If the audience are temporarily misled, however, it means that Stoppard, while employing one of his ambushes and withholding information, has made them interpret the situation differently from how it actually is.

The printed text, on the other hand, does not permit such a misinterpretation as the stage directions are quite telling:

*The essence of the situation is that RIDLEY moves around and through, in and out of view, demonstrating that the place as a whole is variously circumnavigable in a way which will later recall, if not replicate, the problem of the bridges of Königsberg. ... As a matter of interest, the RIDLEY who posts the briefcase is not the same as RIDLEY who entered with it.*  
(pp. 2–3)

The case of the bridges of Königsberg is explained verbatim by Kerner, the atomic physicist, who provides numerous scientific explanations of what the characters and audience alike are witnessing. In the Prussian city of Königsberg there were seven bridges and "an ancient amusement of the people of Königsberg was to try to cross all the seven bridges without crossing any of them twice". It was the Swiss mathematician, Leonhard Euler (1707–1783) who "took up the problem of the seven bridges and ... presented his solution to the St Petersburg Academy of Science in the form of a general principle based on vertices". The conclusion the mathematician came to was that it cannot be done, two walkers are needed (pp. 45–46). The knowledge of mathematics and Euler's solution enables Kerner to solve the mystery of the dressing room case. Looking at the situational diagram of the scene at the swimming pool, which he has drawn, he comes to the conclusion there must be two Ridleys.

## The theory of relativity

In *Hapgood* Stoppard turns to mathematics and physics in order to provide an explanation for the events presented. Euler's solution supplied a scientific explanation which shed light on reality and explained it. The numerous references to physics in the play have an opposite effect and stress the importance of relativity. It was Clive James (1975, 71) who first noticed the parallels between Stoppardian theatrics and Einsteinian physics.

He argued that Stoppard's plays reflect the new, post-Newtonian outlook based on the proposition voiced by Einstein who "found himself obliged to rule out the possibility of a viewpoint at rest". In an interview Stoppard said that he considered James's article to be brilliant and added:

What he said was that you get into trouble with my plays if you think that there's a static viewpoint on the events. There is no observer. There is no safe point around which everything takes its proper place, so that you see things flat and see how they relate to each other. Although the Eisensteinian versus Copernican image sounds pretentious, I can't think of a better one to explain what he meant – that there is no point of rest.  
(Hayman 1979b, 144)

Already George Moore in *Jumpers* complained about the uncertainty resulting from the development of science: "Copernicus cracked our confidence, and Einstein smashed it" (p. 75). The case of Copernicus is similar to that of Euler in the sense that both of them described the nature of reality and, employing science, explained it. It is also reminiscent of the Wittgenstein anecdote mentioned by George. On being told by his friend that people assumed that the sun went round the earth because it looked like this, Wittgenstein asked: "Well, what would it have looked like if it had looked as if earth was rotating?" (p. 75). Copernicus proved that sometimes our interpretation may be misleading and that, due to imperfect perception, the description of reality may be faulty. Furthermore, Copernicus's discovery may also be viewed in the light of Einstein's theory of relativity concerning space.

Making numerous references to the discoveries of modern physics, *Hapgood* demonstrates the changes that have occurred in our conception of reality as a result of the shift from Newtonian mechanics to the formulation of relativity and quantum theory. Classical Newtonian physics postulated a permanent external world, fixed, objective and describable. Scientific laws were always based on strict cause and effect principles and independent of the perceiver. Modern physics has shown that, once it is discovered that a law does not hold in conditions in which it has so far been considered to hold, it is necessary to search for new explanations. This notion was expressed by Richard Feynman in his *Lectures on Physics* from which Stoppard takes the motto for his play and to which he often refers in the course of the drama.

## Relativity in quantum mechanics

In the lecture "Probability and Uncertainty – the Quantum Mechanical View of Nature", Feynman discusses the experiments concerning defining the nature of light. He describes an experiment during which electrons were

supposed to get through two holes. The observation of their movement is to bring the answer whether they are particles or waves. In order to be able to observe the behaviour of the electrons, the experimenter has to use light which “affects the result. If the light is on you get a different answer from that when the light is off. You can say that the light affects the behaviour of electrons” (Feynman 1965, 140). The situation provides no solution – it is not possible to state exactly what is happening: either you turn the light off and are unable to watch the electrons because you do not see what is happening, or you turn it on and thus affect their behaviour. Feynman has written:

A philosopher once said “It is necessary for the very existence of the science that the same conditions always produce the same result”. Well, they do not. You set up the circumstances, with the same conditions every time, and you cannot predict behind which hole you will see the electron. Yet science goes on in spite of it – although the same conditions do not always produce the same results. That makes us unhappy, that we cannot predict exactly what will happen. (Feynman 1965, 144)

Feynman’s experiment is referred to by Kerner who calls it “a trick of the light” (p. 10). In discussing it, he does not pay much attention, though, to the changed circumstances (the light being either turned on or off) but he concentrates on the perceiver: “Every time we don’t look we get wave pattern. Every time we look to see how we get wave pattern, we get particle pattern. The act of observing determines the reality”. Furthermore, as Kerner continues, “nobody knows” how this is possible: “Einstein didn’t know. I don’t know. There is no explanation in classical physics. Somehow light is particle and wave. The experimenter makes the choice” (p. 12). At another point in the play, Kerner makes a reference to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle and compares the particle world and “the dream world of the intelligence officer”:

An electron can be here and there at the same moment. You can choose; it can go from here to there without going in between, it can pass through two doors at the same time, or from one door to another by a path which is there for all to see until someone looks, and then the act of looking has made it take a different path. Its movements cannot be anticipated because it has no reasons. It defeats surveillance because when you know what it’s doing you can’t be certain where it is, and when you know where it is you can’t be certain what it’s doing; Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle; and this is not because you’re not looking carefully enough, it’s because there is no *such thing* as an electron with a definite position and a definite momentum; you fix one, you lose the other, and it’s all done without tricks, it’s the real world, it is awake. (p. 48)

In this passage Kerner concentrates not on the perceiver but on the very nature of electrons which seems to escape a clear definition. Werner Karl Heisenberg, mentioned by Kerner, an atomic physicist, a specialist in quantum mechanics, has formulated the uncertainty principle which “concerns

attempts to measure the position and motion of a quantum object simultaneously. ... The very act of trying to pin down an electron to a specific place introduces an uncontrollable and indeterminate disturbance to its motion and vice versa"<sup>4</sup>. Feynman (1965, 143) paraphrases this uncertainty principle in order to be able to use it while describing his own experiment: "It is impossible to design any apparatus whatsoever to determine through which hole the electron passes that will not at the same time disturb the electron enough to destroy the interference pattern". Anthony Jenkins (1990c, 174) discusses an intertextual reference to a scientific experiment called Schrödinger's Cat paradox (1935): "The experiment consisted in closing a cat in a steel chamber with a Geiger device which was to release a toxic acid. The cat, according to the rules of quantum mechanics, is both dead and alive until the result is revealed the moment the box is opened". Jenkins traces this source in connection with the scene with Celia pretending to be Hapgood's twin sister: "Hapgood, at the hotel, obeys these quantum rules: she is both Betty and Celia, since Ridley does not open the disc box, but, as he says earlier, 'I'd trade it for my cat if I had a cat'".

## Quantum mechanics and the reality of the world of espionage

The dual nature of the agents, further underlined by the fact that quite often they are literally doubled, appearing in couples as twins, is evocative of the structure of light as both a wave and a particle. This metaphor of the world of spies being reminiscent of the world of quantum mechanics is enriched by the introduction of the "quantum jump". The probability function, introduced into physics by Feynman, among others, indicates a tendency of the possible course of events as well as our limited ability to know it. The so-called "quantum jump" is an expression of the transition between the "possible" and the "actual". According to atomic physicists, the probability function is a mid-stage between the idea of an event (our perception and interpretation) and the actual event. This point is again explained by Kerner:

I cannot stand the pictures of atoms they put in schoolbooks, like little solar system: Bohr's atom. Forget it. You can't make a picture of what Bohr proposed, an electron does not go round like a planet, it is like a moth which was there a moment ago, it gains or loses quantum of energy and it jumps, and at the moment of the quantum jump it is like two moths, one to be here and one to stop being there; an electron is like twins, each one unique, a unique twin. (p. 49)

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<sup>4</sup> P. G. Davies and J. R. Brown (eds), *The Ghost in the Atom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 6; quoted in Jenkins 1990c, 174.

Stoppard uses the notion of the “quantum jump” three times in the course of the play to make it work in visual terms. On the first occasion, it functions as a visual bridge between the first two scenes. Scene One ends with Blair making arrangements to meet Kerner and Ridley at twelve in the zoo. As it ends *“he puts the radio away and looks at his wrist-watch. The next time he moves, it is twelve o'clock and he is at the zoo”* (p. 9). Later on, a similar “quantum jump” of Blair provides a link between scene 3 and scene 4 (p. 24). On still another occasion, in the inter-scene, as Stoppard calls it, it is Ridley who makes something like *“a quantum jump”*. The stage directions indicate that the Ridley we see in this inter-scene is *“somebody else”* than the Ridley presented in the preceding one (p. 69). What the audience are watching is Ridley’s literal twin materialising out of nowhere. The use of the “quantum jump” in reference to Blair and Ridley is differentiated. In the case of Ridley, the scene is meant to bring out in visual terms the notion that Ridley is something other than he claims to be, that there are, in fact, two Ridleys, twins taking part in espionage. He is (they are) a double agent in both senses of the word – he is spying both for the British and the Russians and there are two of them. In the case of Blair the “quantum jump” has another meaning. When the audience see Blair as he appears in consecutive scenes, they may realise that he has varied faces to show in different situations. In scene one, appearing at the bath, coming out of the darkness, he does not react to Wates’s drawn revolver, remains professional, cool and in control. At several moments in the play, however, especially in some scenes with Hapgood, he appears to care for his people, to be a loving, tender father figure to them. Yet Kerner comments on the other Blair when he says that what counts for him is the “technical” aspect of espionage, not the “personal” one, the espionage at large and not the individual people involved. Kerner clarifies this point when he tells Blair that he would betray Hapgood if he thought it necessary (p. 73)<sup>5</sup>.

Quantum mechanics, the uncertainty principle, Feynman’s experiment, the “quantum jump”, all contain the “mystery”, mentioned in Feynman’s motto chosen by Stoppard for the play and talked about by Kerner: “There is a straight ladder from the atom to the grain of sand, and the only real mystery in physics is the missing rung. Below it, particle physics; above it, classical physics; but in between, metaphysics” (p. 49). It is relevant in this context to mention the correspondence between Stoppard and a theoretical physicist, J. C. Polkinghorne, included in the Aldwych Theatre programme.

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<sup>5</sup> Hersch Zeifman (1990b, 191), while discussing the scene, notices: “As an accomplished Intelligence agent, Blair is a master of ‘Newspeak’, the lies that posed as truth in Orwell’s *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*. (Orwell, as we recall, was born as Eric Blair)”.

Stoppard wrote to Polkinghorne: "I think that the choice of epigraph will irritate you and the word 'metaphysics' in scene five will infuriate you". In his reply, the physicist asserted that mathematical language can penetrate beyond "the everyday dialectic of wave and particle" and make the dual nature of light "free of paradox for those in the know". Stoppard, however, refused to be included among those "in the know" and thus preferred to be puzzled by the quantum mystery. "I think I understand your point", he responded, "but it seems to me that in the case of quantum mechanics the difficulty is in reconciling the mathematical language with the common-sensical view of what is possible. Feynman who presumably understands the mathematics insists on being amazed and so do I, so please forgive me ..."<sup>6</sup>

The mystery inherent in quantum mechanics makes Kerner, an atomic physicist, doubt the possibility of describing objective reality. Twice in the course of the play, during dialogues with Blair who insists that he likes "to know what's what", Kerner remarks ironically: "objective reality" (pp. 10 and 73). On the first occasion, he starts talking about "the trick of light". On the second, the following conversation takes place:

KERNER: So now I am a prime suspect – I love that phrase, it's in nearly all the books. A prime is a number which cannot be divided except by itself, and all the suspects are prime; threes, fives, sevens, elevens ... But really suspects are like squares, the product of twin roots, fours, nines, sixteens ... what is the square root of sixteen?

BLAIR: Is this a trick question?

KERNER: For you probably.

BLAIR: Four, then.

KERNER: Correct. But also minus four. Two correct answers. Positive and negative.

I am very fond of that minus, it is why I am what I am, I mean not as a suspect but as a physicist. Literally. I am an alchemist of energy and mass, I can turn one into the other and back again, because energy is mass multiplied by the speed of light squared. But the famous equation was not precisely found in its famous form, it was really the *square* of that, and  $E$  equals  $MC$  squared is a square root. But of course so is  $E$  equals *minus*  $MC$  squared, an equally correct solution ... just like with your sixteen. Nobody took notice of the minus for years, it didn't seem to mean anything, there was nothing to which it belonged, you needed a minus world, an anti-world, with all the charges reversed, positive for negative, negative for positive. But finally someone trusted the mathematics and said – Well, maybe there is anti-matter; anti-atoms made of anti-particles. And lo!, they started to find them. And so on, et cetera, until, here I am, Joseph Kerner, the anti-matter man at the zoo. ... We're all doubles. Even you. ... The one who puts on the clothes in the morning is the working minority, but at night – perhaps in the moment before unconsciousness – we meet our sleeper – the priest is visited by the doubter, the Marxist sees the civilising force of the bourgeoisie, the captain of industry admits the justice of common ownership. (pp. 71–72)

<sup>6</sup> Tom Stoppard, "Some Quotes and Correspondence", *Hapgood Theatre Programme*, London: Aldwych Theatre, March 1988, 11; quoted in Deloney 1990, 128.

As a matter of fact, Kerner (Stoppard?) makes three mathematical mistakes in the above speech. Firstly, prime may be divided both by itself and by one. Secondly,  $E$  does not have to be a square. Take, for instance  $m = 2$  and  $c = 3$ . Calculated on the basis of Einstein's equation,  $E$  is then 2 multiplied by 9 and equals 18 which is not a square. Thirdly, it does not follow from his discussion of Einstein's equation that the anti-matter exists. What he "proves", at best, is that  $E$ , being a square number (a mistake in itself) has both a positive and a negative root and thus anti-energy exists. The mathematical correctness does not seem to be important in this case, however. What is important is the point being made about human nature. At the root of a single individual we may find two (sometimes even more) opposites: the priest and doubter, patriot and traitor, the socialist and the capitalist, "sleeper" and "joe". The notion of the duality inherent in human nature helps Stoppard present and solve the mystery concerning espionage. Not only are some of the spies double-agents but, having twins, they are literally doubled.

## Relativity of human identity

The analogy between particle physics and square numbers extends beyond espionage to include a much more general notion of the mystery of human identity itself and the nature of reality. Stoppard has stressed this point in some of his interviews. He told Michael Billington (1988a) soon after the play's opening night: "The play is specifically about a woman – Hapgood – .... The central idea is that inside Hapgood one there is a Hapgood two sharing the same body; that goes for most of us". "The espionage thing", he insisted in a talk with Kate Kellaway, "came second. It was just a consequence of looking for some sort of narrative which would try to exemplify the first thought"<sup>7</sup>.

Elizabeth Hapgood, the only woman in the man dominated world of espionage presented in the play, is the drama's main character as the title indicates. She appears in nearly all the scenes, the only two exceptions being scene two in Act I and scene three in Act II which are set at the zoo and present Kerner explaining to Blair Feynman's experiment and the nature of a square number. When the audience first see her, during the opening scene at the pool, she is taking part in the exchange of briefcases, an act which aims to find the traitor among them. She is then efficient, fully in command of the situation until later on it appears that they have

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<sup>7</sup> Tom Stoppard in an interview Kate Kellaway, *Review*, BBC TV, 13 March 1988; quoted in Deloney 1990, 130. See also: Lewis 1988.

blown it. When she makes her second appearance in scene three, she is busy watching her son playing rugby and discussing the problems concerning her network with her superior, Blair. Her reactions to her son's achievements as well as the remarks she makes about him, indicate that she is (or, at least, would like to be) a loving mother. The first two glimpses of her we get in the play, then, present her "technical" and "personal" sides.

In several places in the drama references are made to a difference between the "technical" and "personal" aspect both of the situation and the characters involved (pp. 17, 24 and 52). Thus, two aspects of Hapgood's character are presented. In the world of espionage she is the network co-ordinator: an intelligent and efficient person, not only knowing the tricks of the trade of her job but also capable of winning a chess game without having a chess board in front of her. It is here that she has her "joes" and is called by them "Mother". Blair comments on the origin of her code name: "she was called Mother when she joined the Defence Liaison Committee – the tea would arrive and the Minister would say, 'Who's going to be mother?'" (p. 27). When the tea-tray is brought in during one of the meetings in course of the play, she asks "*brightly*" whether she should be mother (p. 39). To some extent, at least, even in the present times, she is a mother figure for her joes, taking care they are treated properly and not harmed by unjustified accusations and suspicion. On the whole, however, "technically" speaking, she is a strong, most independent female who organises and supervises the work of her network and the men working in it.

On the "personal" level she seems very vulnerable, unhappy and torn by conflicting emotions of whether to follow the line of duty towards the network or towards the closest ones, her two "Joes", Joseph Kerner and her son, Joe Hapgood. In the past, when she had a love affair with Joe Kerner and got pregnant, she decided to keep it secret, because as Ridley phrases it, "it was a choice between losing a daddy and losing a prize double, a turned mole who would have been blown overnight if he was known to be the father, and we aren't in the daddy business, we're in the mole business" (p. 81). At present, she senses that little Joe's staying at a boarding school and having to pretend he was adopted is very stressful for him, on which she comments to Blair at the rugby pitch, while both of them are watching Joe play (pp. 18–19). Hapgood's vulnerability is visible in this scene and in the fact that she invites Blair to have tea with her: "Do you want some tea? They lay it on for parents and he's entitled to two" (p. 24). She seems to be dependent on Blair, her section chief, whom she looks upon as a surrogate father-figure for herself and her son. She needs his friendship and responds to his affection and that is why she is so disappointed and infuriated when it appears at the end of the play that, making little Joe come to the swap scene, Blair jeopardised his safety (p. 86).



Hapgood's private self is also stressed during the scene with Kerner when she tells him that his career will be over after his cover as her "joe" has been blown. Then, suddenly she switches from "technical" to "personal": "I won't need you any more, I mean I'll need you again – oh, *sugar!* – you *know* what I mean – do you want to marry me? I think I'd like to be married?" Kerner, however, tells her he has decided to go back to Russia and she concludes "I don't think I'm going to marry you after all" (p. 50). Her feelings for him seem uneasy to define. It could be said that Hapgood does not really know whether or not she wants to marry Kerner. It could be also said that, because her proposal has not been accepted, she takes it back and pretends she does not care. At the end of their conversation, she switches back to the "technical" level and reminds him about their professional meeting in the evening during which they will set the trap for Ridley.

The trap consists of two elements. Firstly, Ridley is told that little Joe has been kidnapped and will be exchanged for the materials delivered to the Russians by him. Only at the end of the scene, when Ridley has already left the room and we watch Hapgood talking on the phone with her son who is safe at school, do we discover that the characters were pretending, playing out a scene of their own making in order to deceive Ridley. The ambush, then, has been set for Ridley and not for the audience. During the swap scene it appears that Blair has acted on his own. He has set his own ambush and, without warning or consulting anyone, has had the boy brought to the pool. Secondly, in order to achieve her aim, Hapgood decides to do so with the aid of her own twin, Celia Newton. The ambush is set both for Ridley and the audience. When the scene in a photographer's studio starts, we see Hapgood who "*is as different from her other self as the flat is different from her office*" (p. 65). Ridley, talking on the radio with Hapgood, comments on this saying: "She may be your twin sister but there the resemblance ends" (p. 66). The disorderly, absent minded, pot-smoking, bohemian Celia is just the opposite of the matter-of-fact, well-organised Hapgood. The gap separating them is also underscored by the differentiation of language they use. Hapgood never swears, this being pointed out by Blair both indirectly in teasing her with "f-f-fiddle" (p. 19), the only swear word she uses, and directly, when he asks her: "do you never use bad language, never ever?" (p. 23). Celia uses a language full of slang expressions and obscenities, the very first word uttered by her being scatological. It appears that Ridley wants Celia to play the part of Hapgood which would appear to be a difficult task as the two women are diametrically different.

As we next see them, they are in Hapgood's office. When Maggs, Hapgood's secretary, enters Ridley has to be very inventive not to let the

disguise be revealed. He does not fully succeed, though, as Celia tells Maggs to “piss off” and “*The world ends for MAGGS, just for a moment*” (p. 76). They are now waiting for the phone call which is to settle the details of the swap and Celia makes Ridley start playing a cardgame. The situation is complicated as they do not have a deck and Ridley does not know which game they are playing. The basis of “snap”, the game they are playing, is twinning cards. The players reveal successive cards simultaneously and if they match the first one to say “snap” wins the pair. The player who gets the bigger number of pairs wins. The choice of the game metaphorically underscores the doubling of the players and spies, there being two Ridleys as well as twin sisters. Celia wins this deckless cardgame just as Hapgood wins her boardless chessgames. When the telephone rings Ridley nearly breaks her hand, so that when she starts speaking “*she is whimpering and disoriented*” (p. 79). Not only does he want Celia to pretend she is Hapgood but he also wants her to sound as if she were in pain over the loss of her son. This scene demonstrates the notion so important in the play that “the act of observing determines the reality” (p. 12). The obvious explanation of her sounding as if she were in pain is that she actually *is* in pain. Her interlocutor on the phone may be justified in thinking that her sobbing is an expression of her grief and sorrow concerning Joe. The audience, however, know that her cry of pain has quite a different source. The interpretation given by an individual perceiver is thus determined by his perception and information provided to him. As the scene ends and Ridley has left, the audience discover they have been ambushed: Hapgood tells Maggs what the next chess move is to be. It is only then that the audience learn there is no Celia: Hapgood is playing the role of her twin sister in order to trap Ridley.

In scene five, set in the hotel room, we see Hapgood (playing the role of Celia again) sleeping. In the preceding scene Kerner, while discussing everyone’s doubles mentioned meeting our “sleepers”, our hidden selves (p. 72). At the same time, he complained about never having seen Elizabeth sleeping (p. 74). Now we watch her sleeping, the scene evoking numerous possible interpretations. Firstly, the sleeping woman is Celia, the opposite of Hapgood who never sleeps. Secondly, she is Hapgood’s “sleeper”, her double, her “personal” self. And thirdly, she is, as she puts it, Ridley’s “dreamgirl”, “Hapgood without the brains or the taste”, this being her answer to his question: “*Who the hell are you?*” (p. 83). In the next scene, set at the pool, Ridley meets his double and “*the two men embrace briefly*” (p. 83). The ensuing exchange of briefcases points to Ridley as the traitor, a double agent who is also physically doubled, working with a twin brother. It is unclear whether he realises that Hapgood does not have a twin sister. If we consider the final sentence uttered by him before being shot, “Well,

now I don't know which one you are. One of them can shoot and one of them can —", (p. 85) we can assume that he believes there are two of them. Yet, if this interpretation is accepted, it is difficult to account for his earlier speech:

Listen, be yourself. These people are not for you, in the end they get it all wrong, the dustbins are gaping for them. Him most. He's had enough out of you and you're getting nothing back, he's dry and you're the juice. We can walk out of here, Auntie. (p. 83)

His using the word "Auntie" indicates that he is speaking to Celia and not to Hapgood. Yet, if this is the case, what he is saying does not make sense, the words being addressed to Hapgood and not Celia. Besides, in the earlier scene, he promised he would kill Hapgood (and not Celia) if she set him up (p. 82). It seems, therefore, that he does know Celia has never existed as an individual, but has been only the other self of Hapgood, her sleeper, her private self. If this option is taken, the words "be yourself" are an urge directed to Hapgood asking her to stop treating her "technical" side as more important and to concentrate on her more real, "personal" self.

Feeling that she has been betrayed, Hapgood does not or cannot respond and, as Ridley reaches for his gun, he is shot by her. While Ridley's body is carried away, Wates spits at her a particularly well chosen epithet, "Oh, you *mother*" (p. 86). Gradually, a change begins taking place within Hapgood, "*Her anger starts dispersing into misery*" (p. 86). She becomes aware of all the implications of the situation and of the fact that she has killed a man who, even though suspecting a possible risk, decided to help her son. While taking this decision Ridley considered the "personal" more important than the "technical". While shooting him she acted as Mother and not as the mother of a child who has been saved by Ridley. The killing of Ridley puts her under a great stress. Firstly, as an ultimate act of killing someone and, secondly, as the killing of a person who loves her and is willing to sacrifice his safety in order to protect her and her child. There is yet one more aspect of the situation which should be stressed here. Ridley, who put the "personal" before the "technical", is dead. Blair, for whom the "technical" dominates over the "personal", who has put little Joe at a risk, thinks that Hapgood will get over it. Hapgood, however, has decided to withdraw. When he insists that "One has to pick oneself up and carry on. It's them or us, isn't it?" she finishes her answer insisting on the need to withdraw by saying "oh, f-f-fuck it, Paul!" (p. 87). The phrase she uses is evidently one of Celia's not one of Hapgood's. It is yet Hapgood who uses it. It can be argued that her using of this phrase is an indication that her "sleeper" has at last awakened. Due to the new understanding of the rules governing espionage achieved thanks to the recent

events, she has decided to withdraw and to concentrate on the “personal” which is, as she has found out, more important than the “technical”.

The last glimpse the audience get of her in the play is her “personal” self: she is at the rugby pitch, watching her small Joe taking part in the game. Her other Joe, Joseph Kerner, is standing next to her, having come to say good-bye to her before his departure for Russia. Kerner is introduced to Joe yet the boy is not told that this is his father. Hapgood suggests to Kerner that they could go to have tea together, “They lay it on for parents” (p. 88). This part of the conversation is reminiscent of the earlier conversation at the pitch between Hapgood and Blair, yet now she does not utter the end of the earlier sentence (“and he’s entitled to two”, p. 24). When Kerner refuses to join her, “*She breaks down*” and he tries to comfort her. As he is about to leave she cries out “How can you go? *How can you?*” Then she starts watching the game which has just begun. A few moments later, “*She turns round and finds that KERNER is still there. She turns back to game and comes alive*” (p. 89). The ending of the play is ambiguous. According to Roger Rees who played the part “maybe Kerner does not stay at the rugby pitch or maybe he stays for the rest of his life or maybe he stays for two days”<sup>8</sup>.

The ending of the play does not provide an answer as to whether Kerner will leave or stay yet it states explicitly what is most important in life. Simon Jones, who played Blair in the Los Angeles production has remarked that the events of the play make it obvious that what is most real and important in life are “straightforward ordinary human relationships”<sup>9</sup>. As the curtain falls, the audience know that Hapgood has given up the “technical” for the sake of the “personal”. Little Joe, who earlier did not even have a mother, Hapgood’s “personal” self being suppressed by her “technical” self, now gets his mother back. Maybe he will also have a father in the end, the closing of the play indicating that Kerner might stay, after all. In his earlier play, Stoppard argued that every good boy deserves a father and there is no reason to suspect that Joe might be an exception to this rule. The Faber and Faber edition of *Hapgood*, presenting three numbered booths at the pool and two briefcases placed outside them, refers to the “technical” side of the play and is evocative of the beginning of the drama as far as the world of espionage is concerned. The cover of the programme of the Aldwych Theatre was “dominated by the photograph of young Hapgood, its edges tattered where his father has torn it from a team picture, and meeting directly over the heart of the boy are a pair of rifle

<sup>8</sup> Roger Rees, Interview with Deloney, London, 16 June 1988; quoted in Deloney 1990, 147.

<sup>9</sup> S. Jones, *Morning Edition*, National Public Radio, 12 April 1989; quoted in Deloney, 1990, 157.

sights" (Deloney 1990, 140), and referred to and stressed the "personal" aspect of Stoppard's drama.

The complexity inherent in human nature is not restricted to Hapgood only, even though in her case it is most evident. This notion is evoked by a specific use of names. Hapgood is given a great number of them. The agents Ridley and Merryweather call her "Mother", her secretary, Maggs, calls her "Mrs Hapgood", Wates uses the form "ma'am", Blair calls her "Mother" and "Elizabeth", little Joe uses the phrases "Mummy" and "Mum" and Celia speaks of "Betty". And, finally, Kerner employs the Russian form of her name, "Yelizaveta", its diminutives, "Lilya" and "Lilitchka" and "mamushka". Hersch Zeifman (1990b, 196 and 194) also discusses the etymological meaning of her two other names. This critic notices that the heroine's name, Hapgood, consists of two elements and "Hap (defined by the *Old English Dictionary* as 'chance or fortune, luck, lot') is specifically linked to good". He furthermore stresses the fact that when Hapgood chooses to play her twin sister "she slyly names herself Celia (Latin *caelum*: heaven) Newton". The variety of names used for Hapgood seems to point out that, even though she is the same individual, she yet presents divergent images to different people.

The names of other characters are also telling and add to the overall impact of the play. Ridley (a telling name in itself as the characters and the audience alike have to solve the riddle of his identity) appears to have Ernest as his first name which becomes telling if we realise that, while he is a traitor in the "technical" sense, he is most earnest in the "personal" sense<sup>10</sup>. Hersch Zeifman (1990b, 191) points out that "Kerner is thus as much a riddle as Ridley is . . . , the enigma of Kerner's identity, like Ridley's, is embodied in his very name (German Kern: the nucleus of atom)". It can be said, then, that the use of specific telling names is one of the ways of introducing the principal thematic interest of the play that is the difficulty of establishing the nature of human identity and, by extension the nature of reality itself.

## Language as a means of describing reality

The main idea of *Hapgood*, a play using the subatomic metaphor and stressing the difficulty of interpreting reality, is that "the act of observing determines the reality" (p. 12). The play presents an image of the mysteries of human nature and reality and indicates that in the act of observing the

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<sup>10</sup> Two critics mention the affinities between *Hapgood* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*: Cohn (1991, 144) and Zinman (1991, 316).

viewers are in part determining the meaning they will find. This notion is evoked not only by what Kerner says but also by a specific use of language. The conversation on the radio, opening the play, contains a number of specific phrases used in the code language of espionage. The same kind of language is often used in the course of the play, especially during the conversations on the radio and on the telephone. When we hear Maggs tell Hapgood that a reply has come from Ottawa ("Exchange bishops, and queen to king one", p. 35) or when we watch him say into the telephone ("One square finding Whitaker for Matron", p. 26) we think these are espionage messages. Soon, however, we become aware that we have been mistaken. Some conversations, even those made on the security link, are not connected with espionage at all. It appears that the two messages, which sounded like coded espionage, were a boardless chess game and a message from little Joe. The play also demonstrates misunderstandings which arise when Hapgood, playing the part of Celia, pretending not to know the code language of espionage, seems to understand only the everyday, literal meaning of certain phrases. That is why, watching Ridley trying to reach Mother on his radio, she asks: "Ernest . . . I can hardly dare ask you this, but is your mother in the secret service too?" (p. 80). A similar confusion is connected with the use of the expression "yo-yo" ("Your eyes only", p. 25). In all these cases, two language systems overlap and the sentences are misinterpreted, a contravention of co-referential rules taking place. The specific use of language on these occasions indicates that the interpretation depends to an equal extent both on what is said and on the listener, on the thing perceived and on the perceiver and his ability to draw the proper conclusions.

## Theatrical components of the production

The dual nature of reality and human identity is also stressed by means of theatrical components of the production. One of these is a specific use of lighting in the play. In scene two, set in the zoo, Kerner explains his notion that "A double agent is more like a trick of the light" (p. 10). The point he is making is underlined by the stage directions which say: "*We need one particular and distinct demarcation of light and shadow on the floor, perhaps thrown by the edge of a wall*" (p. 9). While Kerner is speaking about the dual nature of light (its being a particle and a wave), we perceive a visual image of the duality inherent in light (light versus shadow on the floor). The two images, visual and verbal one, metaphorically refer to the dichotomy inherent in human nature. A similar effect is achieved in scene six, when the torch held by Ridley produces a beam of light in which the audience see the two Ridleys embracing. Slightly later on, when Ridley is

shot by Hapgood, the stage directions ask for "*Strobe lighting*" (p. 85). The fact that the light focuses on Ridley, that it becomes, in a sense, associated with him, makes it possible to compare his identity of a double agent to the dual nature of light, as described by Feynman.

Several critics have stressed the importance of Carl Tom's set and David Hersey's lighting in the original London production. Christopher Innes (1992, 345) has written: "The settings continually required the spectators to reevaluate their perception through *trompe l'oeil* distortions of scale, or deceptive perspectives. Thus the boarding school building in the background to the rugby-match scenes ... which at first glance appeared convincingly three-dimensional, was a flat cardboard cut-out. The photographer's studio (in which Hapgood plays the part of her own sister) contained an eight-foot long toothpaste tube, monstrously out of scale". Hersch Zeifman (1990b, 183) discusses the setting of scene two: "this conversation at the zoo occurred directly in front of an enormous giraffe – or rather a pair of giraffes, positioned in such a way that we seemed to be seeing a two-head giraffe emanating from a single body"<sup>11</sup>. While Kerner was arguing that "objective reality is for zoologists. 'Ah, yes, definitely a giraffe.' But a double agent is not a giraffe" (p. 10), the setting indicated that even in connection with a giraffe objective reality does not seem to exist. The thematic dominant of the piece was underscored by its visual, theatrical component.

## Self-reflexiveness

The specific setting of the original production not only stressed the thematic issues of the drama but, being so obviously non-realistic, also underscored the fact that what the audience were watching was not reality but only its theatrical representation. The text of the play itself makes also references to the relationship between reality and art, or, to be more specific, to spy stories. In a conversation with Hapgood, Kerner praises this genre:

I like them. Well, they're different, you know. Not from each other naturally. I read in hope but they all surprise in the same way. Ridley is not very nice: he'll turn out to be all right. Blair will be the traitor: the one you liked. This is how the author says, "You see! Life is not like books, alas!" ... When I have learned the language I will write my own book. The traitor will be the one you don't like very much, it will be a scandal. And I will reveal him at the beginning. I don't understand this mania for surprises. If the author knows, it's rude not to tell.  
(p. 47)

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of other elements of the setting see also Kelly 1991, 154.

It could be argued that the description of what Kerner's novel will be like is the description of *Hapgood*. The author, Stoppard himself, does not reveal Ridley as the traitor at the beginning yet he constructs the play in a way similar to the rules governing an experiment. From the beginning of the play the audience are aware that the traitor is to be found while the play presents the act of setting up the experiment whose aim is to discover whether Ridley is the guilty one or not. Unlike a physics experiment, however, the drama not only says how the world of things works but also what the world of things means. The relativity and uncertainty concerning both the world of physics and the world of human beings are unquestionable, yet the overall impact of the play and its final scene indicate that one should not sacrifice the "personal" to the "technical", that one should remain faithful to oneself and the beloved ones. Paradoxically enough, among the numerous dichotomies discernible in the play (light as both particle and wave, double agents, twins, art and science, illusion and reality) yet another one can be noticed: the overall relativity is put side by side with idealism visible in the stress put on the not relative value of simple and basic human relationships.



## XV. *In the Native State, Arcadia, Indian Ink*

The three plays enumerated in the title of the chapter will be discussed together for a number of reasons, there being several similarities between them. All of them tackle the problem of reconstructing the past, present a more or less scholarly research investigating the biographies of some people, intermingle scenes set in the past and the present and, finally, indicate the existence of certain repetitive patterns in history. Furthermore, *Indian Ink* is a stage version of the earlier *In the Native State*, with passages of the initial radio play included verbatim. Therefore, the first and third play will be analysed together, even though, chronologically speaking, they are separated by *Arcadia*.

### *Arcadia*

The play, which opened at the Lyttelton Theatre, Royal National Theatre, on 13 April 1993, is a complex drama, interweaving numerous problems, plots and two phases of time. The play has been described by John Gross (1993a, 409) as one which “is three plays rolled into one. Four or five plays, probably; but let me simplify”. As it starts, we see “a room on the garden front of a very large country house in Derbyshire in April 1809”<sup>1</sup>. The room is occupied by Thomasina Coverly and her tutor, Septimus Hodge, engaged in reading books. The first words are uttered by Thomasina who enquires what a “carnal embrace” is and gets the answer: “Carnal embrace is the practice of throwing one’s arms around a side of beef” (p. 1). As the disappointed girl begins pressing for another definition and the conversation starts being filled with sexual undertones, the tutor reminds her of what she should be thinking about and concentrating on: “I thought you were finding a proof of Fermat’s last theorem” (p. 2). The

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<sup>1</sup> *Arcadia*, 1993, 1. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

initial moments of the drama raise two of the numerous interests of the play: sex and science. Even though only thirteen (in the later scenes, set in 1812, sixteen), Thomasina is interested in sex and love, discusses these problems (or at least tries to) with other characters and towards the end of the play is attracted to Septimus whom she teases with the idea she might marry Lord Byron. The attraction appears to be shared by the tutor who, after her tragic death, retires to the solitude of the hermitage built in the garden and concentrates on trying to solve the mathematical problems posed by his gifted pupil and never answered by her during her short life. The scenes involving Thomasina and Septimus, even though hinting at the growing affection between the two, focus mainly on certain scientific problems. Their lessons and discussions deal with free will, determinism, Newton, Cleopatra, the burning of the library of Alexandria, geometry, the possibility of devising an equation which would represent a leaf, for instance, and "the equation of the propagation of heat in the solid body" (p. 81).

In the scenes from the early nineteenth century the discussion of scientific problems is restricted to the dialogues conducted by Thomasina and Septimus, while issues connected with love and sex are common to nearly all the characters. The person who is most important in this respect is Mrs Charter, the wife of a mediocre versifier. Even though she never makes an appearance on the stage, she is much talked about, being, according to Septimus, a person whose "chief renown is for the readiness that keeps her in a state of tropical humidity as would grow orchids in her drawers in January" (p. 7). She is caught in flagrante delicto with Septimus in the garden gazebo which makes her husband want to have a duel with the tutor. Then he decides to forget about the event, after being told that Hodge will write a review of his most recent book of poetry, *The Couch of Eros*. Some time later, however, the possibility of the two men having a duel is discussed again as Mr Charter discovers that the anonymous, extremely negative review of his earlier book, *Maid of Turkey*, was written by Septimus Hodge. Yet the duel never takes place as the Charters leave the house, being told to do so by Lady Croom, the owner of the manor and the mother of Thomasina. The hostess gets rid of her guests after discovering that Mrs Charter is having an affair with Lord Byron. The Charters go the Indies, accompanying Captain Brice – Lady Croom's brother. The wife becomes the Captain's mistress and later his wife, while the husband takes the job of a plant gatherer who "described a dwarf dahlia in Martinique in 1820 and died there, of a monkey bite" (p. 89).

Lady Croom, even though not so keen on having love affairs as Mrs Charter is, also has a weakness for men – she is fascinated by Lord Byron and, therefore, furious to discover the affair going on between him and Mrs Charter. Disappointed, she complains to Septimus and suggests that

he could visit her in her room in the evening – unable to conquer Lord Byron she will make do with the tutor. It is not only because of her interest in and links with the male characters that Lady Croom is important for the overall scheme of the play. Reminiscent of the Wildean, nymphomaniac Lady Bracknell, she is a person who desperately wants to follow the fashion of the day. That is why yet another character is present in Sidley Park – it is Richard Noakes, a specialist in landscape gardening, who is changing the orderly, symmetrical, classical garden into a new Gothic “picturesque” disorder. Lady Croom dislikes the effect of the efforts of the architect and expresses her disgust at several points in the play. She also nicknames him “Culpability” Noakes (p. 83), a comic reference to the name of Lancelot “Capability” Brown, the most famous propagator of the new style of gardening<sup>2</sup>. Wanting to remain in the avant-garde of the fashion of the day she yet suffers the pains of watching her garden changed:

Where there is the familiar pastoral refinement of an Englishman's garden, here is an eruption of gloomy forest and towering crag, of ruins where there was never a house, of water dashing against rocks where there was neither spring nor a stone I could not throw the length of a cricket pitch. My hyacinth dell is become a haunt for hobgoblins, my Chinese bridge ... is usurped by a fallen obelisk overgrown with briars. (pp. 11–12)

The gazebo is replaced by a hermitage, unoccupied yet, because there is no hermit available. The classical symmetry of the previous garden is conquered by the disorder, irregularity and chaos of Romantic landscape gardening, one kind of reality is replaced by another, just as one era with all its fashions gives way to another.

The two kinds of garden discussed in the play are meant to introduce the notion of change, the order of the past giving way to the disorder of the present. The play is built according to the principle of binary oppositions: classical versus romantic, Newton versus modern physics, determinism versus free will, reality as it was and as it is perceived from a historical perspective (tinted by the inefficiency of the scholars and insufficiency of data), a cool distance versus lust (both in life and research), sameness versus change, literature and humanistic studies versus science and, last but not least, the past versus the present. The last idea is evoked, as mentioned earlier, by the specific structure of the drama which takes place not only in 1809 and 1812 but also in the present. The scenes set in the present introduce a number of characters and themes, providing links with those presented in the scenes set in the past. While the motifs of science and sex (love) are still discernible, yet another one is introduced here, namely the motif

<sup>2</sup> *Programme* of the first production contains a note by John Barrell, “Geometry and the Garden”, in which he discusses the two styles in gardening.

of attempting to reconstruct the past, to describe and to interpret it, the motif of literary detectives, Hannah Jarvis and Bernard Nightingale.

Hannah Jarvis, in her late thirties, the author of a controversial work *Caro* on Caroline Lamb and Lord Byron, is now busily engaged in writing a book on "the nervous breakdown of the Romantic Imagination. [She is] doing landscape and literature 1750 to 1834" (p. 25). The starting point of her present research is a picture of a hermit she came across in Noakes's sketch book and now proudly demonstrates as "the only known likeness of the Sidley hermit" (p. 25). The date 1834 refers to the death of the hermit, the pivot of her dissertation. Focusing on a minor figure she has forgotten that "Coleridge also died in 1834" (p. 25), of which she is reminded by Bernard. Paying attention to unimportant details, no matter how essential for her dissertation they might be, she seems to have lost a wider perspective – after all Coleridge's importance for the Romantic imagination is unquestionable. As the play progresses and new evidence is gathered, Hannah and the audience alike become aware of her mistake. The man from the hermitage turns out to be Septimus Hodge who retired into its peace and quiet after Thomasina's death. Hodge was not "*placed* in the landscape exactly as one might place a pottery gnome" (p. 27). He was not an "idiot in the landscape", either, as she envisaged him (p. 66), describing him as "a perfect symbol" of "the Romantic sham", "the decline from thinking to feeling" (pp. 27 and 28). Furthermore, his calculations concerning "cabalistic proofs that the world was coming to an end" are decoded by the twentieth century scientist, Valentine, as "the second law of thermodynamics" (p. 65). Doing her research, she discovers that the hermit was born in the same year as Septimus. The audience realise her mistakes quicker than she does. Early in the play, they actually see Thomasina drawing a picture of a hermit in Noakes's sketchbook (p. 13). The picture, then, does not represent an actual hermit – his existence is solely a product of her imagination. Later on, at the end of the play, Hannah is given another picture also drawn earlier in front of our eyes by Thomasina – this one presents Hodge and Plautus, the tortoise (pp. 97 and 87). Hannah has been badly misled by her false assumptions yet she discovers her mistakes and will not have the false theory published.

Unlike Hannah, the second literary sleuth, Bernard Nightingale, is hardly a likeable figure as he is extremely artificial and, wanting to impress the other characters, employs theatricality in everyday life. Although a don at Sussex University, he does not think much of teaching and is only eager to become famous. Recently, he has come across three letters which have made him put forward a theory that the correspondence was between Lord Byron and Mr Charter thus, it seems to him that he has solved the mystery of Byron's sudden departure from England in 1809: while at Sidley Park,

Byron first seduced Mrs Charter and then killed Mr Charter in a duel which made him flee the country. Stressing the importance of his discovery, Nightingale delivers a lecture which becomes a show whose aim is to impress his audience. The lecture and Nightingale's behaviour while giving it are charged with theatricality. Bernard employs this social convention to impress his listeners. Simultaneously, the lecture, being a show inside the play, is yet another variant of Stoppard's favourite device of a play within a play. Even though the other characters warn him that his theory cannot be proved, Nightingale does not give up. Initially, he is planning to come up with a scholarly monograph for the *Journal of English Studies* yet, finally, he publishes some articles in scandal hunting newspapers. Hannah, irritated by Nightingale's stupidity and lack of academic decency and also by his extremely negative review of her *Caro*, takes real pleasure in pointing out his mistake. She finds the evidence that Mr Charter was not killed in a duel by Byron or anyone else but died during the expedition with Captain Brice. She sends a letter to *The Times* pointing out Bernard's mistake and expects him to send one containing "dignified congratulations to a colleague, in the language of scholars" which would praise her achievement in "dahlia studies" (p. 90). Not only does she manage to come up with a real, fully documented discovery but she also takes her revenge on a mediocre academic who does not try to discover the historical truth but cares only for his own fame, be it even among scandal mongers of posh papers.

The third important modern character is Valentine Coverly, a post-doc studying mathematics and doing research on the population of grouse. It is he who discovers that Thomasina's "New Geometry of Irregular Forms", "a truly wonderful method whereby all the forms of nature must give up their numerical secrets and draw themselves through number alone", is equivalent to the "iterated algorithm" in modern mathematics (p. 43) and that Hodge's "melancholy certitude of a world without light or life ... as a wooden stove that must consume itself until ash and stove are as one, and heat is gone from the earth", is nothing else than the principle described by the second law of thermodynamics in the modern physics (p. 65). It is he, then, who brings in modern science of entropy and the non-linear mathematics of "chaos theory", notions which have replaced the earlier Newtonian mechanistic outlook.

## The chaos theory

In his article, "The Day Art Met Science", Roger Highfield (1993) recalls the meeting between Stoppard and Professor Robert May (mathematical biologist), the playwright's interest in the chaos theory as well as the collaboration between the scientist and the cast when preparing

the performance. May's graduate student, Alun Lloyd, developed "the Coverly set" which, thanks to the use of an algebraic equation, enables Valentine to produce by means of his computer a complex leaf-like shape (p. 76). Professor Robert May wrote a short essay on non-linear mathematics, "From Newton to Chaos", which is included in the *Programme* of the first production and which says that the mathematics of "deterministic chaos" argues that "a situation can be both deterministic and unpredictable; that is, unpredictable without being random (on the one hand) or (on the other hand) attributable to very complicated causes". The professor highly praised the play, arguing that each spectator has to decide for himself what the links are between the chaos theory and the other motifs of the play: "On the one hand they are very separate and, on the other, the arrow of time pervades the whole thing". It seems, however, that in the case of *Arcadia* the separate threads of the numerous motifs are not really interwoven to form a coherent whole. It may be said, of course, that the play deals with the theme of "the random nature of sexual attraction, symbolised by the chaos theory of the universe" (Paton 1993). It seems, however, that Stoppard has not managed to incorporate scientific discoveries into literary fiction in so convincing a way as he did in the case of *Hapgood*. Even though dealing with "the complexity, unpredictability and inscrutability of the world – pet themes since *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*" (Nightingale 1993a, 407), he does not say much about reality, either. The sexual behaviour of the characters is unpredictable, the past is perceived differently from what it actually was and the future cannot be foreseen because of either insufficient or too numerous data or from mistakes in interpretation. None of these uncertainties results from the epistemological relativity pertaining to the subjective nature of perception. The reality does not present a different image to individual perceivers, as was the case in *After Magritte*, for instance, but is not fully understood for objective reasons.

## Relativity of time

The second scientific motif employed by Stoppard in *Arcadia* is the post-Newtonian theory of relativity introduced by Einstein. As the great scientist argued, his theory has robbed time and space of the last trace of objective reality (Tatarkiewicz 1978, vol. III, 274). Time plays an important thematic and structural function in *Arcadia*. Early in the play Thomasina notices: "When you stir your rice pudding, Septimus, the spoonful of jam spreads itself round making red trails like the picture of a meteor in my astronomy atlas. But if you stir backward, the jam will not come together again", to which Septimus remarks that time has only one direction, moving

from the past to the future (pp. 4-5). The notion of the irreversibility of time is discernible at several moments in the play (pp. 47, 69, 78) and is also expressed by Valentine in reference to Thomasina's essay when he says that she has discovered the rule that "you can't run the film backwards" (p. 93). Simultaneously, the play also stresses the subjective quality of time, its being perceived differently by people. Bernard Nightingale expresses this when, discussing the times of Byron, he says: "Everything moved more slowly then. Time was different" (p. 59). On another occasion, the don argues that he is absolutely positive about his theory concerning Byron: "The certainty for which there is no back-reference. Because time is reversed. Tock, tick goes the universe and then recovers itself, but it was enough, you were in there and you bloody *know*" (p. 50).

While Bernard's trip into the past results in confusion and misunderstanding, the audience are taken by Stoppard for a trip which not only shows what the past was like but also indicates that certain things repeat themselves in the course of time. This point is clarified by Septimus when he tries to pacify Thomasina lamenting the cultural loss pertaining to the burning of the Alexandria library:

You should no more grieve for the rest than for a buckle lost from your shoe, or for the lesson book which will be lost when you are old. We shed as we pick up, like travellers who must carry everything in their arms, and what we let fall will be picked up by those behind. The procession is very long and life is very short. We die on the march. But there is nothing outside the march so nothing can be lost. The missing plays of Sophocles will turn up piece by piece, or be written again in another language. Ancient cures for diseases will reveal themselves once more. Mathematical discoveries glimpsed and lost to view will have their time again. (p. 38)

It may be argued that, among other things, *Arcadia* demonstrates that this is really the case: Thomasina's notebook is found and Valentine argues that her (and Septimus's) investigations have found their counterparts in modern science.

## Theatricality

The notions of the continuity and reversibility of time provide the basic structural element of *Arcadia*, a play which at the beginning shows successively scenes from the past and the present later on to present them happening simultaneously. In this respect, Stoppard departs from the idea of creating an illusion of reality. The blurring of the distinction between the past and the present is introduced gradually. Initially, it refers to objects only and so an apple given to Hannah in scene two, presenting the present, reappears

in the next scene, set in the past. In the last scene Septimus and Valentine study the same diagram “*doubled by time*” (p. 93) as the characters from the past and the present occupy the stage simultaneously. Even though the characters from one period do not seem to notice those from another and are involved in separate conversations, the latter overlap so that an impression is created that all the characters are having a common conversation. The last scene of *Arcadia* presents two couples dancing side by side. The end of the play brings together two opposites: relativity, visible in the mixing of the past and the present, and the absolute value of innocence and true feelings as opposed to the numerous, passing fancies of other characters looking for short lived love affairs. At the same time, the end is highly effective because of its theatricality. The audience leave the theatre bearing in their minds the final visual image of a complete fusion of the past and the present which, even though not possible in reality, is yet possible in an artistic presentation of it.

### *In the Native State, Indian Ink*

The beginnings of *In the Native State* (broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 21 April 1991) and *Indian Ink* (premiered at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford, and opened at the Aldwych Theatre, London, on 27 February 1995) are both set in India in 1930. In the radio play, the interior voice of Flora Crewe reciting her poem is heard. In the stage play, she is seen alone on a train reading fragments of a letter written to her sister, Nell. The openings of the two plays are thus different yet the two pieces bear a much closer resemblance to each other than the earlier plays written by Stoppard for one medium and then transformed to another. Therefore, it seems justified to discuss them together at first and then to point out certain changes introduced by Stoppard while adapting the earlier radio play for the stage. Both plays are characterised by a high degree of intertextuality: there are letters and poems read, fragments of a radio programme devoted to the poetess and numerous references to writers and painters as well as to literary works, periodicals and paintings. The use of intertextual references and the presentation of two phases of time makes the two plays discussed in this chapter similar to *Arcadia*. Unlike in the latter, however, in both *In the Native State* and *Indian Ink* Stoppard has a better command of the material and manages to create pieces which are really exciting and simultaneously touching and moving.



## The past as it was and its reconstruction

The binary time structure presents two periods and places and different sets of characters for each. The scenes from the past, set in India in 1930, show Flora Crewe, a poetess, during her stay in Jummapur, where she has come to give a number of lectures on "Literary Life in London"<sup>3</sup>. Another reason for her coming is the poor state of her health. She has been told by her doctor to take a sea voyage and go somewhere where it is warm. The doctor did not mention a concrete place. It was her own choice as she "wanted to come to India" (p. 56) and a disastrous one, as she dies there. During her stay in Jummapur, Flora meets several people: Mr Coomaraswami, a member of the Jummapur Theosophical Society, David Durance, the Resident's representative, who proposes to her, the Resident, the Rajah and last, but not least, Nirad Das, a painter. The numerous dialogues deal with the problems facing India on the threshold of independence, Anglo-Indian relationships and art.

The scenes from the present show two main characters: Anish Das and Mrs Swan, Flora's sister. The reason for their meeting is a book of Flora's letters which has recently been published and whose cover is a reproduction of Nirad's portrait of Flora. The picture has no signature of the artist but Anish recognises his father's work as he has another picture of Flora which he inherited after his father's death. There is yet another character in the present, namely Pike, who teaches at a university, specialising in Flora Crewe (p. 19). He has written a monograph on her and supplied footnotes to the present edition of *Selected Letters of Flora Crewe*. He has a regular radio broadcast in which he comments on her life and work. He makes his appearance only in the stage version, *Indian Ink*, where he is also given the first name, Eldon. In *In the Native State* his existence is limited to the radio broadcast which is heard in Stoppard's radio play, this being a variant of a play within a play. Mr Pike, just like Bernard Nightingale in *Arcadia*, is partly a comic figure. He is trying desperately to reveal the truth about Flora Crewe, her life and work but, including footnotes concerning the most trivial and unimportant matters, he is yet unable to reconstruct the past as it really was and arrives at the following conclusion: "Thus, the frontispiece of this book shows the only known portrait of Flora Crewe, by an unknown Indian artist" (p. 80). The audience are aware that not only is the painter's name known but also that he has painted another portrait of Flora. Pike's fallibility is also indicated by Mrs Swan when she tells him in *Indian Ink*: "Now, Eldon, you are *not* allowed to write a book, not if you were to eat the entire cake. The *Collected Poems* was a lovely

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<sup>3</sup> *In the Native State*, 1991, 14. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

surprise and I'm sure the *Collected Letters* will be splendid, but *biography* is the worst possible excuse for getting people wrong"<sup>4</sup>.

## Artistic representations of reality

The two plays are a return to the notion presented in *Arcadia* that the past cannot be reconstructed because of the inaccessibility of all the data. Yet, while in the case of *Arcadia* this idea was linked (in a quite unconvincing way) with the chaos theory, in the two later dramas it is connected with Stoppard's favourite issues concerning reality and the ways of representing it. This kind of approach is fully justified in the case of pieces dealing with a poetess and a painter and their works. At several places in the play, it is stressed that Flora and Nirad Das belong to two different cultures. At the same time, however, it is also indicated that these two different worlds overlap and influence each other. Early in the play, Flora asks Das to be more "Indian" and less "Englished-up" and says: "I want you to be with me as you would be if I were Indian", after which the following conversation follows:

DAS: An Indian Miss Crewe! Oh, dear, that is a mental construction which has no counterpart in the material world.

FLORA: A *unicorn* is a mental construction which has no counterpart in the material world but you can imagine it.

DAS: You can imagine it but you cannot mount it.

FLORA: Imagining it was all I was asking in my case.

(p. 6)

This dialogue has important repercussions for the future. Initially, Das draws a pencil sketch of Flora which he tears up afterwards. Later, we see him painting a portrait of Flora (that reproduced on the book cover) which, even though faithful, according to Mrs Swan, has never been finished, as Anish argues (p. 40). The mystery of the picture is explained by another conversation between Flora and Nirad in which she accuses him of not being an Indian painter and of being fascinated with English culture – his oil paintings are no longer Indian but English. Das confesses that she is right (p. 44) and, urged by Flora, starts working on yet another portrait, the one now in the possession of Anish. Slightly later on, there is one more dialogue between them in which they discuss different representations of reality in different art schools. Flora argues that the Pre-Raphaelites "painted life as if it were a costume drama put on by Beerbohm Tree"

<sup>4</sup> *Indian Ink*, 1995, 5. All the references in the text will be to this edition. The page numbers refer mainly to *In the Native State* unless otherwise stated.

and Nirad says he likes "Pre-Raphaelites because they tell stories", narrative art being also an Indian tradition (p. 46). And finally, the water-colour is discussed by Mrs Swan and Anish. Arguing that "It looks Indian but he hasn't made *her* Indian", the sister explains all the details and insists that Anish has not read the footnotes (provided by Pike). The son draws attention to the symbolism of the picture, saying that "To a Hindu every object has an inner meaning, everything is to be interpreted in a language of symbols". Furthermore, he comes to the conclusion that his father must have known Flora was dying and that the picture "was done with great love" (pp. 49–51). The reality depicted by the picture may be interpreted differently, as Mrs Swan and Anish Das demonstrate. The portrait represents a perfect union between the two cultures. The book visible in it is simultaneously a realistic representation of Emily Eden's *Up the Country* and a symbolic representation of Flora's own Eden which she has found in India. Das has managed to create a mental construction of a unicorn – he has managed to stop thinking about himself and Flora in terms of Englishness or Indianness. He has made these two concepts blur successfully. His painting is so emotional and personal that Anish decides not to tell the sensation-hunting Pike about it.

The water-colour is perceived differently by individual viewers. It also may be discussed in terms of the changes taking place both in the sitter and the artist. This point is clarified by a dialogue between the two of them which starts when Das "*grunting in exasperation*" and "*sighing*", being dissatisfied with his work, says:

DAS: Oh, fiddlesticks!

FLORA: I'm sorry. Is it my fault?

DAS: No, how can it be?

FLORA: Is that so silly?

DAS: No ... forgive me! Oh dear, Miss Crewe! Yesterday I felt ... a communion and today –

FLORA: Oh! *It is my* fault! Yesterday I was writing a poem, and today I have been writing a letter. That's what it is.

DAS: A letter?

FLORA: I am not the same sitter. How thoughtless of me. How could I expect to be the same writing to my sister as for writing my poem.

DAS: Yes. Yes.

(pp. 33–34)

This conversation may be discussed in a number of ways. It can be said, for instance, that people are affected by changes in the situation, be it even such slight ones as writing a letter instead of a poem. Furthermore, these slight variations might be further strengthened by the changes taking place simultaneously in the perceiver. It can be also argued that Das is getting more and more attracted to Flora. Their preceding dialogue concerned the *rasa* of erotic love and he has just made her a present of a pencil

sketch of his making. Maybe Das is already thinking about the water-colour depicting Flora and that is why he is dissatisfied with the present picture. It could be said, therefore, that not only is Flora not the same sitter but also Das is not the same painter. The reality undergoes changes, the process being further strengthened by the subjective emotions of the perceiver, or, to put it differently, his point of view. The situation is complicated as it pertains not to reality itself but to its representation, no matter whether it is an artistic one or a description made by means of language.

## Linguistic representations of reality

There are several instances in the play when people talking about the same thing use different expressions and, as a result, the specific phrasing evokes a completely different reality. Many of these situations involve discussions about India. And so, while talking about the Rising of 1857, Anish calls it "the First War of Independence" while Mrs Swan argues: "you mean the Mutiny" (p. 9). In the same dialogue, discussing the past, both of them argue that they were to the other nation what the Romans were to the English. The idea that the Anglo-Indian relations may be viewed in diametrically opposite ways is also expressed by Flora when she writes in her letter:

and here I came in triumph like Britannia in a carnival float representing Empire, or, depending how you look at it, the Oppression of the Indian People, which is how you will look at it and no doubt you're right but I never saw anyone less oppressed than Mr Coomaraswami, whose entire twenty stone shakes with laughter all the time long.  
(p. 30)

The question pertaining to what the native state really is may also be answered differently. Durance tries to explain to Flora, "Jummapur is not British India", so the head of the government is the Viceroy. At the same time, however, it is also a part of the Empire (p. 15). This point is exemplified when, talking about Nirad's imprisonment, Anish argues that his father, put in prison by the British, "suffered for his beliefs". He is immediately corrected by Mrs Swan who notices that if he had taken part in various actions "he was imprisoned for his actions not his opinions" (p. 4). Later on, she specifies the situation, arguing:

Jummapur was a native state, so your father was put in goal by his own people ... Whatever your father may have done, the Resident would have had no authority to imprison an Indian. The Rajah of Jummapur had his own justice.  
(p. 17)

Jummapur being simultaneously not British India and a part of the Empire made certain situations difficult to define and describe. Similarly, distinguishing between Indian and English people, Anish does not seem to notice how funny he is when, on being asked whether his wife is English, he answers: "Yes. Australian" (p. 25).

Language as a means of describing reality may be an imprecise and misleading tool, especially when used by people situated at opposed positions. Then the misunderstanding results from the different perspective of each user. Sometimes, however, the misunderstandings may arise from other reasons, they may, for instance, be brought about on purpose. Such is the case with the label on the duck pâté which is stolen from Flora's refrigerator. Explaining the situation Flora says: "One must read the small print, Mr Das, 'Duck pâté' in large letters, 'with pork' in small letters. It's normal commercial practice" (p. 20). The word "duck" appears in another context in *Indian Ink* when Flora is reading her letter to Nell in the past and, in the present, Mrs Swan is making corrections and providing explanations to Pike's (and audience's) satisfaction:

FLORA: '... and all this is under a big green tree with monkeys and parrots in the branches, and it's called a duck bungalow ...'

MRS SWAN: *Dak bungalow.*

FLORA: '... although there is not a duck to be seen'.

(*She disappears into the bathroom with her suitcase.*)

MRS SWAN: Dak was the post; they were post houses, when letters went by runner.

PIKE: Ah ...

(p. 3)

The misunderstanding in this case results from the lack of knowledge of both India and its languages. It may be overcome if the native tongues of the Indians are mastered.

A dialogue between Flora and Nirad Das demonstrates the complexity of the Indian reality and the fact that the English quite often have acted against themselves when the latter says:

I have to thank Lord Macaulay for English, you know. It was his idea when he was in the government of India that English should be taught to us all. He wanted to supply the East India Company with clerks, but he was sowing dragon's teeth. Instead of babus he produced lawyers, journalists, civil servants, he produced Ghandi! We have so many, many languages, you know, that English is the only language the nationalists can communicate in! That's a very good joke on Macaulay, don't you think? (p. 19)

The reality in India in the past was complex, Indians (like Nirad Das) treating the English with a mixture of contempt and respect. *Indian Ink*, even more so than *In the Native State*, indicates that, even though much has changed, this ambiguity of feelings can still be noticed. In both plays,

Durance notices that Flora reminds him of Emily Eden, an excerpt of whose prose the poetess reads at the end of both pieces. Having described the Queen's Ball which took place on May 25th, 1839, the Indian servants bowing whenever a European came near them, Eden wrote: "I sometimes wonder they do not cut all our heads off and say nothing more about it" (p. 83 and 85). The ambivalent feelings in Indians have not disappeared as becomes evident from a dialogue between Pike and Dilip, a young man who helps him gather materials for his research. Unwillingly at first, Dilip yet admits that he is crazy about the English, their way of dressing, their public schools and their way of life (p. 59). The reality of the present India is no less complex than it used to be in the past.

### Shattering the theatrical illusion

On the thematic level, *In the Native State* and *Indian Ink* return to Stoppard's most important preoccupations: what reality is like, its epistemological status, changeability and simultaneous sameness, the status and importance of the artist and his (or her) ways of depicting a given reality in a work of art. Michael Coveney (1993), in his review of *Arcadia*, has written: "*In the Native State*, split like *Arcadia* between past and present may be his finest work to date, a novelistic, Fosterian epic of painting, poetry, imperialism and literary reputations". On the structural level, *In the Native State* and *Indian Ink* not only present two phases of time but also once more demonstrate Stoppard's masterful use of the different media, his craftsmanship thanks to which at one moment he creates a perfect illusion of reality to destroy it a few seconds later in order to remind the audience that what they are watching (or listening to) is not reality but its but artistic representation.

Generally speaking, *In the Native State* follows the principles of a realistic, illusionist radio play. The stage directions often indicate specific sound effects. The scene introducing the guesthouse requires "*the ambient sounds [which] would not be urban. There are references to monkeys, parrots, dogs, chickens*" (p. 1). Before Durance appears for the first time, "*we have heard the horse walking forward, perhaps snorting*" (p. 13). When Durance and Flora go for a ride, we hear "*a sudden combination of animal noises ... – buffalo snorting, horses whinnying*" (p. 60). We hear the gramophone music (p. 55), sounds of different cars – Durance's Daimler (p. 53) and the Rajah's Royce (p. 64), the sounds of the exterior "*which makes its own noise, crickets, insects, leaves ...*" (p. 56). All these aural effects create an illusion of reality. The situation, however, is not quite that simple. There are numerous moments in the play when the audience listen to scenes

taking place simultaneously in England in the present day and in India in 1930. The beginning of scene nine, for instance, presents two voices speaking in turn. The first one pertains to the past – it is Flora reading out her letter to Nell. The second voice belongs to Pike, who, on a radio programme, is giving comments to what has been read out by Flora. The stage directions read as follows:

*The appropriate sound effects creep in to illustrate Flora's letter, so here we begin to hear a slow steam train, followed in due course by the hubbub of the station, the clip-clop of the horse pulling the buggy as mentioned and the bicycle bells etc. which accompany the ride into the town. Further down the letter, it is intended that Flora's questioner at the lecture will be heard in the appropriate physical ambience. In general, Flora's letter becomes the immediate presence – we can hear the pen scratching now and then, and insects, distant life etc. – but when the letter takes us into the event, the sound-plot turns into the appropriate accompaniment.* (p. 29)

At first, it could be assumed that we encounter here a completely realistic and fully illusionist representation. When we start considering the situation, however, doubts arise. We notice that people living in different time periods appear simultaneously. Furthermore, Flora, who is at the beginning reading a letter she wrote a long time ago, is then heard writing it, in the end to appear in the scenes she described earlier as belonging to the past. The audience realise that, even though seemingly realistic, the scenes presenting Flora cannot have happened in this sequence. It is not an illusionist representation of a concrete reality, then, but its artistic reshaping. It must be said, however, that, in comparison to *Indian Ink*, *In the Native State* much more frequently creates an illusion of reality. This might be due to the fact that in the case of a radio play, which works in terms of sounds only, it could be too demanding a task set for the listeners, who are laboriously trying to imagine in their minds' eyes the situation presented, if Stoppard shattered the illusion of reality more frequently.

In *Indian Ink*, now and again, Stoppard also shatters the illusion of reality in order to remind the audience that what they are watching is not reality but merely a theatrical illusion. Stoppard moves freely between the two phases of time, trying, as in the case of *Arcadia*, not to offend any period. And so, for instance, Dilip and Pike are brought drinks

*served by a WAITER decked out in the authentic livery of the old regime. Thus, the SERVANTS operate freely between the two periods.* (p. 57)

The playwright moves between one period and another, employing skilfully audio bridges. The scene presenting Flora reading her letter to Nell, for instance, is interrupted by Pike's comments. Suddenly Flora says; "Oh, shut up!" and the following stage directions are provided:

*It is as though she has turned on PIKE. Simultaneously, DAS, losing his temper, is shouting in Hindi, 'Get off! Get off!' But they are both shouting at a couple of unseen pi-dogs who have been heard yapping and barking and are now fighting under the verandah. In the middle of this, DILIP calls out for 'Eldon!'. The fuss resolves itself. PIKE follows DILIP off. The dogs go whining into oblivion.* (p. 34)

The dogs and servants exist on two levels simultaneously, both in the past and in the present. Even though, theoretically speaking, they are the same, it would be more precise to say that they represent two sets of waiters and dogs – those from the past being other than those from the present. A similar device is employed when, after a conversation with the Rajah, Flora leaves the stage. The audience hear the commentary of Pike while the Rajah occupies his place on the stage. He

*looks around the courtyard seeking someone ... and spots PIKE. PIKE has not noticed him. The RAJAH, soi disant, approaches PIKE.* (p. 64)

The dialogue which follows indicates that the Rajah is no longer the one who spoke to Flora but his grandson. The same person (actor) depicts two different characters. The audience are again reminded that what they are watching is not a reality but a theatre performance. Another variant of this device can be noticed in the scene presenting Nell visiting the grave of her sister and talking to Eric (her future husband) while Mrs Swan is present on the stage (p. 80). The same character is represented on the stage by two different actors and thus, an elderly woman watching her own ego from the past can be seen.

*Indian Ink*, while being very similar to *In the Native State* in respect of its thematic content, departs from its predecessor with regard to theatrical illusion. While the earlier play, as mentioned above, generally follows the rules of theatrical illusion, the second one moves considerably in the direction of non-illusionist, metatheatrical presentation. The best example of this development are the scenes introducing horses. In the radio play adequate sound effects create an illusion of reality – the listeners are made to believe there are horses taking part in the scenes (pp. 13 and 60)<sup>5</sup>. The situation is different in the case of *Indian Ink*. When Durance comes to visit Flora for the first time, it is indicated that he has ridden a horse. We hear the characters talk offstage about the animal yet when Durance makes his appearance on the stage, he is on foot. At the beginning of Act Two, we are presented an image of the Jummapur Club. Some people, Flora and Durance among others, are dancing and in the back of the

<sup>5</sup> On this occasion, their assumptions are not shattered as the situation with a similar sound in *Artist Descending a Staircase* was, when it turned out to be produced by Beauchamp experimenting with his "Tenth Horse".



stage, on a verandah, we can notice two gymnasium horses used for practising polo (p. 47). Later on, they go into the verandah and Durance “who has been standing, swings himself aboard one of the gymnasium horses”, starts talking about polo and “swings the polo mallet” (p. 54). The gymnasium horses are really gymnasium horses used for practising polo. They still are when, a few moments later, Flora mounts the second horse. Then, however,

*The horses whinny. FLORA's horse lurches enough to almost throw her. ... The scene becomes exterior. The actors remain astride the gym horses. Ground mist. The horses whinny, the riders shift and rebalance themselves, FLORA whooping with alarm, the birds are crying out, distancing rapidly.* (pp. 55–56)

As the scene ends, “*The horses trot*” (p. 57). The stage directions are very telling here and point out the dual nature of the image. What the audience see are really “actors astride of gym horses”. On the other hand, however, thanks to the magic of the theatre, they are simultaneously riders on “real” horses. Stoppard uses theatricality and combines the reality of stage props and the reality of the fictitious world employing sound effect to create an illusion of real horses. While doing this, however, he does so with tongue in his cheek. He seems to be saying that, even though he makes the audience notice the artificiality of the situation, he can yet convince them that what they are watching is real. And this is probably one of the greatest achievements of the playwright. Even though he constantly keeps reminding his audience that it is only theatre, an illusion and not reality, he writes his pieces in such a way that they forget about his warnings and are sucked into the fantasy world of his plays.

## Conclusion

In my study I have analysed the concepts of reality, illusion and theatricality in the output of Tom Stoppard. It seems that providing fully satisfactory conclusions will be difficult if possible at all, the playwright's writings being so varied, divergent and complex. What appears to be unquestionable is that all the three notions play an important role in his creativity. It might be argued that it is partly due to the artist's specific treatment of these concepts that his dramas are what they are, that they make us think but at the same time also entertain us.

The image of reality presented in Stoppard's plays very often reflects the new post-Newtonian outlook based on the proposition voiced by Einstein who found that a viewpoint at rest was not possible. Einstein's relativity theory is mentioned directly in *Jumpers* and *Hapgood*. Furthermore, while setting out to write *Dirty Linen* Stoppard considered having Einstein as one of the main characters. He later on abandoned this plan yet the initial idea indicates the playwright's fascination with the physicist and his ideas.

The lack of "point of rest" has two repercussions in Stoppard's artistic output. Everything being relative, there is no possibility of any epistemological certainty about the surrounding reality which is thus perceived differently due to the shifts in perspective and also to the differences between individual onlookers. The relative quality of reality, the limitations of perception and the resulting misunderstandings are recurrent motifs in Stoppard's work. They are one of the basic preoccupations of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, a play which demonstrates in theatrical terms the notion of "every exit being an entrance somewhere else" (p. 21), of *After Magritte*, which sets numerous ambushes for the characters and the audience alike and of *Hapgood*, where the relative quality of reality and human identity is discussed in terms of quantum mechanics and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. The absence of "point of rest" also results in a specific thematic and structural pattern of the plays. Many of Stoppard's dramas use an open-ended debate structure; they are a sign of the lack of certainty on the author's part.

Stoppard repeatedly stresses the impossibility of defining reality precisely. Yet he has also said; "Few statements remain unrebutted" (Hudson interview 1974, 13): certain utterances, those presenting truth itself, are not relative. The artist often argues in his plays that, despite the constant flux and relativity, some things should not, must not be perceived as relative: George Moore in *Jumpers* is unable to prove the existence of God and the need for absolute morality, yet the events of the play demonstrate that his beliefs are fully justified. His successor, Professor Anderson, follows moral rules in practice and commits a professional foul, believing that every good boy deserves a father and *Night and Day* demonstrates that the very notion of a "relatively free press" is a nonsense. In many of his plays, Stoppard presents unequivocal moral judgements. If, then, a moral matrix is possible and necessary, as his plays demonstrate, certain concepts cannot be rebutted.

The epistemological status of reality as something relative and difficult to define is connected with another issue repeatedly discussed by Stoppard, namely with the question of whether it is possible to provide an adequate representation of reality, to create its fully convincing artistic illusion. He tackles this question in reference to different means of expression, both those used in everyday life by ordinary people and the purely artistic ones. A number of his plays deal with the notion of usefulness (or uselessness) of language as a means of describing reality. The numerous misunderstandings between the characters themselves indicate that communication among people is sometimes difficult. Here Stoppard skilfully resorts to the use of puns and contravention of co-referential rules. He also devotes a lot of attention to the views of Ludwig Wittgenstein and his language games. Then he seems to contradict the idea of the impossibility of proper communication by means of language. In *Dogg's Hamlet*, *Cahoot's Macbeth* the playwright demonstrates that for those really wanting to communicate there is nothing which can prevent them from achieving their goal.

Stoppard also deals with the question of art's ability to create an image of reality. The problem is presented in connection with the visual art of painting (*After Magritte, Artist Descending a Staircase*), the aural art of the radio (*Where Are They Now, After Magritte, In the Native State*) and the most complex art of the theatre (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, The Real Inspector Hound, Travesties, The Real Thing*). While showing the advantages and disadvantages of the different media, Stoppard constantly keeps reminding us of the fact that a representation (even the most illusionist one) is not equivalent to reality. While doing so, he draws our attention to the fact that art is art and thus his pieces are characterised by a high degree of self-reflexiveness and theatricality.

Throughout his career, Stoppard keeps experimenting with theatrical forms, with realistic representation of reality and non-realistic presentation.

A certain shift in the artist's treatment of the form can be detected. In the earlier plays, we often note a surrealistic beginning which later on acquires a fully logical explanation (*Jumpers*, *Travesties*, *After Magritte*). In the case of his later plays, an opposite situation can be noticed. What we consider to be a realistic representation, an example of illusionistic theatre, turns out to be not an illusionist representation of reality but an image of a dream (*Night and Day*), a play within a play (*The Real Thing*), a reconstruction of possible facts (*Squaring the Circle*), a fragment of a letter (*Indian Ink*) or the inner voice of the heroine (*In the Native State*). While a shift in the relationship between realism and non-illusionist technique has undoubtedly taken place, the two constituents remain in his plays and their interdependencies are still valid. It must be stressed, however, that none of Stoppard's plays can be labelled as fully realistic because all of them indicate that what the audience are watching is not reality itself but only its artistic reconstruction.

The theatricality of Stoppard's plays may be discussed from a number of different angles. One can, for instance, follow Richard Hornby's (1986) views on metadrama. All the features of metadrama mentioned by this critic can be detected in Stoppard's works. Many of the playwright's pieces contain a play within a play, either familiar (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *Travesties*, *The Real Thing*, *Dogg's Hamlet*, *Cahoot's Macbeth*) or fictitious (*Real Inspector Hound*, *The Real Thing*) or its variant: a TV broadcast within a TV broadcast (*Another Moon Called Earth*), a tape recording within a tape recording (*Artist Descending a Staircase*), a play within a monologue (*Travesties*), a play within a narrative (*Squaring the Circle*). A ceremony, a show within a play takes place in *Another Moon Called Earth* and in *Jumpers*. Role playing within a role can be spotted in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *The Real Inspector Hound*, *Dogg's Hamlet*, *Cahoot's Macbeth* and *The Real Thing* where the characters are involved in producing inner plays. Theatricality as a social convention can be detected in the behaviour of many characters who employ it in everyday life. They do so either for private (*Enter a Free Man*) or professional reasons (the detectives in *The Real Inspector Hound* and *Jumpers*, the literary sleuths in *Arcadia* and *Indian Ink*, the Inspector in *After Magritte*, the President in *Night and Day*). There are also many examples of literary and real life reference. Numerous figures on loan, both fictitious and historical, appear (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *Travesties*, *Squaring the Circle*).

The self-reflexive quality of Stoppard's metatheatre is achieved, among other factors, also by means of numerous intertextual references, borrowings both from literature and other sign systems. There are two kinds of literary transpositions to be found in Stoppard's output. The first one consists of either a direct or paraphrased quotation of an earlier literary work. Nearly

all Stoppard's plays quote directly a line taken from Shakespeare. There are also borrowings from other playwrights or from writers: S. Beckett (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Jumpers*), J. Joyce (*Travesties*), T. S. Eliot (*Travesties*), N. Mailer (*Jumpers*), O. Goldsmith (*The Dog It Was That Died*), J. Donne (*New-Found-Land*), J. Keats (*Dirty Linen*), W. H. Auden (*The Real Thing*), J. Osborne (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*) and G. Orwell (*Jumpers* and *Night and Day*). The second type of literary intertextual references is more elaborate as the original is reshaped by Stoppard in such a way as to become a thematic or structural (or both) backbone of his own piece. Such is the case with *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot*, the ur-texts of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, and with *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Ulysses* which fulfil an akin function in *Travesties*. A similar situation can be detected in *The Real Thing* and *The Real Inspector Hound* where the ur-texts are *Miss Julie* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *The Mousetrap*, respectively. There is also a close relationship to be noticed between *The Real Thing* and by Henry James' story under the same title.

Stoppard also sometimes quotes or paraphrases other kinds of writings than literature as an artistic enterprise. And so, for instance, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* he gives a paraphrase of *Lord's Prayer* and in *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* of Euclid's geometrical axiom, Matthew the Evangelist and the Declaration of Independence. In many of his dramas songs and music play an important thematic role: *Travesties* ("My Heart Belongs to Dada" and "I Was Born under a Rhyming Planet"), *Jumpers* ("The Moon and the Sixpence"), *Night and Day* ("Help", "Night and Day", "The Lady is a Tramp") and *The Real Thing* ("A Whiter Shade of Pale", "I'm a Believer", "I'm into Something Good", "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" and Bach's "Air on a G String").

The other three fields he is especially fond of are fine arts, philosophy and science. There are three kinds of intertextual references to art in Stoppard's output. Firstly, the playwright transposes an image created by a painter and makes it work in his own art. Such is the case with the initial stage image of *After Magritte* which is highly evocative of *L'assassin menacé* (and also of the beginning of Sławomir Mrożek's *Tango*). A slightly altered version appears in *Artist Descending a Staircase* which is undoubtedly related to the famous painting of Marcel Duchamp. A variant of the same kind can be detected in *Travesties*. In this case, however, the stage image recalls not a painting but a photograph re-touched by Stalin. Secondly, many of the works of art created by the characters of *Artist Descending a Staircase* can be easily related to concrete objects produced by surrealist art and the similarity between the names of Beauchamp and Duchamp is nothing but accidental. Thirdly, all Stoppard's dramas related to fine arts

tackle the problems concerning the possibility of art producing an image of a concrete reality.

There are occasional references to philosophers in a few of Stoppard's plays, the cases of Descartes (*Jumpers*), Voltaire (*Travesties*), and Wittgenstein (*Professional Foul*) being most obvious. Furthermore, concrete philosophical ideas are the basis of some of his plays: Logical Positivism in *Jumpers* and Ludwig Wittgenstein's outlook in *The (15 Minute) Dogg's Troupe Hamlet* and *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*. Last, but not least, the debate concerning reality and the ways of its adequate descriptions becomes the main thematic interest of two plays referring directly to modern physics – *Hapgood* (quantum mechanics), *Arcadia* (the chaos theory).

The various kinds of intertextual references used by Stoppard fulfil many functions in his plays. Intertextuality as a means of evoking the metatheatrical character of the pieces is often used in connection with the defamiliarisation technique which also adds to their self-reflexive quality. By means of these two devices, frequently combined with skilfully set ambushes for the audience, Stoppard destroys the spectator's presuppositions concerning the overall coherence both of the dramatic work and of reality itself. Dislocating audience's assumptions, he makes them take a new look and reconsider their automatic, habitual perceptions and thus renews their capacity for fresh sensation. Stoppard's audiences are invited to provide their own insights into the philosophical, moral, political, artistic or even simple, everyday problems depicted. Ann Ubersfeld (1982, 129) argues theoretically that theatre is a "sign of a gap-being-filled" and that the spectator's pleasure results from the act of filling the gap. Stoppard proves in practical terms that this critic is right. He continually urges his audience to become creators themselves, provide their own interpretations, notice the intertextual references and fill the gaps left for them. It must be noticed here that the artist hardly ever provides a hint which would help the viewer to specify the ur-text used. Sometimes the pre-text is self evident, as in the case of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *After Magritte*, for instance. On other occasions, however, the viewer must make his own guesses, the playwright not having given any cues. Only on one occasion, does Stoppard specify the author of the quotation given. This happens in *Travesties* where the original speaker is identified as La Rochefoucauld. Even in this case, however, Stoppard does not really indicate the source. What he does is to set an ambush for the audience. Those who know French will notice that the quote does not come from La Rochefoucauld but is a translation of Carr's earlier line.

Stoppard's spectators derive their pleasure also from the fact that his art functions supremely as entertainment. The artist is aware of the potential of the medium he uses and employs it in a way which guarantees maximum

effect. He has repeatedly argued that what counts is the theatrical production, drama being not literature but an event<sup>1</sup>. While writing he creates a stage image of the event and one of his assets is, as he himself puts it, to “keep people in a room reasonably preoccupied and interested” (McCulloch interview 1974, 168). And this is where Stoppard’s genius rests – he really writes entertaining pieces yet, at the same time, pieces which make people think. Stoppard has often argued that his plays are meant for enactment and not for scholarly debate<sup>2</sup>. He has said, for instance,

I don’t write plays for discussion – plays with secrets in them which are only discovered after patient research. I think of a play as an event in the theatre: to look for a kind of cryptogram in a play is to approach it in a way not really to do with the theatre.

(Watts interview 1973, 12)

This statement, even though uttered in 1973, is still valid, as Stoppard argues in a more recent interview (Bareham 1990, 10). One might disagree here with the playwright: his plays are undoubtedly “an event for the theatre” (or radio and TV) yet, at the same time, they do contain secrets which may be “discovered after patient research”.

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<sup>1</sup> Brassell 1987, 261, Gussow interview 1979, 22, Lutterbie 1986, 15, Stoppard 1982 and Watts interview 1973.

<sup>2</sup> Bareham 1990, 10 and Bradshaw 1977, 51. See also Stoppard’s article *Playwrights and Professors* (1972) and his interviews with Kuurman (1980) and Watts (1973).

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*Jadwiga Uchman*

## About the Author

Jadwiga Uchman graduated from the Institute of English Studies, University of Łódź, in 1973, having presented an M. A. thesis on "the comedies of menace" written by Harold Pinter. Since that time she has been working in the same Institute, the field of her academic specialisation being modern English drama. In 1982 she got her Ph. D., the subject of her thesis being the concept of time in the poetic plays of T. S. Eliot and Samuel Beckett. She has published a number of articles on Dylan Thomas, T. S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett and Tom Stoppard, a review of J. L. Styan's *Elements of Drama* and footnotes to an 1984 Polish edition of *Macbeth*. In 1987 she published a book entitled *The Problem of Time in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*.