

TOM STOPPARD'S COMEDY OF IDEAS : AN EXAMINATION  
OF THEMES AND TECHNIQUES

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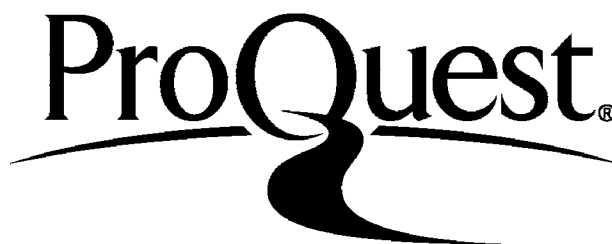
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### Abstract

This thesis examines Tom Stoppard's comedy of ideas. A study of the relationship between form and content, comedy and ideas, will demonstrate how the playwright draws attention to the nature of the play as a theatrical event and relies upon the audience's recognition of theatrical conventions and devices. Upon this basis of familiar theatrical conventions Stoppard establishes various layers of dramatic dialogue - between playwright and audience, audience and play, play and argument - employing the comedy on the surface as a means of involving the audience in the underlying dialectic. I will look at the early radio and television plays and at Stoppard's only novel where these contribute to the examination of themes and techniques in Stoppard's comedy of ideas. I will note a change of direction, a change of perspective in Stoppard's comedy of ideas after Travesties and show how the later stage plays and the television play Professional Foul succeed in developing the playwright's comedy of ideas in conjunction with his change of direction. Stoppard's adaptations of Mrözek, Lorca, Schnitzler and Molnàr lie beyond the scope of this study; although Stoppard's voice is clearly discernible in these adaptations, the plays essentially involve the re-working of another dramatist's plots and themes and therefore do not warrant inclusion in a study of Stoppard's comedy of ideas.

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## CHAPTER I - Introduction

Tom Stoppard's Comedy of Ideas

For all the apparent anarchy and frivolity of their theatricality, Tom Stoppard's plays conform to an essentially logical design. The characters are clichés, their behaviour amusing, often irrational and their situations absurd, but all are vital elements in Stoppard's most carefully constructed comedy of ideas. The comedy and farce on the surface highlight the absurd and incongruous in life and invite the audience to contemplate rationally the underlying issues which are far from frivolous, for the action on the surface runs parallel to a sub-text bearing serious or potentially tragic overtones. Stoppard employs comic techniques first to involve his audience and then to enable them to maintain a necessary detachment. The result is an exciting, dynamic tension between form and content, comedy and ideas, which is one of Stoppard's most distinctive qualities as playwright.

This thesis aims to examine the relationship between form and content in Stoppard's comedy and to show how important to Stoppard's style is his emphasis on the play as a theatrical event rather than as a literary product. I will also demonstrate how, by pursuing this emphasis on the event, Stoppard stresses the theatricality of his plays and relies on the audience's recognition of this quality. He presumes a degree of familiarity with theatrical conventions and devices, recognition of which is fundamental to the structure and achievement of effect in the plays themselves. Stoppard engages the audience's attention on the dialectic of the sub-text by inviting their collusion in recognising the theatricality of the comedy on the surface. Dramatist and audience share a common language where a technique or convention implies a particular context and upon this basis Stoppard builds various inter-relating layers of dramatic

dialogue: between playwright and audience, audience and play, text and sub-text. The play then permits different levels of response from the audience according to the experience and knowledge which they bring to the theatre: (a) On the most superficial level is the dialogue between dramatist and audience via their shared theatrical language. Stock characters and techniques, familiar conventions and easily identifiable genres, linguistic humour which draws attention to itself - these establish the context, emphasise the theatricality of the play, and are responsible for much of the humour and the tone which pervades the most successful plays.

(b) The next layer of dialogue invites another level of response when the familiar techniques and conventions are used as a vehicle for the sub-text. They provide a framework against which to bounce ideas when Stoppard mocks the familiar devices by drawing attention to their stock nature and, more importantly, develops them in directions completely unexpected of the borrowed tradition. Such is the case in After Magritte and The Real Inspector Hound, two of the earliest plays, which demonstrate how the familiar whodunnit genre not only provides structure but also makes a vital contribution to the examination of theme.

(c) This relationship of form and content is further reinforced and introduces another level of dramatic dialogue in those plays which are hinged on to others which are very much part of theatrical tradition and with which the playwright may reasonably expect his audience to be acquainted. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead is twinned with Hamlet, Travesties with The Importance of Being Earnest. The choice of twin play in such cases is a vital element in the examination of theme so that anyone watching Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead without some knowledge of Hamlet will probably be unable to participate satisfactorily in any but

the most superficial level of the dramatic dialogue. Similarly in Travesties the narrative itself supplies much of the information concerning the roles of Lenin, Joyce and Tzara in the argument, but Stoppard does expect a basic knowledge of The Importance of Being Earnest and Wildean style for the dialectic to work beyond level (a). It is not an unreasonable expectation by the dramatist and it is significant that he makes fewer demands on television audiences. Plays which have no twin may create their own frame of reference via their relationship with a familiar convention and by giving visual illustration to a linguistic term - Jumpers and Professional Foul are foremost in this category. In each play the pun in the title draws attention to the metaphorical import of surface events, and in each play the surface narrative offers a literal interpretation. Hence the acrobat-philosophers in Jumpers and the football match in the television play Professional Foul. The characters voice the different viewpoints and the situation/plot provides dramatically the information necessary for the examination of the main theme, but in Jumpers especially the audience participates more actively in the debate if they have at least a layman's familiarity with philosophical ideas.

(d) A further level of response is open to a minority in the audience - the philosophers who can appreciate the subtleties in the references to particular philosophers in Jumpers; the biographer and students of Joyce who may recognise the facts behind the travesty of Joyce's middle name (Augusta) in Travesties and who appreciates the extra joke and verbal resonances in the Irishman's claim that he paid his way; the scholars who recognise the imitation of the catechistic style of an episode in Ulysses; the students and critics of Marxism who recognise, in the dandy's amusing speech beginning, "No, no, no, no, my dear girl - Marx got it wrong",

the reference to 20th Century evaluations of Marx's theory regarding the class war. Stoppard is not afraid of engaging with the experts in dramatic dialogue, but he does not lose sight of the fact that his audience is constituted primarily of individuals who are neither experts nor academics but who should be able to participate in at least three of the levels of dialogue if the plays are to succeed. His style is at its best when it interweaves the various layers because it is essentially analytical and dramatic, in the sense that it demonstrates ideas in dynamic opposition. It is a style temperamentally suited to the medium of the stage and Stoppard takes steps to make its deeper levels accessible to the majority of his audience. Paradoxically for a playwright who makes demands on his audience's knowledge and education in this way, Stoppard rejects ideas of élitism in theatre and its appeal by stressing the importance of the event of the performance over the play's literary content. This in no way implies that the latter is neglected - rather, it testifies to the intriguing ambiguity in Stoppard's work between the serious and the comic.

Stoppard's plays are very much part of the comic tradition in theatre in that they are concerned with the relationship of the individual to society; his basically theoretical approach to the examination of this relationship enables him to investigate aspects of the world of ideas and philosophy. The content is serious, but the style and tone belong to comedy and one of the playwright's main aims is entertainment. Although it is generally dangerous to attribute to the author views voiced by characters he has created, Stoppard may certainly be said to empathise with the statement of George Moore in Jumpers that any attempt to sustain his audience's attention by argument alone would be "tantamount to constructing a Gothic arch out of junket", so he intends to demonstrate his argument. That is why

he has with him a bow and arrow, a tortoise and hare. He will use these to demonstrate the fallacy in the argument that the existence of God must be proved empirically. It is a visually absurd combination of aim and method, form and content, but whilst fully aware of the absurdity of the action, the audience comes to appreciate the underlying rationality and seriousness of aim. The more absurd the surface narrative, the more powerful is the impact of the complementary seriousness which is revealed.

Stoppard's audiences, unlike Moore's, are not in the auditorium in an academic capacity and the vast majority will not be academics at all. However laudable the playwright's aims, and however literary or serious his theme, his play will ultimately be judged by its success in performance. If he has not involved the majority of his audience in the deeper levels of response, he has served neither his own aims nor the audience's expectations. He might well agree with Chaucer's Host who states, "Where as a man may have noon audience, Noght helpeth it to tellen his sentence", for Chaucer was a craftsman with a strong awareness of the need for complementary levels of seriousness and entertainment and their importance in controlling the audience's attention. Stoppard approaches a play like a craftsman making the most of the particular tools of his trade and he gives full weight to the different skills of other craftsmen involved in the same event. He acknowledges his debt to both director and actors - the former for his emphasis on the foremost duty of the playwright, to communicate with the audience; the latter for expressing the human within the stock character. (1) Stoppard regards the audience itself as one of the most valuable materials available to him and his comedy of ideas is at its best when he can make use of the audience's experience as theatre audience to engage their interest in his examination of the world of ideas and philosophy. It is significant that when writing

for television, a medium with a wider range of audience, he cannot make the same assumptions about knowledge and interests. This must be partly responsible for the fact that his most successful full-scale comedies of ideas are stage plays - the television play Professional Foul, as will be discussed later, being a notable exception. It is also significant that once he had consolidated his reputation as a playwright, Stoppard avoided the television medium, choosing instead to concentrate on stage work. He wrote one television play in 1977 and another in 1984, both on issues which enjoyed a particularly high public profile in their respective years. Professional Foul was written to mark Amnesty International's 'Prisoner of Conscience Year' and Squaring the Circle was broadcast at a time when Stoppard could assume that the majority in the audience would be familiar with the events with which his play was concerned: Western media had made the names of Welesa, Brezhnev and Jaruzelski immediately accessible and Solidarnosc badges were on sale in British High Streets. In contrast, between 1963 and 1968 Stoppard wrote no less than six television plays and although one should bear in mind that practical considerations as well as artistic applied (plays were often written to commission) it is surely not merely coincidental that these early television plays are mainly interesting for the appearance in them of ideas, themes or characters which are treated more substantially in later stage plays. For example, Another Moon Called Earth (1967) features a situation which looks forward to Jumpers: a woman who won't get out of bed, a husband working in the next room, a death, a visiting detective and a porter named Crouch. The comic dramatist has traditionally appealed to the minds of his audience by directing their attention to the follies and weaknesses of mankind, inviting the audience to stand aside and observe, often to judge. Stoppard invites his audience to observe but the question

of judgement is largely irrelevant because the questions with which he deals do not, in the majority of plays, admit unambiguous, clear-cut answers or solutions. He does not present characters as examples of individual psychology, neither does he see himself primarily as spokesman for contemporary social or political issues. Like George Bernard Shaw, Stoppard is interested in examining ideas, but his temperament does not find congenial his predecessor's more overtly polemical approach and aims. Stoppard selects characters and situations to illustrate a debate. By the end of each play neither character nor plot has advanced - the surface narrative is usually circular or conforms to certain predetermined rules, the plot of Shakespeare's Hamlet or Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest. But the end of the play offers a new beginning for the audience who now have a clearer understanding of the question under discussion. (Professor Anderson in Professional Foul is a notable exception to this rule too; he does progress in the course of the play and is alone among Stoppard's philosophers by being able to apply theory to life.) It must be stated, however, that Stoppard's reluctance to appear to be offering definitive answers or solutions to timeless questions about philosophy, politics or art does not imply uncertainty on the part of the playwright himself. If a play ended only in nebulous uncertainty and bewilderment, the result would be far from satisfactory. It would certainly no longer merit the term "comedy" since comedy and farce rely on the implicit belief in the existence of a sane and moral world which determines that all that is strange or ridiculous in the play itself is an aberration of the norm. Stoppard's plays may include absurd, surreal elements but they leave their audience with the comic tradition's affirmation of belief in the Golden Mean: reason must be tempered with imagination, the life of the emotions must have its place alongside the claims of logic

and reason. Man must apply complementary degrees of subjectivity and objectivity in order to relate successfully to his world; theory must be applied to the realities of everyday life if it is to have any validity; the seriousness must be tempered with humour. Reason is a powerful tool which Stoppard wields with skill but it also has its limitations as he demonstrates via characters whose emphasis on reason precipitates them into behaviour which is irrational and potentially destructive. Stoppard's exploitation of the strengths and weaknesses of logic and reason, often explored through the ambiguities of the language used to try to understand them, permits an approach which is especially congenial to the 20th Century temperament: he convinces whilst avoiding didacticism. In an interview with Theatre Quarterly in 1974<sup>(2)</sup> Stoppard rightly observed that the most valuable (and he might have added, distinguishing) element in his own work is "that there is very often no single clear statement in my plays. What there is, is a series of conflicting statements made by conflicting characters, and they tend to play a sort of infinite leap-frog. You know, an argument, a refutation, then a rebuttal of the refutation, then a counter-rebuttal'....." This complexity derives from a compulsion towards greater truth, not obscurity. His objective, he said, in the same interview was to contrive "the perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce or perhaps even high comedy."

In contrast to contemporary playwrights writing in the Look Back In Anger era of the British stage, Stoppard cultivated a Wildean stance of detachment and lack of commitment mainly to avoid the idea that there was a cipher which provided the answer to each play. His act was so successful that newspaper and magazine articles on Stoppard seized on this attitude and gave it further emphasis in their headings: The Joke's The Thing, Writing's my 43rd Priority, The Definite Maybe, Withdrawing With Style, Serious Artist or Siren?<sup>(3)</sup>

Stoppard avoided overtly contemporary social issues, was consciously literary in his use of language, making learned allusions to Shakespeare and philosophy in his first stage play to capture public attention. The plays from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead onwards continued to avoid immediately contemporary issues, characters were usually articulate professional types and situations were chosen and exploited for their comic potential. As a result, plays like Professional Foul and Every Good Boy Deserves Favour were hailed by some as if Stoppard had at last grown up, out of a literary élite phase and "taken a giant step forward." These plays do indeed usher in a more naturalistic phase of writing, as Stoppard acknowledged in a television interview in 1978 from which the above reference is taken<sup>(4)</sup> but they are not so fundamentally different from his more theatrical plays. Jumpers and Travesties are as political as the later plays which were welcomed as such. The difference is one of approach or perspective. In the same interview Stoppard emphasised the importance of context - Professional Foul was a response to the invitation to write a television play to mark Amnesty International's Prisoner of Conscience Year; Every Good Boy Deserves Favour was written the same year, its form largely determined by the wish to make use of a symphony orchestra. Similarly practical, empirical considerations had led to the very different style of Travesties. (Stoppard had wanted to write about Lenin and Tzara in Zurich during World War I and he also wanted a bravura part for the actor John Wood who looked like neither.<sup>(5)</sup> This led him to introduce Joyce and later Henry Carr.)

Every Good Boy Deserves Favour and Travesties both deal with the role of the artist in society; Professional Foul and Jumpers both emphasise the need for a moral basis to political actions. The later plays revolve around identifiable contemporary situations in the real world but are not, for that reason, more committed. At a time

when the prevailing trend was for overt commitment, Stoppard objected to the large claims made for committed art. He felt that some writers wrote for the stage "not because what they had to say was particularly suited to dramatic form but because the theatre was clearly the most interesting and dynamic medium"<sup>(6)</sup> - especially since it

had been "freed" by Beckett with Waiting for Godot. This statement<sup>(7)</sup> by Stoppard was misconstrued by some to imply that Stoppard did not believe in the possibility of literary merit in committed plays - a gross misinterpretation. The point is surely a rational one: commitment does not in itself guarantee literary merit and there is more than one way for a writer to present his beliefs.

<sup>(8)</sup>  
In 1966 Stoppard thought that his novel would make his name but Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon is more interesting to the reader for those elements in its style which seem to demand a stage. Drama is the medium most congenial to Stoppard's personal style and temperament because it enables him to maintain distance from his subject matter in order to view it as objectively, as rationally as possible. He can present various sides of an argument without being seen to favour any. The end product will obviously indicate where his sympathies lie but it has the virtue of being seen to reach its conclusion rationally. Humour ensures that he avoids the criticism of too much earnestness-anathema of comedy-and never loses sight of the fact that actors and audience have come together for the performance of a play, not a lecture.

Stoppard refers to the practical considerations of his craft when he describes the writing of plays in mathematical, scientific terms, stressing the point that the end product must be self-contained, a complete event. Although he studiously avoids being prescriptive about certain aspects of the content, he must have the form under total control. Stoppard says that he aimed at an architectural struc-

ture in Travesties, mentions its "facetiousness quotient" and compares the difficulties of the subject matter to the mathematical problem of squaring the circle; he thinks of The Real Inspector Hound as a machine which has been worked out on graph paper and talks of plot as being a firm "edifice" or "bridge", sound in construction and without loose ends. (9) Significantly, Stoppard's admiration for the work of Samuel Beckett (to whom he pays tribute at the end of Jumpers and more directly in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead) stems primarily from the achievements of Beckett as craftsman: Stoppard credits him with having liberated the stage when Waiting for Godot "redefined the minima of theatrical validity." He also admires the almost mathematical process by which Beckett "picks up a proposition and then dismantles and qualifies each part of its structure as he goes along, until he nullifies what he started out with." (10) Stoppard refers to a similar process at work in his own plays, and thereby emphasises the importance he places on levels of dialogue, when he compares the writing of a play to a game of ping-pong "between me and myself." (11) On another occasion he refers to the dialogue as "intellectual leap-frog." (12) Characters are chosen, not as examples of individual psychology, but as mouthpieces for different points of view and are usually professional types - the detective, philosopher, playwright, journalist. Often the type is an especially theatrical version, easily recognisable and exaggerated and success depends on the audience's recognition of the conventional type who may or may not react as expected of the convention - for example, the Police Inspector in After Magritte and Jumpers, the professional reviewers in The Real Inspector Hound. The women characters are also stock theatrical types - young wife, actress, starlet, sexy secretary, but they provide substantial roles for actresses and are not merely decorative. Maddie Gotobed in the light-weight Dirty Linen may be

characterised by her Page 3 poses and Janet Reger underwear and she may not be able to take down more than 30 wpm shorthand, but it is patently clear that she is more exploiting than exploited. This approach to character in Stoppard's comedy of ideas is an important means of controlling the audience's responses and maintaining the equilibrium between the comedy of the form and the seriousness of the content. His more traditional, naturalistic approach to character in his first play, Enter a Free Man, illustrates by default the value of the treatment of characters as types. Stoppard himself commented that although Enter a Free Man works pretty well as a play "it's actually phoney because it's written about other people's characters." (13)

As was the case with the professional comedian of the commedia dell'arte where the repertoire of stock characters and situations relied significantly on the skills and versatility of the actor, so in Stoppard's plays the actor can contribute a great deal to the success of a character. The plays are so well constructed that they may be relied upon to work on the level of comedy or farce (as seen even in weak productions of the very popular Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, for example) but the strong actor will reveal the individual truth within the stereotype - and by thus strengthening the human element he can draw greater attention to the seriousness of his character's predicament. This debt to the actor does not detract from the achievements of the playwright himself; rather, it testifies to the emphasis he places on the dramatic nature of the medium and to the vital relationship of form and content in his comedy of ideas. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, for example, are in many ways a comic vaudeville duo and their routines rarely fail to arouse laughter, but John Stride in the first National Theatre production (1967, Old Vic Theatre) managed by tone of voice to convey Rosencrantz's very human vulnerability beneath the comic mask, a quality which aroused

the audience to the darker aspects of the superficially very amusing situation.

The initial choice of situation is all-important because the situation in which the characters are placed best illustrates the ambiguities and paradoxes of the play's argument and is instrumental in successfully combining form and content into a dynamic relationship. As will be discussed in the examination of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, it was interest in the situation of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern within the context of Hamlet which intrigued him and led to the re-writing of what was originally a burlesque one-acter. In the later plays it is Stoppard's concern with the reciprocal relationship of form and content which determines the choice of characters and situations. For example, it determines Anderson's profession in Professional Foul, Henry's profession in The Real Thing, the crime which never took place in After Magritte, Henry Carr's faulty memory in Travesties, Albert's choice of employment in Albert's Bridge, Moore's profession in Jumpers. This emphasis on paradox and ambiguity is vivid in Stoppard's defence of his predilection for comedy of ideas over "committed drama":

"One thing that had an enormous effect on me was the evidence at the trial of the people who killed three Civic Rights workers at Meridian, Mississippi. I couldn't get out of my head the awful fact of those murders; but I couldn't begin to write about that kind of subject in real terms. I think what I would write about if I ever got to the subject at all would be the fact that I was so personally revolted and disturbed by the cold-blooded killing of those three people that I'd like to get the people who did it and cold-bloodedly kill them." (14)

The importance in Stoppard's work of the dramatic illustration of theme is evident in the changes made to his early play A Walk On The Water (first performed in a television production by Rediffusion, November 1963). Although obviously derivative - he later referred to it with characteristic adroitness as "Flowering Death Of A Cherry

Salesman", alluding to its associations with Flowering Cherry and Death Of A Salesman - one aspect of its revision is especially interesting: Stoppard added the indoor watering system which had no controlling mechanism and which provided visual illustration of Riley's problems in reconciling the demands of reason and imagination. The new title, Enter A Free Man, was also important in that it commented ironically on George Riley's situation. Another early play, The Dissolution of Dominic Boot (first written as a 15-minute radio play for BBC in February 1964 and later produced by NBC in the United States in March 1970 under the title The Engagement) also focused on irony of situation: it featured a man riding around in a taxi trying to raise the money he needed to catch up with the meter. Stoppard's consciously craftsmanlike attitude to his work is reflected in the variety of writing tasks he has undertaken throughout his career. When a freelance journalist in the early 1960's he wrote short stories as well as various plays commissioned for radio and television: 'M' Is For Moon Among Other Things (BBC radio, February 1964); The Gamblers (produced by Bristol University Drama Department in 1965); Teeth (BBC Television, February 1967); Another Moon Called Earth (BBC Television, June 1967); Neutral Ground (Thames Television, December 1968). He has also adapted foreign plays in English, one for the RSC in 1960 (Slawomir Mrozek's Tango), another for the Greenwich Theatre in 1973 (Garcia Lorca's The House of Bernado Alba). More recently he has worked on other adaptations for the National Theatre: Undiscovered Country and Dalliance (by Arthur Schnitzler) 1979, Olivier Theatre and 1986, Lyttleton respectively; On The Razzle (by Johann Nestroy) 1981, Lyttleton; Rough Crossing (by Ferenc Molnár) 1984, Lyttleton. The adaptations lie beyond the scope of this thesis, as do the early plays which are mainly interesting for the ideas, themes or characters which appear in the later stage work. But the

radio and television plays will be discussed where they contribute to the examination of Stoppard's comedy of ideas: If You're Glad I'll Be Frank, A Separate Peace, Albert's Bridge, and Artist Descending A Staircase are particularly relevant to this study, as is Stoppard's only novel Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon, as experiments with form and content and for their treatment of themes and characters which dominate the major plays.

CHAPTER II Early Experiments With Theme And Technique(A Separate Peace - BBC Television, 22 August 1966If You're Glad I'll Be Frank - BBC Third Programme, 8 February 1966)

There are clear indications in Stoppard's early work of his interest in combining seriousness and humour, and of his use of familiar forms as a vehicle for the examination of ideas. Work intended for different media, or even commissioned for a specific series, succeeds in combining Stoppard's own prevailing thematic and artistic concerns. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon, If You're Glad I'll Be Frank and A Separate Peace made their first appearance on stage, novel, radio and television respectively in 1966. The stage play was the most innovative work and the one to capture audience interest and attention when it was produced by the Oxford Theatre Group as part of the "fringe" at the Edinburgh Festival on 24 August. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead forged the most successful marriage between form and content, but all four works reflect the author's preoccupation with this relationship and all trace the development of his distinctive approach to the illustration of philosophical questions. The plays and the novel deal with characters who cannot cope with everyday life because they are overwhelmed by what is humanly incomprehensible and by the idea of man's lack of control. Their attempts to escape the problem lead them into situations which both illustrate and consolidate their difficulties. The radio play, written for a series about people with unusual jobs chooses the Post Office speaking clock girl Gladys and traces her alienation by focusing on time; the television play, written to accompany a documentary about chess players, chooses a voluntary patient, Brown, and traces Brown's alienation by focusing on the desire to avoid all personal relationships. In his introduction to a collection

of early plays published in 1983, Stoppard observed that A Separate Peace does not really illuminate what he thinks about chess players<sup>(1)</sup> - it happened to be "the only idea I had at the time for a play."

It was an idea that was to recur in various forms until it was finally explored more satisfactorily in Jumpers in 1972.

With the exception of Enter A Free Man, A Separate Peace is the most conventional of Stoppard's early plays as regards form and it also lacks the display of linguistic dexterity which one has come to associate with a Stoppard play. A contributory factor in the determination of style and form is the nature of the medium for which the play was intended. Stoppard is at his best when working from within any medium, exploiting its strengths and challenging its weaknesses.

Whereas the stage offers the playwright a static space upon which to impose his world and an audience whose experiences and expectations of the medium he can turn to advantage, television offers him technical resources with almost limitless possibilities, and a more varied audience about whose experiences and expectations he can make fewer assumptions. It is far more difficult to challenge the audience's belief in what is possible or credible on television and in 1966 Stoppard was either not ready or not interested in exploring the technical possibilities of the medium. Instead he chose to work from within the familiar situation comedy convention in television and to make merely functional use of television's simplest techniques. There are two clearly defined rather static acting areas; cross-fading effects easy transition from one to the other; close-ups work well in brief but important scenes which serve to advance the narrative- when, for example, the Doctor speaks to the police on the telephone, giving and receiving information which is essential to the plot. Unfortunately the BBC who broadcast the play in 1966 did not retain it in their library so today's reader must try to judge visual effects

from the text alone. Fortunately the lack of such first-hand experience of the play in performance is not, I believe, so great a handicap as it would be with the later more subtle television play Professional Foul or, indeed, with the stage plays where the event of the performance is of paramount importance. The main interest of A Separate Peace lies in its choice of situation and the effectiveness of this situation in demonstrating the play's Theme-alienation and the wish to escape from life.

The scene is in a country nursing home with a minimum of characters - the requisite Doctor, Nurse, Matron. Enter stranger, potential source of humour. In a typical situation comedy the newcomer would disturb the routine of the hospital; in this play John Brown is determined to do no such thing. He registers himself as a patient and assures the Doctor that he need not trouble himself about him because he is not unwell. All Brown wants is a quiet room with the usual day and night service and he has the money to pay. From this inversion of the normal, Stoppard creates a metaphor for alienation and despite a primarily simplistic approach to the illustration of the play's main theme, he introduces some irony and subtlety. Brown's desire to escape the demands of life in a hospital for the healthy creates the metaphor for his inability to connect, in the same way that the bridge symbolises Albert's alienation in Albert's Bridge. What is important is not the opportunities for humour offered by a new arrival in the nursing home, but the way in which the situation demonstrates the seriousness behind the comedy. Incidental opportunities for humour are exploited to ensure that the seriousness of the idea does not submerge the comedy of the form, and both seriousness and humour are inextricably bound in the revelation of the rational impulses which underlie Brown's illogical action. A Separate Peace draws on the detective story tradition for its narrative structure - the

hospital authorities and the police search for clues to the identity of the 'anonymously named' John Brown. Here too the familiar is turned on its head, for whereas the detective story is usually pre-occupied with searching for a character and motive, Brown arrives voluntarily, intends no trouble and states his motives openly from the start. He makes no attempt to hide his suitcase full of money and states simply and honestly, "I need to be nursed for a bit." The search for identity is as important to Stoppard's play as to the borrowed convention, but whereas in the latter it is an end in itself, in the former it is only the beginning of the real problem. The search does not succeed in helping Brown to understand his own dilemma, nor does it treat the root cause of his unorthodox behaviour. When the authorities trace his relatives they simply confirm that he is indeed John Brown and far from helping him, they drive him away. The play suggests that Brown is not the only one to behave irrationally; the hospital authorities are confronted with a man who must be unwell - why else should a man who is physically healthy admit himself into hospital if not as a cry for help? - but they try to get him off their hands because his symptoms are not "normal". Their own inability to connect, to apply their theories to their own practical behaviour, reinforces the play's main interest. As is usually the case with Stoppard's plays, the audience alone have progressed by the end in that they are armed with a little more knowledge and are therefore better able to understand the problem. It is ironic that those in the role of detective fail to recognise their own part in the affair. The hospital had unwittingly taken the first step in helping Brown: Nurse Maggie (the nurse instructed to glean information about him) was accepted by him, he grew to trust her and to take an interest in her life - in other words, to connect - but she was taken away at the moment when she could have helped

him most. The Doctor believes that by finding members of Brown's family he has discovered Brown's real identity and wants to compel the patient to "connect" (p.22) but at this crucial point Brown is denied the only human contact he has managed to achieve. A stranger, Nurse Jones, enters (her name as impersonal as his own).

Brown : Where's Maggie?  
 Jones : Nurse Coates? I don't know.  
 Brown : But - She's my nurse.  
 Jones : Yours? Well, she's everybody's.

(p.21)

The suspense created by the detective story framework is deliberately muted since Brown is, perversely for the genre, telling the truth from the outset. The real drama and interest lie in the simultaneous unravelling of Brown's past and the revelation of the play's main theme. Brown's inversion of the natural order is the main theme and source of much of the play's humour. He would like a hospital for the healthy or a monastery for agnostics - a contradiction in terms whose irony he fails to appreciate. He cannot cope with life and wants a place where he can divorce himself from the problems of living; he would settle for a comfortable existence. He refers to this inner need in terms of surface order and routine: "a nice atmosphere - good food - clean rooms - a day and night service - no demands - cheerful staff." (p.8) Matron's suggestion of an hotel is rejected because, however satisfying the organised routine, an hotel lacks one vital element - complete separation from society: "I want to do nothing and have nothing expected of me. That isn't possible out there. It worries them. They want to know what you're at..." In hospital, however, "It is understood that you're not doing anything because ... it's the normal thing." Combining both absurdity and logic, he concludes, "Being a patient. That's what I'm cut out for, I think - I've got a vocation for it." (p.8)

The only other time and place Brown experienced a state of contentment

was in a P.O.W. camp during the war. There as in a hospital, the inmate was absolved from the need to cope with the usual problems of living, making decisions, forming relationships. All that was required was observation of the rules ensuring routine efficiency. He was as pleased to obey those rules as he is willing to fit in with the hospital's routine. Far from reminding him of the world's overwhelming problems, the P.O.W. camp "was like breathing out for the first time in months ... It was like winning, being captured." Chaos may have reigned outside - "all the pins must have fallen off the map" - but he was untouched. Absolved of the responsibility for action, he felt under no pressure to attempt escape since he could reasonably demonstrate that such attempt was futile. In stark contrast to this contentment, peace, when it came, was harrowing. No longer able to alienate himself from the world, he felt "there was too much going on," (p.20) When looking for a job, his main priority was that it should require no communication and no personal relationships.

There is both comedy and pathos in Brown's failure to appreciate the irrationality of his demands. The institutions he favours exist only as temporary measures (in the case of the hospital and P.O.W. camp) or require absolute religious commitment (in the case of the monastery) not total lack of it. The rational need behind his illogical demands serves both the humour and the theme. Failure is inevitable and this, not the detective story element, is what creates the major tension in the play. The title points to the <sup>n</sup>inate irony of his predicament: peace can only be attained when he is at one with his world; separation suggests failure. On another level, however, Brown does appreciate how a strain of irony works against him: if he had lied, been a simple malingerer or hypochondriac or pretended to be such there would have been no problem with the authorities.

Simultaneously revealing both insight and blindness he adds, "My approach is too straightforward." It is a Catch-22 situation and he ambushes himself.

Brown lets drop few hints about the reasons behind his present state of mind. His memory significantly goes back only as far as the war in which he served. Despite his careful reticence he admits to Maggie that the war was a harrowing experience and that being captured was a relief. The P.O.W. camp provided a much-needed refuge and reminded him of a pleasant stay in a nursing home following an accident, as a child. His return to the home, so many years later, is an attempt to recapture the comforting sense of tranquility, the knowledge that his place in the world is assured and that nothing is expected of him. His dream of Utopia includes just such a hospital to himself:

"all built around me and staffed to feed me and  
check me and tick me off on a rota system."  
(p.10)

At heart he is conscious of the deliberate nature of the lie he tries to establish, the idea that life in hospital is unaffected by the outside world. In an uncharacteristic movement when the mask drops he is beguiled by Maggie's real concern into being honest with himself:

Brown : ...You need never know anything, it doesn't  
touch you.  
Maggie : That's not true, Brownie.  
Brown : I know it's not.  
Maggie : Then you shouldn't try to make it true.  
Brown : I know I shouldn't.

(p.16)

However, the partial articulation of a problem does not automatically suggest a solution and Brown cannot proceed beyond this point. Maggie, genuinely sympathetic, suggests he needs someone to help with the daily routine of life, to look after him. Brown admits he would enjoy the routine - it's "the things that go with it" that he cannot cope with. Sadly the play does not even attempt to explore this interesting area which could explain the background to Brown's

alienation, largely because it lies beyond its scope. Once the authorities have solved their problem - the discovery of Brown's "official" identity - they cease the investigation and Maggie is withdrawn.

The play succeeds in giving a dramatic illustration of the idea of alienation and the inability to cope with life. The unanswered questions that it raises are explored in greater depth in later plays and in the novel published the same year.

Little attempt is made to examine Brown's character as an example of individual psychology beyond suggesting that the horrors of war precipitated his malady:

"Yes. Funny thing, that camp. Up to then it was all terrible. Chaos - all the pins must have fallen off the map. The queue on the beach - dive bombers and bullets. Oh dear, yes. The camp was like breathing out for the first time in months."

(p.19)

He is endowed with as much individuality as is necessary to fulfil his role. He is polite, pleasant, non-descript in appearance with a gentle sense of humour: his exchange with Matron about the therapeutic value of the basket-weaving he has obligingly agreed to undertake on her insistence that he must do something, amusingly and adroitly highlights the nature of his predicament:

Matron : What is it? (re: shapeless piece of basketry)  
 Brown : Basket work.  
 Matron : But what is it for?  
 Brown : Therapy.  
 Matron : You're making fun of me.  
 Brown : It is functional on one level only. If that.  
You'd like me to make a sort of laundry basket and lower myself in it out of the window. That would be functional on 2 levels. At least.  
 (Regarding the mess sadly) And I'm not even blind. Ladies and gentlemen - a failure! Now I suppose you'll start asking me questions again.

(p.12)

Above all, Brown is likeable (as Matron grudgingly admits(p.15)).

The psychiatrist thinks so too. Stoppard tries to control the audience's sympathy for Brown as an individual by emphasising the ambiguity

of Brown's situation, its latent irony - it is the character's predicament which concerns him more than the individual character himself. It is significant, however, that despite the playwright's insistence on objectivity we do become interested in Brown as an individual and we do care about his success or failure. Part of the reason for this lies in the dynamic nature of the drama itself - on the screen (or on the stage) Brown becomes more than a figure in an equation and much depends on the actor's contribution in performance, his ability to suggest a credible personality. Another reason must lie in the fact that Brown's predicament touches a raw nerve in all of us. His name itself (whilst affording opportunity for humour in a detective story) emphasises the idea that he is not exceptional or alone. His problem may be heightened for the sake of the drama but it is recognisable, shared by many. Stoppard's choice of situation, therefore, is of paramount importance to the play's success. It is the situation which provides a dramatic illustration - or metaphor - complementing the theme itself. Stoppard's skill in identifying the situation which will best serve his theme is crucial to all his plays. It is this reciprocal relationship of form and content which attracted most critical attention when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead first appeared and it is the same relationship for which the novel strives. The early television and radio plays are successful exercises in the same field, but If You're Glad I'll Be Frank differs from A Separate Peace in that it makes greater use of the medium for which it was conceived, as an element of its composition. Although it has been staged professionally on at least one occasion, (2)  
If You're Glad I'll Be Frank is very much a play for radio.

From the very first sounds introducing Scene One the play arouses aural expectations: the familiar sounds of dialling a telephone number are followed by the equally familiar speaking clock voice announcing

the time. The caller's identification of the speaking clock voice as his wife Gladys is totally unexpected and amusing and immediately introduces a new dimension. On the assumption that the speaking clock voice belongs to a woman seated in the Post Office, answering telephone enquiries about the time, Stoppard examines various aspects of society's preoccupation with time and the related issues of order and routine. The telephone caller is Frank Jenkins, a bus driver. His attempts to reach his estranged wife, Gladys, whose voice he recognises when checking up on the time, provides the comic framework for the examination of a decidedly unfunny theme - the individual trapped by time and incapable of living.

The scenes are brief and swiftly-moving; each scene advances Frank's search and invites laughter whilst simultaneously reinforcing the theme of the tyranny of time and order. Scene 2, for example, charts the arrival at work of the Post Office staff - Gladys's colleagues. With the sounds of Big Ben beginning "its nine am routine" the Porter takes his place by the entrance and greets each arrival. The employees arrive in ascending order of rank. They greet first the Porter, then the First Lord himself - Lord Coot. Stoppard exploits the comic technique of repetition and variation to introduce his play's main theme by reinforcing the idea of hierarchy and routine within the employees' relationships. There is an amusing circular movement to the routine as the First Lord's friendly, informal greeting echoes Myrtle's:

Porter	:	Morning, Mrs Trelawney.
Myrtle	:	Hello, Tommy.
Porter	:	Morning, Mr Mortimer.
Mr Mortimer	:	Good morning, Tom.
Porter	:	Good morning, Mr Courtenay-Smith.
Mr Courtenay-Smith	:	Morning, Mr Thompson.
Porter	:	Good morning, Sir John.
Sir John	:	Ah, Thompson.
Porter	:	Good morning, my Lord.
1st Lord	:	Morning, Tommy. Anything to report?

The humour is further emphasised by the repetition of the same sound effects as the opening and closing of the street door - "on the first, third, fifth, seventh and ninth strokes of Big Ben respectively" - lets in sounds of street traffic and Big Ben. The second, fourth, sixth and eighth strokes are heard through the closed door and the whole sequence is amusing in its clockwork precision. The varying moods of each arrival run parallel to their degree of intimacy and formality - they move from the gay Myrtle, the tired Mortimer, a vague Courtenay-Smith and an aloof Sir John to the friendly and conspiratorial First Lord. The sequence then goes into its second movement as the employees greet the First Lord but this time it begins with formality (as Myrtle and Lord Coot address each other) and proceeds by various degrees to the informality of equals in rank of Sir John and Lord Coot:

Myrtle	:	Good morning, your Lordship.
1st Lord	:	Good morning, Mrs Trelawney.
Mr Mortimer	:	Good morning, my Lord.
1st Lord	:	Good morning, ah, Mortimer.
Mr Courtenay-Smith	:	Good morning, Lord Coot.
1st Lord	:	Good morning, Mr Courtenay-Smith.
Sir John	:	What ho, Cooty.
1st Lord	:	Morning, Jack.

This ritual is then interrupted by an unexpected voice - Beryl Bligh, a replacement for the First Lord's secretary, whose name (significantly) he cannot remember and who apparently "cracked...at 1.53 am."(p.9) The secretary's break-down is reported unemotionally and with meticulous accuracy regarding time. Thus with a joke, Stoppard introduces the idea that everyone suffers some anxiety regarding time. Gladys and Frank are not alone in their dilemma. Lord Coot's main concern is the regular functioning of the Post Office services so he and Beryl synchronize their watches before beginning the continuous check on the Telephone Services.

Sound effects, the telephone Time signal, effect a smooth transition from Scene Two to Scene Three. An unexpected change of perspective,

however, alerts the listener's attention for the Time signal and the speaking clock voice are now heard direct, not through the 'phone as is the listener's usual experience. Further dislocation of expectations follows after ten seconds when Gladys' internal monologue in an identifiably working class voice is heard parallel to her "classless" speaking clock voice:

Gladys:

...At the third stroke it will  
be nine two and fifty seconds...  
(PIP PIP PIP)

...At the third stroke it will  
be nine three precisely.  
(PIP PIP PIP)

Or to put it another way,  
three minutes past nine,  
precisely, though which  
nine in particular, I don't  
say, so what's precise  
about that?...

...nine three and ten seconds...  
(PIP PIP PIP)

Aurally the effect at the introduction of Gladys' internal monologue is very striking. (One imagines dialling GOD for the Post Office's dial-a-Bible-reading-service and hearing instead a voice in an unexpected idiom advocating atheism). Gladys' speech, halfway between verse and prose, alerts the listener's attention to her perspective on time and reinforces the ideas so amusingly presented in the preceding scene.

Gladys' role as custodian of time has reinforced her awareness that time, in terms that humans can understand it, is meaningless. Its infinite nature puts it beyond the limits of human comprehension, "reducing the life-size to nothing - it upsets the scale you live by". Gladys' scale of reference has been destroyed with the result that her whole perspective, or outlook on life is out of focus. She has realised, like Lord Malquist, that:

"People are not the world, they are merely a recent and transitory product of it. The world is ten million years old. If you think of that period condensed into one year

beginning on 1st January, then people do not make their appearance in it until 31st December; or, to be more precise, in the last 40 seconds of that day."

(3)

Malquist is able to "withdraw with style" from the chaos this implies; Gladys has no escape. She did try to avoid the world altogether by entering a convent - just as Brown in A Separate Peace tried to enter a hospital and monastery - but was denied this refuge because of her lack of commitment. The impossibility of escape, the impasse in her dilemma is compounded by her job which appears to have imprisoned her in time itself. Once again, the situation in which Stoppard places his character best illustrates the ambiguity of her predicament.

Gladys's job involves keeping track of time, punctuating time by numbering the passing seconds, trying to contain time in units humanly comprehensible. She has herself, meanwhile, withdrawn from life - she has left home and her husband Frank and appears to spend 24 hours a day at her station. This distance from life itself contributes to her perspective on time and she sees that in "real" (i.e. cosmic) terms, she and her function are useless. She regards with irony human beings still unaware of their own insignificance:

"They dial for 20 seconds' worth of time  
and hurry off contained within it  
until the next correction,  
with no sense of its enormity,  
no sense of their scurrying insignificance." (p.17) They  
confuse man-made clocks with time itself:  
"luminous, anti-magnetic,  
fifteen-jewelled self-winding,  
grandfather, cuckoo, electric  
shock-dust-and waterproofed,  
chiming;  
it counts for nothing against the scale of time." (p.16)

Gladys has a wider perspective on time which people have for their own convenience, "divided up into ticks and tocks." Her job as the speaking clock has awakened her to the idea that it would make no difference to time if she stopped altogether:

"Silence is the sound of time passing.  
 Don't ask when the pendulum began to swing.  
 Because there is no pendulum.  
 It's only the clock that goes tick tock  
 and never the time that chimes.  
 It's never the time that stops." (p.18)

Like other Stoppard characters, she feels so overwhelmed by the humanly incomprehensible that she is emotionally paralysed. In Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead the two attendant lords, uncertain of their part in the whole design, play games to pass the time; in Albert's Bridge the philosopher fills his days by painting a bridge which will always require re-painting; in this play Gladys can only give way to despair.

However, a glimmer of hope is provided by Frank, the bus-driver husband whom she deserted. She recalls a time when they were happy together, before she became aware of the eternity of time. If Frank can reach her in the Post Office tower where she is imprisoned by time, there might be hope for her. Human contact, human relationships in which the individual is wanted and accepted for himself/herself would affirm his/her existence in the face of the inhuman, vast design. As in other Stoppard plays and the novel, the marriage relationship serves as a metaphor for such contact.

Even as the hope is introduced, the difficulty is compounded for it appears that Frank is trapped in his own impasse. Although the reasons for Gladys leaving her husband in the first place (and thereby precipitating her present dilemma) are not discussed, it is clear that they were associated, appropriately enough for the play's theme, with his attitude to time; the quality that drew them together at the start of their relationship was primarily responsible for its failure:

"He took his timetable seriously  
 Frank.  
 You could set your clock by him." (p.19-20)

His wooing, it appears, was conducted according to schedule:

"His bus passed my window twice a day,  
on the route he had then,  
every day, with a toot and a wave  
and was gone."

Frank too is an illustration of a victim of time. It regulates his existence. Even his joke about their names - which gives the play its title, reinforces by its rhythms and symmetry, the play's concern with order. This is amusingly and poignantly demonstrated throughout the play as Frank tries desperately to reach his wife without departing from a strict schedule. The narrative and sub-text are thereby interrelated; comedy and idea are complementary. It simply does not occur to Frank to break out of the superimposed rules of time, to act independently. Similarly Gladys is afraid to upset the accepted order by replying directly to his pleading on the 'phone:

"But how can I reply?  
I'd bring the whole thing down with a cough,  
stun them with a sigh..." (p.23)

Instead Frank tries to accommodate his search for Gladys to the pressures of his schedule; it is this same preoccupation with time and routine which, paradoxically, saves him from Gladys's despair, and which is amusingly reflected in the frantic remonstrances of Ivy, his conductress, every time he makes an unscheduled stop. Frank's earnest assurances highlight both the comedy and the pathos of their predicament:

"It's all right, I got 90 seconds ahead going  
round the park..." (p.21)

The absurdity of the situation is marvellously reflected in Frank's anxious enquiry about the time on first speaking to his newly-found wife: (p.14)

Frank : Keep your chin up, Glad - you can hear me  
can't you? I'll be giving you another ring  
later - Goodbye, Gladys - oh, Gladys - what's  
the time now?

Gladys : Nine fourteen precisely -

Much of the play's comedy derives from Frank's frustrated attempts. This often depends on easily recognisable situations and idioms and - appropriately for a radio play - relies heavily on the impact of sound and repetition. Frank's confrontations with the porters, for example, are based on the comic technique of misunderstanding and on the conflict between the petty official savouring his temporary authority at the expense of the comic hero in a hurry. In the stage directions introducing these scenes, Stoppard emphasises that the sound effects must set the scene very clearly and simply:

"Scene 8 - In the street Frank's bus comes to a rather abrupt halt, the door of his cab opens, slams shut as he runs across the pavement and through a door. He is breathless and in a frantic hurry."

His next attempts gain an extra comic dimension by mere repetition:

"Scenes 9 and 12: Frank's bus draws up once more, same slam, same feet, same door, same frenzy."

The point is made, very obviously, and part of its effectiveness lies in the recognition by the audience of the conventional nature of the technique and the repetition. It resembles the effect intended by the stage direction in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (Act III) which establishes the fact that the scene is on a boat and insists that the point should be "well made and more so."

Repetition and variation in Frank's confrontations with the two porters in Scenes 8 and 9 are exploited for their comic potential and allow the Director and actors to exercise their own inventiveness. In the original BBC production, for example, the 2nd porter was immediately distinguished from his colleague by aural clues - he had a strong northern accent and his speech delivery suggested he was drunk. (Stoppard's stage directions make no mention of these details of accent and drunkenness.) The repetition itself adds another comic dimension and at the same time these scenes focus on yet another

aspect of our society's preoccupation with order and routine for Frank cannot get past the porters because he has no identifiable position in the world over which they stand guard. When, on the third attempt, Frank breaks through this first barrier and into Mortimer's office he unwittingly finds himself playing in another scene - an office affair between Myrtle and Mortimer. Talking at cross purposes, Mortimer believing Frank to be Myrtle's husband, the office affair is brought to light. The sequence is repeated with variations when Frank bursts unannounced into a board meeting and misunderstanding leads Sir John to reveal that he too has had an affair with the same Myrtle:

"Don't you come here with your nasty little  
innuendoes, Trelawney - whatever you may have heard  
about the Bournemouth Conference, Myrtle and I - "  
(p.29)

Scenes are brief and swiftly moving. They are efficiently and effectively established by employing an easily recognisable, appropriate idiom. Gladys's scenes for example, begin with the Time signal or TIM voice and her personal voice is half prose - half verse; Frank's enquiries at the Post Office are introduced by the sound effects of his frantic rush from bus to door; the boardroom scene opens with a deliberately laboured joke - "Well, gentlemen, in bringing the board meeting to a close, and I'm sure you're all as bored as I am, (chuckle, chuckle, hear, hear)...."(p.28); the utterances of "Hear Hear" are delivered almost ritualistically and emphasise the stock nature of the meeting in progress.

Each scene contributes to the accumulating irony of the main theme and it is upon this development that the effectiveness of the play depends. There is no happy ending or definitive answer to Gladys's problem. By the end of the play Gladys succeeds only in keeping despair at bay. She breaks down temporarily but fortunately (for

the Post Office) the First Lord sets her back on the rails:

Gladys : At the third stroke I don't know what time it is and I don't care, because it doesn't go tick tock at all, it just goes and I have seen - I have seen infinity!

1st Lord : Mrs Jenkins!

Gladys(sniffing)

: I can't go on!

1st Lord : Come on now, this isn't like you at all... Think of the public, Mrs Jenkins ... Come on now...at the third stroke... (p.31)

The familiar sounds and rhythms restore the status quo but Gladys's inner voice is not completely conquered:

Gladys(direct now) :

At the third stroke it will be five thirty-eight and ten seconds...

He thinks he's God...

(PIP PIP PIP)

At the third stroke...  
(Fading out)

As in previous scenes, the aural impact of hearing the speaking clock direct, not via a telephone, is very effective; the familiar and the unexpected are juxtaposed as the personal voice questions the official, impersonal statement.

It is not clear whether Frank will persist with his search in the Post Office - the First Lord appears to have convinced him that the speaking clock cannot be his wife: "My dear fellow - there's no Gladys - we wouldn't trust your wife with the time - it's a machine, I thought everyone knew that...."(p.30) This brief surfacing of common sense makes even more effective the surreal humour of what follows: Miss Bligh urgently calls the First Lord's attention to the malfunctioning of the Speaking Clock and he proceeds to put Gladys back on the rails. The circular movement of the play suggests that Frank and Gladys can no longer help each other even though they share, essentially, the same problem with time. Husband and wife move in concentric circles and although their attempts to reach each other invite our sympathy, their dilemma invites our laughter. The latter is essential

if we are to achieve the distanced perspective they so sadly lack. The radio play ends, as it began, with the sound of the speaking clock but with the important difference that the listener's perspective on the familiar sounds has been sharply re-focused. They now hear the sounds as if direct and are awake to the tragic dimension of the human relationship with time. The choice of situation has been vital to the successful illustration of this relationship and is no less effective for being basically ludicrous. Once the premise is established of a human identity for the speaking clock, the play develops and remains faithful to its own coherent logic. The play which was commissioned as part of a series about people with unusual jobs demonstrates (and ensures our sympathy for) the human element in the vast apparently impersonal and largely incomprehensible design of existence. More than one author before Stoppard had referred to the de-humanising treatment of the individual within a large corporation; Stoppard exploits a similar situation to serve his own thematic and artistic considerations regarding the individual vis-à-vis life. Hamlet was to provide him with an even more rewarding framework for a fuller, more philosophical approach to the same problem in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead.

CHAPTER III      Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead

(The first performance was given in a slightly shortened form on 24 August 1966 at Cranston Street Hall, Edinburgh, by the Oxford Theatre Group as part of the "fringe" of the Edinburgh Festival. First professional production: 11 April 1967, Old Vic Theatre.)

Jesus Christ and Hamlet are two of the most written-about figures of all time. The life of each, whether historical or literary, touches each generation and has bequeathed to the world a wealth of material which by its very nature demands that each generation investigates it anew. Few people in the Western world will be ignorant of the former and Stoppard could depend on the fact that few theatre-goers would have been completely ignorant of Hamlet when they visited Cranston Street Hall, Edinburgh on 24 August 1966 where Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead was first performed as part of the "fringe" of the Edinburgh Festival. Of all Shakespeare's plays Hamlet is probably the most frequently staged and most often quoted. One of the first reviewers describing the relationship between Stoppard's play and Shakespeare's observed the latter was "the story we know so well".<sup>(1)</sup> Many others who have perhaps only rarely visited a theatre would nevertheless be able to quote, with a variety of self-mocking or serious inflexions, the first line of that play's most famous soliloquy, "To be, or not to be, that is the question." In fact, the "question" is so firmly embedded in the public consciousness that cigar manufacturers in the 20th century could name their product after the speaker and base an expensive television advertising campaign on the idea that their product provides solace from the troublesome problems of life: a man trapped with an open window in a car-wash (a peculiarly 20th century phenomenon) would bear his misfortune stoically so long as he could reach for his cigars, because "Happiness

is a cigar called Hamlet." Music derived from Bach provides the theme tune and the campaign has been running for 22 years on an identical theme, making 'Hamlet' the best selling cigar brand, accounting for 40% of all cigar sales in the U.K. (2)

"Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark" is an analogy which has crossed the divide between art and life as an example of futility or loss of direction. Yet in his own play based on Hamlet Stoppard relegates the Prince to a minor role and chooses for his protagonists two minor attendant lords whom Olivier, as has been frequently noted, even excluded from his film of the play. But Hamlet - both the character and the play - is vital to Stoppard's characters and play. Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are hapless enough to lose Hamlet and are lost without him. Guildenstern bewails this fact when he complains after the pirates' attack that without the Prince their journey is pointless: "We need Hamlet for our release!" The audience too would be lost without some knowledge of Shakespeare's play. In the unlikely event of their complete ignorance of one of the classics of the stage, they would be able to respond to few of the play's layers of dramatic dialogue. They would enjoy the word play and the vaudeville comic routines but would lose much of the action of the sub-text where philosophical and metaphysical questions are debated; they would lose those aspects of the play which give a new life to old routines and which ensured that a young dramatist's first stage play was taken up by the National Theatre who gave the first professional production on 11 April 1967 at the Old Vic. Influential theatre critics hailed Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead as an important arrival on the British stage. Ronald Bryden writing for The Observer declared it to be "the most brilliant debut by a young playwright since John Arden's"; (3) Harold Hobson writing for The Sunday Times declared it the most important event in the British professional theatre since

Pinter's The Birthday Party in 1958 and congratulated the audience on their enthusiastic reception of the play - "for not to appreciate it is to merit a gamma in the College of Theatrical Enjoyment and a gamma minus in the University of Life"<sup>(4)</sup> - an interesting perspective on the situation, reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's observations to the first night audience of Lady Windermere's Fan, congratulating them for their good sense in applauding his play.<sup>(5)</sup>

Oral tradition maintains that American visitors 'doing' British theatre would see Hamlet and comment that it is full of quotations. Actors and directors involved in each new production of the play - one of the most frequently produced plays in the Shakespeare canon - traditionally express the difficulties encountered in approaching the many purple passages which some members of the audience practically quote with the actor during the performance. With great dexterity, due largely to his unexpected choice of perspective, Stoppard ensures that his play is not submerged by the stature, familiarity and complexities of Hamlet, but exploits it as a base upon which to construct an independent, new play. Hamlet becomes a framework against which to bounce ideas and within which to engage the audience in levels of dramatic dialogue according to the depth of their individual knowledge of Hamlet and their interest in the perennial philosophical questions which trouble each generation, every man and woman with the ability to think and reason. Apparently eschewing the more prominent passages in Hamlet, he chooses instead to approach the play via line near the end: the English Ambassador, whose sole speech this is and who serves merely to tie up loose ends in the narrative,

reports: our affairs from England come too late.  
The ears are senseless that should give us hearing,  
To tell him his commandment is fulfilled  
That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.  
Where should we have our thanks?

(V.ii 369-373 )

Horatio's reply makes the point that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are relatively unimportant to the central tragedy, mere pawns between Hamlet and Claudius. Hamlet abandons them to their death with no more than a passing thought:

Why, man, they did make love to this employment.  
They are not near my conscience.

(V.ii 57-8)

Shakespeare makes little attempt to differentiate between the two lords since they are unimportant - a point highlighted by Stoppard who indicates that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's problems with identity derive not so much from any fact that they are similar (for he differentiates clearly between the two characters) as from the sense of their unimportance. Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead must be chiefly responsible for the tendency of many productions of Hamlet in the 1970's and 1980's to gain some comic mileage from Claudius' confusion of their names when welcoming them to Elsinore in II.2. (There were numerous travesties of Hamlet in the 19th century which parodied particular productions and performances and which could have been expected to seize on any such confusion for comic effect but there is no indication that any confusion of the two characters existed in 19th century productions of the play. Indeed, the fact that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were sometimes omitted altogether from the travesties suggests they were considered unimportant).

It is an interesting reversal of roles whereby the later play contributes a new light to the understanding of its source play. The names Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are associated as often with Stoppard as with Shakespeare, a fact which led to the absurd situation where a German audience would applaud the entry of these two minor characters in a production of Hamlet when Shakespeare's play was performed on alternate nights with Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead (Young Vic production, directed by M. Bogdanov in 1979). Equally incongruous

was the advice given by a reviewer that anyone unfamiliar with Hamlet should read that play in order to enjoy Stoppard's.<sup>(6)</sup> Happily most audiences do not react in the extreme way of the German audience mentioned above for Stoppard's aim was not to present a critique on Hamlet or to take his characters out of context. His selection of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for his protagonists was determined primarily by their situation, by the fact that "in Shakespeare's context [they] don't really know what they are doing. The little they are told is mainly lies, and there's no reason to suppose that they ever find out why they are killed."<sup>(7)</sup> Stoppard felt that this situation had "enormous dramatic and comic potential" and Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead proves this to be the case. It is a particularly rewarding choice of perspective because it raises questions to place alongside those presented by Hamlet itself. Like Hamlet it offers no definitive answers.

By choosing to concentrate on these two, attendant lords who, as T.S. Eliot's Prufrock commented of himself, "will do/To swell a progress, start a scene or two" in Hamlet's tragedy, Stoppard highlights rather than ignores Hamlet itself. The deeper the audience's knowledge of Shakespeare's play, the more appreciative will be their response to Stoppard's, as will be demonstrated by examples below. Indeed, those who bring to the modern play a sounder knowledge of Shakespeare, will appreciate the especial relevance of the theatrical metaphor which is prominent in Shakespeare's comedies as well as the tragedies and which is encapsulated in a speech as well-known as Hamlet's most famous soliloquy: "All the world's a stage,/And all the men and women merely players." (As You Like It(II.vii.139)). However, Stoppard's audiences do not have to be Shakespearean scholars in order to be able to engage in more than one level of the dramatic dialogue. The experience of the event of the performance itself,

its visual/theatrical impact engages the audience in the dialectic. By enlisting the aid of yet another source, he opens other routes to the sub-text, as the examination of the contribution of Beckett's Waiting For Godot will explore. At this stage it should be noted that at the heart of Stoppard's play lie many of the elements which are central to the debate on Hamlet: Hamlet's deliberations on the nature of existence, his preoccupation with the duality of man's nature, the role of destiny and the ambivalence about action and delay, the concern with being and seeming and the theatrical metaphor which pervades the play. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, like Hamlet, complain of their "miscasting". Hamlet, against his nature, finds he must be an avenging hero: "The time is out of joint: O cursed spite/That ever I was born to set it right"(I.v.188-189). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who are further removed from the centre of events, are told even less about their roles and are expected to perform without understanding their role: "it is not enough. To be told so little - to such an end - and still, finally, to be denied an explanation."(p.89) Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead is a meta-physical comedy which brings to the fore another of Hamlet's observations: Contemplating the indignities now offered to the skull of a man who was once so full of life, he comments, "Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come; make her laugh at that." (V. i 192-5) Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead accepts the challenge and rouses many a laugh at the expense of the powerlessness of its protagonists faced with the bare facts of man's ineluctable destiny. The title and our own knowledge of Hamlet ensures that there is no ambiguity about this destiny. Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's end is determined before they toss the first coin - the game with which their story begins. The audience knows how the play must end and there is no

question of their being intrigued by any detective story element; Stoppard cannot depart from the Hamlet framework and retain the interest in the situation he has set out to explore. But he can re-direct the audience's attention and perspective on the familiar. How do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern react to the situation and how do they see it? How can the playwright occupy them in between their involvement in Hamlet? The technical or mechanical aspects of the integration of the two narratives contributes to various levels of the dramatic dialogue because the choice of situation is of integral importance. Hamlet serves Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead both thematically and structurally and is used as a vehicle, much as Shakespeare himself used the revenge tradition for his own ends. The chief interest lies in how Rosencrantz and Guildenstern pass the interim, in the event of the performance in progress. Stoppard exploits their situation to draw attention to the nature of the play as an event in the theatre, to the audience's presence and their awareness of the role of the characters before them. When these characters in their turn draw attention to their own role as spectators, philosophical and metaphysical issues are explored. The pointless prospect of actors without an audience, characters uncertain of their own identity or role or even the main plot, expands to embrace mankind in general. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's uncertainty of their position or role in the court of Denmark reflects their sense of their position in the wider scheme of things. Much humour is derived from the mechanical aspects of the interweaving of the Hamlet plot with that of Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead, but this relationship is only a means, not an end in itself; Stoppard is not the first to use a Shakespeare play as the basis for his own; the uniqueness lies in the method and aim. Over the centuries various writers have tried their hand at adapting, re-writing or "improving" Shakespeare's plays -

John Dryden and Nahum Tate among them, with All For Love, (1678) and Richard II (1681) respectively. Others have been inspired by Shakespeare's plays to create independent, new work - Edward Bond's Lear, for example; Men of the theatre from Sir William Davenant (1660's) to Henry Irving (1890's) and John Barrymore (1920's) presented their own versions of Hamlet. In fact, George Bernard Shaw was so pleasantly surprised by Forbes Robertson's production of Hamlet at the Lyceum in October 1897 that he could remark ironically, "the effect of this success, coming after that of Mr Alexander's experiment with a Shakespearean version of As You Like It, makes it almost probable that we shall presently find managers vying with each other in offering the public as much of the original Shakespearean stuff as possible..."<sup>(8)</sup>

19th century burlesque writers could use Shakespeare's plays as a basis for their entertainments because Shakespeare's plays were firmly established in the repertoire of the legitimate theatres. Therefore particular trends, productions or individual performances could be parodied, particular passages or phrases travestied. No fewer than 10 burlesques on Hamlet are included in Stanley Wells' 19th Century Shakespeare Burlesques.<sup>(9)</sup> W.S. Gilbert's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (printed 1874, 1st performance 3 June 1891) differed in that it contained less direct parody and anticipated Stoppard's play in its choice of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as the prominent characters but the two plays have little else in common. In Gilbert's burlesque there is no murder (except of a literary nature) and Hamlet is the King's son. The King's Crime, the guilty secret he attempts to keep from the world, is a 5 Act tragedy, so bad that even sychophants were reduced to helpless laughter. The prince is a comic introspective figure "whose tendency to soliloquy has so alarmed his mother" that she sends for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to entertain him. These two are bright, assertive characters - Rosencrantz the more so -

and they devise a plan to remove Hamlet who is engaged to Ophelia (against her will) so that she may marry Rosencrantz, her childhood sweetheart. It can be seen from this that there is no intention to explore Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's situation within the context of Hamlet and via comic conventions, wherein lies the originality of Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead. Gilbert's play also differs from that of other burlesque writers in that it seems less concerned to incite laughter at the expense of popular trends in productions of Hamlet, than to express an almost philistine revolt against the reverence accorded to Shakespeare's play. Relegating the prince to a minor role and portraying him as a fool may have been the main reason behind the decision to look on the two attendant lords as the heroes. Ophelia's response to Guildenstern's "And what's he like?" provides telling information about contemporary practices:

Alike for no two seasons at a time.  
 Sometimes he's tall - sometimes he's very short -  
 Now with black hair - now with a flaxen wig -  
 Sometimes an English accent - then a French -  
 Then English with a strong provincial "burr".  
 Once an American and once a Jew -  
 But Danish never, take him how you will!  
 And strange to say, whate'er his tongue may be,  
 Whether he's dark or flaxen - English - French -  
 Though we're in Denmark, A.D., ten-six-two-  
 He always dresses as King James the First!

Guildenstern sees signs of madness in this problem with identity, a madness amusingly projected onto the Prince himself, and there is a feeling of exasperation in Ophelia's reply on one of the play's vexed questions:

Opinion is divided. Some men hold  
 That he's the sanest, far, of all sane men -  
 Some that he's really sane, but shamming mad -  
 Some that he's really mad, but shamming sane -  
 Some that he will be mad, some that he was -  
 Some that he couldn't be. But on the whole  
 (As far as I can make out what they mean)  
 The favourite theory's somewhat like this:  
 Hamlet is idiotically sane  
 With lucid intervals of lunacy.

(19th Century Shakespeare Burlesques  
 p.249)

This absurd conclusion might seem to reflect the conclusion in Stoppard's play that Hamlet is "stark raving sane", but the similarity is fortuitous. There is no indication that Stoppard was familiar with the Gilbert play even though his own developed from a burlesque, Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Meet King Lear, which he wrote while on a Ford Foundation Grant in Berlin in 1965. According to one of the adjudicators this burlesque concerned two attendant lords "who spent a lot of time tossing coins in the air and receiving a visit from a hoary old self-denigrating gent called King Lear."<sup>(10)</sup> In its burlesque form, it appeared to have little to recommend it to serious attention. But burlesque developed into comedy of ideas as Stoppard became interested in the philosophical and metaphysical implications of the situation of two of Hamlet's minor characters.

"The transition from one play to the other was an attempt to find a solution to a practical problem - that if you write a play about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in England you can't count on people knowing who they are and how they got there. So one tended to get back into the end of Hamlet a bit. But the explanations are always partial and ambiguous, so one went back a bit further into the plot, and as soon as I started doing this I totally lost interest in England. The interesting thing was them at Elsinore."<sup>(11)</sup>

Ultimately the use he makes of Hamlet differs fundamentally from that made by Gilbert. Stoppard entertains his audience with a new perspective on the questions raised in Shakespeare's play; Gilbert rather mocks the popularity and accepted status of the same, an impression reinforced by the fate he decrees for the Prince of Denmark - he will be sent away to England (unaccompanied by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) :

"And men will rise or sink in good esteem  
According as they worship him, or slight him!"

Gilbert's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are assertive, enterprising and very much alive at the end. Stoppard's decision to examine their predicament within Shakespeare's context would seem to owe little,

if anything, to W.S. Gilbert and more to Oscar Wilde's observations in De Profundis that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are "little cups that can hold so much and no more....They are merely out of their sphere: that is all."<sup>(12)</sup> For Stoppard's characters never succeed in understanding their position in the court of Denmark, let alone in the wider scheme of things. They are presented as minor actors uncertain of their roles and in this aspect Stoppard's play recalls James Saunders' Next Time I'll Sing To You (1962 Questors Theatre, Ealing). Saunders, who was the senior member of the group of playwrights on the trip to Berlin on the Ford Foundation Grant in 1966, provided a framework for his existential comedy by presenting on stage a group of actors apparently involved in a play without any traditional, formal dramatic structure. They raise Pirandellian questions about their own identity and are advised by Rudge (the author amongst them) to "act natural." In response to Lizzie's persistent questioning about her role he demands, "So you want to know who you are. And what special virtue do you think you possess that you should be granted this piece of knowledge denied to the rest of us?" He insists that he has no real control and is himself attempting, through his play about the Hermit, to understand a similar question: "All I want is to understand the purpose of existence; of one man - not of the population of Liverpool, you understand, just of one man. Is that so unreasonable?"(p.68-9) Rosencrantz and Guildenstern repeatedly make similar demands about their own roles but there is no answer as apparently straightforward as the question. At the end of their play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, tired and drained, give up the struggle to understand. They were called at dawn and their day is nearing its end:

Ros. : All right, then. I don't care. I've had enough.  
To tell you the truth, I'm relieved.  
(And he disappears from view)

Guil. struggles a little longer to find the answer, the perspective that might shed light on the whole but he too soon surrenders:

Guil. : Our names shouted in a certain dawn...a message  
 ...a summons...  
 There must have been a moment, at the beginning,  
 where we could have said - no. But somehow  
 we missed it...

But such moments are not marked out like red letter days in a diary and the audience appreciates the irony in his hope,

Well, we'll know better next time. Now you  
 see me, now you - (And disappears) (p.91)

The Hamlet framework enables Stoppard to construct levels of dramatic irony. At the same time it permits both playwright and audience to maintain a level of objectivity when contemplating the characters' painfully human dilemma. The suffering of the attendant lords is as real to them as is Hamlet's suffering to him and their tragedy is as poignant. What it lacks in dignity it makes up in pathos. Hamlet at least attained some understanding and acceptance of the human condition before he died and he died a man of action, leaving his mark upon the world. During the course of their play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern succeed only in moving from one time-consuming exercise to another, paralysed into inactivity and fear of taking the initiative or exerting some control over their own lives by fear of what fate has in store. The Player recognises them as "fellow artists" on the same road but Guildenstern complains, "We don't know how to act." (p.48) They are unable to follow the Player's suggestion that they "act natural." For most of the play they see themselves as spectators and draw attention to their predicament. They wait in the wings of the Hamlet action which subsumes or discards them in a manner which to them appears wholly arbitrary. After the first of these incidents, their interview with the King and Queen, they are left to their own devices but are powerless to act, their

confusion and loss of control reflected in the fragmentation of their language which contrasts so strikingly with the Shakespearean blank verse which precedes:

Ros. : I want to go home.  
 Guil. : Don't let them confuse you.  
 Ros. : I'm out of my step here -  
 Guil. : We'll soon be home and high-dry and home - I'll-  
 Ros. : It's all over my depth -  
 Guil. : -I'll hie you home and -  
 Ros. : - out of my head -  
 Guil. : - dry you high and -  
 Ros. : (cracking, high)- over my step over my head body!-  
 I tell you it's all stopping to a death, it's  
 boding to a depth, stepping to a head, it's  
 all heading to a dead stop-  
 Guil. : (the nursemaid) There'...and we'll soon be home  
 and dry...and high and dry...(p.27)

Rosencrantz ventures, "Shouldn't we be doing something - constructive?" but Guildenstern scathingly retorts, "What did you have in mind?... A short, blunt human pyramid...?" Uncertain as they are of their role, they feel they cannot afford anything so arbitrary as action: "They've got us placed now - if we start moving around, we'll be chasing each other all night." Demonstrating their feeling that they have no control over the action Rosencrantz stands at the foot-lights and comments, "How very intriguing! (Turns) I feel like a spectator - an appalling prospect. The only thing that makes it bearable is the irrational belief that somebody interesting will come on in a minute..." On another occasion, looking for a way to fill up the time, Rosencrantz again taunts the audience with their own predicament when he shouts "Fire!" and comments contemptuously to Guildenstern, "Not a move. They should burn to death in their shoes." Later still Guildenstern observes of the audience, "They're waiting to see what we're going to do." The audience who still expect a reassuring tale with a beginning, middle and end will be as frustrated as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who still hope to hear an unambiguous explanation of their role.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's dilemma is one in which Stoppard is particularly interested and mirrors that of Moon, another spectator cast as a hero, in the novel published the same year as Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead. Their main failure, which they share with most of Stoppard's philosophers, is their inability to accept the fact of the unknowable and to connect with their world despite this fact. In Jumpers Stoppard would show his protagonist grappling with the ethical linguistic and religious ramifications of this dilemma. In Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead the Hamlet framework and Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's position within it enabled Stoppard to illustrate a metaphysical question as it affects two minor characters on the world stage. Like T.S. Eliot's Prufrock who has no illusions about his own stature - "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be" - Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are limited vessels:

- "a bit obtuse;  
At times indeed, almost ridiculous -  
Almost, at times, the Fool." (13)

Although George Moore is himself often ridiculous and he too fails in facing his world, he does nevertheless make marginally better progress than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern - at least theoretically with his attempts to justify the role of the irrational. Rosencrantz's anecdote about "a Christian, a Moslem and a Jew [who] chanced to meet in a closed carriage", whilst amusing in music-hall terms with its confusion of names and labels and its challenge to the audience's assumptions, serves to demonstrate that for him, the existence of Faith - or Faiths - provides little comfort; there is a sense of arbitrariness even here:

..."Silverstein!" cried the Jew, "Who's your friend?"...  
"His name's Abdullah", replied the Moslem, "but he's  
no friend of mine since he became a convert." (p.51)

Uncertainty about their position leads to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's preoccupation with ideas about the nature of illusion and reality. Rosencrantz is instinctively grappling with this problem with his anecdotes about types and labels. Guildenstern tries to be more objective and to approach the problem philosophically with his story about the sighting of a unicorn:

Guil. : A man breaking his journey between one place and another at a third place of no name, character, population or 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.14-15)

Significantly, the only person to converse with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in their own context is the Player, one whose craft depends on the manipulation of illusion and reality, and whose existence, like theirs, depends on the assumption that an audience is watching. He advises them to stop striving against the unknowable - "Uncertainty is the normal state. You're nobody special." (p.47) The players are themselves on their own journey and their direction is no clearer than that of the attendant lords: "We have no control. Tonight we play to the court. Or the night after. Or to the tavern. Or not." (p.18) He advises them to "act natural" : "You can't go through life questioning your situation at every turn." Rosencrantz would probably take this advice if he could but keep occupied, but the more intellectual Guildenstern rejects it as facile and worthless

dismissing the actor's experience and the actor's reality:

Player : In our experience, most things end in death.  
 Guil. : (fear, vengeance, scorn): Your experience!—Actors!  
 (He snatches a dagger from the Player's belt and holds the point 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—)  
 If we have a destiny, then so had he—and if this is ours, then that was his—and if there are no explanations for us, then let there be none for him—

(p.89)

This interesting and dramatic illustration of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's dilemma, provides tension and action on the surface whilst bringing into play various levels of audience response and pursuing the sub-text. For the audience is acutely aware of the fact that Guildenstern's single, desperate, spontaneous action, in a life otherwise paralysed with inactivity and fear of initiative, is not only misdirected but inherently mad and pointless: Murder will not help him get a firmer grip on life. Killing the Player would not have helped Guildenstern break out of his impasse; rather, it entrenches him further in the same. The knife is an actor's prop and it proves the Player right too. His death has been convincing and he modestly accepts the applause of his colleagues: "Oh, come, come, gentlemen - no flattery - it was merely competent-." The timing provides welcome comic relief as the players throw themselves wholeheartedly into various deaths to the accompaniment of a drum-roll. When the

music stops the light on the players goes out and they disappear. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are once more alone. Their journey is pointless and they submit to defeat because they have "lost" Hamlet in more ways than one. On a literal level, they have lost the character - Hamlet has tricked them with his exchange of letters, substituting his own letter for Claudius' original. On a deeper level they have lost their way in Hamlet the play. As Wilde observed in De Profundis, "Great passions are for the great of soul, and great events can be seen only by those who are on a level with them" - Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are so close to Hamlet yet fail to understand him and the problems with which he struggles. They cannot even learn by experience; Hamlet had valued the Players for the power of the illusion at their command. To Hamlet they are "the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time" but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fail to appreciate the validity of the Players' experience. There is a further layer of irony in the audience's recollection of the fact that the Players would not have been on the road again so soon, had it not been for the strength of their illusion - 'The Murder of Gonzago' had been too close to the truth for the King's liking. Stoppard emphasises the importance of this by having Rosencrantz and Guildenstern witness a rehearsal of the 'Gonzago' story which is interrupted by part of the nunnery scene from Hamlet(p.56) Members of the audience familiar with Hamlet will be reminded of the power of the 'illusion' in its reflection of Hamlet's own story; others may be bemused (as are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) but will nevertheless realise that there is some connection between the mime taking place downstage, and the Hamlet extracts which interrupt and follow it midstage.

Just as no review of a production of Hamlet will be particularly valuable if it fails to look at the central performance, so most

reviewers of Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead can be expected to mention the Player as well as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and in doing so they hint (often unintentionally) at the essential difference between him and the two more sympathetic protagonists. He lacks their pathos and vulnerability because he is content not to question; whereas they are likeable but ineffectual - a fact emphasised by their vaudeville-duo relationship - the Player's performance is more stylized: "splendidly artificial", of "ceremonial appearance", "sinister" and "hilariously cynical."<sup>(14)</sup> The performance of Graham Crowdon who created the part in the first National Theatre production and returned to it in 1975 was described as "resonant with remembered bravado, electric with contempt."<sup>(15)</sup> The same actor would later create another unquestioning, more sinister character as Archie Jumper in the first production of Jumpers (National Theatre, 2 February 1972 ).

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern differ from the Player in response but as regards their role as actors on the world stage they are essentially similar and their similarity is highlighted by simple comic routines and obvious word play; this entertains the audience whilst at the same time drawing attention to the dialectic of the sub-text and reinforcing the play's interest in the importance of relativity. They are all fellow artists on the same road - "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. (Bows again) Don't clap too loudly - it's a very old world." (p.16) Here again, levels of response come into play; everyone in the audience can appreciate the witty joke whether or not they recognise it as a typical vaudeville line; others for whom it carries resonances of Archie Rice in Osborne's The Entertainer ("Don't clap too loudly - it's a very old building") will register the idea of another actor down on his luck but one who does not react

as coolly as the Player to the sad change in the times in which he now works. Later the Player again emphasises their shared dilemma when he greets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with "Aha! All in the same boat then!" (p.82) as he and his troupe emerge from the barrels to join the other two on deck.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern resemble the Players most obviously in their role-playing games - the games themselves adding a further dimension to the play-within-the-play device. Ambivalently, as regards the question of illusion and reality, the only times Rosencrantz and Guildenstern come anywhere near the truth is when they are pretending to be someone else, examining the situation from another's perspective. At the point of despair, they embark on a comic routine of quick-fire exchanges which leads them to the truth:

Ros. : (furious): He won't know what we're talking about-What are we going to say?  
 Guil. : We say-Your majesty, we have arrived!  
 Ros. : (kingly): And who are you?  
 Guil. : We are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.  
 Ros. : (barks): Never heard of you!  
 Guil. : Well, we're nobody special-  
 Ros. : (regal and nasty): What's your game?  
 Guil. : We've got our instructions-  
 Ros. : First I've heard of it-  
 Guil. : (angry): Let me finish-(Humble) We've come from Denmark.  
 Ros. : What do you want?  
 Guil. : Nothing-we're delivering Hamlet-  
 Ros. : Who's he?  
 Guil. : (irritated): You've heard of him-  
 Ros. : Oh, I've heard of him all right and I want nothing to do with it.  
 Guil. : But-  
 Ros. : You march in here without so much as a by your leave and expect me to take in every lunatic you try to pass off with a lot of unsubstantiated-  
 Guil. : We've got a letter-  
 (Ros. snatches it and tears it open.)  
 Ros. : (efficiently): I see...I see...well, this seems to support your story such as it is-it is an exact command from the king of Denmark, for several different reasons, importing Denmark's health and England's too, that on the reading of this letter, without delay, I should have Hamlet's head cut off-!  
 (Guil. snatches the letter. Ros. doubletaking, snatches it back. Guil. snatches its half back. They read it together, and separate.)(Pause.)

Rosencrantz's comically over-enthusiastic performance in the role assigned to him does in fact, lead to the revelation of the truth. Characteristically, however, they cannot act on their discovery and a repetition of the same routine (leading this time to the letter demanding their death) reinforces the point. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern make little progress despite regular attempts to recap the situation in order to understand it better because they fail to add a little imagination to the bare facts and to connect with their world. In Act 1 their failure is amusingly presented by exploiting the comic technique of bathos or anti-climax:

Ros. : To sum up: your father, whom you love, dies, you are his heir, you come back to find that hardly was the corpse cold before his young brother popped on to his throne and into his sheets, thereby offending both legal and natural practice. Now why exactly are you behaving in this extraordinary manner?

Guil. : I can't imagine! (Pause) But that is well known, common property.

(p.36)

In Act II the Player tries with direct questions to help them progress from what is well known and often repeated - so much so, in fact, that it becomes almost meaningless - and to progress from there but they cannot:

Ros. : Hamlet is not himself, outside or in. We have to glean what afflicts him.

Guil. : He doesn't give much away.

Player : Who does, nowadays?

Guil. : He's-melancholy.

Player : Melancholy?

Ros. : Mad.

Player : How is he mad?

Ros. : Ah. (To Guil.) How is he mad?

Guil. : More morose than mad, perhaps.

Player : Melancholy.

Guil. : Moody.

Ros. : He has moods.

Player : Of moroseness?

Guil. : Madness. And yet.

Ros. : Quite.

Guil. : For instance.

Ros. : He talks to himself, which might be madness.

Guil. : If he didn't talk sense, which he does.

Ros. : Which suggests the opposite.

Player : Of what?

(Small pause.)

Like Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon in Waiting for Godot they cannot progress. Another attempt to recap leads to another swiftly-moving comic routine and the inevitable conclusion:

Guil. : I think I have it. A man talking sense to himself is no madder than a man talking nonsense not to himself.

Ros. : Or just as mad.

Guil. : Or just as mad.

Ros. : And he does both.

Guil. : So there you are.

Ros. : Stark raving sane.

(p.48-9)

When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are faced with their counterparts in the 'Murder of Gonzago' mime(p.60) they fail to identify their own roles; the audience's knowledge of Hamlet, reinforced by the staging/design, ensures that they do not make the same mistake: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are drawn forward towards the actors in the mime by the fact that the two Spies wear cloaks identical to their own. Their failure to connect is underlined by a well-known joke and familiar routine turned on its head:

Ros. : Well, if it isn't-!No, wait a minute, don't tell me-it's a long 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.... For a moment I thought-no, I don't know you, do I? Yes, I'm afraid you're quite wrong. You must have mistaken me for someone else.

The Player's breathless commentary on the play-within-the-play is no less pertinent for being melodramatically expressed: "Traitors hoist by their own petard? - or victims of the gods? We shall never know." Stoppard's treatment of their story inclines to the second view.

It is a rewarding perspective, this emphasis on minor characters whom others usually overlook. Much has been written about Hamlet and his dilemma but few have given more than a passing thought to the fate of the attendant lords who, through no fault of their own,

are involved in events beyond their ken. No young actor ever adds these two names to the list of role to which he aspires because, in Shakespeare's context, they are nonentities. The usual practice is to present them as villains, disloyal to Hamlet and to accept without question Hamlet's criticism that "they did make love to this employment", as excuse for his lack of compunction for their death in England. Now that Stoppard's Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead is itself established as a modern classic, one wonders how much it was responsible for the conscious decision to explore Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's relationship with Hamlet in a recent workshop production of Hamlet directed by Cicely Berry with the National Theatre as part of the work of their Education Department. The Director says she felt that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern should be strong characters and in this production they are clearly differentiated; (16) Guildenstern grows more antagonistic towards Hamlet especially in scenes where, as far as he can see (III 2 & III 3) Hamlet's behaviour threatens law and order. It is a rewarding choice of perspective, recalling Wilde's comment in De Profundis that all that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern understand of Hamlet's behaviour is the breach of court etiquette. Guildenstern's resultant support of the King can be seen to deserve Hamlet's summary dismissal of their death. Stoppard's choice of perspective bears a natural affinity to Samuel Beckett's idiosyncratic perspective on life and to Beckett's Waiting For Godot whose aid Stoppard enlists as another element in the creation of levels of dramatic dialogue. In his plays and novels Beckett gives voice to those neglected by other writers, the outcasts, the debilitated and moribund. In his uncompromising examination of the human predicament he cleared the stage of its trappings, leaving his characters with the minimum of props - a hat and pair of boots for Vladimir and Estragon, a whip for Pozzo, a handbag and umbrella

for Winnie. The latter reminds us that the characters are sometimes deprived of more; they may be eyeless or limbless. But he leaves them with speech. In fact, the more extreme their misery, the greater their reliance on the spoken word, the more acute their search for a phrase to describe the unbearable. The human condition is the cruellest fate and the clownish behaviour of protagonists like Vladimir and Estragon (whose situation partly resembles that of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) illustrates Winnie's comment, "How can one better magnify the Almighty than by sniggering with him at his little jokes." (17)

Didi and Gogo exhort each other to say something that will pass the time and deflect their attention from their interminable waiting for Godot - shouting abuse at each other is preferable to silence. The vaudeville relationship of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern reflects that of Didi and Gogo and they share a similar dilemma in their uncertainty about past, present and future, and in their play's emphasis on the essentially theatrical nature of the event of their present performance. Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead abounds with verbal resonances and echoes of the Waiting For Godot situation: "I've forgotten", "Nothing we can do about it", "Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand", "Nothing is certain". Pozzo's demand for an audience mirrors the Player's insistence on the same; Pozzo's mistreatment of Lucky reflects that of the Player of Alfred. Both duos repeatedly state their determination to leave the stage - "Let's go" - and remain unmoving; both fail to recognise their present location and identity of place is emphasised in a joke: Estragon angrily replies, "Recognise! What is there to recognise? All my life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery!" (p.61) Guildenstern responds angrily to Rosencrantz's suggestion that he goes to see the position of the sun: "Pragmatism?! - is that all you have to offer? You seem to have no conception of where we stand! You won't find the answer

written down for you in the bowl of a compass."(p.42) In both exchanges, direction/location works on more than one level. Both duos are caught unprepared by the sudden realisation that "something is happening"; both embark on verbal fights which leave them exactly where they began and in each pair one complains about the impasse in terms of a vaudeville comic annoyed with his duller companion: Vladimir, exhorted to use his intelligence, fails visibly and states, "You're my only hope";(p.17) Rosencrantz admits dumbly, "I'm only good in support." There is some hope for both duos in their companionship, a fact reinforced by their expressed need for momentary contact - their abrupt embrace, in both plays, reflecting their inner need and their vaudeville relationship on the comic surface.

Beckett's play, written ten years before Stoppard's, established a dramatic precedent and theatrical tradition from which the later play benefits. Waiting for Godot facilitated emphasis on the fundamental nature of the play as an event in the theatre, enabling an audience to pass a certain length of time, and drawing parallels between this situation and the predicament of the characters on stage. His comic duo, taken from vaudeville tradition not only gave the audiences something to laugh at when they were confused or disconcerted by the fact that nothing was happening in the play, but enabled them to contemplate the futility and poignancy of the human situation which was illustrated. Stoppard's debt to Waiting for Godot is as undeniable as his debt to Hamlet. At the same time, Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead presents its own perspective and creates a style as idiosyncratic as that of its sources. Beckett sets his characters on a country road, evening, and makes them wait for Godot. Godot's identity is as much a mystery at the end of the play as it is at the start and there is no implication that he will come, although Didi and Gogo can do nothing but wait. Their despair seems inevitable

since they can neither progress nor take control. Beckett stresses the futility of their predicament and (through their dogged persistence, their companionship and the fact that they are still there) its poignancy. Stoppard examines a similar situation, but although he too offers no false comfort the resultant tone is less bleak. This may be partly accounted for by the greater complexity of the theatrical metaphor in Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead which presents a series of plays within plays. Whereas Beckett's characters are set on a road, Stoppard's are on a stage. Following the basic "All the world's a stage" metaphor, the audience watch Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who watch a mime (which is in itself a play within a play) or scenes from Hamlet. The failure of Stoppard's characters lies more in their own inability to connect and to accept the inevitability of their human destiny, than in the destiny itself. It is a question of emphasis. By setting his characters within the Hamlet context Stoppard conveys a sense of the existence of an understandable design which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not succeed in understanding. At the same time the importance of Shakespeare's play to the theme as well as the structure is implicit and the audience responds to the inter-relating layers of dramatic dialogue according to the depth of their knowledge of the source play. For those with only a basic knowledge of the same, the echoes of Waiting for Godot serve to make more of these layers of dialogue accessible. It is reasonable to assume that the modern audience has some knowledge of Beckett's play and yet in this case the techniques will be effective to a degree even if their source is not identified: The success of productions of Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead with younger audiences such as the school-age dominated audiences in the Young Vic, shows that the play can be enjoyed by audiences with a basic knowledge of Hamlet and little or no knowledge of Beckett. Rosencrantz

And Guildenstern Are Dead is frequently in the Young Vic's repertoire and reviewers comment on the "delight" and "uncontrollable laughter" (18) with which the audience respond to the play. It is an important reminder of the strength of the comic routines which carry the play forward and reminds one of the importance of the visual element in the humour and of the power of the stage: when Rosencrantz almost loses his trousers or he and Guildenstern find themselves foolishly bowing to nothing; when they bob up and down in response to other characters, uncertain whether to answer to their own name or each other's; when Alfred obediently climbs in and out of his skirt on command or Rosencrantz wimpers, "I want to go home" and is comforted by Guildenstern, their childishness and vulnerability appeals to the audience's sympathy and ensures interest in the characters and their fate.

The comedy, therefore, and especially the vaudeville-duo relationship of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is an important device enabling Stoppard to present his theme in a theatrically effective manner. The differentiation of the two characters - or more precisely the avowed difficulty in distinguishing them - introduces the far from frivolous problem of identity to the accompaniment of a laugh. Claudius and Gertrude cannot tell them apart and this leads to the farcical episode of the lords bowing confusedly at the beginning and end of their audience with royalty. (p.25-26) The whole incident takes many words to describe but is swift and effective in performance:

- Claudius : Thanks, Rosencrantz (turning to Ros. who is caught unprepared, while Guil. bows) and gentle Guildenstern (turning to Guil. who is bent double.)
- Gertrude : (correcting): Thanks Guildenstern (turning to Ros. who bows as Guil. checks upward movement to bow too-both bent double, squinting at each other)...and gentle Rosencrantz. (Turning to Guil., both straightening up-Guil. checks again and bows again.)

Hamlet, too, mistakes them (p.37-8) and each time they are addressed the audience comes to expect a mistake so that when the names are avoided, the joke is reinforced, especially when integrated within the Hamlet context: Gertrude: "Good(fractional suspense)gentlemen... (Both bow) He hath much talked of you/And sure I am two men there is not living/To whom he more adheres"(p.26) It is not surprising therefore that Rosencrantz answers indiscriminately to either name, much to Guildenstern's annoyance(p.26) As regards the importance of the problem of identity to the play, it is necessary to remember that it is Rosencrantz who introduces the theme via a comic routine:

My name is Guildenstern, and this is Rosencrantz.  
 (Guil. confers briefly with him)  
 (Without embarrassment) I'm sorry - his name's  
 Guildenstern and I'm Rosencrantz. (p.16 )

It is an amusing routine but the confusion, it is gradually revealed, is indicative of uncertainty of a very serious nature. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are, as the Player observes, two sides of the same coin. They share a friendship and dilemma. In the guise of a clown and his stooge they represent different reactions to the same problem. During an impasse an exasperated Guildenstern complains, "Why don't you say something original! No wonder the whole thing is so stagnant! You don't take me up on anything - you just repeat it in a different order." Rosencrantz, with a mournful expression, that in performance often enlists the audience's sympathy even as they laugh at his stupidity, replies simply, "I can't think of anything original, I'm only good in support." (p.75) Rosencrantz reacts instinctively, intuitively to each situation; Guildenstern is more philosophical, intellectual and in performance physical appearance serves to emphasise the contrast: Guildenstern is usually tall and thin, Rosencrantz shorter and stouter. Even reviewers who profess not  
 (19)  
 to remember which is which nevertheless distinguish the two clearly

in terms of temperament: Rosencrantz is dull, bluff; Guildenstern is sharp, intelligent. There is a Laurel and Hardy element in their partnership - as there is in that of Beckett's duo - which reinforces the comic humour and the thematic content. For it is their difference in temperament which leads to their bickering, mutual exasperation and inability to surmount the impasse in their situation. Rosencrantz is more or less content as long as he occupies his time tossing coins, cutting his nails, playing word-games but he is more frequently in need of comfort and reassurance, unable to articulate the cause of his confusion or dissatisfaction. Like a child he can only say, "I want to go home". Guildenstern is exasperated when Rosencrantz fails to appreciate the philosophical implications of their coin-tossing game but is swift to offer comfort (such as it is) when Rosencrantz is frightened.(p.27) They bicker and annoy each other but their mutual need unites them in moments of crisis. Guildenstern appears to be the stronger character because he tries to distance the problem and to regard it objectively but who can say which character suffers more acutely - he who sees the problem but cannot solve it or he who only knows he suffers? Like Vladimir and Estragon who state that they will separate when their differing temperaments clash, they remain together because they have only each other's companionship. When on their way to England, Rosencrantz is the first to voice their feelings of helplessness, declaring that he does not believe in England.

Ros. : I mean I don't believe it!(Calmer) I have no image. I try to picture us arriving, a little harbour perhaps...roads...inhabitants to point the way...horses on the road...riding for a day or a fortnight and then a palace and the English king...That would be the logical kind of thing....But my mind remains a blank. No. We're slipping off the map.

(p.77-8)

Guildestern tries to reassure him with the idea that once they reach England there may be something in the letter they are carrying to keep them going, to clarify their direction. Rosencrantz's desperation leads to their role-playing game which culminates in their reading Claudius' letter and the discovery of the King's plan for Hamlet's death. Rosencrantz's simple statement, "We're his friends" shows his instinctive reaction to the discovery of their role in the plan. John Stride's tone (Rosencrantz in the first National Theatre production) eloquently conveyed his bewilderment; his good nature assailed by matters he fails to understand. Guildestern can only cope with the situation as it unravels by distancing it. Regarding the question in a philosophical light he concludes:

Guil. : Let us keep things in proportion. Assume, if you like, that they're going to kill him. Well, he is a man, he is mortal, death comes to us all, etcetera, and consequently he would have died anyway, sooner or later. Or to look at it from the social point of view-he's just one man among many, the loss would be well within reason and convenience. And then again, what is so terrible about death? As Socrates so philosophically put it, since we don't know what death is, it is illogical to fear it. It might be...very nice. Certainly it is a release from the burden of life, and, for the godly, a haven and a reward. Or to look at it another way-we are little men, we don't know the ins and outs of the matter, there are wheels within wheels, etcetera-it would be presumptuous of us to interfere with the designs of fate or even of kings. All in all, I think we'd be well advised to leave well alone.

(p.79)

Rosencrantz, less articulate, can only comment, "It's awful" but the effort of recapping the facts slowly and deliberately gives him the impression that he has some hold over the situation and can stop questioning:

Ros. : The position as I see it, then. We, Rosencrantz and Guildestern, from our young days brought up with him, awakened by a man standing on his saddle, are summoned, and arrive, and are instructed to glean what afflicts him and draw him

on to pleasures, such as a play, which unfortunately, as it turns out, is abandoned in some confusion owing to certain nuances outside our appreciation-which, among other causes, results in, among other effects, a high, not to say, homicidal, excitement in Hamlet, whom we, in consequence, are escorting, for his own good, to England. Good. We're on top of it now.

The context makes clear to all the audience the characters' contribution to their own failure. Those for whom Guildenstern's speech recalls Hamlet's parallel speech submitting to Fate may appreciate the implied contrast between the Prince and these two lords. Similarly some members in the audience will appreciate the irony in the fact that Guildenstern should quote Socrates' comment about the irrationality in fearing death when he and Rosencrantz are singularly incapable of coping with the state of existential perplexity which the philosopher considered a necessary element in the search for truth. After the boat is attacked by pirates, the roles of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are reversed in that it is Guildenstern who needs reassurance. Reason tells him that if there was at least the possibility of a design at work (even though an understanding of it were denied to himself and Rosencrantz) in escorting Hamlet to England, the whole journey is now pointless. Near tears, he grows desperate: "Nothing will be resolved without him....We need Hamlet for our release!" Rosencrantz tries his best to keep despair at bay: "We'll be all right. I suppose we just go on", but Guildenstern now cannot even believe in the existence of England. A repetition of their comic routine involving role-playing culminates in their reading the letter Hamlet substituted for Claudius' original. The comic business of double-take as each snatches the letter from the other and they both read it again, effectively combines seriousness and relief. In the end, their situation is essentially similar and neither can help the other. Rosencrantz expresses himself more simply than

Guildestern but both ask the same questions and neither succeeds to a satisfying answer:(p.89)

- Ros. : They had it in for us, didn't they? Right from the beginning.  
 Who'd have thought that we were so important?  
 Guil. : But why? Was it all for this? Who are we that so much should converge on our little deaths?  
 (In anguish to the Player) Who are we?

Their world, like that of Hamlet, is full of doubt. It is significant that their word games involve posing questions and avoiding statements and that they see their confrontation with Hamlet in terms of a question and answer game in which he has the upper hand. Hamlet, it has been asserted, is written pre-eminently in the interrogative mood; Stoppard does not claim to have discovered the answers but Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead rearranges some of the familiar questions, examining them from another perspective. Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead's combination of metaphysics, literature and vaudeville creates Stoppard's comedy of ideas. The apparently leisurely progress of the action on the comic surface masks an underlying structure conforming to strict, logical rules. The games with which they while away the time advance the dialectic of the sub-text while providing humour on the surface. For example, the game of pitch and toss with which the play starts is an amusing and dramatic illustration of the relationship between "the fortuitous and the ordained" which they find so difficult to reconcile in their own lives. Guildenstern's reference to the proposition that if six monkeys were thrown up into the air for long enough, they would land on their heads as often as on their tails, is especially amusing when juxtaposed with the coin-tossing game. It is also especially apt when it recalls the popular analogy for the laws of probability which asserts that, given time, six monkeys typing at random could produce the works of Shakespeare. The Player comments, "There's a design at work in all art....Events must play themselves out to

aesthetic, moral and logical conclusion."(p.57) The design decrees that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern should die without knowing why and they submit, fatalistically. The light goes out on their stage and the audience accepts this as inevitable. Guildenstern says, "We'll know better next time" but there has been nothing in his behaviour to suggest that this will be the case nor in the situation to suggest there will be such an opportunity. Like the majority of Stoppard's protagonists they have demonstrated an argument and a dilemma, making little personal progress. The comic routines, are always inextricably bound with the sub-text and are an important part of the fabric of the play. A single sentence contributes to the main design: Rosencrantz's angry "There were answers everywhere you looked. There was no question about it," is an integral part of the same design which gives him 25 lines in which to struggle with the problems of understanding the idea of infinity in the manner of a less articulate, duller second clown:

Ros. : It could go on for ever. Well, not for ever, I suppose.(Pause). Do you ever think of yourself as actually dead, lying in a box with a lid on it?

Guil. : No.

Ros. : Nor do I, really....It's silly to be depressed by it. I mean one thinks of it like being alive in a box, one keeps forgetting to take into account the fact that one is dead...which should make all the difference...shouldn't it? I mean, you'd never know you were in a box, would you? It would be just like being asleep in a box. Not that I'd like to sleep in a box, mind you, not without any air-you'd wake up dead, for a start and then where would you be? Apart from inside a box. That's the bit I don't like, frankly. That's why I don't think of it...  
(Guil. stirs restlessly, pulling his cloak round him.)  
Because you'd be helpless, wouldn't you? Stuffed in a box like that, I mean you'd be in there for ever. Even taking into account the fact that you're dead, it isn't a pleasant thought. Especially if you're dead, really...ask yourself, if I asked you straight off-I'm going to stuff you in this box now, would you rather be alive or dead? Naturally, you'd prefer to be alive.

Life in a box is better than no life at all, I expect, you'd have a chance at least. You could lie there thinking-well, at least I'm not dead! In a minute someone's going to bang on the lid and tell me to come out.(Banging the floor with his fists.)"Hey you, whatsyername! Come out of there!"

Guil. : (jumps up savagely): You don't have to flog it to death!  
(Pause.)

Ros. : I wouldn't think about it, if I were you. You'd only get depressed.(Pause.)Eternity is a terrible thought. I mean, where's it going to end?

Like Samuel Beckett's characters, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have no control except over language. But even language as the above extract shows, refuses to be static, wholly logical. Guildenstern especially, with his attempts to apply reason and logic to the problems of existence, is alive to the ambiguities and ambivalences of language. He hopes that by finding the right word or phrase he can name and thereby understand the unknowable. His persistence in trying to clarify each situation objectively, to see it theoretically, is particularly effective when contrasted with Rosencrantz's simplistic utterances. At the start of the play Rosencrantz is contentedly oblivious to the wider implications of their coin-tossing record. When Guildenstern suggests Rosencrantz might have lost eighty-five in a row, Rosencrantz is doubtful and jocularly comments, "Well, I'd have a good look at your coins for a start!" Guildenstern's impersonal response is typical of his attempts to distance and theorise: "I'm relieved. At least we can still count on self-interest as a predictable factor." Guildenstern's syllogism about the relationship of the laws of probability to un-, sub- or supernatural forces is amusing in the convolutions of the syntax which contrasts strikingly with the deliberate understatement by which he tries to control his growing panic: "I hope that doesn't sound surprising because its very unsurprisingness is something I am trying to keep hold of."  
(p.11-12)

A comedy where the characters are incapable of action relies much

on words and linguistic humour. The word-play is sometimes simplistic and obvious, highlighting the ambiguities of language itself: as did Hamlet for its audience in the equivocation of the Grave digger. Guildenstern muses on Rosencrantz's statement that "The toenails on the other hand never grow at all." The brief exchange with the Player in which a simple pronoun creates utter confusion is another apt example:

Player : The old man thinks he's in love with his daughter.  
 Ros. : (appalled): Good God! We're out of our depth here.  
 Player : No, no, no—he hasn't got a daughter—the old man thinks he's in love with his daughter.  
 Ros. : The old man is?  
 Player : Hamlet, in love with the old man's daughter, the old man thinks.  
 Ros. : Ha! It's beginning to make sense! Unrequited passion!

(p.49)

The whole incident acquires an extra comic dimension for those whose knowledge of Hamlet tells them that this laboriously achieved conclusion is wrong, even as Rosencrantz and the Player struggle to understand one another. Language and its ambiguities, wherein lie its strengths as well as its weaknesses, gives rise to many comic routines. For example, the literal interpretation of a figurative expression leads to panic when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern talk themselves into thinking they have lost Claudius' letter to the King of England. (p.76) On other occasions, repetition and variation, a well established technique in comic routines, is exploited to reveal enjoyment of language itself:

Ros. : It's all questions.  
 Guil. : Do you think it matters?  
 Ros. : Doesn't it matter to you?  
 Guil. : Why should it matter?  
 Ros. : Why does it matter why?  
 Guil. : (teasing gently): Doesn't it matter why it matters?  
 Ros. : (rounding on him): What's the matter with you? (Pause.)  
 Guil. : It doesn't matter.

(p.32)

Besides the enjoyment of language this exchange with its blend of sense and nonsense will carry Wildean overtones for some members of the audience and contribute to the element of nihilism in the play. In Wilde's existential comedy, The Importance of Being Earnest, another theatrical milestone with which the modern audience may reasonably be expected to be familiar, Jack and Algernon reject all action in favour of doing: Nothing. A little earlier in their scene, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had decided against action: "They've got us placed now"(p.30) and throughout their play they fail repeatedly to do anything. The verbal resonances are introduced early in the play in a brief exchange where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern imitate Wilde's characters:

Guil. : What are you going to do now?  
 Ros. : I don't know. What do you want to do?  
 Guil. : I have no desires. None.

(p.11)

In the second act of The Importance of Being Earnest Miss Prism speaking of her novel states, "The good ended happily and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means." The Player in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead echoes this definition but with important differences which will contribute to the dramatic dialogue when he informs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "The bad end unhappily, the good unluckily. That is what tragedy means." It is an amusing combination of sources - Hamlet and Miss Prism, Beckettian tramps and Wildean dandies. Indeed the eloquence and rhetorical flights of Stoppard's protagonists, sustained longer than the brief excursions of Beckett's duo whom they imitate, recall Wilde's witty diction.

Echoes of T.S. Eliot are also evoked: Guildenstern's "Nor did we come all this way for a christening"(p.28) bears verbal resonances of "The Journey of the Magi": "Were we led all that way for Birth or Death?" The tone and context of Guildenstern's speech highlights

its concern with identity; some members of the audience may be prompted by the verbal resonances to recall that the travellers in Eliot's poem were on their own spiritual journey and that they too felt like strangers, not only on the road but in their own land on their return. They too waited for death. Tones and rhythms of speech have enormous comic potential which Stoppard exploits when he juxtaposes the modern idiom with Shakespearean blank verse. When Hamlet enters upstage 'weighing the pros and cons of making his quietus' Guildenstern comments "I can't for the life of me see how we're going to get into conversation." The contrasting tone and idiom reinforce the idea of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as helpless spectators occasionally swept into the main action and invite the audience's sympathy. Those without close knowledge of Hamlet may respond to the characters' appealing vulnerability - a quality emphasised by the contrast of their humble prose and the blank verse with which the audience may be unfamiliar and which gives them the feeling that they too, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, are out of their depth. Simultaneously the audience with a clearer understanding of the present play's relationship to Hamlet and familiarity with Shakespeare's blank verse, will find it exquisitely ironic that these two indecisive, comic characters should be required to "sound the heart of [the.]mystery" by "something on the lines of a direct informal approach...man to man...straight from the shoulder...Now look here, what's it all about...sort of thing."(p.54) They are absurdly miscast, "victims of the gods" to quote the Player.

When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are drawn into the verse-speaking Hamlet context visual aspects of the presentation are extremely important. The opening stage directions stipulate: "Two Elizabethans passing the time in a place without any visible character." Their Elizabethan garb and money-bags contrast strikingly with their vaudeville-

duo relationship and their modern idiom and especially with Guildenstern's theoretical, deliberate articulation. This visual contrast emphasises the theatricality of the play in progress and dramatically challenges the audience's preconceptions about the aims of the play in creating an identifiable world on stage, one which invites them to suspend disbelief and to take on trust the illusion before them. It is an important element in the creation of levels of dramatic dialogue and it makes possible various levels of response. The theatrical metaphor unites both form and content and is chiefly responsible for the resultant tone which in its own turn is of vital importance to the success of the play. Significantly in the radio version of Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead written by Stoppard himself (December 1978 BBC Third Programme) the full power of the theatrical metaphor is weakened and the overall tone suffers as a result: it lacks the lightness which balances the seriousness of the metaphysics and which makes the play a theatrical event enjoyed by a varied audience. On radio it requires more of an élite audience who know Hamlet well and can recognise the points at which the modern play and Shakespeare's merge/interact. For example, a trumpet fanfare brings in Claudius and Gertrude questioning Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about their success with Hamlet. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern respond in blank verse (Shakespeare's context III.i) and they sound like different characters; there is little impression of their being swept helplessly in and out of the Hamlet stage. Whereas on stage Shakespeare's Hamlet can be seen upstage 'weighing the pros and cons of making his quietus' whilst the two lords look on, uncomprehending from downstage, on radio he must be heard in the background and the visual humour is lost. In the radio version Rosencrantz and Guildenstern move away from the mike, to the sides and the back in order to give the idea of their being on an enclosed stage. During their

first encounter with Hamlet, they follow him out onto the battlements (to sounds of a roaring sea), along covered areas (to sounds of dripping water) and out into the castle grounds. All the time the characters try to make themselves heard above the sounds of the elements or bleating sheep, squealing pigs, and a variety of farmyard fowl - thereby conveying the impression that they have no control and no option but to follow Hamlet. The latter is an amusing scene, but the comic and thematic effectiveness of their role as spectators and actors who don't know the whole story cannot be satisfactorily sustained. The vaudeville element of their relationship and the visual humour in the physical contrast not only between the two characters but also between their Elizabethan apparel and their modern idiom is likewise lost. It is important to see Rosencrantz lost in his own thoughts about cutting his fingernails whilst Guildenstern is struggling with the "scientific approach to the examination of phenomena" in an attempt to keep fear at bay; or Guildenstern's barely controlled hysteria as he tries unsuccessfully to ignore Rosencrantz's clumsy deliberations about death. In the radio version, inevitably, this visual aid is lost. The dramatist attempts to compensate by exploiting more opportunities to illustrate his protagonists' loss of control through the fragmentation of their language: they exhibit the same kind of rather involved spoonerism from which Herr Zangler suffers in Stoppard's *On The Razzle*; for example Rosencrantz says, "I'll watch the tape - tape the watch - take the first watch." On another occasion he says, "Yang of the slip - slip of the tongue." More frequently in the radio version their language approaches rhythms of speech but misses the meaning. Stoppard makes a suggestive joke about Polonius being stabbed "behind the arras" which makes one wonder how that phrase has managed to escape being so construed until now and he also adds an amusing prologue: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern,

snoring, are woken by someone calling their names; Rosencrantz reports from the window that it's "a man with two money bags on his belt - with two horses banging on the shutters" and causes Guildenstern to ask if it's a circus act. Equally amusing is the next brief scene, set in Wittenberg and featuring a class roll-call which establishes that Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Hamlet are absent; the witty students waggishly reply "Absum" to their own names and the master sounds obviously very harassed. Despite these additional amusing touches, the radio version, by default, highlights the fundamental contribution of the medium of the stage itself to the success of Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead.

Early in the play Guildenstern says, "Words, words. They're all we have to go on." (p.30) Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead demonstrates the truth of this. Whenever they feel abandoned, at a loose end like Beckett's characters they try to talk themselves into a sense of security and understanding. Like Hamlet they analyse their situation but unlike him they never progress from words to either action or understanding; they fail to make the imaginative leap which would unite reason with imagination and perhaps facilitate progress. Words pass the time but are not enough in themselves. In the light of this it is particularly interesting that a review <sup>(20)</sup> of the first production compared Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead to Love's Labour's Lost one of Shakespeare's most linguistically dazzling plays and one which lays great stress on the role of language, its use and misuse. Like Hamlet and Love's Labour's Lost in their own day, Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead was presented to a theatrically sophisticated audience and its success depended on the strength of its theatricality. Interestingly however Stoppard did not repeat the literary framework upon which much of the theatricality is based until he wrote Travesties eight years later. Yet in the meantime

he consolidated his reputation as a major modern dramatist applauded for the qualities of style and the theatrical conjuring tricks, displayed in Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead. In the stage plays (The Real Inspector Hound, After Magritte) and a minor television play (A Separate Peace) he experimented with ways of making established theatrical conventions and genres serve a framework supporting layers of dramatic dialogue and inviting levels of response. In the radio plays he developed the thematic content, working out a more specifically 20th century perspective on the perennial philosophical issues. Jumpers, his next major stage play, would benefit from his work in both these areas and combine the best elements from both in the comedy of ideas.

There is no mystery in the surface narrative which proceeds steadily and almost inevitably in a series of ready-made scenes, marked conventionally by fading techniques or simply cutting from one to the next. Interestingly, this crassly programmed reveals a decidedly non-standard element on the hero's life. The resultant tension between superimposed surface order and underlying chaos becomes the play's dialectic and impels the play forward. In the guise of a straightforward account of Albert's role in the painting of the picture, the play is a study in the art of the impossible.

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## CHAPTER IV

Albert's Bridge

(BBC Third Programme, 13 July 1967)

Albert's Bridge first broadcast three months after the first professional production of Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead, is especially interesting for its successful fusion of form and content which exploits a simple situation to serve as a metaphor in a philosophical discussion, and for its choice of a professional philosopher as hero. Albert is the first in a line of modern philosophers in Stoppard's plays. His attempts to put theory into practice lead paradoxically to withdrawal from life itself and he illustrates amusingly the tragedy of man ambushing his own struggle for survival - he is driven to the greatest absurdities in the very act of seeking to fulfil a rational impulse. Like If You're Glad I'll Be Frank, broadcast on radio the previous year, Albert's Bridge uses the same medium to work out philosophical ideas which would be given more visual, theatrical treatment in the stage plays. It shows skill in handling the technical aspects of the medium, harnessing these to contribute to the humour, but it does not set out to explore or experiment with the medium itself in any radical way. Its interest lies predominantly in presenting complex ideas through an easily accessible form.

There is no intricacy in the surface narrative which proceeds steadily and almost inevitably in a series of twenty-six scenes, marked conventionally by fading techniques or simply cutting from one to the next. Interestingly, this orderly progression reveals a decidedly odd and disorderly element on the hero's life. The resultant tension between superimposed surface order and underlying chaos unravels the play's dialectic and impels the play forward. In the guise of a straightforward account of Albert's role in the painting of the

Clufton Bay Bridge, Stoppard demonstrates, with a peculiarly 20th century perspective, a perennial philosophical problem.

This philosophical play begins without a trace of sophistry with the exchanges of four men - obviously workmen, judging by their voices and idiom - about to finish work. Our attention is immediately drawn to Albert who is closer to the mike and who does not join in with the preparations of the others until their repeated calls for his attention interrupt his satisfied musings on his work. Their exchanges and Albert's monologue inform us that they have just completed another two years' painting of the Clufton Bay Bridge in rust brown and that Albert is there on a vacation job. As the play unfolds, Albert's decision to devote his life to the painting of the bridge runs parallel to the authorities' plans for greater efficiency. The world revealed through this dual line of development is one of chaos within which some characters try desperately to impose a semblance of order and control. Albert wants a life ensuring continuity and a sense of purpose - a need satisfied by his vacation job on the bridge:

"I saw the context. It reduced philosophy and everything else. I got a perspective. Because that bridge was-separate-complete-removed, defined by principles of engineering which makes it stop at a certain point, which compels a certain shape, certain joints-the whole thing utterly fixed by the rules that make it stay up. It's complete, and a man can give his life to its maintenance, a very fine bargain."  
(p.16)

The Authorities want an efficient, inexpensive solution to the perennial problem of keeping the bridge in good repair. All want order. Their combined efforts lead eventually to the destruction of the bridge and Albert too.

Albert, we learn from his mother's complaints, is a philosophy graduate who cannot bring himself to get out of bed and face the world. But his reluctance is more serious than is usual in such situations in drama and cannot be attributed simply to laziness. Albert's training and inclination for philosophical speculation ironically prevent

him from adopting a philosophical attitude to life. Like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Moon (in the novel) and his successor George Moore, Albert is so overwhelmed by the details of life in close-up that he cannot act, nor can he connect in any meaningful relationship. The latter failure is suggested in terms of aspirations not shared. His own idea of what constitutes a good life is worlds apart from the social and economic aspirations of his parents and of his wife Kate. Kate's regrets paint a very clear picture for the audience as well as Albert:

"You could have had so much—a white wedding, nice house, an office job with real prospects, the country club... tennis....Yes, you could have had Metal Alloys and Allied Metals—"

(p.23)

There is a certain aural dullness in the summits of success as envisaged by Kate — the anti-climactic Metal Alloys and Allied Metals — that the listener probably shares the relief implied in Albert's quiet response: "Yes, I'm well out of that." Those who give little thought to issues beyond the merely personal and financial fare far better on day to day terms but betray a dullness and limitation that is not sympathetic, and a quality of life that is questionable. Albert's father propounds the unimaginative 'hard work never did me any harm' theory and his mother's comments on Albert's education reveal dramatically and amusingly how difficult it is for them to communicate at all:

Mother : (sighs): I was against that university from the start.  
 Albert : The country needs universities.  
 Mother : I mean it's changed you, Albert. You're thinking all the time. It's not like you, Albert.  
 Albert : Thinking?  
 Mother : You don't talk to me. Or your father. Well, I'm glad it's all behind you, I hope it starts to wear off.  
 Albert : I wanted to stay on after my degree, but they wouldn't have me.  
 Mother : I don't know what you want to know about philosophy for. Your father didn't have to study

philosophy, and look where he is, Chairman of Metal Alloys and Allied Metals. It's not as if you were going to be a philosopher or something....Yes, you could have been a trainee executive by now. As it is you'll have to do your stint on the factory floor, philosophy or no philosophy. That university has held you back.

(p.14)

At this stage the listener may sympathise with Albert but with each successive scene we realise that Mother was probably closer to the truth than she (or the audience) was aware, and that the quality of Albert's life is as questionable as that he rejects.

It requires imagination, sensitivity and intelligence to fail as sadly as Albert fails. He had been content at University - "I wanted to stay on after my degree but they wouldn't have me" - because it had provided him with a refuge from which to observe life without the need for personal commitment or involvement. However, that was neither the aim nor the function of the University. It had taught him to see but he had to make for himself the imaginative leap which would have enabled him to make constructive use of his insight.

As we come to understand him better we realise that his wife and parents do in fact have the advantage of a more realistic attitude to life and Albert's amusing speech about getting himself articled to a philosopher was less tongue-in-cheek than we imagined. Initially it seemed that he was being clever and amusing, gently parodying Mother's hopes for him. When we realise, in retrospect, that it was more in the nature of wish-fulfillment, the same speech highlights his own weaknesses instead. With a combination of absurdity and logic Albert muses:

"Start at the bottom. Of course, a philosopher's clerk wouldn't get the really interesting work straight off, I know that. It'll be a matter of filing the generalizations, tidying up the paradoxes, laying out the premises before the boss gets in-that kind of thing; but after I've learned the ropes I might get a half share in a dialectic, perhaps, and work up towards a treatise....Yes, I could have my own thriving little philosopher's office in a few years."

(p.15)

Like most of Stoppard's philosophers Albert cannot cope with the element of mystery or uncertainty in life. The apparent randomness and contradictions upset his faith in ultimate cosmic order and stability. It would indeed be comforting to file the generalisations and tidy up the paradoxes before moving on to the next problem but such neatness is not possible and life demands greater flexibility of the individual. Rules, logic, order have their place but cannot demand our slavish, unthinking adherence. Professor Anderson in Professional Foul would later illustrate how the letter of the law might be broken for the spirit of the law to reign but Albert has not the strength to permit such ambivalence. By the end of his play he regresses into further isolation from life.

Painting the Clufton Bay Bridge provides him with what appears to be the perfect solution to life's problems. It gives him a sense of purpose and the illusion that he is an ordinary working man. A sense of purpose is vital for he must feel that he is performing a task which is both useful and necessary: the bridge connects (something he cannot do) and provides a necessary service. At the same time it enables him to maintain his distance and a sense of perspective. Life in close-up is unmanageable but from the bridge the scale is reduced and an identifiable pattern emerges. All that was previously suffocating and insurmountable is no more threatening than a toy town:

"I straddle a sort of overflowing gutter on which bathtub boats push up and down....The banks are littered with various bricks, kiddiblocks with windows; dinky toys move through the gaps, dodged by moving dots that have no colour; under my feet the Triang train thunders across the Meccano, and the minibrick estates straggle up over the hill in neat rows with paintbox gardens. It's the most expensive toytown in the store-the detail is remarkable.  
(p.22)

'Dots' are easier to cope with than people; they do not assert themselves or demand attention. They are simply specks in a grander

design. "Is it possible that all the dots have names?" he later wonders incredulously. However, the calm he attains from this distance is precariously balanced. By looking at his world in terms of a toy town he betrays his fears for its vulnerability:

"I tremble for it, half expecting some petulant pampered child to step over the hill and kick the whole thing to bits with her Startrite sandals."

When he consciously tries to make some connection with the world it is rather tenuous; he imagines himself in the future filling an easily recognised social role:

"I'll be assimilated then,  
The honest working man, father of three -  
you've seen him around,  
content in his obscurity, come to terms with public truths,  
digging the garden of a council house  
in what is now my Sunday suit...."

Significantly he prefers to think of himself in the role of one who has come to terms with life, one who has found his place in society, unambitious, content, undisturbed by wider issues beyond his control. Kate cannot understand his liking for the menial job and the listeners can sympathise with her exasperation, despite the dullness in the repetition of Metal Alloys and Allied Metals:

Albert : I like a quiet life, that's all.  
Kate : Gutless. You'll spend your whole life painting that bridge....  
Albert : It's a good job.  
Kate : You know damn well it's a stupid job which any thick idiot could do-but you're educated, Albert. You had opportunities. There was Metal Alloys and Allied Metals-you could have gone right up the ladder-we'd have a house, and friends, and we'd entertain and Katherine would have nice friends-you could have been an executive!  
(p.28)

Albert wonders why he married:

Albert : I was lying in bed one day when the maid came in to make it...She was all starchy. When she moved, her skirt sort of crackled against her nylons....I never had any regrets, but I did want her to be happy too.

(p.28)

There is sadness in his admission of failure but it is not overwhelming. He can escape all his problems on the bridge. He is content with the simplicity and sense of continuity in his job, and he envies Dad his ten coats of paint on Clifton Bay Bridge which he sees as a way of keeping track, making one's mark on the past: "Now that's something; to keep track of everything you put into the kitty." He pays no attention to Dad's view that the ten coats of paint symbolise for him a life of wasted opportunities, of unrealised ambitions. For Albert it is sufficient that his work remains where it is put. He pities the factory man who has no control over his own work:

"his bits and pieces scatter,...disintegrate,...join up in new forms which he doesn't know anything about. In short, he doesn't know what he's done, to whom."

Albert's descent into the real world becomes increasingly irregular. At the outset he tries to relate to his wife and child, telling Kate to bring the baby in her pram so he can see them at work, but before long he cannot distinguish them from the other dots below. Finally Kate admits that her rival is the bridge, however ridiculous this may be: "You don't talk to me, you don't talk to Katherine, you can't wait to get out of the house and up your favourite girder." This scene is particularly amusing in that it begins like a typical jealousy scene with Kate demanding, "What's her name?" as she smashes the crockery. But the humour is not unalloyed because Kate knows she cannot beat her rival - a woman would be normal but how can she compete with the bridge? The comic and the serious are indivisible. When he visits the Eiffel Tower Albert is reassured that his sense of perspective is validated - the world as seen from the top of the Eiffel Tower is much the same as that he sees from Clifton Bay Bridge - "Dots, bricks, beetles....in B flat" - but he is struck by the audacity of the inventor:

"a tower connects nothing, it stands only so that one can go up and look down. Bridge builders have none of this

audacity, compromise themselves with function."

He could not have maintained even his precarious balance by painting the Eiffel Tower; Clifton Bay Bridge is superior because a sense of purpose is necessary to the thinking man.

The visit to Paris is amusingly presented in terms of a bus man's holiday. Albert at first insisted there was no point in going to Paris - "I've been to Paris. There's nothing there believe me" - and suggested The Firth of Forth instead. The very name is associated in most minds with the famous bridge and Kate wisely steers clear. The humour is reinforced by the abrupt scene change on the magical words 'Eiffel Tower'. Albert is deaf to all the reasons Kate puts forward in favour of joining their neighbours on their trip to Paris until she mentions the famous landmark. Cliché French accordion music immediately carries the play forward and establishes the next scene. The familiar hum and the distant sound of Kate's voice pleading with Albert to descend tells the listener a great deal about the progress of the holiday:

Kate : We could afford it. It wouldn't be hard, it's easier with two children and joined forces.... It would be lovely, I've always wanted to see the Champs Elysee and the Ark de Triumph and the Seine and the Eiffel Tower....  
(Cliché French accordion music. Cross-fade to Eiffel Tower.  
It's the same as Clifton Bridge.)  
(Distant. Shouting up.): Albert! A-a-albert!  
(Repeated, fading, despairing.): Come down!  
Please come down!

Albert : I thought as much. Dots, bricks, beetles... in B flat. Still, I'm glad I came.

(p.26-7)

The sound of Albert's quiet voice, close to the mike, and his familiar, "Dots, bricks, beetles...in B flat" is a further aural clue to filling in the details. The bridge, and the perspective it allows him is a dubious saviour; it provides Albert with his one link with normality but at the same time it keeps him forever from the need

to connect in his own life in real terms.

Fitch, the City Engineer responsible for the bridge, is at first not anxious to employ a philosophy graduate to paint the bridge on his own, despite the fact that the other employees had no hesitation in rejecting the proposal. Bob would prefer to revert to painting the Corporation crest on the dustcarts, Charlie states roundly that he would jump off within a month and Dad thinks there is more future in painting yellow no parking lines. Albert amuses the audience by acting against type and seizing the opportunity. Fitch considers him over-qualified but the former convinces him not only of his suitability but also of the importance of the job itself:

Fitch : Is it the open air life that attracts you?

Albert : No. It's the work, the whole thing-crawling round that great basket, so high up, being responsible for so much that is so visible. Actually I don't know if that's why I like it. I like it because I was happy up there, doing something simple but so grand, without end. It doesn't get away from you.

Fitch : The intellectual rather than the practical-that's it, is it?

(p.18)

Fitch appreciates this philosophical approach and thinks he has found a kindred spirit. In an amusing *reductio ad absurdum* he concludes, "I should have known it was a job for a university man."

It is a natural conclusion for Fitch to reach. The audience appreciates this whilst also savouring the absurdity in his earnestness. He sees poetry in mathematics, beauty in order and efficiency and tries to apply his theories to life. It is his attempts to realise the beauty and poetry of mathematics in the day to day working of Clifton that lead to the most ridiculous and dehumanising bureaucratic decisions - one man to a colour in painting the Corporation crest on the dustcarts; one man taking eight years to paint the bridge alone, using longer-lasting paint. Fitch is another superb illustration of self-destructive logic. But despite his absurd conclusions

Fitch attracts our sympathy more than his more realistic colleagues whose main concern is simply money and their own reputation. The contrast is effectively and dramatically presented in the committee meeting during which Fitch suggests a new way in which Clufton may function as smoothly as a machine, "a cybernetic poem", no less. He automatically translates the problem into a more manageable idiom. As an equation it conveniently disregards any extraneous elements, any human considerations, for example.

Fitch : This cycle is not a fortuitous one. It is contrived by relating the area of the surface to be painted-call it A-to the rate of the painting-B-and the durability of the paint-C. The resultant equation determines the variable factor X-i.e. the number of painters required to paint surfaces A at speed B within time C. For example-

Chairman : E.g.

Fitch : Quite. Er, e.g. with X plus one painters the work would proceed at a higher rate-i.e. B, plus, e.g. Q. However, the factors A and C, the surface area and the lasting quality of the paint remain, of course, constant. The result would be that the painters would be ready to begin painting the bridge for the second time strictly speaking before it needed re-painting. This creates the co-efficient-Waste.

Chairman : W.

The earnestness in Fitch's voice, his anxiety to help the other members of the committee see the situation as he sees it, is rather touching - particularly when contrasted by their sharing a joke at his expense:

Fitch : If you like. This co-efficient belies efficiency, you see.

Chairman : U.C. You see, George?

George : OK, I see.

(p.13)

Unaware that he is the butt of a joke, Fitch sums up his argument, surprising both himself and the listeners with his conclusion:

"You see, they are all the time catching up on themselves progressively, until there'll come a point where they'll be re-painting the bridge, while it's still wet!(Pause.) No that can't be right...."

In this amusing reductio ad absurdum he demonstrates how logic will

hang itself, given enough rope. The Chairman and George lose patience, Dave has fallen asleep and Fitch becomes more flustered as he tries to retrace his steps. All he needed to say to convince the committee was that they could save money by employing one painter instead of four. On hearing this, the Chairman has no time for further discussion and won't even allow George to comment. The whole scene is amusingly presented in terms of a cliché committee meeting and the characters themselves are easily recognisable, stock types. Dave is simply an obliging inferior - his youthful voice is farthest from the Chairman at the head of the table. His contribution is limited to "Hear, hear, Mr. Chairman" at regular intervals and with no discrimination. The repetition itself becomes a comic routine. The Chairman is ambitious, with hopes of becoming Mayor; he is a tolerant man, deriving supercilious amusement at the expense of others when he has nothing at stake personally, but a bully with an affectation for plain speaking when personal ambition or money are concerned. When voicing his opinion that the bridge - a symbol of his own prosperity as well as Clufton's - should be repainted, he belittles any opposition with affected bluffness: "I for one do not begrudge the spending of a few extra quid on a lick of paint." George captures his attention by revealing that Fitch's longer-lasting paint will cost more: "Four times as much? Money?" he asks incredulously. And although a moment previously he had been supportive of the Chief Engineer, he now ruthlessly reduces the situation to essentials: "Does this new-fangled paint of yours cost four times as much as the paint we've got, and if so, what's in it for you?" One moment he encourages Fitch in his careful and painstaking explanation of the equation and the next he brusquely admonishes him with "Pull yourself together, Fitch - I don't know what you're drivelling about." George is an independent spirit with a clearer understanding. He

is the only one to see the flaw in Fitch's infallible logic - "when we cut down to one painter using eight-year paint, it was obvious that in two years' time he'd only be a quarter of the way along, so the old paint would be ready for another coat." He understands and translates for the others Fitch's equation, and can be biting in his own comments, even towards the Chairman: "I know it's a symbol of your prosperity, Mr Chairman, but...." However, George's non-nonsense approach is as fallible as Fitch's and this is illustrated in his plans for dealing swiftly and efficiently with the problem of disrepair: he will engage 1800 men to complete the repainting within a single day. The human tragedy is compounded by this newest absurdity. Originally three painters were dismissed in the interests of efficiency and economy; now, to serve the same interests, 1800 painters are hired. The cliché, stock nature of the brief scene which shows the way in which proposals are passed or rejected is amusing in itself but also serves to comment further on Albert's tragedy:

(Cut to a gavel banged on table.)  
 Mayoral Voice : Number 43 on the order paper, proposal  
 from Bridge sub-committee....  
 Voice 1 : Move....  
 Voice 2 : Second.  
 Mayoral Voice : All in favour.  
 (Absent-minded murmur of fifty 'Ayes'.)  
 Against.(Pause.)Carried. Number 44 on the  
 order paper.  
 (Fade.)

(P.16)

His fate - and his bridge - is in the hands of those who know and care little about either.

In the light of this, it is especially ironical that Albert should resent anyone else using the bridge. Fraser's sudden appearance surprises both Albert and the listeners when Fraser's applause interrupts Albert's idiosyncratic rendition of 'Night and Day'.

(Cut to bridge and painting.)  
 Albert : (crooning flatly amid and around the tune of  
 'Night and Day'):  
 Night and day, I am the one...  
 day and night, I'm really a part of me...  
 I've got me under my skin.  
 So why  
 don't I take all of me  
 When I begin the beguine....  
 I get accustomed to my face,  
 The thought of me makes me stop  
 before I begin  
 Yes, I've got me under my skin,  
 and I get a kick out of me....  
 Day and night, night and day....  
 Shall I compare me to a summer's day,  
 'Cos I can't get me out of my mind  
 I saw me in Monterey...  
 and I'm all right by me,  
 yes I'm all right, I'm all right,  
 I'm all right by me....  
 (Applause, two-handed, from quite close.  
 Painting stops.)  
 Who's there? Who's that?  
 Fraser : (applauding): Very nice, very nice. The egotist  
 school of songwriting.  
 Albert : Who are you?  
 Fraser : You mean my name?  
 Albert : I suppose so.  
 Fraser : Fraser.

(p.29)

The linguistic jokes draw attention to the underlying seriousness and is an effective way of introducing Fraser whose presence serves to reinforce this 'egotism' or withdrawal from life in Albert. Fraser reveals that he has climbed the bridge in order to throw himself off. Like Albert, he finds life in close-up to be unmanageable; he fears the end is near and does not want to be caught in the inevitable explosion:

"There's too much of everything, but the space for it is constant. So the shell of human existence is filling out, expanding, and it's going to go bang."

He does not believe that there is anyone in control although he does concede that there is an appearance of a design of a sort: "supply meeting demand, one-way streets, give and take, the presumption of return tickets" - but there is "nothing really holding it together." To Albert the world is a fragile toy-town; to Fraser it is a monkey-

puzzle: remove the lynch-pin and it will collapse. However, after climbing high enough to jump, Fraser achieves a perspective which helps him to appreciate a greater degree of order. The deafening noise has become a gentle hum and the chaos is no longer threatening:

"Laid out in squares, each square a function, each dot a functionary.

I really think it might work."

(p.32)

Instead of sympathising with the newcomer as with one who shares his own anxieties, Albert feels threatened and his responses are at once comic and sad. When Fraser attempts to explain his fears about the world as a constant space being crammed by infinite variety, Albert exploits a familiar comic technique by insisting on understanding him literally and exclaims, "You're afraid of traffic?" When Fraser speaks of civilisation in decline, attempting to clarify this fear by referring to the extinction of animals, Albert clutches at another simple label for him - animal lover. He refuses to understand the intruder, as he sees him, in any but the most literal terms, summing him up (after the latter's reference to cows and dentists) as a lunatic. Fraser's more direct references to the absence of order and stability, to the perspective that may be gained from distance, serves only to increase Albert's impatience. He had, after all, avoided thinking about such problems by retiring to the bridge, and here are they now asserting themselves again. The humour arising from Albert's idiosyncratic, but nevertheless coherent, logic enables the audience to contemplate the implicit tragedy of the situation. Stoppard ensures that the scene with Fitch in the role of prospective suicide sustains the complementary balance between seriousness and humour, content and form. It is presented as an easily recognisable situation suggesting typical responses but the whole thing is turned on its head. Instead of trying to dissuade him - as he expects:

"Aren't you going to try to talk me out of it?" - Albert encourages him briskly to jump:

"You know your own mind. And you're holding me up.  
I've got to paint where you're standing."

Fraser is forced to look at the situation anew - "You wouldn't just stand there without lifting a finger?" - and the listeners cannot avoid understanding the fact that his threatened suicide is a cry for help. Stoppard was to give a more literal illustration of the cry for help in Jumpers - Bones is prevented from attending to Dotty's cries because according to Archie, "It's all right - just exhibitionism: what we psychiatrists call a cry for help." (p.66) Albert's refusal to answer this plea is at once comic (in the stock nature of his expression) and horrifying (in its inversion of the norm): "I knew it. You're just a talker. Those ones never do it." The humour enables the listeners to appreciate more clearly the latent irony - Albert, Fraser and Fitch represent different responses to the same problem but can derive no comfort from the knowledge of a problem shared. Fraser might seem initially to suggest some hope in that he partly recognises the cause of his fears but his return to the refuge of the bridge indicates that he is no closer to a solution than is Albert - he makes no real progress; he achieves only temporary escape.

The play comprises twenty-six scenes of varying length, taking place in nine different locations but it remains an essentially static play in the sense that there is little in the way of action on stage. The movement and interest is primarily in the realm of ideas and the dialectic involving dramatist and audience as form and content interact. The main theme, surface order superimposed on internal chaos, creates the tension which carries the play forward. Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon, written the year before Albert's Bridge, was

tackling similar concerns regarding form and content and later stage plays would incorporate the dialectic successfully in more visual, theatrical forms. The Real Inspector Hound and After Magritte both deal with questions of perspective, the demands on reason and imagination and the individual's need to impose some order on his world. Jumpers, the first major stage play after Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead, adds both breadth and depth to the same canvas and is in many ways the culmination of Stoppard's philosophical and theatrical investigations in this area.

The radio proved to be a valuable medium for Stoppard in 1977, its freedoms and discipline enabling him to experiment with ideas and to focus more clearly on both the ideas and their presentation.

The audience's dependence on sound demands a straightforward surface narrative that can be easily followed, but simultaneously permits the introduction of complex ideas which may be reinforced or recalled by aural clues. The introduction of Fraser and his comment on Albert's singing - "The egotist school of songwriting" - is one such example that has already been noted. Stoppard moves the scene smoothly from the bridge to office to home to Paris by fading or cutting. And he establishes each scene economically with aural clues like cliché music, a particular idiom or even tone of voice, clearly exaggerated for effect. Thus he advances the narrative or suggests ideas without the need for cumbersome explanation. For example, Albert's mother complains about his spending the morning in bed and getting in Kate's way - "She's got to clean." Two scenes later a knock on the door informs us that he is still in bed:

(Fade up knock on door off. Door opens)  
 Kate : Oh, I'm sorry, Mr Albert.  
 Albert : Hello, I was just thinking of getting up.

His tone of voice conveys his pleasure and surprise effectively,

so that in the next home scene when mention of Kate causes Mother to observe, "I've suspected her for some time and now one can't ignore it. Even with her corset," the audience immediately realise how far the narrative has progressed. Moreover there is an element of humour in this understanding when the subsequent conversation reveals that Father and Albert are both oblivious to Mother's suggestions. The same technique is employed when one scene ends with Mother's dismissal of Kate: "Well, I'm sorry. You can have a month's wages, of course," and her advice: "You'd better make sure that the young man does the right thing by you." The play then moves straight into the next scene with repetition that requires no explanation: "I never thought you'd do the right thing by me, Albert." The precision and economy with which the shift is accomplished calls the audience's attention to the technique itself and to the underlying humour as well as to the more serious implications regarding the basis of the marriage. This will be especially important in the subsequent delineation of Albert's failure to cope with the demands of everyday life.

In Jumpers Stoppard would examine more closely the vital role of language in the play's philosophical investigations. The movement towards this examination is evident in Albert's Bridge which exploits the medium of radio to highlight the inherent absurdities of language. Sometimes it is with simple comments such as Kate's, "If you fell I'd die, Albert," and the latter's response, "So would I." More importantly it is by working indirectly to stress the power of sound and language. Prose gives way to free verse and the sounds and rhythms of speech convey Albert's sense of contentment when on his bridge. The steady hum in the background establishes the location for the benefit of the listeners and simultaneously reinforces

both Albert's contentment and alienation:

(Cut in bridge and painting.)  
 Albert : Slip, slap, brush, dip, slop, slide, slick and  
 wipe....  
 In eight years I'll be pushing thirty, and the  
 Clufton Bay Bridge will be a silver bridge-dip-  
 brush, slick, slide, slap without end, I'm the  
 bridge man,  
 web-spinning silvering spiderman  
 crawling between heaven and earth on a cantil-  
 evered span,  
 cat's cradled in the sky...  
 look down at the toy ships  
 where the sea pounds under toy trains to  
 toy towns  
 under my hand.  
 Am I the spider or the fly?  
 I'm the bridge man....

(p.20-1)

The radio allows us to follow Albert onto his bridge and our dependence on his voice and thoughts enables us to share, for a few moments, his own perspective. We hear the world below as a gentle hum and appreciate his sense of satisfaction as reflected in the contented sounds/rhythms of his speech.

Our own sense of perspective is then readjusted when such scenes are juxtaposed with those of a very different mood. Humour is often used to emphasise the transition: the gentle hum gives way to a baby's cries and Albert's difficulties in coping with life in close-up are presented with a joke:

(Cut out bridge. Cut in crying baby.)  
 Albert : I name this child Albert.  
 Kate : You can't.  
 Albert : Very well. I name this child Kate.  
 Kate : Katherine.

(p.21)

The enjoyment and manipulation of sounds provides both colour and humour in the radio play which offers no visual relief. Repetition, variation and unexpected deviation capture the listeners' attention and awaken their imagination - as, for example, in the opening sequence where in a few lines Stoppard suggests movement and exploits the

comic potential of the scene:

Dad : Keep off the wet-work down the slope to the middle-and watch your feet.  
 (Everyone climbing down, the distance between them closing.)  
 Going down for good, oh yes, I'm not facing that again.  
 Ten coats I've done, end to end, and now I'm done all right. I had ambitions, you know....

Charlie: (nearer): Mind my head, Dad.

Dad : Watch my feet, Charlie-comin' down-

Charlie: I'll watch your feet-you mind my head. Watch your head, Bob-

Bob : (nearer): Watch your feet, Charlie-

Charlie: Mind my feet Bob-watch my head, Dad....

Dad : I'm not your dad, and mind my feet-that's my head, Albert.

Albert : Comin' down....Doesn't she look beautiful? (p.8)

Similarly, the transition from Albert's untroubled existence on the bridge to the demands of communication and relationships in ordinary life is effectively and amusingly established with the comic techniques of repetition and anti-climax. Albert ends his musings on the bridge with, "Look down. Is it a fact that all the dots have names?" only to be bombarded with the names of various dots as soon as he descends:

Kate : Jack Morris is taking Maureen and little Leslie to Paris.

Albert : Who's Jack Morris?

Kate : Next door, Albert.

Albert : Oh yes. Who's Maureen?

Kate : Mrs Morris.

Albert : So little Leslie would be their little girl.

Kate : It's a little boy.

Albert : Ah. Why are we talking about them? (p.25-6)

Their conversation appears to be stuck in a groove and they are unable to proceed. Their relationship is in much the same condition since the bridge fulfils its dual nature - it not only connects but divides. Kate is forced to admit that the bridge has won:

Kate : (crying): I can smell her on your coat!

Albert : It's paint-I tell you I was up on the bridge.

Kate : All night!

Albert : I just thought I would. It was nice up there. (p.27)

The bridge is a dubious saviour; it provides him with a means of escape and prevents him from facing his anxieties. As a metaphor for his dilemma it is most apt and its fate is as inexorable as the laws governing its existence. The play's internal logic demands that it destroys Albert; the surface narrative demands that 1799 painters join Albert, and their determined march onto the bridge brings them all down. The final irony is that, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern whose questioning he mirrors in his last words, Albert never understands his own contribution to his failure:

"To go to such lengths! I didn't do them any harm!  
What did I have that they wanted?"

(The bridge collapses.)

He thought he had perspective but ironically perspective is what he lacked. In the next two stage plays Stoppard experimented with a more visual and essentially more theatrical illustration of perspective. The Real Inspector Hound and After Magritte would combine exercises concerning illusion and reality with Stoppard's interest in the individual's ability to connect with his/her world.

CHAPTER V Investigating the Conventions

(After Magritte Ambiance Lunch-hour Theatre Club, 9 April 1970

The Real Inspector Hound Criterion Theatre, 17 June 1968)

After Magritte and The Real Inspector Hound are two of Stoppard's most efficient "nuts and bolts" exercises. Stoppard applied the term to The Real Inspector Hound to describe the way in which the play was designed to work like a carefully constructed machine: once all the cogs fall into position the machine whirrs smoothly. In these plays, part of the enjoyment lies in the impression that the audience itself is being challenged to predict how the various parts will fit together: how will the complications be unravelled and the apparently incongruous be sensibly explained? Both plays are, in effect, concerned with the relativity of vision or experience and both demonstrate the need for objectivity as well as imagination in response to experience. Where Are They Now?, commissioned for BBC Schools Radio and broadcast on 28 January 1970, deals with much the same theme and suggests that Stoppard was preoccupied with the idea and the method of its presentation. In the twenty-five minute radio play he set out to demonstrate how perceptions of reality are largely determined by the nature of the individual. Juxtaposing scenes from past schooldays with the Old Boys' Reunion Dinner in the present, he showed how the same situation can give rise to very different experiences. The idea is convincingly illustrated despite the fact that there is little scope within the twenty-five minutes for a full exploration of the questions raised. However, despite the schoolboy jokes (for example, about inedible school dinners or the ambiguously worded school song) the radio play lacks the lightness of tone which characterises Stoppard's most successful comedy of ideas. The stage plays After Magritte and The Real Inspector Hound

are markedly more successful in maintaining the balance between light-hearted comedy and serious argument, primarily because of their exploitation of familiar theatrical conventions. Form and content are in complementary partnership when the search for truth is presented as a parody of the detective story which, conventionally, works towards its conclusion via the examination of observable data.

#### After Magritte

Facts, as the play illustrates, are rarely straightforward and are observed in more ways than one. Reality is a question of perspective. If we are to go by facts alone, what is P.C. Holmes to deduce from the sight confronting him as he looks through the window into the Harris' sitting-room? A fruit basket is suspended in the air; the furniture is stacked up against the street door in a barricade; of the three people in the room, one, head and part of face obscured by black rubber cap, is lying motionless, as if prepared for an operation, on an ironing-board. Another, wearing a ballgown, is on her hands and knees on the floor, whilst the third is a man, bare to the waist, wearing thigh-length rubber waders; he is standing on a chair, blowing into the lampshade. This is the tableau facing the audience when the house-lights go down and the stage lights go up.

As this strange tableau moves to life, a sense of normality is slowly restored and each question is answered. From the point of view of the protagonists, this is a fairly straightforward situation: Reginald and Thelma Harris have been delayed in their preparations for a ball-room dancing competition. Harris donned waders to replace a light-bulb in the bathroom - the bath being full as Mother intended taking a bath. He then removed the bulb in the sitting room in order to plug in the iron for Thelma to iron his shirt. The basket of fruit acts as a counterbalance for the light fixture, the usual counter-

weight - a porcelain container with lead slugs - having broken, hence Thelma's position, searching for the scattered contents. Mother, waiting for her bath, has lain on the ironing-board to be massaged by Thelma whose back prevents her from bending too far.

Parallel to the solution of the opening tableau runs the growing confusion of a more bizarre event witnessed by all three characters simultaneously but with strikingly different conclusions. What did they see on their return to the car after a visit to the Magritte exhibition at the Tate? Was it a plucky one-legged young footballer, face covered in shaving foam, carrying a football? Was it a blind, white-bearded old man in pyjamas carrying a tortoise? Or could it have been an escaped convict playing hopscotch, a handbag under one arm and a cricket bat in the other, wearing dark glasses and a surgical mask? If facts are undeniable how can they all say, with conviction: I saw it with my own eyes?

A further complication is introduced with the entry of Chief Inspector Foot and P.C. Holmes, led there after tracing the car seen at the site where Chief Inspector Foot suspects a crime to have taken place; he believes that a one-legged minstrel was seen escaping with the box office takings of the Victoria Palace. When a telephone call shatters him with the information that his ingenious hypothesis "has proved false in every particular", Harris is triumphant, having resented Foot's intrusion. The latter rallies sufficiently to present another masterly deduction that will refute Harris' alibi (to be confirmed by a witness who was, "roughly speaking", a blind, one-legged musician): "You are obviously unaware that a blind man cannot stand on one leg!" His attempts to prove this impossibility contributes to the final bizarre spectacle confronting the unsuspecting P.C. Holmes on his return to the room, (p.46-7) a spectacle stranger than that which he and the audience observed with amazement in the opening scene.

The progress is circular, but this time the audience is one step ahead and enjoys P.C. Holmes' surprise as well as their own understanding of the reasons behind the surreal juxtaposition of people and objects.

Each character insists on his own initial interpretation of events, unprepared to modify it in the light of subsequent revelations.

Hence the failure to realise that each interpretation contains but a grain of the whole truth: the figure they saw was Chief Inspector Foot himself, rushing to move his car to the only available parking bay about to be vacated by the Harris' car. Although this reality may in some ways seem stranger than fiction, in others the real explanation is straightforward, even banal, but the characters' interpretations have simply heightened the confusion. Those members of the audience who know that the idea for After Magritte originated from the personal experience of one of Stoppard's friends, will enjoy a heightened awareness of the ambivalent relationship between truth and absurdity, for the original situation was stranger than fiction: the friend interrupted his shaving to catch a pet peacock who had run into the road. Stoppard was struck by the idea of how the sight of a pyjama-clad man, face covered in shaving foam and carrying a peacock under one arm must have struck any passing motorist.<sup>(1)</sup>

The Chief Inspector and Police Constable are stereotypes, a fact emphasised by their names which are exploited for their full comic potential. Names, in Stoppard's plays often carry the force of names in Restoration comedy, acting as a form of theatrical short-hand to indicate type. Their actions parody those of a typical stage Chief Inspector and Police Constable. Foot is aggressive, conceited, a career-man, consciously professional...and wrong. Holmes is self-effacing, plodding, not especially bright. His famous namesake of Baker Street is able to deduce at a glance that a "client" travelled

by train after having ridden in a dog-cart, along heavy roads by noticing: "There is a second half of a return ticket tucked into your left glove...The left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. The marks are perfectly fresh. Only a dog-cart throws up mud in that way."<sup>(2)</sup> But P.C. Holmes can unearth no serviceable clue in this strange household littered with lead bullets, fruit in the air, a man in rubber waders and women either stretched out on ironing-boards or crawling about on hands and knees, dressed to the nines or half dressed.

These characters are important not as individuals but as types, painstakingly searching for clues to answers beyond their reach. Their grasp on reality is shown to be especially tenuous with the audience's realisation that the crime they attempt to solve has not in fact taken place. (Sherlock Holmes, we are reminded by association, never had problems with the questions.) The exercise of reason and logic must be tempered with imagination. The converse is equally true. The suspect family, too, are more interesting as a unit-husband, wife, mother - than as individuals but are given as much individuality as will be relevant to the delineation of their predicament. Husbands, wives and mothers-in-law in continual disagreement, each striving for the last word, are the stock-in-trade of many a comedy on both stage and television. Alternately aggressive and cowed, Harris tries to hold his own against the more placid but equally assertive Thelma and the tuba-obsessed Mother. The interest in relativity and perspective is even served by giving a new twist to the stock mother-in-law joke when Harris is reminded that Mother is, in fact, Thelma's mother-in-law, not his.

Stoppard presents the audience with a series of surreal tableaux, each related to those before and after in the sequence, each as improbable or surreal as any painting by Magritte, a visit to whose

exhibition gives the play both its title and plot. As regards the latter, the events do indeed take place after a visit to the exhibition. As regards the structure, it is akin to the style and apparently incongruous juxtaposition of objects associated with the artist. In the title lies another connection with the detective dramas the play parodies as 'Magritte' is confused by Thelma with 'Maigret'. (p.36)

By a process of circular development, the initial equation is neatly resolved, but only after greater complications. The theme in which the playwright was interested has been presented visually, making full use of the theatricality of the medium. The 'whodunnit' convention accommodates the theme, providing Stoppard with many opportunities to reinforce the basic idea - the complications of perspective. What may appear illogical to one person is straightforward to another. This is succinctly summarised when Thelma stoutly informs Chief Inspector Foot, "I am prepared to defend myself against any logician you care to produce." (p.30) In the circumstances, she is right to reject his interpretation of reality. Harris is dumbstruck when, having admitted to not owning a television licence, Foot demands, "Then perhaps you have a diploma from the Royal College of Surgeons?" This is not the retort that would most immediately spring to most minds, but what is nonsensical non-sequitur to Harris (and the audience) is to Foot a stroke of genius, following the report of an apparently anaesthetized body.

#### The Real Inspector Hound

The question of perspective is further dealt with in The Real Inspector Hound, described by its author as "a sort of mechanical toy." Its plot is resolved as adroitly as any conventional whodunnit, the style of which it parodies and which provides the overall structure. In this play the distinction between audience and action is more deliberately blurred. The two become merged as the stage audience

projects its own fantasies and fears onto the play enacted before them. Not only is the play itself a parody, but the characters become enmeshed in a further parody taking place on a stage within the stage. This is made possible by the employment of one of Stoppard's favourite techniques, the play-within-the-play. For this to work, the play-within-the-play has to be easily recognisable yet sufficiently flexible to accommodate the intervention and assimilation of the actor/audience. The country-house-based whodunnit in which, as in the best Agatha Christie, there are as many suspects as there are inmates to be quizzed by the sleuth "generically" named Inspector Hound, provides the appropriate structure. Each inmate is a conventional type: beautiful, sophisticated lady, pretty ingénue, handsome young man-about-town, the obligatory Major. Their names, in stark contrast to those of the two outsiders, the critics, are conventionally associated with stock characters of the upper-middle classes: Lady Cynthia, Felicity Cunningham, Simon Gascoyne, Major Muldoon. The cleaning lady is appropriately named Mrs Drudge. The names, therefore, act as shorthand in identifying the role of the character and establishing their context. The country house context with its revelation of skeletons in cupboards, is swiftly established with the sounds of tennis off stage, and on stage the cocktail garb and after dinner card games. The stock theatrical nature of the setting is deliberately highlighted and exploited for its comic potential early in the play with Mrs Drudge's narration and scene-setting:

"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 wheel-chair-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-and all alone, for they had no children-"

These are obviously the lines of someone whose main function in the play is to set the scene as clearly as possible, and this is what Mrs Drudge does with conspicuous lack of subtlety. When she answers the telephone the second time she is even more succinct: "The same, half an hour later?"(p.28) Birdboot and Moon are not part of this smart set. They are critics, the former representing a popular daily (effectively introduced with mixed metaphors: "The skeleton in the cupboard is coming home to roost"); the latter writing for a readership apparently well-versed in more sophisticated theatrical metaphor: "Already in the opening stages we note the classic impact of the catalytic figure-the outsider..."(p.19) Their response to the run-of-the-mill, cliché-ridden play before them is determined not by any objective means, nor is it dependent on the play's intrinsic qualities, but according to the preoccupations and interests of each. Stoppard uses the play-within-the-play as a means of inviting the audience's collusion in recognising the largely subjective nature of the critics' responses. It is clear from the start and Mrs Drudge's scene-setting that the play-within-the-play is a parody of the whodunnit; a form which rests on the conviction that reality is susceptible of rational analysis, and which moves determinedly (including deliberately-placed red-herrings to increase the audience's delight in the search for clues) towards its denouement. Those experienced in the genre may predict the outcome - indeed, Birdboot senses from the start that "the one to watch" is Magnus. Working on a parallel plane The Real Inspector Hound is itself a parody of the whodunnit which develops against type. Whereas the genre normally decrees that each character's role is clearly identified, be it as victim, murderer or detective; The Real Inspector Hound confounds such expectations. Not only is the play's audience drawn into the action but Moon, as detective, becomes chief suspect and victim too. By

drawing attention to the techniques and devices of the genre, Stoppard encourages the audience to question the reliance on causality. When the radio is switched on in the first scene it is fortuitously in time to report the police message; a man answering the description in the police message appears, "acting suspiciously"; the characters' view of the body in the drawing-room is, equally fortuitously, obstructed. In the 1985 National Theatre production, directed by Stoppard himself in the Olivier, the stock-in-trade devices of the whodunnit were mercilessly sent up. For example, the body lay at the front of the stage in full view of the Olivier audience and it would only have needed a turn of the head for the characters on stage to notice it. A great deal of comedy derived from the audience's anticipation of Mrs Drudge's first sighting of the body as she moved about the room with a vacuum cleaner. There was no subtlety but much hilarity at the expense of the genre when she so obviously failed to see the body: she obstructed her own view of it by raising the rug and then throwing the rug over the body. As in the basically similar opening situation of Agatha Christie's The Body In The Library, we know that the identity of the body and the explanation it demands will be revealed gradually, by a process of elimination - and this is a process of which the audience is made aware by the deliberate highlighting of technique.

Like the characters in the play-within-the-play, Birdboot and Moon are easily recognisable types. Birdboot is plumpish, middle-aged, married and unfaithful, a womaniser who uses his position as critic to attract favours of young actresses in return for favourable reviews which might set them on the road to success. Moon is younger, more ambitious professionally, more pretentious and frustrated by having to move in the shadow of Higgs, the paper's first drama critic. Their reaction to the play and subsequent involvement in it is a

result of their individual fantasies and hopes and a demonstration of Stoppard's concern with the question of perspective. Through Birdboot and Moon, Stoppard parodies critical response to plays but both characters are more than just representations of critics in general. Stoppard has himself pointed out that "the one thing The Real Inspector Hound isn't about, as far as I'm concerned, is theatre critics." He began with the idea of two members of the audience getting involved in the play-within-the-play and then decided that the two characters should be theatre critics because this provided him with a type which had "integral entertainment value." With theatre critics he had "something known and defined to parody."<sup>(3)</sup> The choice further enabled Stoppard to maintain the play's own coherent logic whilst sabotaging the characters' reliance on rational analysis in their search for answers.

Birdboot and Moon are differentiated as professional types and as representations of different responses. Birdboot's preoccupations and enjoyments are unashamedly sensual but he has a firmer grip on reality than that enjoyed by Moon. Birdboot's aims are modest, if banal. What he wants is akin to his own summing-up: "A rattling good evening out,"(p.36), preferably without Myrtle, his "homely but good-natured wife."(p.12) In contrast, Moon has more intellectual aspirations and his ambitions are frustrated by playing second-fiddle to his colleague Higgs. Birdboot is interested in the actresses and his involvement in the parody within the play stems from this interest; Moon suffers from insecurity and endows even the parody before him with significance: "Je suis, it seems to be saying, ergo sum. But is that enough? I think we are entitled to ask. For what is this play concerned with? It is my belief that 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?" This contrasts strikingly with Birdboot's critical pronouncement at the same stage of the action: "Well, it seems open and shut to me, Moon - Magnus is not what he pretends to be and he's got his next victim marked down..."(p.28) Birdboot is at this moment the more perceptive character, but he lacks the pathos with which Moon gains our sympathy.

By characterizing the two critics as types, the playwright can present them in a clear, detached manner which highlights their part in the "equation". To emphasise the fact that the parody enacted before them is no more than a facile exercise in the search for clues and that the audience's perceptions are greatly dependent on their differing expectations, Stoppard draws his critics into the action itself.

Although Moon is the first physically <sup>to</sup> cross the barrier between stage and auditorium by answering the telephone, Birdboot is the first to join the action, appropriately slipping into the role of Simon Gascoyne whose relationship with Felicity and Cynthia on stage runs parallel to Birdboot's off-stage relationship with the two actresses cast in the roles of ingénue and sophisticated lady respectively. He is shot, sharing the same fate as Simon Gascoyne with whom he identified and thereby draws Moon into the action. This breaking down of tacitly accepted barriers between actors and audience is theatrically striking and it further jolts The Real Inspector Hound audience with a Pirandellian assault on their expectations. The relationship between audience and actors is unexpectedly reversed as Moon now finds himself, appropriately, in the role of Inspector, looking for answers, while the actor formerly in this role joins Gascoyne in the critics' seats. Instead of maintaining the illusion that we are witnessing "a slice of life", Stoppard further challenges our suspension of disbelief by emphasising the illusion and highlighting

the techniques of the convention before us. In order to satisfy our desire to find some meaning in and to make sense of what is before us, the audience, we are forced to accept the absurd and to see our role enacted by Moon. The absurdity is stressed rather than relieved by subsequent events as Moon in the role of Inspector presents his desperate deduction, fitting together pieces of a jigsaw. He is aided by Mrs Drudge's helpful reports of overheard threats and his own memory of "the real McCoy", an event which he visualises literally. Against his own better judgement and fully aware that he is not the real Inspector Hound, he tries to fit into the illusion on its own terms, identifying Puckeridge as McCoy and Birdboot as Gascoyne. He concludes (p.46) that the first body was McCoy, killed by Gascoyne to settle a grudge from the past. Gascoyne was himself shot by Felicity for deserting her in favour of Cynthia. When Felicity protests "But it doesn't make sense!" he is forced to concede, "Not at first glance, perhaps." Whilst fully aware of this yet for the answer on Moon's part, the audience accepts the author's challenge and tries to predict the outcome of so improbable a situation.

This section in which Moon suddenly finds himself on stage forced to produce some kind of resolution, sounds echoes of James Saunders' Next Time I'll Sing To You and of Pirandello's Six Characters in search of an Author, especially in the way the characters in the whodunnit protest against Moon's (to them) arbitrary conclusions and defend themselves against his accusations - accusations made because he feels it behoves him to find the answer. The distinction between stage and auditorium is blurred and the play-within-the-play confronts Stoppard's audience with mirror images of their own situation. When Moon finds himself trapped on stage, unable to return to his seat which is now occupied by Hound, he is forced to face a semi-circle of the other characters, who question his account of their

motivation.(p.45) An innovation introduced in the 1985 National Theatre production, directed by Stoppard, focused clearly on the surreal and Pirandellian nature of the situation: when Moon made instinctively to go back to his seat in the auditorium he came face to face with a backdrop of the fourth wall in the play-within-the-play. His exit across the footlights was blocked and he was trapped on stage. Suddenly other levels of experience were indicated as the audience was forced to contemplate the idea of characters continuing to act after the curtain comes down. It is a surreal moment when the characters unexpectedly confront the one in control to see how he will dispose of them and satisfactorily complete the puzzle. At the same time Stoppard appears to be throwing the problem to the audience: How would you solve this? Moon, as Hound, has two dead bodies to account for and certain characters at his disposal. Unlike his predecessor he is unsure of himself in this new role. So desperate is he for meaning that he allows himself to take on its own terms the facile exercise before him: "Well...now...Ah-yes-well, that's it then. This...chap...(pointing) was obviously killed by (pointing) er...by(pause) Simon." Prompted by Mrs Drudge's timely revelations, painfully obvious in self-conscious parody of the more adroit techniques of Agatha Christie, he suspects, in turn, Magnus, Cynthia and Felicity.

The whole thing is turned on its head as Moon suddenly finds himself in the role of suspect. The part of the Inspector is now taken over by Magnus who accuses Moon of having killed the first body - identified as Higgs - then Birdboot who was about to discover this. Moon's hold on reality is so tenuous that he is persuaded that he, in fact, is the murderer. He can only protest weakly, "But...I'm not mad... I'm almost sure I'm not mad...But I didn't kill - I'm almost sure I - ." Finally he admits, "I only dreamed...sometimes I dreamed."

how many of the audience picked up the clue? When Stoppard insists that he himself had no idea as to the identity of the body and the solution of the problem when he began the play,<sup>(4)</sup> his assertion serves to reinforce further the play's investigation of planes of reality and fiction. Like Rudge the on-stage author in James Saunders' Next Time I'll Sing To You, he insists he does not know how his play will be resolved. Stoppard continually reminds us that there is a world, a reality, just beyond our ken because our view of reality is necessarily subjective and limited. It is an idea he had explored in Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead which used as its heroes two characters who had until the 20th century been simply onlookers in another context. Similarly in Travesties, he chooses a minor consular official as his hero whilst the giants of politics, literature and art play supporting roles.

Puckeridge's action is Moon's dream come true:(p.11)

"Sometimes I dream of revolution, a bloody coup d'état by the second rank - troupes of actors slaughtered by their understudies, an army of assistants and deputies, the seconds-in-command, the runners-up, the right-hand-man - storming the palace gates wherein the second son has already mounted the throne having committed regicide with a croquet mallet - stand-ins of the world stand up!-----  
(Beat) Sometimes I dream of Higgs."

In the end he concedes admiration for the victor who went one better than he dared dream, moving from third position to first in one fell swoop:

"Puckeridge...you cunning bastard." (Moon dies)

By using the form of the conventional whodunnit, The Real Inspector Hound presents a series of plays within a play: (i) the parody, or the author's joke at the expense of the conventions and the audience's expectations.

(ii) the fulfilment of Birdboot's dream; he has at last found his leading lady and is no longer concerned with preserving the position which helped him

His helplessness here appeals to our sympathy but Stoppard does not allow this to take centre stage. If we are allowed to become involved emotionally with the characters the overall tone will be disturbed, and the equation will not work out. The level of sympathy sustained will depend a great deal on the artistry of the individual actor. Magnus' deductions sound more plausible than Moon's, but we know them to be false. However, the last of the cogs fits into position and the mechanical toy whirrs smoothly with the revelation that Magnus is not really Magnus Muldoon, "the crippled half-brother of Lord Muldoon who turned up out of the blue from Canada just the other day,"(p.25) but the real Inspector Hound who laid the whole trap. Normally in the genre, the identity of the Inspector is never an issue - he is the only character in whom we can trust. In Stoppard's play, however, we are reminded that even questions which would presumably admit no doubt are problematical. Moon recognises him as the third string critic Puckeridge who has ingeniously rid himself of all colleagues who stood in his way - Higgs, Moon, Birdboot. Moreover true to tradition regarding the hero, he has won the girl too. The conclusion is worthy of Agatha Christie: a character introduced early in the story, suspected but apparently rejected is ultimately revealed to be the chief architect of the whole affair. In The Body in the Library already mentioned, Josephine Turner's orchestration of a very complicated plot is unravelled by Miss Marple who discerns the motive: Josephine was one of the few characters who appeared to have no motive, but, as Moon comments, (p.35) "Yes, getting away with murder must be quite easy provided that one's motive is sufficiently inscrutable." The real Inspector Hound turns out to be someone who until the very end had been a minor figure in the background. A clue was given earlier (p.35) with Moon's question, "Does Puckeridge dream of me?" and in retrospect the answer now seems obvious but

to so many ingénues: (p.43) "I know, I know - but I can't live without her." (He is making erratic neurotic journeys about the stage) I shall resign my position, of course. I don't care. I'm a gonner, I tell you -."

(iii) the enaction of Moon's hopes and fears: (p.43) on recognising the body of Higgs, he acknowledges, "So it's me and Puckeridge now."

(iv) an unexpected coup d'état by Puckeridge, the outsider content to bide his time. The effectiveness and humour derive chiefly from the audience's mastery of the theatrical shorthand, their appreciation of Stoppard's conscious manipulation of the conventions which provide the play's structure.

Yet despite the deliberate contrivance and the dryness of its cold, equation-like character, the play is more than an intellectual exercise, for the important reason that we become interested in Birdboot and Moon as characters. However amusing and contrived, their predicament touches the audience. Stoppard has commented on his interest as playwright in "the correspondence between easy stereotypes<sup>(5)</sup> and truth" and acknowledged his debt to the actor who was able

to appeal to the audience's sympathies whilst the author was making demands on their intellect. In an interview on television (The South Bank Show)<sup>(6)</sup> he said that as an author he was enjoying "an inhuman joke" at his characters' expense whereas Richard Briars who played Moon in the first production approached his role with more warmth:

"When he died people cared about him." This is one reason why The Real Inspector Hound falls short of satisfying fully as a play; the sympathy that is latent in Moon's predicament is not exploited but is presented in too detached a manner. In later plays, Jumpers for example, Stoppard would be able to balance the claims of comedy and seriousness, content and form, within a more human context.

In this theatrical exercise Stoppard employs parody to preclude too overwhelming a sense of seriousness. The characters in the play-within-the-play are little more than stock figures who fit easily into any variation of the tradition, as is demonstrated with first Birdboot's then Moon's assimilation into the play. Their speeches are deliberately cliché-ridden and give rise to much humour. For example, Mrs Drudge's unsubtly enigmatic prognostication that "now that the cuckoo-beard is in bud there'll be fog before the sun hits Foster's Ridge", (p.16) is followed by Simon's, "I say, it's wonderful how you country people really know weather." This affords the playwright yet another opportunity to illustrate the ambiguities of language and the suspicious Mrs Drudge counters with, "Know whether what?" The exchanges between jilting and jilted lover are equally typical of Stoppard's exploitation of the familiar:

Simon : Look, about the things I said-it may be that  
I got carried away a little-we both did-  
Felicity: (stiffly): What are you trying to say?  
Simon : I love another!  
Felicity: I see....You philandering coward-  
(p.20)

The scenes between the wooer and reluctant lady also yield some gems of the genre:

Cynthia : We can't go on meeting like this!  
Simon : We have nothing to be ashamed of!  
Cynthia : But darling, this is madness!  
Simon : Yes!-I am mad with love for you!  
...  
Cynthia : No-I'll never give up hope! Let me go! We are  
not free!  
Simon : I don't care, we were meant for each other-  
had we but met in time.  
(p.23)

Another technique is that of the double-entendre, employed in a deliberately self-conscious manner:

Cynthia : There's no need to introduce you two, is there,  
for I recall now that you, Simon, met me through  
Felicity, our mutual friend.  
Felicity: Yes, Simon is an old friend, though not as old  
as you, Cynthia dear.  
(p.24)

A little further on we have another obvious example:

Cynthia : Will you partner Felicity, Magnus, against Simon and me?

Magnus : (aside): Will Simon and you always be partnered against me, Cynthia?

Sophisticated drawing room comedy, with the smart set enjoying their customary country weekend, making and breaking relationships, reminds us of Coward; parody for the sake of the idea is uniquely Stoppard.

When he encourages us to laugh at the conventions being sent up in the parody of the play-within-the-play, he is drawing our attention to the play's concern with questions of perspective.

By using such easily recognisable examples, Stoppard has the best of both worlds: he reinforces the comic content of his own play whilst exposing the limitations of the genre he is parodying. This exaggeration is adroitly exploited in the card game, a cameo scene made up almost entirely of single words or expressions incomprehensible to the uninitiated:(p.41)

Magnus : (as he plays cards): Faites vos jeux. Rien ne va plus. Rouge et noir. Zero.

Cynthia : Simon?

Birdboot: (triumphant, leaping to his feet): And I call your bluff!

Cynthia : (imperturbably): I meld.

Felicity: I huff.

Magnus : I ruff.

Birdboot: I bluff.

Cynthia : Twist.

Felicity: Bust.

Magnus : Check.

Birdboot: Snap.

Cynthia : How's that?

Felicity: Not out.

Magnus : Double top.

Birdboot: Bingo!

The game seems to move from chess to roulette to various card games, through cricket and on to bingo. It also neatly concludes the series of double-entendres begun by Felicity's resentment of Simon's rejection of her in favour of Cynthia, with her dramatic exit line (again, typical of the whodunnit genre being parodied): "We shall see-the night is not over yet, Simon Gascoyne!"(she quickly exits)p.42

Felicity's dramatic exit is just one of a series of similar climactic statements. Each character expresses a strong desire to kill Simon and each does so, ostentatiously, within the hearing of Mrs Drudge. Magnus' painfully obvious, "Well, I think I'll go and oil my gun," (p.26) is another such example. By making the clues so obvious, Stoppard is again reminding the audience of its expectations, gently criticising the desire to "solve the mystery", a desire upon which all detective stories and whodunnits are based, exploiting man's yearning for answers.

Stoppard employs repetition to lull the audience into a sense of security of knowledge only to flout their expectations. As Moon and then Birdboot are drawn into the action, certain scenes are repeated. Some speeches remain the same, but knowledge of the outcome of the previous enactment of a scene does not guarantee control of the next. Magnus' approach and entry by wheelchair (p.23) the first time reminds Birdboot of Simon's fate - he was knocked over violently - and he sensibly takes steps to avoid a similar fate when he assumes the discarded role. However, he and the audience are equally surprised when his precautions are in vain and he too is knocked over as the wheelchair speeds in from another direction.(p.39) Here Stoppard seems to be deliberately flaunting the audience's expectations as might a music hall act.

These ambushes do not always bear an important relevance to the main theme; unlike Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead and Jumpers where almost all jokes can be directly related to the main theme, in this play Stoppard will exploit these ambushes simply for their comic potential, just as he will interpose any situation yielding opportunities for humour or parody. Such is the case in the offer of chocolates at the start of the play (p.14) and in the at times deliberately obvious word play:(p.23)

Magnus : How long have you been a pedestrian?  
 Simon : Ever since I could walk.

Stoppard is continually emphasising the fact that what is before us is a lie, in the sense that Plato called poets 'liars' because they invented stories that never happened. The play is a lie deliberately fashioned by the playwright, using whatever techniques or tools are at his disposal. These tools are the conventions found, with variations, in each genre: the language, incidents, clues and methods of unfolding the action or story. By making obvious the fact that he is working within a certain convention, highlighting the techniques he has borrowed, Stoppard is able to comment on the convention itself and to reinforce the main idea behind the play - his examination of the relationship between audience and play in The Real Inspector Hound or the importance of perspective in the apprehension of reality in After Magritte. In each case the overall structure of the play best illustrates and accommodates the theme. In each case the humour or farce helps him to present the idea visually, making full use of the stage as a medium. The play-within-the-play invites the audience's collusion in recognising the stock nature of the genre being parodied and is accessible to all the audience. (The 1985 National Theatre production was interestingly presented as one half of a double-bill with Sheridan's The Critic which also contains a parody as its play-within-the-play.) Some members of the audience will appreciate also the fact that the whodunnit form is a most suitable subject for Stoppard's parody since it rests on the conviction that reality is susceptible of rational analysis. It gives him something known and defined to parody and he can make a serious point via familiar comic conventions.

Both After Magritte and The Real Inspector Hound are interested in serious subjects but they are conceived on a small scale as 'mechanical

toys'.<sup>(7)</sup> Threads from both these early plays are woven into the much more intricate pattern of Jumpers and Travesties.

## CHAPTER VI

Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon

(Faber and Faber 1966)

Stoppard's only novel casts an interesting light on the development of the playwright's comedy of ideas. It was published in the same year that Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead was first performed on stage and reflects that play's concern with the spectator cast as hero, with philosophy, language games and a theatricality in style. The themes in the novel were to preoccupy Stoppard either singly or in various combinations in all his plays between 1966 and 1972 when Jumpers was performed. The novel's style is very theatrical; it is full of the absurd, surreal and pastiche-techniques with which Stoppard created his distinctive dramatic style as playwright. The novel also demonstrates the dynamic interrelationship between form and content which is vital to Stoppard's comedy of ideas. The main theme in Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon is the individual's desperate yearning to discover an order or discernible pattern in life, to prove that there is an element of control and that existence is not arbitrary and therefore, to Moon, meaningless. Closely allied to this theme is that of the individual's inability to relate either to his surroundings or to other people, because of his fears of commitment and direct action. Nothing appears to be stable - even identities are ambiguous - so how can one reasonably and confidently commit oneself to this or that statement or absolute? Moon's attempt to cope with the chameleon nature of life highlights the role of language. If one articulates one's fears and emotions, one has a better chance of being able to understand and thereby exercise some degree of control over them, a better chance of putting them into a satisfying and illuminating perspective. In Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead one of the characters comments, "Words, words.

They're all we've got to go on." Many of Stoppard's characters, including Moon in the novel and his successor George Moore in Jumpers, illustrate both the truth and the limitations of this statement concerning language, and the full force of the paradox is appreciated when one considers how important Stoppard's use of language is to the effectiveness of his own work. Stoppard's comedy of ideas illustrates dramatically how language is a powerful weapon in the individual's attempts to cope with his world but stresses that one must also appreciate and recognise its limitations. George Moore senses this but persists doggedly in trying to find the appropriate words. Initially and superficially his struggle with language seems to be a typically donnish trait and as such gives rise to much humour. At the same time, it opens avenues to the deeper levels of meaning in the play, and is largely determined by Moore's very nature. Moon, who is Moore's immediate precursor, is not a professional Professor of Ethics but he is a philosopher by nature and the questions which preoccupy him are essentially similar. Moon, too, finds that words and their meanings elude him and as a result he fails to connect with, or relate to his world. He shares with Moore and with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern too, the inability to cope with what Keats described as Negative Capability: "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."<sup>(1)</sup>

The style and structure of the novel are designed to reinforce the reader's awareness and appreciation of the subject matter so that, in some ways, the reader shares the character's dilemma. There is no clearly defined narrative or plot. It begins in the third person, giving an account of Malquist's words and Moon's thoughts and describing actions as they impinge in the latter's attention. It moves temporarily to Moon's first person account of the previous eighty-nine

pages which it summarises in 10: this is Moon's attempt to describe the events in a more conventional, controlled manner but it proves to the reader that objectivity and facts alone do not necessarily capture the truth. According to Moon, *Chronicler of the Time*, "Lord Malquist and I went inside and I was privileged to introduce my wife Jane to him. She was entertaining a friend, Mr Jones...."(p.101) The original version of the same event was more bizzare: "In the drawing- room Jane was lying on the Chesterfield, all but naked despite her silk dressing-gown. A cowboy was kneeling beside her, rubbing cream into her left buttock."(p.22) However incongruous, the latter is the truer account and later in the novel a rational explanation is given for Jane's state of undress, the need for the cream and the presence of the cowboy. As in After Magritte, each explanation raises further questions but the various strands of enquiry are satisfactorily drawn together by the end. For example, Lord Malquist's letter to *The Times*, four pages before the end of the novel, explains an incident which occurs three pages from the beginning.(p.p.11&185) Moon tries different ways of recounting the day's events, moving from the descriptive to the factual (p.150) in the hope of coming upon a reasonable pattern or solution. However, he continually fails to find the right tone or perspective and the failure arises chiefly from the flaw in his own nature - he wants to identify the solution or grand design, the key which will unlock the mysteries of existence, before he can relate to his world. He cannot cope with piecing together the information as it surfaces, because without the key it all seems arbitrary and pointless.

The author challenges the reader by confronting him with a continually shifting perspective with the result that the reader's preconceptions and expectations are continually flouted in the same way that Moon's consciousness is assailed by the absurd and surreal. The reader

must be content to take up various scattered strands of plot as they appear and to weave them into a gradually discernible pattern. These strands act as glimpses of an identifiable rational world beneath the apparent absurdity and ensure that the reader benefits from a more objective viewpoint than that experienced by Moon. For example, the reader comes to understand that the crowds of people in Pall Mall and the surrounding area are lining the route for a famous statesman's funeral, that the two cowboys are in a commercial for baked beans and that when Mrs Cuttle accosts Lord Malquist's carriage it is under the misapprehension that he is involved in the sales promotion campaign for a particular product. Once he has accepted the absence of a conventional story line with a stable perspective, the reader can enjoy the variety and parody and he will recognise an emerging design. Like the reader of Ulysses (a novel whose aid Stoppard enlists more directly in Travesties when discussing the role of art in life) he must be content to wait for clarification, he must accept the information as it is offered and not strive irritably after fact and reason. Any attempt to summarise the plot or explain the characters in more conventional terms would probably lead to even greater confusion, for the novel is peopled by a strange assortment of characters: a black Irish coachman, an 18th century dandy, cowboys, a beautiful and apparently unfaithful wife, the Risen Christ, a French prostitute. The events too defy summary: the writing of a biography, horse-drawn carriages and a donkey in Piccadilly Circus, Wild West shoot out, toilet tissue competition, exploding bombs, adultery and the reading of navels. This apparently incongruous juxtaposition of characters, styles and events makes for a surreal concoction and the author delights in attaching Magritte-type labels. For example, O'Hara is an Irish Negro, the Risen Christ comes from Dublin and is distinctly un-Christian in word and deed - he kicks

and punches his donkey viciously, calling the animal a "milk-brained whoor!" (p.15)

Moon's desire for order and control in the midst of this confusion is closely related to, and exacerbated by, the problems of living in the post-Einstein era. Like many of Stoppard's philosophers, Moon would sympathise with their author's wish that he had lived at the turn of the 17th century. In a television programme in 1972 (2) called "One Pair of Eyes" and subtitled "Tom Stoppard Doesn't Know", Stoppard observed that the 17th century must have been a particularly satisfying time in which to have lived because an educated man alive then might have aspired to know all that was thought to be known. Such illusions are no longer possible. When, in the attempt to be more accurate, Einstein rejected the possibility of a viewpoint at rest, physics and science ceased to offer the comforts of a sense of stability and certainty about our world and the nature of our own understanding of it. In the television programme Stoppard brings in a physicist, Professor Tolansky, on the grounds that a physicist ought to be able to feel certain about something, if certainty about anything is possible. The Professor admits to having, on numerous occasions, discovered himself to be wrong and explains that, as a scientist, he thinks of himself as making interim judgments rather than dealing with absolute truths. In the course of the programme Stoppard pursues his search for certainty in other areas - the Church, the Arts, even the Department of Weights and Measures but without success. Finally he goes to the London Library where someone reads from A.J. Ayer's The Problem of Knowledge and emphasises the point that the word "know" is itself not precise - a dictionary definition offers 'to be aware of, to comprehend, to apprehend.' Shots of impressive rows of books in the London Library make the point that knowledge is never absolute. In the novel and in many plays leading

up to Jumpers Stoppard is particularly interested in characters who find it difficult to accept this level of uncertainty and the situations in which he places them both reinforce and illustrate their dilemma. In Moon's case, this is expressed in Moon's decision to write a history - a History of the World, no less - which will help him organise history into coherence of a sort. But far from helping him cope with his problems, this drives him further into his malaise - just as Albert's bridge sustains his alienation. For Moon cannot begin writing until he knows the ending; only the ending will show him the key which will arrange history into patterns on a chart and show how all events interrelate, "discover the grand design, find out if there is one." (p.139) Like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Moon cannot act without considering all aspects. He is paralysed into inactivity by fear of upsetting the grand design in whose existence he wants desperately to believe. He tries to explain his fears about modern civilization but when he puts them into words they sound trivialised and, like Fraser's fears in Albert's Bridge, become translated into fear of traffic and overcrowding. Always one to see both sides of a question, Moon uses logic to reduce his fears to absurdity: "No doubt, Mr Moon, the streets tend to be rather crowded at certain times of the day but I don't see that there is any cause for alarm, even if you do think that the Church of Rome is putting too great a reliance on the rhythm method..." (p.23) Thus when Moon takes both parts in a knock knock joke or interviews himself as in the above extract, a music-hall technique becomes a vehicle for the philosophy. When he does unexpectedly react with spontaneity, Moon immediately withdraws and watches himself act, continually changing his perspective in the effort to understand the experience. For example, he tries to understand his relationship with Lady Malquist by describing it in a variety of ways ranging from the poetic ("I have lain with Lady

Malquist"), the journalistic ("been intimate with her"), the legalistic ("had carnal knowledge") and the biblical ("I have known her") to the sophisticated ("I've had an affair with Laura Malquist").(p.145) The range of styles alluded to in this extract reflects Stoppard's general approach to style in the novel as a whole; he moves from third person reports to first person account, from the descriptive to the factual mode of expression, taking into his stride references to Hamlet and T.S. Eliot. There are resonances of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' in Moon's failure to pin down the experience, to transfix it with the right words, and in his "looking for the answer to the overwhelming question".(p.46) The allusion is reinforced by further direct quotations, "Oh do not ask what is it, let us go and make our visit"(p.47), "That is not it at all"(p.23) and "Hurry up please, it's time"(p.119). These echoes of T.S. Eliot's Prufrock recall another world of emotional emptiness, one lacking in communication. At the same time they suggest that Moon's desire to attach an experience with language, to label it and expect it to remain fixed, cannot succeed. Prufrock, we recall, was resentful of "The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase...pinned and wriggling on the wall." The reference to Hamlet's comments about death ("Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come"(p.75)) is particularly poignant for its echoes of the dilemma of literature's most famous actor - one compelled to put on an "antic disposition" in his search for the truth. Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead made greater use of the strength of the resonances from Shakespeare's play. Moon feels that "If he made a certain move, changed the angle of his existence to the common ground, logic and absurdity would separate." (p.32) The novel demonstrates that truth will be reached by a judicious balance of imagination and reason in the individual's response

to his world. Moon complains that he is an actor whose role has not been explained to him: "I haven't got myself placed yet...I haven't got myself taped, you see. So I've got no direction, no momentum, and everything reaches me at slightly the wrong angle." (p.54) Paradoxically, he cannot hope to understand while he fails to connect. His feeling that the human scale is overlooked in what appears to him to be the horrifying mass and arbitrariness of modern life, is conveyed dramatically and structurally in the way he drifts along until incidents impinge on his awareness and he attempts to clarify them. For much of the time the reader shares his uncertainty because the narrative is at Moon's mercy. It would be comforting for Moon if he could share the Risen Christ's belief that "this world is but a life's shadow...just an incident on the way to the Eternal Life" but he cannot. It is one of the novel's weaknesses that it does not examine closely the religious dimension in Moon's dilemma - that investigation would have to wait for Jumpers. Moon's fears of releasing his rather tenuous hold on some strands of reality prevent him from giving himself to new experiences and relating to other characters. He prefers keeping to situations over which he has some control - hence his self-interview and taking both parts in a knock knock joke. He becomes incapable of making even the simplest of imaginative leaps - Jane's make-up gives rise to a typical incident in his laboured attempt to account for the unexpected colour on eyes and lips. He feels, quite rightly, that there must be a single explanatory factor, if he could but locate it, and in its absence he "felt like the victim of a sensational riposte by a barrister who was making up his own law as he went along." (p.33) He cannot separate the commonplace from the mystical and he hopes to find "a single explanatory factor" not only for Jane's make-up, but also for the very different question of existence. He moves from his own house

to Malquist's, from Lady Malquist's bedroom to Jane's, from bathroom to horse-drawn carriage in the crowd-lined roads of Central London, continually baffled by the variety of people, objects and incidents which force themselves on his awareness and which both illustrate and impede his search for the answer to the one single, overriding question, "What's going on?"(p.181) It does not seem to be an unreasonable demand; he is like Rudge in James Saunders' Next Time I'll Sing To You (of which there are stronger echoes in Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead) who simply wants "to understand the purpose of existence; of one man - not of the population of Liverpool, you understand, just of one man. Is that so unreasonable?"<sup>(3)</sup> All the other characters in the novel have a refuge, as will be indicated below; Moon has only Uncle Jackson's home-made bomb which he carries about with him in his pocket, deriving some comfort from the knowledge that he can call a halt when things grow too much out of hand. At least, so he thinks and it is supremely ironic that Moon should feel that he might get to grips with life by destroying it.

Some of the characters who drift in and out of the novel serve to add to the bewildering variety of information surrounding Moon (for example, the General, Mrs Cuttle, the policemen disguised as road-sweeper and seller of clockwork spiders). Others - the man who thinks he is the Risen Christ, Jane, Lord and Lady Malquist - serve to demonstrate the variety of ways in which different people cope with problems similar to Moon's. The Risen Christ is content with the belief that "the world and everything in it is over-rated...on account of it being just an incident on the way to the Eternal Life"(p.41) and spends his time looking for the multitude to whom he can preach this message. Laura Malquist is not especially concerned at man's inability to identify a coherent pattern - she tells Moon that life would be equally pointless whether events were random or inevitable.

All one can do is to provide one's own reason for living - or find one's own refuge. Her refuge is whisky. She can accept the absence of a humanly discernible order, and would be reasonably content if she had children to provide her with a sense of continuity and to endow her life with a purpose. Denied this sense of purpose, she takes refuge in a numbing of the senses. The only time she allows herself to respond directly to any experience and to emerge from a protective alcoholic haze is in her grief for the woman knocked down by Malquist's coach. When she learns that Mrs Cuttle left no children, however, she loses all interest in the accident. (p.131)

The marriage relationships (of Jane and Moon, of Lord and Lady Malquist) are a further indication of the individuals' failure to ~~communicate~~

In a world of uncertainties and lack of understanding, the relationship could provide the comforting sense of stability arising from human contact and the fulfilment of mutual needs. Unfortunately its possibilities are never realised, despite the presence of genuine affection. In the plays Stoppard illustrates more clearly that this failure arises from the fact that each partner is so preoccupied with his/her own perspective on the problem that they cannot help each other -

the dilemma is most effectively illustrated in Jumpers where George and Dotty are confined to study and bedroom respectively and the set emphasises the idea that the barriers between them are not merely physical. Moon and Jane cannot consummate their marriage but each is more successful in a physical relationship with one of the partners in the other marriage. Faced with what appears to be Jane's infidelity, Moon's inner voice tells him, "I don't care, I simply don't care."

(p. 59) Lord and Lady Malquist are not even seen together if one discounts their chance meeting in Green Park when he admonishes her for lying in the road and drives on. It is the relationship's inherent possibilities for communication which are important and not its

physical aspects. Laura refers to this when she tells Moon, "He does love me, you know, Bosie, and he's never unkind, but he won't - attend, even when it's all collapsing around him he won't...."(p.141) Ironically and sadly, Lady Malquist does not realise that his inattention is Malquist's refuge. He has accepted the fact that in cosmic terms human beings are insignificant:

"...they are merely a recent and transitory product.... The world is ten million years old. If you think of that period condensed into one year beginning on the first of January then people do not make their appearance until the 31st of December; or, to be more precise, in the last 40 seconds of that day."

(p.188)

It is this perspective which determines Malquist's behaviour; he decides that the only dignified position left to man, considering his relatively poor showing in cosmic terms, is to withdraw with style from the chaos and to refuse to engage with the problem. He won't even acknowledge the Einsteinian century and confines himself to the 18th century, a stylist. Whereas Moon is frightened by mass and crowds, Malquist can observe both with detachment and with the help of this objectivity he maintains stability of a sort. Moon struggles to identify a coherent pattern within the chaos but Malquist chooses to interpret the lack of order as a fault in the composition of the crowd itself, rather than a weakness in his own powers of observation or understanding. He would attend to the chaos and to the crowds only if they could be arranged into more aesthetically pleasing forms and colours. In other words, he chooses to concentrate on form rather than substance and limits his energies to making an art of himself as an 18th century dandy - that is one area where he can exercise control. He affects a Wildean emphasis on self and contents himself with making an art of his own life. "Everything in art is important except the subject" is an attitude governing his behaviour. Unlike Moon who continually strives to connect, Malquist

has given up on all relationships and has no fears for continuity or, posterity. He would like to leave the world his example and an attractive "slim, useless volume." (p.67) The former would be his biography - hence his engagement of Moon as Boswellian companion; the latter might be "a little monograph on Hamlet as a source of book titles" - a double-edged in-joke considering the author's own Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead the same year.

Malquist does maintain his sanity with more success than Moon but it is at the expense of his humanity and his position too demands continuous re-assertion. Each new incident requires that he withdraw into further examples of style, continually "defining [his] context" (p.154) On the other hand, he is no more successful than Moon in the practical world and he is bankrupt financially as well as emotionally. However, Malquist possesses a quality which could make him a power to be reckoned with. When his lack of feeling is developed and allied to personal ambition, he becomes the sinister Archie Jumper. In Jumpers the concern with personal style is translated into concern with administrative order and control; detachment and withdrawal from the chaos is translated into an amoral approach to life and the refusal to acknowledge the existence of any problem that is not capable of pragmatic solution.

Jane Moon also creates and continually defines her own context; Stoppard does not allow her to articulate her problem but it is clear that her particular refuge lies in role-playing the romantic heroine. Hence her encouragement of Slaughter and Jones who fight over her (their cowboy garb and idiom fulfilling some role-playing need of their own) and her lies regarding her relationship with Moon. She tells Long John Slaughter that her husband was killed in a duel and to both cowboys she is known as Fertility Jane - an ironically inappropriate title in view of the fact that she and Moon cannot even

consummate their marriage. They cannot "act naturally" together and Moon tries to account for this by relating it to the fact that they knew each other well as children and cannot cope with a different perspective on their relationship. He tries to account for it further by referring vaguely to problems in her family - "she had a terrible childhood, with her family, you know"(p.142) - but this is not explored satisfactorily. When Jane became Dotty in Jumpers, Stoppard gave more specific detail about the character's search for romance and emotional sustenance via role-playing. Dotty's background receives more attention and it is clear from a newspaper article which Stoppard wrote whilst Jumpers was going into rehearsal that there was a need for a satisfactory explanation for Dotty's condition which would highlight her contribution to the play's central dilemma. Commenting on the start of the rehearsal period Stoppard notes, "The reading passes off all right. In the discussion afterwards there is a general feeling that Dotty's background is a bit obscure...."<sup>(4)</sup> In the novel Moon's is the only problem explored in any depth; the rest serve as further illustrations of it, and contribute to the delineation of a world full of incongruities. In Jumpers Stoppard minimised the number of characters and demonstrated more effectively how each type represented a different perspective or response on the same central question. The problem itself was presented dramatically as a philosophical proposition and was set firmly in a social context which added greater poignancy and immediacy to the characters' suffering. The stage in Jumpers imposed a tighter structure because the medium does not allow for a large cast and frequent changes of location. For all their wanderings, the characters do not, in fact, go anywhere. This is demonstrated more effectively in Jumpers where the characters are confined physically and the play's real movement is in the progress of the argument. Mr. Moon becomes Professor George

Moore, professional philosopher with the academic's intellectual response; Jane becomes Dotty, star of musical stage, with the artist's essentially emotional response; Lord Malquist becomes Sir Archie Jumper, the amoral administrator whose methods are determined by pragmatic considerations alone. And in the play, the central linguistic metaphor - mental acrobatics, or jumpers - accommodates the surface farce and humour.

In Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon humour and tone are largely dependent on the incongruities - a cowboy's inability to control a placid mount and his colleague's ineptitude with spurs, the language of the Wild West before a West End dandy, an Irishman who thinks he is the Risen Christ, or a black Irishman who chooses to be a coachman yet "seems to have no rapport with animals"(p.21) The humour, however, soon turns black and it is with unease that we reconcile these superficial absurdities with the fact that the mock cowboys use real bullets - their bullets ensure that Marie, the French maid with a sideline in prostitution, is dead under the settee and Moon sees Slaughter's head "turn inside out"(p.164) Malquist has no compunction in allowing his horses and carriage to run over someone in the crowd; on the Risen Christ's donkey, Cleopatra-fashion in a carpet, are two corpses; and Moon, who fails so pathetically with his own bomb, is finally killed as a result of mistaken identity. The novel's comic tone is not consistent.

The incongruities which contribute to the delineation of an absurd or farcical world so vital to the novel's success - vital because it partly recreates Moon's experience for the reader's better understanding of it - are also responsible for its major weakness. The effectiveness of farce as a technique in the comedy of ideas (and in comedy in general) depends upon the reader's or audience's confidence in the existence of an ordinary, commonplace background which throws

into relief the absurd elements which contend against it. For example, there would be no inherent humour in the marriage of an old philosopher and a sexy young actress if the two types were not normally considered to be incompatible or incongruous. In the novel we often lose sight of this background because we are required to see the world very much from Moon's viewpoint and to understand his inner life via his apprehension of the outer world. When oblique reference is made to the recognizable world in which he moves and which accommodates the strange events, the effect is indeed striking. But the reader must of necessity rely heavily on the author's description of incongruous relationships and does not benefit from the visual relief that there is in farce or comedy on stage. For example, the reader of Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon loses sight of Moon's gradual physical deterioration and forgets the bomb in Moon's pocket until both details return to the foreground of Moon's awareness and are therefore again noted by the author. Moon's physical decline (he cuts his foot and his hand and leaves a trail of blood) is a visual illustration of his mental breakdown but the reader cannot keep in his mind's eye all the images and ideas as they emerge and re-align. If this were on stage, however, the pathos and the absurdity of Moon's appearance would be more eloquent. We can compare the above situation in the novel with the moment in Jumpers when George Moore opens the door, face covered in shaving foam, a tortoise in one hand, a bow and arrow in the other and informs the startled Inspector Bones, "I was expecting a psychiatrist." The Inspector stares at the Professor, notes the silent young secretary in the room and the audience can immediately appreciate his perspective on the situation. The playwright has no need to elaborate or comment; the various layers of meaning and understanding are dramatically illustrated. The narrative remains in the foreground and visual comedy provides comic

relief. Consequently, the novel's major weakness lies in insufficient emphasis on the nature of the world inhabited by the characters, which in turn lessens the impact of their dilemma.

Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon is nevertheless valuable in the investigation of Stoppard's comedy of ideas for the very fact that it seems to have been conceived in essentially theatrical terms. Its weaknesses indicate, by default, how the author's thematic and stylistic preoccupations are temperamentally more suited to the medium of the stage. Chapter headings are akin to stage directions: *Dramatis Personae and Other Coincidences*; *A Couple of Deaths and Exits*; *Spectator As Hero*. Events are introduced as if on to a stage: *Enter Right - The Funeral of the Year*. The theatrical metaphor is reinforced thematically in the importance of acting and role-playing for each character - be it dandy, romantic heroine, Western hero, literary companion. Most important of all, Moon's problem is that he cannot "act natural" - a dilemma he shares with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Moon feels like an actor "trapped in the room, without a cue or a plausible motive for any speech or action"(p.58) The novel is also successful in maintaining its own coherent inner logic. Moon's approach to philosophical questions about existence can never be resolved and his life is ended amidst further confusion: Mr Cuttle, a newcomer to the scene, recognises Malquist's horse-drawn carriage which had run over Mrs Cuttle. He throws in a bomb and only when it is too late does he realise that the passenger is not Malquist himself. Moon dies, the victim of an absurdly logical case of mistaken identity, and the novel demonstrates the author's concern with the reciprocal nature of form and content - a concern which characterises Stoppard's comedy of ideas on the stage. In most comedy from the Old Comedy of Ancient Greece, through Shakespeare and the Restoration to the 20th century, absurdities and misunderstandings are resolved by the

end. The rules of the real world once more supercede the inverted order of the holiday world of the comedy; truth comes to light and cases of mistaken identity are solved. The characters have usually profited in self-knowledge or in knowledge of others and although they may not all end happily - Jack may not have Jill as Berowne observes ruefully in Love's Labours Lost <sup>(5)</sup> more people are nearer the truth than they were at the beginning. In Stoppard's comedy only the audience are any the wiser - Professional Foul and The Real Thing are notable departures from this rule, as will be discussed later. Stoppard's characters fail to make personal progress but they succeed in demonstrating the complexities of an argument or idea and there is no question of a final solution, just as there is none for Moon.

## CHAPTER VII

Jumpers

(National Theatre, Old Vic, 2 February 1972)

Jumpers marks a high point in the development of Stoppard's comedy of ideas, bringing together the various threads of philosophical interest and experiments with form and content which characterised his plays and novel since Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead. Form and content, structure and style are inseparable in this play, each contributing to and commenting on the other. In the guise of a farce, Stoppard offers the audience a play dealing with linguistic philosophy and metaphysics. To say, as does Professor J. Bennett, that the philosophical content "serves the play only in a decorative and marginal way"<sup>(1)</sup> or, with Henning Jensen writing about Professor Bennett's article, that the philosophical content is marginal rather than central to the structure of the play"<sup>(2)</sup> is to ignore the vital relationship of form and content and, indeed, the very nature of the play itself. In fact, both the above-named philosophers concentrate almost exclusively on the philosophical content and singularly fail to consider the nature of the vehicle in which it is carried. Jumpers is a play, not a philosophical lecture but it is conceived as a play dealing with philosophical issues and these are not the exclusive prerogative of the professional philosopher. Indeed, part of the force of the play lies in its demonstration of how philosophical theories affect the non-academic life. Stoppard has stated quite clearly, and rightly, that most of the philosophical propositions in the play "are propositions which have been claimed and dressed up by academic philosophy, but they are nevertheless the kind of propositions which might occur to any intelligent person."<sup>(3)</sup> Jumpers aims at total theatre, an event combining music and dance, seriousness and song, exploiting to the full all the materials available to the

playwright. It marks a high point in Stoppard's experiments with the stage and its relationship with the audience; it dispenses with conventional structure based on development of plot and character and creates a major comedy of ideas. The stage accommodates a wide variety of styles and an apparently surreal juxtaposition of characters and events.

This freedom from the traditional restraints of conventional dramatic structure is made possible by Stoppard's exploitation of the paradoxes inherent in his subject matter. By skilful deployment of the comic technique of *reductio ad absurdum*, Stoppard can argue with impeccable logic whilst simultaneously exposing the inadequacies of logic.

If rationality and empiricism are to be the guiding lights of our times, as asserted by logical positivism, let us apply this principle to all aspects of our life, to our environment and our institutions. Let us reject all things irrational or not empirically verifiable. This would effectively remove our dependence on morality, religion and mystery. Archie, Moore and Dotty respectively illustrate the outcome of such a proposition. If value judgments are nonsensical, unverifiable expressions of feeling, then murder cannot be evil - at most it would be anti-social. To set the play in motion, therefore, let us have a murder - for logical reasons of expediency, of course - and see what kind of world we might have once this particular philosophic proposition is applied to the activities of the human race. Ironically and paradoxically, this focus on the rational leads to the most irrational and surreal combination of characters and events. In terms of theatre it leads to farce - behind which, traditionally, lies a perfectly reasonable explanation - and to an exuberant combination of seriousness and comedy, philosophy and farce. The former provides the theme, the latter provides the structure. Together they create the comedy of ideas.

"Does, for the sake of argument, God, so to speak, exist?" - a hesitant, undynamic start to the paper with which Professor Moore struggles for most part of the play, because language itself, as will be demonstrated, is fraught with dangers. "My method of inquiry this evening into certain aspects of this hardy perennial may strike some of you as overly engaging but experience has taught me that to attempt to sustain the attention of rival schools of academics by argument alone is tantamount to constructing a Gothic arch out of junket." The attempt to present a philosophical debate on stage is equally audacious; if "A theatre audience" were to replace "rival schools of academics" Moore's statement could be Stoppard's own apology, for the subject matter is not confined to academics; it is relevant at all times and has been since man first began to exercise his reason and imagination to both comprehend and control his environment. It is at the same time especially appropriate to the 20th century when rapidly increasing knowledge in the sciences poses greater challenges to Faith. Jumpers presents "this hardy perennial" as a proposition, championed by George Moore. Its counter-argument is represented by the logical positivist philosophy of Sir Archie Jumper, Vice-Chancellor of the University. The social implications of logical positivist theory are seen in the workings of the Radical-Liberal Party, also led by Sir Archie Jumper, and its ethical ramifications are made clearly apparent in the behaviour of the astronauts on the moon. Moore's wife, the retired star of the musical stage, shows the theory's effects on the life of the emotions. Archie Jumper would consider the question "Does God exist?" to be irrelevant, referring as it does to a metaphysical being. Logical positivism holds that such a being cannot be proved logically to exist: "A statement expresses a genuine empirical hypothesis - that is, worthy of the attention of philosophers, - if some possible sense

experience should be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood."<sup>(4)</sup> It need not be conclusively verifiable but it must be possible for sense experience to render it probable. This being so, "no statement which refers to a "reality" transcending the limits of all possible sense experience can possibly have any literal significance; from which it must follow that the labours of those who have striven to describe such a reality have all been devoted to the production of nonsense."<sup>(5)</sup> Linguistic considerations undermine Moore's efforts from the start and Stoppard derives much comic capital from the struggle with language and meaning.

Archie Jumper thinks of Moore as a talker of nonsense and indeed some of the latter's arguments, striving to name the unknowable, do sound nonsensical: "How does one know what it is one believes when it's so difficult to know what it is one knows. I don't claim to know that God exists, I only claim that He does without my knowing it, and while I claim as much I do not claim to know as much; indeed I cannot know and God knows I cannot." (p.71) The desperate exclamation and colloquial non-philosophical use of "God knows" on which the argument both climaxes and crumbles is both amusing and revealing in the way precision of expression collapses at crucial moments. Equally important is the dramatic illustration of the weakness of a language on which linguistic philosophers base their theories. Moore strives to show that too great a dependence on language can be counter-productive since language is "a finite instrument applied to an infinity of ideas." It is "an approximation of meaning and not a logical symbolism for it." (p.24) Vaclav Havel's The Memorandum (which will be referred to more fully in relation to Stoppard's Professional Foul) illustrated the dangers of trying to fetter something as fluid as language with strict logic.<sup>(6)</sup> Nuances and overtones will seep through the barriers of even the most logically constructed

language. Bertrand Russell, to whom Moore refers more than once in his search for the right words, like many other 20th century philosophers, often approached his discipline through considerations of language and he had pointed out that formulations of words could be logically non-sensical despite being grammatically correct. The liar paradox, whereby the statement "I am lying" is true only if it is false, and false if it is true, illustrate this ambiguity. <sup>(7)</sup> There is added irony in Moore's difficulties in finding the correct terms with which to refer to Russell himself - should he be "the late Lord Russell" or "my friend the late Lord Russell"? This difficulty, compounded by Dotty's assertion that he was her friend, not Moore's, suggests that the friendship in question was one of partial professional affinity rather than real - the joke introduces the atheist philosopher's viewpoint on the argument preoccupying Moore. Dotty insists that Russell was her friend: "If he hadn't asked me who was that bloke always hanging about, you'd never have met him." (p.31) In any case, Russell did not appear to take Moore any more seriously than Archie does. This is not surprising when one considers that Russell, an atheist, criticised religious beliefs as rationally indefensible and indeed, a positive hindrance to human progress and well-being, <sup>(8)</sup> whereas for Moore the existence of a First Cause is essential if life is to have any meaning.

The historical G.E. Moore, author of Principia Ethica, took an essentially empiricist standpoint on the theory of knowledge but had, nevertheless, been able to reject the sceptical conclusions often drawn from empiricism and to assert the validity of a kind of moral intuition. When Stoppard's George Moore struggles to prove empirically that God-or-Gods-exist and that belief in moral values is valid despite not being empirically verifiable by sense experience, some members of the audience might appreciate the subtle irony of the name he

shares with the historical G.E. Moore. By giving his character this name, Stoppard is drawing the comparison, economically via suggestion and allusion, with the historical Moore. However, it is not necessary for the audience to have detailed knowledge of the historical Moore's beliefs in order to respond to the deeper levels of the play's meaning. Recognition of the fact that the two philosophers - one real, one fictional - share the same name but disagree on philosophical issues, is sufficient to ensure a level of irony. Moreover the paper he is preparing for the Symposium, Moore provides the relevant information about his famous namesake's beliefs which will make the deeper levels of meaning accessible to all the audience. Professor Moore's failure to take the imaginative step which would enable him to reject the sceptical conclusions of logical positivism and to accept a certain measure of uncertainty - to attain the Negative Capability praised by Keats - is emphasised when he commends the historical G.E. Moore for avoiding "the moral limbo devised by his successors," but makes cutting remarks about "the intuitionist philosopher(who)did not believe in God," and asserts that "of all forms of wishful thinking, humanism demands the greatest sympathy."(p.67) Moore's pursuit of greater accuracy of expression and meaning - he needs two Gods, one to create the world and another to support moral values - leads to his ungrammatical "Are God?"(p.25) He strives to explain to Bones that "though my convictions are intact and my ideas coherent, I can't seem to find the words...", to which Bones, taking the detective's perfectly reasonable common sense approach, retorts, "Well, 'Are God?' is wrong for a start." Moore's dilemma lies partly in the fact that he cannot simply accept his own convictions but feels impelled, by nature, to find the right words to provide academic respectability for them. This compulsion forces him to play into the hands of the opposition by implicitly conceding the

need for empirical proof. He points out that "a small number of men...have been able to argue coherently against the existence of God," and that "a much larger number of men, by the exercise of their emotional and psychological states," have affirmed the same.(p.25) He concedes that "the onus of proof [has] passed from the atheist to the believer"(p.25) The linguistic and visual joke with which this conclusion is capped, emphasises Moore's inability to proceed: Looking into an imaginary mirror in the stage's fourth wall and preparing to squeeze a blackhead, he concludes, "The tide is running[the atheist's] way...There is presumably a calendar date—a moment—when the onus of proof passed from the atheist to the believer, when, quite suddenly, secretly, the noes had it."(p.25) When he straightens up he is faced with the same question: is God? and he starts his argument again.

Moore's inability to move beyond this point carries serious and potentially tragic consequences because his failure has wider implications. He is, as Stoppard himself has pointed out, "culpably ineffectual."<sup>(9)</sup> Moore may be sympathetic but he offers no practical resistance to the world as ruled by Archie. He can glance at the events reported on the television screen and he can observe the political progress of the Radical-Liberal Party from the window in Doty's room but he fails to appreciate fully their connection with the subject of his lecture. He may disapprove of what is happening in the world outside his study but he only partly understands the nature of these events to which he in any case pays little attention, considering them with notable linguistic absurdity, to be part of "the day to day parochialism of international politics."(p.31):

- Moore : It seems in dubious taste...soldiers...fighter planes...After all, it was a general election, not a coup d'état.  
Doty : It's funny you should say that.  
Moore : Why?

Dotty : Archie says it was a coup d'état not a general election.

(p.34)

When he witnesses the attempt to silence the Press(p.37) he denounces the action intellectually but ignores the need for his own involvement in political and social events. The arrest of the newspaper proprietors, the killing of McFee and later Clegthorpe, all suggest that Moore is not alone in his struggle against the evils of the world created by logical positivism. They demonstrate dramatically the implications of the philosophical theory which Moore opposes intellectually and illustrate the fact that philosophical theories are not separated from everyday life - they do gradually seep through into the national consciousness where they are seen in action. Moore, however, does not make this connection and continues his struggle as if alone, not recognising kindred spirits. Even at the end of the play he ignores a direct plea from Clegthorpe: "Well, this seems to be a political quarrel...Surely only a proper respect for absolute values...universal truths...philosophy..."(p.85) Moore's inaction contrasts very starkly with the historical Russell's very active public campaigning on certain issues - his support of C.N.D. for example.

In his own study, however, Moore is very active. As the University's moral philosopher he argues against the prevailing logical positivist ethos, asserting that moral and aesthetic absolutes should be distinguished: goodness in man does not depend exclusively on one's viewpoint in the same way that would apply to goodness in, say, a bacon sandwich. Logical positivism would rightly maintain that the word "good" has meant different things to different people according to context. Moore points out that this is a statement about language and how it is used in different societies, not a statement about values. What should concern the philosopher is the existence of

the notion of "good" and "better". It may be manifested differently in different societies and comic juxtaposition makes the point vividly : "a tribe which believes it confers honour on its elders by eating them is going to be viewed askance by another which prefers to buy them a little bungalow somewhere."(p.34) But the fact remains that there is a notion of some actions being good and some bad:

"The irreducible fact of goodness is not implicit in one kind of action any more than in its opposite, but in the existence of the relationship between the two. It is the sense of comparisons being in order."

(p.85)

This lucid and convincing statement concludes a long speech (in terms of theatre) giving part of Moore's proposed paper on the goodness, badness or indifference of man, and demonstrating his struggles with the combined problem of ethics and language. He appears to have gained some confidence and strength. However, as if to remind and perhaps reassure the audience that they are at a play, not a lecture, Stoppard follows the speech with a dramatic and speechless demonstration of Archie's method of coping with problems: He arrives with an obedient troupe of Jumpers (or acrobats) and, in contrast to Moore's painstaking, academic agonising, he choreographs a slick and witty musical number in which, magician-like, he produces a six-foot-long plastic bag which neatly solves the problem of the removal of McFee's body. That is the only problem - an administrative one - that he recognises and he acts dispassionately as ever. Moore grapples with theory; Archie deals coldly with facts. The theatrical method of its presentation maintains both the play's comic tone and the audience's ability to remain objective before the very serious wider implications of the characters' behaviour. The swift transition from philosophy to music hall controls the pace. It relaxes the tension whilst simultaneously advancing the theme and provides an opportunity to end Act One on a high note of laughter with which to send the audience

into the interval.

It is Archie's philosophy which permeates the world of the play and it might seem initially to have impressive backing. The theory of relativity provides the background to this century because it has removed the comforting belief in stability and certainty offered by physics in the past when it acted on more limited information. Today's scientist thinks of himself as making interim judgments rather than dealing with absolute truths; the greater his knowledge, the humbler his claims. To some people this continually mobile perspective proves a source of fascination which in no way undermines Faith. To others like Archie it merely facilitates a policy of amorality and expediency. The removal or weakening of Faith questions belief in absolutes and for a third group of people this creates a meaningless void. As a professional philosopher, Moore is able to distance himself from the void more successfully than his predecessors Albert and Mr. Moon, and to suggest that empiricism and metaphysics need not be mutually exclusive. However, the same academic discipline which helps him proceed so far prevents him from going any further. He persists in trying to locate the point of fusion and this he cannot do; instead he entrenches himself in his study. On approaching the Vice-Chancellor for the recently vacated Chair of Logic he comments tartly, "My work on moral philosophy has always been based on logical principles and it would do no harm at all if the Chair of Logic applied itself occasionally to the activities of the human race." (p.73) Unfortunately for him, and even more so for Dotty, his intellectual recognition of the relationship is not put into practice and his moral position is thereby called into question. In a later play, Professional Foul, Stoppard would place greater emphasis on the immorality of the philosopher's failure to put his own theories into practice.

Like many a stage philosopher parodied by comedians Moore has been blind to events going on around him whilst he contemplates his left sock and tries to define a "good bacon sandwich" or a "good wicket". He is the absent-minded professor who, when he opens the door to the Inspector, has his face covered in shaving foam, holds a bow-and-arrow in one hand and a tortoise in the other. He confuses the order of his notes, pedantically searches for correct formulations of words to refer to others, shuts himself in his study whilst the rest of the house is enjoying a party and, moreover, has a young beautiful wife who turns to a younger man for comfort. A "real live" philosopher, as Professor A.J. Ayer described himself, commended  
(10)  
the skill of the parody in his review of Jumpers.

On the surface these are the ingredients for a Feydeau farce about a bumbling professor and a young wife but in the play of ideas they serve to elucidate the play's inner logic. Moore's attempts to write a paper on moral philosophy are continually interrupted. They run parallel to Bones' investigation into the murder of McFee and the gradual revelation of the nature of the world outside the set. As the two lines of enquiry - one philosophical, the other factual - intersect then separate, the audience realises that they are complementary. Both search for clues, one theoretically, another in practical terms. The shooting of McFee which provides the obvious subject matter for Bones' investigation is also inextricably bound with Moore's philosophical concerns. The Inspector's investigation cannot be satisfactorily concluded because a definitive answer would be at odds with the play's inner logic which stresses that "the truth" is but an interim judgment. The Inspector searching for practical clues poses a more serious problem to Archie who adroitly tricks him into reversing roles and becoming the suspect in another "crime" by exploiting Bones' admiration for Dorothy Moore, star of the musical

stage. It is an amusing but frightening insight into the methods of the administrator who represents logical positivist philosophy in action. Moore, however, is allowed to proceed with his paper because he poses no real problem to Archie. He is so intent on writing his paper that ironically he ignores the world to which it relates. He fails to make the connection between his own preoccupations and the events in the social/political world. In other words he prevents himself from putting his theories into practice; he ambushes himself both literally, when he shuffles his notes into disorder and begins his paper with, "Secondly!" (p.24) and metaphorically. He is not alone in suffering the tragic consequences.

Moore has been oblivious to McFee's unhappiness with his position and does not realise, even at the end when the pattern begins to repeat itself with Clegthorpe's removal, that he could have found in him a kindred spirit. His response on hearing of his colleague's "suicide" is as cold and selfish as Archie's in its lack of emotion. He thinks of it solely in philosophical terms and can still be concerned about presenting his paper to the symposium. Yet however politically powerless Moore remains, he retains a tattered dignity by virtue of his sheer persistence. He is the Chaplinesque man striving against unfair odds, in a world where those in command change the rules just when he seems to be gaining ground. It is because we feel that he is right that we laugh affectionately at his fumbling and pedantry, at his continually ambushing his own argument and his determination to assert himself when he thinks he is on home ground. His dictation is punctuated by moments of comedy as he relishes his own jokes ("In an impressive display of gymnastics, ho ho, thank you, Professor McFee bends over backwards to demonstrate that..."); allows himself a little professional malice ("The Professor, whose reading is as wide as his jumping is high..."); pedantically pursues a metaphor

("Nevertheless, up this deeply-rutted garden path, Professor McFee leads us, pointing out items of interest along the way..."p.52-5) Moore's pathetically human enjoyment at these moments of victory counterpoints his impotence in the real world. At the same time, the humour at his expense enables the audience to contemplate his failure without destroying the play's balance of seriousness and humour, the vital relationship between form and content. Kenneth Tynan's observation that "Comedy, perhaps, is merely tragedy in which people don't give in" is particularly well suited to Moore's situation, even though it was applied to a very different play. (11)

The importance of this relationship between seriousness and humour is speechlessly and movingly demonstrated at the moment when Moore appears to have burnt his own bridges. Archie neatly disposes of the mystery in life with his facile, "Unlike mystery novels, life does not guarantee a denouement; and if it came, how would one know whether to believe it?"(p.81) Exeunt Archie and Crouch, closely followed by the Secretary. Seeing the blood on the latter's coat, Moore realises that it must have come from the top of the cupboard and climbs on a chair to investigate. He finds the hare, Thumper, killed by his own arrow and grief-stricken, steps down, only to flatten Pat the tortoise. No movement is possible for Moore; laughter is the audience's only relief. Stoppard later revealed that he originally intended stepping on the tortoise to mark the end of Act I but it is obviously far more effective - both thematically and theatrically - at the end of Act II. In the 1985 Aldwych production when many in the audience might have been expected to be more prepared for Pat's unfortunate end, their expectations were deliberately challenged by the earlier stage business: Moore placed Pat on his desk top and Archie narrowly missed landing on the tortoise when he hoisted his considerable weight to sit on the desk. The addition (12)

of this stage business gave a further edge to the laughter -- as the Director must have intended. Moore's stepping on the tortoise marks the climax of the nightmare world of the play and Act II gives way to the Coda. The stage business involving the animals reminds us even as we helplessly and hysterically wait for the 'crunch' how necessary it is for Moore to prove that life will not always abide by the most apparently rational statements. Purely rational arguments do not always make sense. The fate of the impaled Thumper disproves Zeno's famous paradox that an arrow never reaches its target because it must first cover half the distance, then half the remainder and so on ad infinitum. The fate of Pat disproves another paradox (Moore's amalgam of Aesop's fable and Zeno's paradox about Achilles and the hare) which showed "in every way but experience" that a tortoise given a head start in a race with a hare could not be overtaken -- poor Pat fails to move at all and Moore steps on to him. The climactic, almost hysterical, self-ambushing end to Act II demonstrates Moore's impotence in the practical world all too vividly. It invites our laughter and controls our sympathy. Both are important as we watch Moore pick himself up from the ground and attempt to face Archie once more, in the Coda.

By contrast, Archie takes full advantage of the discovery that "truth is an interim judgment" and that "Life does not guarantee a denouement", to further his own interests. Promotion in the University depends on agility in jumping through the Vice Chancellor's hoop. Political life is dictated by his Radical-Liberal Party. The ethical ramifications of his control are further observed in the televised reports of events on the moon -- the same events which have such a powerful effect on Dotty and McFee. Archie's sole aim is control. He places no importance on personal relationships -- it is immaterial to him whether he is Dotty's doctor, psychologist, legal representative

or lover, as long as he remains in control. He refuses to engage with what Moore would consider the real issues. If McFee is in the way, remove him. His administration is cool and unhampered by human or ethical considerations. When he makes his first appearance and is described as 'a dandy', he recalls the 18th century stylist, Lord Malquist and his relationship with Dotty may seem superficially to mirror that of Malquist and Jane. His emphasis on self, however, takes a more sinister turn than Malquist's which is primarily defensive. Neither philosopher nor artist like Moore or Dotty, he is a jack-of-all-trades: M.D., D.Phil., D.Litt., L.D., D.P.M., D.P.T. (Gym). Neither intellectual nor emotional, his eminently practical approach to problems is indeed more immediately helpful to Dotty than Moore's pedantic "hadn't-we-better-inform-the authorities?" approach. (p.32) Archie has no respect for authority per se but will himself become any authority even with the swiftness of putting on the appropriate hat. When Dotty finds herself with a corpse on her hands she calls for Archie who supplies practical advice. He ignores the emotion in her cry for help but duly arrives next morning to dispose of the problem. He helps keep Dotty's spirits up in their deliberately ambiguous relationship of patient and doctor, but he offers no emotional sustenance. According to Archie, emotion is nonsensical: "There is no question of things getting better. Things are one way or they are another way; 'better' is how we see them." (p.41)

The contrast between Archie's and Moore's reactions is strikingly illustrated in the nightmare sequence of the Coda where the latter's impassioned vulnerability is seen to be no match for the former's chilling lack of emotion. Whereas Moore has spent most of the play deliberating over his paper, seeking to demonstrate that purely rational arguments do not always make sense, Archie merely demands that the symposium begin with a two-minute silence - "That will give me a

chance to prepare mine" and will deal adequately with the memory of their departed colleague. (In the event McFee is granted "Approximately two minutes of approximate silence" - an amusing but frightening reminder of the low priority given to human life in this world.) When he does speak, Archie's argument is glib nonsense and he appears to have changed the rules of language itself: "Man - good, bad or indifferent? Indeed, if moon mad herd instinct, is God dad the inference? - to take another point: if goons in mood, by Gad is sin different of banned good, f'r'instance? - thirdly: out of the ether, random nucleic acid testes or neither universa vice, to name but one - fourthly: If the necessary being isn't, surely mother of invention as Voltaire said, not to mention Darwin different from the origin of the specious - to sum up: Super, both natural and stitious, sexual ergo cogito er go-go sometimes, as Descartes said, and who are we? Thank you."(p.83) This nonsense is of a particularly nightmarish quality, the occasional glimmer of sense or recognition suggesting that this is 'the real thing' and not a dream.

The allusion to real historical people is one of Stoppard's important echo techniques which help a passage to work on different levels. As the frightening nonsense of nightmare and a demonstration of how Archie cuts the ground from beneath Moore's feet, it is accessible to all the audience. Archie's words echo the sounds and rhythms of speech but miss the meanings. His refusal to acknowledge the existence of a problem makes him impervious to real argument and that, since Archie is the one in control, undermines Moore's desperate attempts at coherent persuasion. The names and some of the phrases such as "origin of the specious" will register echoes of science and philosophy in the minds of all the audience and this recognition is all that is needed for the passage to work successfully. The members of the audience who can pursue the references will follow

the argument on a deeper thematic level; they may recall that Voltaire was deeply concerned with the improvement of the human condition and bring to mind the hero's progress in the world satirised in Candide; they may note how Darwin's theory of evolution could be taken by Archie to support his own methods of procedure, for Darwin's theory had indeed undermined beliefs about man's superior role in God's design. But they may also note that Darwin had not inferred that human beings should therefore model their behaviour on nature's with its insistence that the fittest and those who adapt survive. Those members of the audience who can pursue the reference to Descartes, whose argument "Cogito ergo sum" is here parodied, may recall Descartes' argument that one of the "proofs" of God's existence lay in the mind: if imperfect man can find in his mind the idea of a supreme perfection, the cause of the idea of perfection must itself be a perfect being - God. Whether or not they agree with the conclusion, they will appreciate its relevance to Moore's struggle in the play. A professional background in philosophy, however, is not essential and the arguments are not pursued in the same way that is required of a philosophical paper, but they are pursued intelligently and with informed interest. Most important of all, the context in which the philosophical propositions are discussed, with its emphasis on the ethical, social and political implications of academic theory, demands serious consideration. The philosophers' names and scientific theories like those of Darwin or Einstein would be familiar to all the audience to some degree and that is sufficient to set up the reverberations. That the professional philosopher can take the argument even further, is a bonus and testifies to Stoppard's own grasp of his material. As in the extract quoted above, the playwright's aim is to make allusions which will encourage the audience to think about the issues in the light of the events on stage. A literate audience would respond

to the nightmarish quality, the travesty parading as argument which typifies Archie's behaviour. It is, besides, an interesting demonstration of his own Cognomen Syndrome at work. The Cognomen Syndrome allows, en route, the joke about an osteopath named Bones and a chiroprapist called Foot, but more importantly it draws attention to the importance of names in the play. When Archie says, "The Cognomen Syndrome is my baby you know...I've got it. Jumper's the name." (p.61) he draws attention to Stoppard's economical method of association and allusion. It is at first a terrible and amusing insight into Archie's methods of procedure when he appoints the agnostic spokesman for Agriculture to the post of Archbishop of Canterbury. But the Cognomen Syndrome is seen to work on a subtler, thematic level when, once he is Archbishop, Clegthorpe succumbs to the traditions of the office, like a famous historical predecessor, and ventures, "Surely belief in man could find room for man's beliefs...?" (p.84) Archie's reaction pursues both the allusion and literary humour and helps the audience bring to mind another amoral, at times amusing ruler: "My Lord Archbishop, when I was last in Lambeth I saw good strawberries (13) in your garden - I do beseech you send for some." When this Archbishop refuses to be sidetracked and insists on his authority - "I mean now that I am Archbishop of Canterbury" - Archie's exclamation is another economical allusion, an historical one to Henry II who removed Thomas Becket as Archbishop of Canterbury when the latter put the good of the Church before the interests of the temporal ruler: "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest!" Archie's misuse of reason, his exploitation of the imperfect nature of the world, is dramatically highlighted in his glib summary: "Millions of children grow up without suffering deprivation, and millions, while deprived, grow up without suffering cruelties, and millions, while deprived and cruelly treated, none the less grow up. No laughter

is sad and many tears are joyful. At the graveside the undertaker doffs his hat and impregnates the prettiest mourner, Wham, bam, thank you Sam."(p.87) There may be truth in some of these observations but our participation in this event belies the assertion about laughter and sorrow. His salutation with its air of complacent finality, illustrates his opportunistic exploitation of the imperfect world and again by allusion, recalls his creator's debt (both stylistically and thematically) to a playwright (Samuel Beckett) noted for his uncompromisingly bleak vision of humanity and its fate. The contrast between the playwright's use of his vision and the character's misuse of his knowledge is implicit.

Archie considers that Moore himself is not important - "He is our tame believer, pointed out to visitors in much the same way as we point out the magnificent stained-glass in what is now the gymnasium" (p.63) When McFee, the Professor of Logic, however, starts believing in God, this, to Archie, is a regression which poses serious problems to the administrator, "A severe blow to Logic."(p.81) Hence the necessity for the deviant's removal, the event which sets the play in motion, and which is repeated in the Coda with Clegthorpe, McFee's successor. The play's circular progress emphasises the fact that Archie is still in control.

The Vice-Chancellor's iron grip on all areas of life is highlighted because of its importance to the play's theme and it is also responsible for a great deal of the play's comedy. To sustain the required equilibrium of seriousness and humour, Stoppard continually draws our attention to the nature of the event in progress - i.e. the play. He employs jokes and situations familiar to a theatre-going, television-viewing audience, carrying immediate comic overtones. The characters, too, are easily identifiable types in theatrical repertoire: beautiful young wife, an 'artiste'; older husband, a pedantic, bumbling

professor; enterprising young man-about-town. In either music hall or situation comedy this would be a familiar trio. In Jumpers, however, stock characters and situations contribute to the weaving of the play's intricate design which draws together both form and content. Dotty, as will be demonstrated, is no mere feminine decoration as is usual in the genre; her desires which Moore is unable to satisfy are not merely sexual. Moore is more than a cuckolded old husband or likeable, ineffectual stooge to the enterprising, amoral gangster. Archie plays unmercifully with Moore, treating him as an insignificant booby, out of his league, when in his role of Vice-Chancellor or as a foolish old husband when acting as Dotty's medical adviser, but the implications of such behaviour are more wide-ranging than is usual in situation comedy. The music hall overtones in Archie's statement that he practises "a bit of law, a bit of philosophy, a bit of gym...A bit of one and then a bit of the other..."(p.70) reinforces the deliberate ambiguity in his relationship with Dotty and simultaneously gives further illustration of his amorality. It is at once amusing and threatening - even more so since he never shows signs of humour, always taking himself seriously. Dictators, according to tradition, rarely smile.

Archie astounds Chief Inspector Bones(C.I.D.)with his ludicrous deduction 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) Bones is now cast in the role of comic's stooge as Archie smartly produces the trump card to silence any open-mouthed incredulity: "...leaving this note...Here is the coroner's certificate." Bones rallies enough to demand "Is this genuine?" to which Archie replies indignantly, "Of course it's genuine. I'm a coroner, not

a forger." It could be a scene from a Marx brothers comedy or a stand-up comic duo - except that the audience knows there really is a dead body, his blood all too red on Dotty's evening gown. Moreover, Archie presents his hypothesis in all seriousness, impervious to the ridiculous aspects of it. By directing our attention to this and inviting our laughter, Stoppard enables us to contemplate the situation.

Obvious word play invites our laughter in Archie's first attempt at bribery as he seeks to stop Bones' murder investigation:

Archie : Now, I judge from your curiously formal and somewhat dated attitude, that you are deaf to offers of large sums of money for favours rendered.  
Bones : I didn't hear that.

(p.65)

This initial failure allows Archie to show himself an accurate judge of character in searching for another way to Bones' heart - in his world every man has his price: "Other men have got on - younger men, flashier men...Superintendents...Commissioners..." He is on the right lines because Bones is ambitious: "There may be something in that." But Bones refuses to be side-tracked and Archie is impressed by the logic of the demand, "If McFee shot himself inside a plastic bag, where is the gun?" It is a perfectly reasonable question but one which Archie had not considered. Far from being non-plussed, however, he shows admiration and changes his offer to the prestigious Chair of Logic. A good administrator recognises a useful quality and it is to his own benefit to ensure that it too serves him. The truth is of no importance. In fact, his greatest strength as an administrator - and his greatest weakness as a human being - is his refusal to regard the death as anything more than an administrative inconvenience. Moore's reaction, by contrast, is intellectual: "Where did he find the despair...? I thought the whole point of denying the Absolute was to reduce the scale, instantly, to the inconsequential

behaviour of inconsequential animals, that nothing could ever be that important..."(p.69)

Professionally/intellectually, Archie is no stronger than Moore - he cannot even "jump" well.(p61) (Simon Cadell's Archie, in the 1985 Aldwych production, was physically a slightly stocky figure, making this comment very plausible.) On the sole occasion before the symposium when he deigns to face Moore directly(p.68), he shows that for a logical positivist, his use of language and argument is lax:

- Archie : It's always been a mystery to me why religious faith and atheism should be thought of as opposing attitudes.  
 George : Always?  
 Archie : It just occurred to me.  
 George : It occurred to you that belief in God and the conviction that God doesn't exist amount to much the same thing?  
 Archie : It gains from careful phrasing.

His glibness here is part of his strength as an administrator because, unlike Moore, he is untroubled by the demands of moral or personal integrity. If he can attain his political ends, the means are justified. Bones discovers to his cost that the Vice-Chancellor will not scruple to employ trickery if bribery fails.

We never lose sight of the fact that Archie, like the other characters, is a cliché rather than an exploration of individual psychology. He is used by Stoppard to demonstrate a point of view. The audience is made to laugh - be it warily - at his clinically efficient, amoral behaviour. To forget that he is, in fact, just another character in a carefully crafted work of fiction, to suspend one's belief and enter emotionally into the world portrayed on stage, would make Jumpers a tragedy. After all, what is amusing about murders, political and professional corruption, failed marriage, destroyed lives, a world devoid of meaning or good?

The comic tone is kept continually in play. McFee's predicament,

for example, is full of latent tragic possibilities but the audience is not allowed to concentrate on these, because to feel for McFee as an individual would disturb the balance of seriousness and humour. Instead, Stoppard deliberately selects a viewpoint which will highlight the absurd in McFee's situation - the formerly agnostic Professor of Logic wanted to enter a monastery. Humour is always in the foreground with the emphasis on his relationship with Moore's secretary; an old joke is given a new twist as we learn that McFee intended breaking not only his engagement to the secretary but also his marriage in order to enter a monastery. These gradual revelations about McFee's private life - closely related, as will be seen, to his professional life - are made by Crouch, the caretaker-cum-philosopher since Moore, typically, was utterly oblivious to the people and events going on around him. Stoppard again seems to be challenging the audience who had so far accepted the silent presence of the secretary and are suddenly forced to see her in a new light. McFee is important to the dialectic of Jumpers. When his contemporary Captain Scott consigns his colleague, Oates, to the lunar wasteland to secure his own survival, McFee questions his own theories. As Professor of Logic he had given "philosophical respectability to a new pragmatism in public life", the results of which are reflected in the behaviour of the astronauts on the moon. This dramatic illustration of his own philosophy causes him to recall the first Captain Oates, "out there in the Antarctic wastes, sacrificing his life to give his companions a slim chance of survival." (p.80) Contrasting this behaviour with that on his television screen he concludes, "If altruism is a possibility...my argument is up a gum-tree."

Stoppard's handling of this particular thread in the play is a vivid example of the way he engages the audience's responses so that nuances and overtones associated with names and situations serve the themes

of his play. The astronauts' names will immediately recall the historical explorers Scott and Oates as surely as Moore's name recalls the philosopher. It needs only a morally similar situation to be established to create a metaphor that will develop one of Stoppard's main themes. Early in Act I the television screen reports, "...Oates was knocked to the ground by his commanding officer...Captain Scott has maintained radio silence since pulling up the ladder and closing the hatch with the remark, 'I am going up now. I may be gone for some time.'"(p.23) The names and the deliberate echoes of the last statement invite the audience's collusion. They enjoy their recognition of the implicit references and they can laugh at the way the same words are applied to behaviour diametrically opposed to that with which they are usually associated. As the play progresses this event is recognised as a vital part of the metaphysical debate. It illustrates the ethical implications of Archie's philosophy and has a profound influence on the lives of McFee and Dotty. McFee, and, later, Clegthorpe attempt to take some action in line with their beliefs but the consequences prove fatal. Dotty's doom is sealed from the start because no action is possible for her. She is confined within her star's bedroom just as Moore is entrenched in his study. A set which is naturalistic in appearance, is in fact endowed with symbolic importance. The characters' inability to move out of the set demonstrates their weakness in life. The bedroom and study are almost constantly before us, separated from each other as well as the outside world. The reasons for this alienation are witnessed through the window, television screen and newspaper reports. Moore does cross the physical barrier dividing their rooms but his own is the only place where he can exercise any form of control; he is totally out of place in his wife's room - a fact emphasised visually by his shabby clothes and their stark contrast to the glamorous

set in which Dotty languishes. It soon becomes clear that the difference of style in their respective rooms points to a far more serious difference in their natures, and that shows how Moore is himself partly to blame for his wife's breakdown. The same modern scientific and philosophical background concerning relativity and perspective, which Archie exploits to serve his own ambitions and which Moore strives to reconcile with Faith, lie at the heart of Dotty's emotional destruction. Scientific advances have ruined her perspective on the moon and Archie's world has consolidated the destruction of everything in which she believed or trusted - mystery and romance have no place in the logical positivist world of the Radical-Liberals. She turns to Moore, her one remaining hope in an attempt to recover from the blow dealt to her world, but he ignores her cries for help because they distract him from his lecture. He does not do so callously; he simply fails to understand her needs which differ from his own. Dotty makes emotional demands whereas he is in need of intellectual reassurance. Unfortunately for Dotty, the fact that his cruelty is not intended does not significantly lessen her suffering. Consequently, her name, which in musical comedy might be given to a dumb blonde type, is as appropriate for one in her mental condition as the name "Jumper" is for the opportunistic Vice-Chancellor. Moreover, "Dorothy" was the name of the historical G.E. Moore's wife and although Stoppard is not interested in mere historical accuracy, his choice has the virtue of combining emotional truth and historical plausibility - a point which John Weightman overlooked when he expressed surprise that Stoppard missed the chance to name the character after the actress playing her (in the first production): "Diana" would have reinforced the moon imagery.

(14)

Dotty's inability to quit her room is emphasised in the aristocratic pretence (as Moore sees it) of her ignorance regarding the location

of the kitchen. The stock joke is tinged with pathos as the play develops and we realise that her ignorance is no mere pretence or aristocratic affectation. Like her predecessor Jane Moon, Dotty is hurt because her emotional needs are rejected. Whereas Jane found some relief in the role of romantic heroine, Dotty is denied even this outlet. She can no longer sing about the moon, fundamental to many a romantic song and symbol of mystery and romance for many a poet. As an artist she depends primarily on her emotions; when these are denied because emotions are subjective and therefore not valid, she is robbed at once of both reason and refuge in existence. Her fondness for charades is a poor substitute and Inspector Bones' sentimental affectation is not the romance for which she yearns. Man's steps on the moon were for Dotty man's rape of the moon's mystery. Her cry of "Murder-Rape-Wolves!" (p.26) is a real cry for help and not, as Moore thinks, the plea for attention by a bored starlet. When the moon landing destroyed her perspective on romance it brought with it the negation of her emotional life: "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) The event which to McFee suggested Faith, to her suggests futility, and her reaction contributes to the dramatic illustration of perspective:

"Poor moon man, falling home like Lucifer. (She turns off the Television; screen goes white)...Of course, to somebody on it, the moon is always full, so the local idea of a sane action may well differ from ours."

(p.38)

Dotty is not particularly concerned by the academic difficulty of proving the existence of a First Cause to give a meaning to life, but the abrupt dislocation of perspective brought about by science, has shattered her very being. The full impact of the horror of their situation is felt when a comic routine involving a domestic dispute about a dead goldfish unexpectedly leads into further revelations

of the extent of Dotty's suffering and their inability to help each other:

- George : (offstage;horrified): My God!  
(George enters from the bathroom,white,shaking with rage)  
You murderous bitch!...You might have put some water in the bath!  
(He is holding a dead goldfish)
- Dotty : Oh dear...I am sorry. I forgot about it.
- George : Poor little Arch---(Catches himself)  
(Archie raises his head a fraction)
- George : Murdered for a charade!
- Dotty : (angrily): Murdered? Don't you dare splash me with your sentimental rhetoric! It's a bloody goldfish! Do you think every sole meunière comes to you untouched by suffering?
- George : The monk who won't walk in the garden for fear of treading on an ant does not have to be a vegetarian....There is an irrational difference which has a rational value.
- Dotty : Brilliant! You must publish your findings in some suitable place like the 'Good Food Guide.'
- George : No doubt your rebuttal would look well in the 'Maccano Magazine.'
- Dotty : You bloody humbug!-the last of the metaphysical egocentrics! You're probably still shaking from the four-hundred-year-old news that the sun doesn't go round you!
- George : We are all still shaking. Copernicus cracked our confidence, and Einstein smashed it: for if one can no longer believe that a twelve-inch ruler is always a foot long, how can one be sure of relatively less certain propositions, such as that God made the Heaven and the Earth....  
(p.74-5)

The reference to the laws of relativity and to the Copernican view of the universe touches Dotty deeply and she suddenly is drained of anger, overwhelmed by a sense of futility. As Archie continues to sit calmly between them, enjoying the food and ignoring their dilemma, Dotty reveals the awful truth:

- Dotty : (dry,drained): Well, it's all over now. Not only are we no longer the still centre of God's universe, we're not even uniquely graced by His footprint in man's image....Man is on the Moon, his feet on solid ground, and he has seen us whole, all in one go, little - local...and all our absolutes, the thou-shalts and the thou-shalt-nots that seemed to be the very condition of our existence, how did they look to two moon-men with a single neck to save between them?... When that thought drips through to the bottom

people won't just carry on. There is going to be such...breakage, such gnashing of unclean meats, such covetting of neighbours' oxen and knowing of neighbours' wives...such dishonourings of mothers and fathers, and bowings and scrapings to images graven and incarnate...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)

The academic, distanced approach is of no use to her and Moore is unable to cope with her emotional demands, they are foreign territory to him. When, ignoring Archie, she cries out against this destruction, "drained" and weeping and appeals affectionately to him, with "Georgie...", the stage directions state clearly that he "won't or can't" help. Instead, he tries to treat the problem of relativity and perspective as a philosophical one and repeats an anecdote about Wittgenstein. Ironically, she has the advantage of being able to recognise Moore's territory better than he himself and her command of the academic idiom shows that it is not weakness in her capacity to understand which is keeping them apart. She demonstrates both wit and insight in teasing the philosopher, referring to his failure to write his book:

"He's stolen a march while you were still comparing knowledge in the sense of having-experience-of, with knowledge in the sense of being-acquainted-with, and knowledge in the sense of inferring facts with knowledge in the sense of comprehending truths, and all the time as you got more and more acquainted with, though no more comprehending of, the symbolic patterns on my Persian carpet, it was knowing in the biblical sense of screwing that you were learning about and maybe there's a book in you yet—"

(p.36)

She is clearly not lacking in intelligence and is more aware of what is happening outside her own and her husband's cocooned existence than he is:

"And yet, Professor, one can't help wondering at the persistence of the reflex, the universal constant unthinking appeal to the non-existent God who is presumed dead. Perhaps He's only missing in action, shot down behind the thin yellow lines of advancing Rad-Libs and getting himself together to go 'Boo!'"

(p.35)

Her glamorous appearance and at times naked body initially suggests a role of feminine decoration, especially when contrasted with the ageing professor in his shabby smoking jacket. But when she infuriates Moore by referring to "rationalising" the Church, it is unfortunately no malapropism. She knows more about politics than he does and when she comments, "At least it's a government that keeps its promises"(p.37) she is not just mouthing a well-worn phrase - the statement is probably as true as it has ever been. However, her recognition of the weakness in Moore's academic approach does not help her cope with the demands of her own nature. Archie helps to "keep her spirits up" but it is significant that she imagines herself with Moore, not Archie, "under that old-fashioned, silvery harvest moon," and that the former comments that they are closer "when all else fails you." She cries out passionately at the loss of a time when "things were in place" and turns to Moore, hoping to recapture a sense of the mystery and romance represented by the moon of poets and popular song-writers. In doing so she is dramatically rejecting Archie's prosaic empiricism which states that things can have any number of real and verifiable properties but that "good and bad, better and worse, these are not real properties of things, they are just expressions of our feelings about them."(p.41) Rational this statement may be but unfortunately, "I don't feel so good today" when Dotty breaks down emotionally shattered and "weeps on George's uncomprehending heart" (here Stoppard's stage directions are as explicit as any in George Bernard Shaw) he can offer no help. He strokes her hair, first gently, then absentmindedly, finally destroying their closeness with his first words, "Have you seen Thumper?" It breaks the tension of the scene but the laughter is not unalloyed; the 'specially trained' hare was to help him demonstrate the fallacy of logical statements disproved by experience. Husband and wife are struggling with the

same problem but from different starting points. Their marriage has failed and they cannot respond to each other's needs because, paradoxically, they are facing the same problem. Their natural responses are so diametrically opposed, either emotional or academic, that they are forced further apart, each taking refuge in his/her own territory. Thus marriage acts as a metaphor, in this play as in previous plays, for communication, for emotional and intellectual support and equilibrium. Infidelity in marriage (real or suspected); young wives and older men; husbands married to their work; opportunistic young men - all these would be well-known to a 20th century audience familiar with situation comedy and domestic dramas. In Jumpers the familiar is given unconventional treatment; characters and situations provide comedy on one level and serious argument on another. They become part of the playwright's theatrical shorthand and his dialogue with the audience. It is significant that Stoppard's plays provide substantial roles for actresses because the women in the plays are rarely merely decorative. They may be the actress, the wife, even the sexy secretary of Dirty Linen, but they are as important in their own right as are the men. The extra-marital affairs may be fodder for comic sexual innuendo on the surface but they are more important on the thematic level. The deliberate ambiguity in the relationship of Dotty and Jane with Archie and Malquist, respectively, reinforces the idea that it is not simply the sexual aspect which is important but what the relationship represents. Of all the characters in the play, Dotty is the one who most deserves our sympathy because she is the one who seems to be suffering most, but Stoppard does not allow her to be seen in too tragic a light hence his emphasis on her as a glamorous, sexy female. He wants to engage the audience's understanding if they are to appreciate Dotty's role in this play of ideas. In order to achieve this he

must maintain the constant balance between the seriousness of the content and the comedy of its presentation. Therefore he makes full use of many comic techniques that will highlight the comedy at the most serious moments. Timing, pacing, repetition, misunderstanding, innuendo, coincidence - all are skilfully applied to keep the laughter in the air. The opening scene of the disastrous party with the demonstration of Dotty's inability to sing about the moon deploys the first three of the above techniques as well as ambushing the audience's expectations. She enters after Archie's introduction, the music starts, we seem set for a stagey musical number, but she dries; it is a false start. She repeats part of Archie's introduction with some amusing changes and tries again, only to dry once more. Before we can fully grasp her failure our attention is directed to a striptease act on a chandelier and obvious stage business involving the stripper and a waiter. We also gradually realise that the audience addressed by Archie and Dotty is not ourselves and this solves our initial uncertainty about whether we should join in the applause. Humour as a distancing technique is again brought into play when dealing with the abrupt ending of the party as Dotty is stranded with the dying gymnast. In performance, the horror of the sight of the dying man trying to pull himself up by clutching at her body is counterpointed by the humour of accompanying music. He dies in her arms and she must hide him. In the 1985 production at the Aldwych Theatre (directed by Peter Wood who also directed the first National Theatre production) the audience was encouraged to laugh at what might otherwise have been a very macabre pas de deux between Dotty and the lifeless gymnast. Dotty's attempt to move the corpse was also so obviously the need for the actress to move from the party set to the bedroom.set, that part of the audience's normal reaction to the idea of the murder was deflected by their interest in how

the actress would accomplish the move. When she succeeded in throwing the body onto the bed, the audience's applause was almost gleeful. As in the awful moment when Moore steps onto the tortoise, the audience is given the opportunity to cope with the horror and despair by grasping at the laughter. Once left alone in her room, Dotty's distress and attempts to hide the dead Jumper are presented through the farcical device of the cupboard door opening and closing at opportune moments. And throughout the play, her cries for help and interruptions of Moore's lecture at climactic moments are, on one level, amusing in their timing, and on a thematic level they are as important to his argument as the more obviously philosophical references which embellish it.

The mood of a scene may be subject to mercurial changes as characters reach the limits of their endurance and are drawn back from the brink; a linguistic joke, familiar comic techniques, effect the change of mood by controlling the pace and carry the argument forward. Moore grows increasingly more agitated as Dotty informs him of recent political events, including the decision to "rationalise the Church", and the appointment of Sam Clegthorpe, Radical-Liberal spokesman for Agriculture, as Archbishop of Canterbury. Dotty tries to calm him down by suggesting tentatively, "I suppose if you think of him as a sort of...shepherd, ministering to his flock..."but this fails:

George : But he's an agnostic.

Dotty : (capitulating): I absolutely agree with you-  
nobody is going to have any confidence in him.  
It's like the Chairman of the Coal Board believing  
in oil.

This reductio ad absurdum exhausts Moore but Dotty tries a new angle, still pursuing the same line of thought:

Dotty : Do you find it incredible that a man with a  
scientific background should be Archbishop of  
Canterbury?

Moore is forced to concede incredulously:

"Credibility is an expanding field...Sheer disbelief hardly registers on the face before the head is nodding with instant hindsight. 'Archbishop Clegthorpe? Of course! The inevitable capstone to a career in veterinary medicine!'"

(p.38)

This reminder about the importance of perspective and the power of language to affect one's view of reality brings to an amusing climax one particular strain (to use a musical analogy). The tension is relaxed and the audience thinks the 'serious' part is over as Dotty and Moore pedantically muse on what would be the correct term to apply to the old Archbishop's removal:

Dotty : He abdicated...or resigned or uncoped himself-  
George : (thoughtfully): Dis-mantled himself, perhaps.

(p.38)

However, this is not the end of the sequence and a new movement begins. As Moore looks out of the window he sees the new Archbishop, "marching along, attended by two chaplains in belted raincoats." Dotty turns on the television which repeats the information about the moon landing. They each pursue their own line of thought, like two melodies in counterpoint which then merge, develop to a crescendo and finally die down as they separate, each to his/her own room once more.(pp.38-42): Moore continues to ponder on the irrationality of the appointment of an agnostic as Archbishop - "from here on the Darwinian revolution declines to its own origins." He derives some comfort from the idea that the existence of God does not depend on "a glorified supporters' club" but is stung to sudden anger by Dotty's "Archie says the church is a monument to irrationality." In a very moving outburst, at moments like a stereotype stage husband exasperated by his wife's stupidity, he juxtaposes the sublime with the ridiculous and affirms his belief:

"The National Gallery is a monument to irrationality! Every concert hall is a monument to irrationality! - and so is a nicely kept garden, or a lover's favour, or a home for stray dogs! You stupid woman, if rationality were the criterion for things being allowed to exist, the world would be one gigantic field of soya beans!"

(p.40)

The contrast between the lyrical and the prosaic enables the audience to laugh and thereby relaxes the tension but the reprieve is temporary because Dotty's melody now takes centre stage. The television reports about the astronauts recalls the destruction, to her, of the moon's mystery: "it was as though I'd seen a unicorn on the television news...." She ponders on her retirement and the powerlessness of words to convey the emptiness within: "The analyst went barking up the wrong tree, of course; I should never have mentioned unicorns to a Freudian." The comic overtones of this reference to Freud invites the audience to view her situation with a degree of objectivity. Moore is anxious to return to his paper and cannot help her, telling her simply that "things will get better." Rejected by Moore, she attempts to find comfort in Archie's philosophy on the relativity of perspective:

"There's no question of things getting better. Things are one way or they are another way; 'better' is how we see them, Archie says, and I don't personally, very much; though sometimes he makes them seem not so bad after all - no, that's wrong, too: he knows not 'seems'."

(p.41)

The echo of the Prince's words from Hamlet is amusing for its juxtaposition of the dissimilar Archie and Hamlet, but the implied reference to the Prince's deliberations on the nature of existence, his concern with action and delay, with being and seeming, is of deeper thematic relevance. Unfortunately, her experience disproves Archie's pronouncements: "I don't feel so good today." She turns to Moore once more and in her desperation to recover mystery and romance we see in all its horror the destruction of her world:

"If you like, I won't see him. It'll be just you and me under that old-fashioned, silvery harvest moon, occasionally blue, jumped over by cows and coupleted by Junes, invariably shining on the one I love; well-known in Carolina, much loved in Allegheny, familiar in Vermont; Keat's bloody moon,-for what has made the sage or poet write but the fair paradise of nature's light-And Milton's

bloody moon! rising in clouded majesty, at length apparent  
 queen, unveiled her peerless light and o'er the dark her  
 silver mantle threw-And Shelley's sodding maiden, with  
 white fire laden, whom mortals call the——(weeping)

Oh yes, things were in place then!

(She weeps on George's uncomprehending heart)

(p.41)

Moore's first words - "Have you seen Thumper?" highlight their alienation and provide welcome comic relief for the audience. Moore returns to his study and Dotty turns her attention once more to the corpse in her room. Thus one particular tune has come to an end but a new note is introduced with a new character, Bones.

The movement of the play is circular; it begins with one murder and ends with another as a second member of the University's acrobatic troupe loses his agility. In the Coda, Moore appeals for the sway of common sense over reason, Archie expresses satisfaction with the status quo and Dotty bids farewell to the moon. The detective story has not been satisfactorily solved, the characters have not developed or progressed in self-knowledge but the audience can now appreciate more fully the complexities of the argument in which they have engaged on stage. As in the comedies of Shakespeare and the poetry of T.S. Eliot, the end is the real beginning. There is no definitive answer but at least the question is clear.

Audience participation is vital to the success of Jumpers. In this comedy of ideas Stoppard depends not only on the audience's understanding but also on their experience as theatre audience. The need for their awareness of themselves as theatre audience was clearly emphasised by the use of a mirrored curtain confronting them on entering the auditorium in both the National Theatre 1976 production in the Lyttleton and in the 1985 Aldwych production. There is no attempt to disguise the fact that the aim of the event in which they are willing participants is to present on stage a carefully crafted play which seeks to highlight certain issues whilst simultaneously

providing entertainment for a literate, theatre-going audience. The playwright relies on the audience's recognition of this relationship, on the assumption of a common literary background and experience of various types of comedy, both in theatre and television, to accommodate the necessary element of narrative in his brand of theatrical shorthand that draws together stage and auditorium. He employs stock jokes, the characters are easily recognisable types, the sets are (apparently) reassuringly naturalistic. But once the play is set in motion the familiar flouts our expectations. The naturalistic and the surreal are in a constant state of balance in proportion to the complementary relationship of philosophy and farce.

The playwright relies heavily on the audience's willingness to respond to the theatrical stimuli, the allusions and suggestions, so he often emphasises his own deliberate machinations. Moreover, the punning and linguistic jokes - above all the main linguistic metaphor which unites the world of the actors with that of philosophers - positively invites the audience's collusion. At the same time this emphasis on its theatricality in style strengthens the structure of the play itself. The movement comes full circle and the audience feels omniscient, they observe the pattern falling into place and stand aside with the dramatist, viewing the mistakes and weaknesses of the characters. In the final analysis, however, they realise that their collusion has been part of the pattern and they have contributed to the creation of an altogether more intricate design. The comedy is as tightly structured as a classical tragedy. Their attention has been controlled like the characters on stage to craft a play which stands independently re-created each time there is an audience: paradox, as has been demonstrated, is an integral part of the dialectic as well as the style. The world of Jumpers is depressing and frightening; the comedy enables us to observe it closely yet with objectivity. By the same token

the play's entertainment value does not detract from the seriousness of its subject matter. Jumpers consolidated unequivocally the reputation Stoppard had established six years earlier with Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead and proved to be one of the best examples to date of his comedy of ideas. Two more years would see another major success - Travesties. The comments of Professor Sir A.J. Ayer, Wykeham Professor of Logic at Oxford and foremost exponent of the principles of logical positivism, highlight Stoppard's achievement: Whilst disagreeing with the philosophical conclusions of Jumpers he states, "Tom is the only living dramatist whose work I would go to see just because he wrote it." He then proceeds to compare Stoppard's approach with that of a more obviously 'committed' and 'serious' contemporary dramatist and adds, "Tom plays with words and makes them dance. John uses them as a sledgehammer."<sup>(15)</sup>

## CHAPTER VIII

Artist Descending A Staircase

(BBC Radio 3 - 14 November 1972)

Artist Descending A Staircase was first broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in November 1972, nine months after the appearance of Jumpers on the stage. The radio play shares the stage play's thematic interest in the question of perspective and its exploitation of the form of the whodunnit. More importantly, it looks forward to Stoppard's next major stage play, Travesties, in both form and content, for it relates to the later play in much the same way that the radio plays, the novel and stage exercises like After Magritte relate to Jumpers. In the radio play Stoppard examines ideas, practises with metaphor and form; in the larger scale stage play he links structure and style, form and content, making full use of the stage as a medium. The circumstances of its commissioning - as one in a series of ten plays specially written for Radio 3 - enabled Stoppard to experiment with form and gave him access to a radio audience whom he could interest in the subject matter. Its main achievement lies in its identification of various elements of the Travesties dialectic and the exploitation of memory as a technical device in the revelation of perspective. Artist Descending A Staircase sows the seeds from which the later play grows: movement into the past facilitates a clearer understanding of the present argument; the artist replaces the philosopher who had dominated the plays up to Jumpers; the concern with war, art and anti-art is introduced. Artist Descending A Staircase highlights the relationship between these areas; Travesties would develop it in still greater depth.

Artist Descending A Staircase solves a "murder" mystery, reveals a love story and questions the role of art in life. It comprises eleven scenes beginning in the present and moving into the past by

a series of flashbacks, linked by memory. Half way through the play the sequence swings back towards the present, covering the same scenes in inverse order and thereby completing a circular pattern. Each movement into the past makes revelations which improve our understanding of the play's present. What appears initially to be the ramblings of old men's memories is in fact a framework for a structured argument. The solution of the murder mystery depends on the interpretation of sounds on a tape - an apt requirement for a radio play. It runs parallel with the almost accidental discovery of a tragedy which in itself acts as a poignant illustration of the nature of perspective. In pursuing this illustration Stoppard takes on board the question of the artist's role in society. To present and solve the murder mystery he engages the very nature of his medium - that is, sound.

The play begins with a sequence of sounds which demands explanation. It is an effective opening which alerts the listener's attention - experience of radio has taught him that much will depend on sounds. There is an irregular droning noise, careful footsteps, creaking board, a voice apparently of recognition, quick steps, a thump, a cry, the cracking of wood followed by a body hitting the ground. It seems straightforward and the listener awaits the discovery of the body which will reveal its identity. His expectations are jolted by what follows. The sequence is repeated and the listener realises that he/she has been listening to a recording of a recording and not the event itself - an aural variation on Stoppard's favourite play-within-a-play device. The repetition of the sequences also serves to fix the sounds in the listener's mind, for their re-interpretation will be of vital import later in the play, and the listener must be able to recall the original sounds. The sounds are followed by two old men engaged in an attempt to explain them, but the men

do not fit into a familiar category - are they police or accomplices? Their first exchange suggests that they are the villains, reliving their actions:

Martello : I think this is where I came in.  
Beauchamp : And this is where you hit him.

But this idea is immediately rejected by their next exchange which indicates that Martello's words do not, in fact, mean what they say - or rather, they do not say what he means. The listener re-adjusts his attention once more but is again foiled as the two men seem to be accusing each other. Each insists he knows the other must have committed the murder; both agree that one of them did and both agree on the interpretation of sounds themselves: the droning noise is their friend Donner, dozing; the careful footsteps belong to the intruder, greeted by Donner as a friend; the quick steps and the cry are the attack on Donner after which he falls to his death, crashing through the balustrade. Part of the listener's dilemma is solved - the sounds have been satisfactorily explained. It now remains to listen for the clues which will determine which of the two men was responsible. Yet possible motives seem so ridiculous that the listener questions the old men's sanity: Donner's refusal to clean the bath after use, his persistence in hiding the honey and whistling the opening of Beethoven's Fifth in six/eight time(p.15) hardly qualify as motives for murder for either Beauchamp or Martello whom these habits irritated. Their confusion of people and places reinforces the listener's doubts - surely no one in his right mind could fail, as these two men fail, to distinguish between Edith Sitwell and Augustus John. At the same time, the scene sets the tone for the play with a blend of the serious and the comic. The careful enunciation of the upper middle class voices of Beauchamp and Donner, a little tremulous with age, is especially amusing when juxtaposed with their

almost childish insistence that the other was to blame; there is the humour of contrast when Beauchamp reminisces about quiet afternoons (in the foreground) while Donner falls to his death (on the tape in the background).

As the men's memories are allowed to roam, the flashbacks gradually provide more information about their relationship with each other and the dead Donner; Sophie is introduced and we realise that their confusion is part of the forgetfulness of old men - a useful technical device enabling Stoppard to change scene and move back and forth in time. A change from the voices of old men to young men's voices allows the playwright to cross decades, moving from the immediate present to 1914 and back again. Martello and Beauchamp confuse Tarzan, Tsar Nicholas and Tzara, the caf  s Russe and Rousseau, Monte Carlo and Zurich, Lenin and Voltaire, (p.23), but their confusion, paradoxically, throws light on both past and present. By the time we reach the second flashback we grow increasingly more interested in the revelations about the characters' relationships and their preoccupation with Art. Their memories, sweeping back and forth carry us irresistibly with them and we lose sight of the problem which confronted us in Scene One. Since this is radio and not stage we do not have the constant visual reminder of the body at the foot of the stairs. The more attentive members of the audience may be reminded of it by the repetition of certain sound effects in other scenes but it is not reverted to until the last two scenes. By the penultimate scene a tragedy has been uncovered. When the revelation of the cause of Donner's death follows - he tried to swat a troublesome fly and fell through the balustrade - it provides welcome comic relief by its very banality and simultaneously reinforces the acute sense of loss felt at the belated discovery of the real tragedy, the lie they had been living. As a young man at the outbreak of

war, Donner had been most concerned that he should not die simply as a result of mistaken identity: "They might think we're spies...and kill us. That would be ridiculous. I don't want to die ridiculously."

(p.46) By the end of the play the listeners realise that Donner died for a far more ridiculous reason. Moreover, his whole life was marred, unfulfilled, on account of a comic case of mistaken identity. Ironically he was himself instrumental in creating this confusion.

When the blind Sophie made her first visit to the artists' flat, Donner was the most considerate in his behaviour towards her, anxious that she should not be made to suffer by Martello's thoughtlessness in inviting her to pour tea or by his talk of pictures and vision.

(p.39) Donner was the only one to remember her from a previous occasion and it is clear that there had been an immediate rapport:

Donner : A girl with spectacles, and a long pigtail  
I think...I believe we exchanged a look!  
(p.39)

Sophie remembered a man and his painting and wanted only to know his name. Was it Martello, Beauchamp or Donner? Starting from the premise that she remembered the painting of a snow scene with a black fence in the foreground, Donner was the first to voice the conclusion, "It was Beauchamp you had in mind," and he remained silent for the rest of the scene. In the continuation scene when the sequence moves forward in time, his intention of accompanying her home is checked by her obvious preference for Beauchamp. Although only Martello had politely excused himself, she bids goodbye to both him and Donner. (p.48-9) The latter's concern for her safety, contrasting in Chekhovian manner with the laughter of the departing pair speaks eloquently of his feelings for her:

Donner : Don't fall.  
Beauchamp : I won't!  
(Their laughter receding down the stairs)

Donner : (close, quiet): Don't fall.  
(Door closes on the laughter).

(p.49)

When Beauchamp grew tired of Sophie, Donner had been prepared to remain with her on any terms but she would not accept this, saying she had "lost the capability of falling in love." (p.33) She remained constant to her memory of her first sight of Beauchamp. So far in her life she had made light of her disability but once rejected by Beauchamp she felt the full force of her blindness. Her frightened, anxious monologue reveals her insecurity - a feeling transmitted dramatically by exploiting the audience's predicament and their own dependence on sound clues. Is she alone or is Donner there? She cannot see him and neither can we. Why does he not calm her anxiety, and our uncertainty, by answering her pleas?

"And I cannot live with you knowing that you want me-Do you see that?...Mouse? Are you here? Say something. Now, don't do that, Mouse, it's not fair-please, you are here... Did you go out? Now please don't...How can I do anything if I can't trust you-I beg you, if you're here, tell me. What do you want? Are you just going to watch me?-standing quietly in the room-sitting on the bed-on the end of the tub-Watch me move about the room, grieving, talking to myself, sleeping, washing, dressing, undressing, crying?"

(p.50)

When Sophie falls through the window to her death we cannot be certain whether it was accidental. Her outburst, growing increasingly hysterical as she feels powerless in her blindness, makes the idea of an accident probable. Yet her last words are ambiguous and could indicate suicide:

"Oh no, there is no way now-I won't-I won't-I won't-no, I won't!"  
(Glass panes and wood smash violently...)

The following flashback reveals that she had, in fact, been alone. In talking about her, Martello can regard her death in a detached manner and he plays with words, as usual. He even suggests they cheer themselves up by inventing words for various kinds of fatality

- he suggests "defenestration" as a suitable description of Sophie's death.(p.51) Donner is evidently moved but in his friend's attempts to comfort him he realises (as does the listener) only when it is too late that the real tragedy has yet to be revealed. The painting Sophie remembered and upon which depended her choice of Beauchamp had probably been Donner's. It was a dark background seen through a white fence, not a snow scene with a black fence. She had remembered the colours and the shapes - it was a question of interpretation. The humour arising from this simple shift in perspective precludes an overwhelming sense of tragedy at its consequences. The unfortunate Donner had indeed lived "ridiculously". A further layer of irony surfaces at this revelation because it seems as though the artists' visual jokes, the type in which they revelled throughout their lives, do indeed trick the observer. They had dressed as soldiers after a war in which they had not served; Beauchamp had taken "a horse" on their walking tour; Martello had planned a figure of "The Cripple" - a wooden man with a real leg - but their greatest achievement was to trick themselves as well as their public. They had unquestioningly accepted Sophie's perspective and thereby ambushed their own senses. The revelation may have demonstrated, by default almost, the truth in the idea of love at first sight but there is a sad irony when one of the lovers is blind. Paradoxically, Sophie was most happy when apparently most deceived so what conclusions can one draw about the nature of illusion and reality?

The three men have been preoccupied with the same problem for over half a century. Two of them appear to have made little progress in either substance or style since their early days when they published their manifestoes and presented their first exhibition called *Frontiers in Art*, featuring paintings of barbed wire fences and signboards saying, "You are now entering Patagonia".(p.33) Beauchamp

explained to Sophie how he was "trying to liberate visual image from the limitations of visual art. The idea is to create images - pictures - which are purely mental..."(p.36) This was an aim voiced by Marcel Duchamp, whose painting *Nude Descending A Staircase* gives the play its title, and by the Dadaists whose style is reflected in that of the play's artists. The result of Beauchamp's efforts to remove visual aspects from painting was his abandonment of canvas altogether and his adoption of tonal art - an art form which produced gramophone records of various pastimes and games: Lloyd George versus Clara Bow playing ping-pong, Lenin versus Jack Dempsey playing chess. Martello criticised naturalistic art insisting that "anybody can do it... it is a technique and can be learned, like playing the piano."(p.39) The truth in his statement is, of course, disproved by experience. Their exhibition of simple paintings of fences was intended "to ambush the mind" with something unexpected about a simple shape, forcing people to see it for the first time. These intentions reflect those of the Dada painters and poets who were to be an important part of the dialectic on the role of art in society in Travesties. In the stage play Stoppard would place greater emphasis on the impulses feeding this need to shock and challenge the audience's expectations. He would show how important to the artistic movement was the social and political context which nurtured it. Artist Descending A Staircase mentions World War I, Lenin, Tzara and Switzerland but does not deal fully with the interrelationships. It merely highlights the incongruities of their juxtaposition on the same stage for comic effect, whereas the stage play would reveal the even more incredible, but historically accurate, similarities. Sophie extolls the combined virtues of imagination and skill involved in the more traditional art she admires: "I don't think I shall much miss what is to come, from what I know, and I am glad that I saw much of the Pre-Raphaelites before my sight

went completely."(p.39) It is significant that Donner takes no part in this dispute on Art but his words and actions later suggest that he has come to agree with Sophie's views.

In his search for the striking image freed from the limitations of naturalism Martello planned a painting based on the Song of Solomon, idealising female beauty:

"I shall paint her navel as a round goblet which wanteth not liquor, her belly like a field of wheat set about with lilies, yea, her two breasts will be like two young roes that are twins, her neck as a tower of ivory, and her eyes will be like the fishpools in Hebdom by the date of Bath - rabbim, her nose like the tower of Lebanon which looketh towards Damascus..."

(p.47)

He apparently sees no discrepancy between this idea and the description of it as a "sane and beautiful" picture. Sonneteers might have based their idealisations on a similar intellectual idea but they used both skill and imagination to develop it into a work worthy of the term 'Art'. Martello's skill and imagination are both limited: he appears to have only one idea which after Sophie's death he adapts for a sculpture.(p.28) To Donner, who inevitably acts as the listener's eyes in observing Martello's sculpture, it "looks like a scarecrow trying to be a tailor's dummy." To Martello it is a metaphorical representation of Sophie. What appears to be straw is her hair of ripe corn - he would have liked 'spun gold' but didn't know how to do that; what appear to be false teeth are real artificial pearls; the feathers are for her swan-like neck, the ripe pears for her breasts; he might install a silver bell for her voice. Martello cannot understand Donner's anger and his inability to distance himself from the real Sophie in order to appreciate this metaphorical image of her. Just before his own death Donner had quarrelled with Beauchamp too, again about Art. The latter was still involved with tonal art - reminiscent of Dadaist bruitism - and had recorded a collection of discordant noises. He admitted that, if play on the radio, "it

would seem a meaningless noise, because it fulfils no expectations: people have been taught to expect certain kinds of insight but not others."(p.20) The practical illustration of this appears to be a reductio ad absurdum and the removal of harmony from music. To Donner - and the audience listening to "a bubbling cauldron of squeaks, gurgles, crackles and other unharmonious noises" - Beauchamp's master-tape sounds like rubbish. Stoppard emphasises the cacophony by stressing in the stage directions that it plays for "longer than one would reasonably hope." Beauchamp attempts to understand his friend's reaction by re-phrasing it in the light of his own perceptions: "You mean a sort of tonal debris, as it were?...The detritus of audible existence, a sort of refuse heap of sound." But Donner is categorical in his description of the tape as "general rubbish. In the sense of being worthless, without value, rot, nonsense. Rubbish in fact." He rejects Beauchamp's assertion that if it were broadcast on the BBC his tape "would become art for millions"(p.21), pointing out that Beauchamp's bubbles, squeaks, gurgles and crackles might be faintly interesting by virtue of his having chosen them but they would not be art unless the commonly-held meaning of the word itself were to be changed. The reference to the BBC is especially amusing in context of the play itself, since Radio 3, is known to cater for more experimental radio drama.

Donner comes to separate himself from their shared past in what he now describes as the immature "child's garden of easy victories known as the avant garde" where Art is made to mean what the individual wishes. Donner's aim now is "the infinitely more difficult task of painting what the eye sees."(p.19) He rejects as pedantic Beauchamp's pointing out that Donner's latest work is hardly realistic - "I've never seen a naked woman sitting about a garden with a unicorn eating the roses." Donner has come to agree with Sophie's views

on art. He rejects modern art and Martello's nonsense art as the result of a limited intellectual idea presented with little technical skill and values instead the art which is the result of artistic imagination executed with skill. His latest painting is referred to as Pre-Raphaelite - an easily identifiable artistic style which Stoppard can assume will be familiar to all the Radio 3 audience. They will not need to be well-versed in artistic traditions in order to appreciate the stark contrast between Donner's present tastes and the anti-art he now associates with youth. At the same time, this allusion to the Pre-Raphaelites reinforces the play's interest in questions of perspective - the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were rebels in their own time, turning against the academic art of their contemporaries and advocating a return to the simple naturalism of the Italian painters prior to Raphael. Their subjects were often taken from the realms of literature and religion which would, in their turn, be rejected by later artistic movements. Donner's own painting (in the play's present) recalls Sophie's admiration for Pre-Raphaelite art and the wish she expressed in her first meeting with the youthful Donner: "I hope you will paint beauty, Mr Donner, and the subtlest beauty is in nature."(p.41) It should also be seen in conjunction with her assertion that, although blind, she can sit in the park and "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."(p.41) Martello's comment that a unicorn holds as much reality as a horse for someone who has seen neither, further reinforces the play's concern with layers of truth and perspective.

Sophie's views on art should not, however, be taken by the audience

as definitive. She is, after all, blind and it was her weak sight in the past which was instrumental in establishing the misunderstanding which sealed her fate and Donner's. Sophie does put forward a valid point in her definition of art as a combination of imagination in conception and technical skill in execution. But the irreverent Dadaists and Marcel Duchamp - whose painting is kept continually in mind by the play's title - would disagree with Sophie's views about the representation of beauty in art. Duchamp disapproved of painting being judged on sensual appeal but he was equally concerned that painting should be put "once again at the service of the mind."<sup>(1)</sup> This view is not elaborated in Artist Descending A Staircase and consequently the play's dialectic is seriously weakened; Martello and Beauchamp cannot adequately oppose Sophie's viewpoint on the role and function of art. Despite the inherent irony of a blind girl making pronouncements on art, the argument is biased in her favour. The failure of Martello and Beauchamp as artists could well be the result of their personal weaknesses and not the failure of the art they espouse. In Travesties Stoppard avoided this ambiguity by giving equal weighting to the modern art movement, emphasising the creative urge behind its iconoclastic impulses. There he allowed its viewpoint to be powerfully represented by a flamboyant, charismatic and polemical figure - in fact the anti-artist Tristan Tzara is a more attractive figure than the representative of traditional art, James Joyce. In Travesties Tzara's nihilism and rejection of tradition is seen to be the result of a keen understanding of social and political realities; in the radio play, however, the artists' failure to connect with their own world inevitably undermines their contribution to the central argument. This then, falsely, implies that the artist who does connect with his world will reject the radical modern art movement.

In Artist Descending A Staircase Donner is the only one of the friends to have matured emotionally and he tries to reflect this development in his art. Beauchamp's comment (referring to Donner's Pre-Raphaelite painting of the departed Sophie) implies that the artist's skill has managed to serve his imagination: "I think you've got her, Donner." It is certainly more successful than Martello's metaphorical sculpture, which looks like a scarecrow aspiring to be a tailor's dummy. Significantly, Donner has been the only one to concern himself seriously with questioning the artist's role in society. It was his serious need for a justification for the artist which had led him from the sculptures of ceramic food - he felt at the time that ceramic food "defined the problem very neatly" - to the amusing but equally impractical edible art. Edible art was his metaphor for the role of the artist in society. Applying the comic technique of *reductio ad absurdum* to Donner's rational demands, Stoppard achieves a startling scene which challenges the listeners' expectations and engages their interest in the argument.

The preceding scene ends with Donner's recollection of the day he took a cup of tea to Martello who was working on his sculpture of Beauty. The sounds of Martello at work smooth the transition back in time and Donner's first words, inviting Martello to take sugar, quickly set the scene. But this innocent opening leads to a bizarre exchange:

Martello	:	I'm not getting any. She's set too hard.
Donner	:	Knock off one of her nipples.
Martello	:	I'd need a chisel.
Donner	:	Wait a minute. I'll tilt her over. Get the breast into your cup, and I'll stir her around a bit.

(p.24-5)

This surreal conversation gradually explains itself - Donner's concern with justifying the artist's role in society led him to sculpt a Venus in sugar, hence the difficulty with nipples and tea cups.

It is an excellent illustration of Stoppard's technique that this scene which proceeds (more intelligibly now that we have re-adjusted our perspective) with references to a salt Penseur, Van Gogh pizzas, Verdun, and a legless/armless café proprietor named Pablo (-Picasso?-) who disliked nonsense art, should be at the centre of his play's main concerns. It allows Donner to explain how the war jolted him: "After that, being an artist made no sense." He began to see his art as "the dislocated anti-art of lost faith", as irrelevant to the maimed and hungry as the art he had rejected, that celebrating "reason and logic and all assumptions." The argument of the anti-artist in Travesties begins, rather than simplistically ends, with this understanding. Donner's answer to the problem was to blur the distinction between art and life and to create edible art. Thus the unreal exchange with which this scene began is later seen to have been the result of a very rational impulse. When the same scene is continued (p.50-2) Donner realises that he was wrong not only about his art but also about his life. He had got both of them back to front. At this point he destroyed his edible Venus de Milo and began his painting of Sophie.

Beauchamp and Martello are not seen to develop; for them life and art remain separate even at the end of the play. They don't even understand the reality behind the sounds on Beauchamp's tape - the only time his tonal art sounds intelligible. They are still two old boys, trapped in mental acrobatics and visual jokes. The flashbacks reveal how little they have changed. They were much the same when, as young men, they went on a walking tour in Europe, Martello and Beauchamp oblivious to the real world outside their own little circle: In this scene, a flashback to 1914, Martello assures them that his Uncle Rupert in the War Office had condoned their holiday plans with the comforting information that "there will be no war

for the very good reason that His Majesty's Government is not ready to go to war, and it will be at least six months before we are strong enough to beat the French." Donner is the only one to question the nationality of the enemy and he is the most agitated. They are lost, bitten by flies and mosquitoes; the walking is rougher than anticipated; the "honest locals" have robbed them; moreover, they are continually forced off the road by convoys of lorries, troops of Cavalry; the rural quiet is disturbed by explosions and field guns. He suggests they should have stayed at home "because of the international situation" but Martello fails to understand all the very obvious signs and demands, "What international situation?"(p.44) He also advises them to ignore the men digging a 'ditch' - "It is not unusual for soldiers to do such work in France. Or Germany."

This scene is at the centre of Stoppard's play both literally and thematically. It is as far back as the flashbacks go. It is instrumental in establishing the men's alienation from the real world outside their immediate circle and in distinguishing Donner's responses from those of his colleagues. Stylistically, it achieves the double trick of criticising their pronouncements on art whilst at the same time benefitting from them, exploiting their comic potential.

The scene is established with sound effects - the clip-clop of a horse, feet walking, flies buzzing in the heat (the latter and the attempts to swat them acting as sound clues to the understanding of the tape in scene one). Beauchamp declaims happily on art, calls on his companions to admire his horse and is well pleased with life. Martello's reply to Beauchamp's question about his horse should provide a clue to the listeners surprised by the presence of a horse on a walking tour: his "Beautiful, Your Majesty"(p.42) evokes the idea of a game along the lines of the story about the Emperor and his clothes. He feels no need to justify himself:

"The artist is a lucky dog. That is all there is to say about him. In any community of a thousand souls there will be nine hundred doing the work, ninety doing well, nine doing good, and one lucky dog painting or writing about the other nine hundred and ninety-nine."

(p.43)

(The same equation is employed in Travesties where it is central to the play's dialectic and where Stoppard suggests that the "one lucky dog" does play a vital role in the lives of the other nine hundred and ninety-nine.)

Martello too thinks about art. He plans his idealisation of beauty, based on the Song of Solomon. Donner alone is disgruntled, uncomfortable; he takes little interest in Beauchamp's horse and refuses to join in abstract discussions on art, saying cynically that his choice of it as a profession was determined by the opportunities it offered for meeting naked women. He is troubled by external matters like the lorries, soldiers and explosions. His two companions are eventually stunned; as is the audience, by the unexpected galloping past of a squadron of Cavalry and Beauchamp is sufficiently sobered to notice the field gun. He thinks simply of taking a train out and abandons his horse. At this point we realise that the recording of a horse had indeed been just that - a recording, one of Beauchamp's tapes. Hence the incongruity of the horse on a walking tour. Martello however, who still fails to connect, tries to recapture their care-free mood by enquiring, "What happened to your Tenth Horse?" Beauchamp merely replies, "My feet are swelling visibly"; there are no more sound effects of the horse skittering at the approach of soldiers or the explosions which grow louder. Instead it seems that the sounds which had at first appeared improbable - the unexpected convoy of rattletrap lorries roaring past, the thunder of hooves - are the real world. The listener had fallen into the trap of accepting as real the first sounds and using them to construct a frame of reference; following events force him to readjust his viewpoint. He has been

surprised in his expectations as were the characters in theirs. Martello's bonhomie, his apparent refusal to allow too much of the outside world to impinge on his consciousness, is alone in persisting with the same tune. This is dramatically illustrated by his passing reference to "when they shot that absurd Archduke Ferdinand of Ruritania" and his bland assurance about the 'French' enemy. The names alone suffice to suggest to the audience of the real state of affairs and, by implication, to question Martello's view of reality. When he continues his long, uninterrupted monologue on art he is oblivious to the explosions which build in the background and finally, and dramatically, drown his words.

As the scene changes, the sound of explosions gives way to the men's voices shouting directions. Stoppard exploits our dependence on sound alone to ensure that our attention is still alert. Are they in Europe? In the army? Sophie's voice and first words tell us that we have now moved forward in time. Stoppard has effected another smooth scene transition by relying on the audience's association of sounds and ideas. He challenges our attention and concentration-an important technique in a radio play where he is denied the powerful hold on our visual sense otherwise afforded him by the stage.

Timing is all important; an idea must be swiftly established before it can be thwarted or developed. On the occasion when the sound effects seem to be laboured and to "play for longer than one would reasonably hope"(p.19) the mistiming is itself relevant - it is Beauchamp playing his master tape for Donner's approval and deaf to its effects on the listener. When another scene ends with Donner's almost lyrical mourning of Sophie, the listener's sympathies are distanced by the cliché of "Paris music, accordion." The mood is thus cleverly held in abeyance as the scene moves back in time. The accordion can still be heard but we are now in Lambeth where Sophie wishes

something might make the accordionist stop and where "the river smells like a dead cat." (p.29) This line evokes the mood of a T.S. Eliot poem and contrasts strikingly with the near lyrical end of the preceding scene. Moreover, as we soon appreciate, its suggestion of alienation and bleakness is especially suited to Sophie's present situation. She has lost Beauchamp's affection and is about to understand that he wishes to exclude her from his world. Her restrained pleading to be alone with Beauchamp is interrupted only by the sounds of Beauchamp persisting with preparations for moving. These sounds are the only sign both to her and the audience of Beauchamp's response. At first the leather suitcase is snapped shut and strapped up. As her pleading intensifies the strapping noise becomes surreptitious but then cruelly starts again when it is clear that her pleading will not change his mind. She shouts "Please don't do it up!...not even slowly..." (p.30) but a moment later he violently pulls the strap tight and takes the case downstairs.

It is important that the listeners' sympathies remain sufficiently detached so that they can respond to further clues necessary to the understanding of the whole situation. Hence the humour, in Martello and Sophie's discussion about Turner (p.31) as they awkwardly await the return of Beauchamp who has taken the suitcase downstairs. Hence Sophie's reference to Beauchamp's love of visual jokes when she realises for the first time that she is not to move with him:

Sophie	:	When was he going to tell me?
Donner	:	Every day.
Sophie	:	Perhaps he was going to leave a note on the mantelpiece. As a sort of joke.

Sophie is never to understand that the 'joke' that brought them together - the exhibition where she first saw him and his painting, the memory of which haunts her - was responsible for their separation. The humour, as always with Stoppard, is inseparable from the sadness; the comic techniques, the timing and mental acrobatics are closely

bound with the content.

The play ends as it began. There are the same sound effects and Martello and Beauchamp still argue about their interpretation. The main difference lies in the listeners' relationship with the play. Now we no longer rely on the characters for our perspective and we interpret the sounds differently, correctly. The crime which the characters are still trying to uncover did not, in fact, happen. They persist in asking the wrong questions so they cannot find the right answers. The repetition of the sequence of sounds leading to Donner's death is now amusing although it reveals much sadness but the old men's continued blindness, especially ironic in two who profess to be artists, is touched with pathos. Donner fell over the balustrade, trying to swat a fly. He was not pushed, but the real world still eludes them. The Shakespearean resonances in Beauchamp's last words stress the almost inhuman irony of the situation:

"As flies to wanton boys are we to the Gods:  
They kill us for their sport."  
Now then.

(p.54)

It is typical of Stoppard's technique that he should choose artists to demonstrate blindness, that the heroine in his radio play should be blind and that he should exploit the importance of recorded sound in a radio play. In other words, he makes the most of established ideas in this chosen medium. His style appears to conform to Beauchamp's pronouncements on art:

"Art consists of constant surprise. Art should break its promises."

(p.42)

but the final result is very different from the emptiness of the jokes achieved by Beauchamp and Martello because it supports an inner logic which draws together the style and the content. The play (through its success) and the characters (through their failure) illustrate dramatically that although art benefits by transcending the restrictions

of the medium itself it should not be divorced from its subject. The artists may be right in rejecting mere historical accuracy which demands a skilled but slavish imitation of nature, but they must not ignore the combined power of skill and imagination. Only when these two work in harmony can one attain an informed perspective on truth. Donner achieves a measure of success at great cost but his friends never grow up. The only thing that distinguishes young Martello and Beauchamp from their older selves is their voice - a simple but effective device which also serves the narrative element in the play as a whole; the movement back and forth in time and place is easy to follow. A change of voice sets the scene in either 1914 or the present. Their art remains separated from the world of which it is a part; it never leaves the realm of its initial intellectual idea but is trapped there, starved of imagination as their lives are empty of emotion. Beauchamp's affair with Sophie was short-lived because founded on a lie. Its failure, ironically, affirms the importance and power of the life of the emotions for it destroyed Sophie. His tonal art made few strides: the gramophone records have given way to tapes but the content can go no further; he now records silence, as opposed to ping-pong or cacophony. It is ironic that he strives to capture reality on tape, to record his absence. Martello has suffered fewer disappointments in life but he has achieved little. At the beginning of the play he betrays irritation with his inability to connect: "God forgive my brain! - it is so attuned to the ironic tone it has become ironical in repose." (p.15-6) When discussing the contents of the spool of tape he comments, "But the tape recorder speaks for itself. That is, of course, the point about tape records. In this case it is eloquent, grandiloquent, not to say Grundigloquent-Oh God, if only I could turn it off!-no wonder I have achieved nothing with my life!-my brain is on a flying trapeze

that outstrips all the possibilities of action. Mental acrobatics, Beauchamp-I have achieved nothing but mental acrobatics...."(p.16)

He does not again refer directly on this failure but revelations of his past life bear out the truth of the comment.

As demonstrated earlier, Martello was least conscious of the real world in 1914 and he was untroubled by the technical demands of art - "Why should art be something difficult to do? Why shouldn't art be something very easy?"(p.38) He insists that emulating nature is easy but pointless and it is only when "the imagination is dragged away from what the eye sees that a picture becomes interesting."(p.39) Here he is voicing modern art's concern to get away from the physical aspects of painting and to bring to the foreground the intellectual aspects of it but his own intellectual and imaginative equipment appears rather limited. In 1914 he planned to interpret literally a metaphorical idea of beauty - the woman's nose would be like a tower, her navel a round goblet filled with liquor. In the play's present he transfers the same idea to a statue of Sophie: real feathers for her neck, corn for her hair. Another example of his art of which we hear is a sculpture of a wooden man with a real leg - the latter of wood because one couldn't use the real thing. Both are part of the same web of mental acrobatics in which he is enmeshed. Significantly Martello has had no relationships apart from his friendship with Donner and Beauchamp, and Sophie during the brief time she entered their lives. His experience of both women and beauty, the ostensible subjects of his work, is as limited as the artistic imagination and skill he applies to their representation. Although, as stated above, his personal weakness prevents the play from dealing satisfactorily with the question of modern art, it is successful in demonstrating the reciprocal nature of the relationship between art and life. Reason and imagination must work together in both art and life if

the individual is not to undermine his own chances of success. Donner was the only one who considered cutting himself off from his colleagues. Despite their continual quibbling and quarrelling, Martello and Beauchamp appear inseparable.

Stoppard's selection of the avant-garde as the favoured style of his characters is determined primarily by artistic considerations of what will best serve the illustration of his theme and only secondly by his own taste in the visual arts. His own taste may be more traditional but there are indications that it embraces Picasso<sup>(2)</sup> and Magritte (to whom After Magritte owes much) as well as 18th and 19th century watercolours.<sup>(3)</sup> In Artist Descending A Staircase he was concerned less with a discussion of the radical elements in the modern art movement than with a demonstration of the idea that life and art should connect - and that does not imply slavish, naturalistic imitation by the latter of the former. The radio play, like Travesties which was to follow, illustrates how Stoppard owes part of his own success as an artist to the use of techniques and devices associated with the art he criticises: challenging the audience's pre-conceptions, casting a new light on the ordinary and ambushing the audience's responses are the stock-in-trade of the anti-art movement. Stoppard's plays may have unusual things going on within them, the audience's expectations may be thwarted or challenged in the process, but the incongruities and absurdities are resolved satisfactorily by the end and the plays conform to the comic tradition's affirmation of belief in a judicious balance of imagination and reason. Stoppard exploits the paradoxes and inconsistencies of the avant-garde to invite laughter at the expense of his characters. There is an inherent irony in the desire to get away from the visual aspects of painting, the most visual of arts, and in the insistence that art can be what is simple to do if the artist cannot do what is difficult. This

attitude would be highlighted in Travesties in a memorable argument between Tzara and Henry Carr. In Travesties where the Dadaists' arguments are more powerfully championed by Tzara, Stoppard still affirms his preference for a more positive attitude to tradition and art. This preference is made clear within the play itself and it has been voiced by Stoppard on other occasions too. In a lecture he gave at the Santa Barbara campus, University of California, in 1977<sup>(4)</sup> he read from early drafts of the confrontation in Travesties between Tristan Tzara and James Joyce, pointing out that he empathised with the views of the latter. In a newspaper article nine years previously<sup>(5)</sup> he had insisted that he was himself a conventional writer in the sense that he worked from within established traditions: "I don't set out in fact to write a play that will demand a new kind of theatre or a new kind of audience." That is as true of his latest work as it was then and one of his most distinctive qualities as a playwright is the way in which he uses the familiar conventions, working with them to create his comedy of ideas.

As an exercise experimenting with ideas about art and life, Artist Descending A Staircase is successful but it highlights more issues than it can fully deal with within the scope of a one hour ten minute play. Its two parallel lines of enquiry - the solution of the whodunnit and the discovery of the doomed love story - are masterfully interwoven to create a radio drama which accommodates a discussion about the relationship of art and life. It is left to Travesties to tackle the more involved question of art and commitment. By the end of the play the listeners realise that the real subject matter was not as suggested by the opening scene and the title itself points to the ambiguity. Like the painting to which the title alludes, it is concerned more with an idea than with the literal illustration of the title. Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending A Staircase* looks

like nothing of the kind to the uninitiated; the artist's aim was to give the idea of movement through the most static of visual arts. Similarly Stoppard does not intend chiefly to solve the mystery of the artist at the foot of the stairs as expected in the first scene which in turn seems to refer to the title. He wants to examine the idea of perspective and the role of art in life, an idea as experimental in a radio whodunnit as was Duchamp's nude descending a staircase in the visual arts. The latter idea was apparently so unusual, (6) even for modern art, that the artist was asked to change the title.

## CHAPTER IX

Travesties

(RSC 10 June 1974, Aldwych Theatre)

It is especially appropriate that a play which owes so much to The Importance Of Being Earnest should demonstrate the truth of Oscar Wilde's statement that life imitates art more than art imitates life. Three revolutionary figures, Vladimir Illyich Lenin, Tristan Tzara and James Joyce happened to move to the same town at a crucial time in history. Their very presence in Zurich during World War I demonstrated their rejection of the war and international politics so in this respect there was much in common between the Irish novelist, Rumanian anti-artist and Russian revolutionary. Yet each man represents a tradition and perspective so opposed to that of the others that their juxtaposition on the same stage appears initially absurd. Historical records indicate that the three 20th century revolution-<sup>(1)</sup>aries in politics and the arts could have met and possibly did meet but Travesties is concerned with truths other than the merely factual or historical. For this reason, Stoppard gives prominence to another less well-known historical fact which probably featured very low on a scale of priorities in the life of Joyce and may not even have impinged on the awareness of Lenin or Tzara. Namely, the role of one Henry Carr in a performance of The Importance Of Being Earnest by The English Players at the Theater Zur Kaufleuten on 29 April 1918, as detailed in the programme notes to the first Aldwych production of Travesties.

As usual with Stoppard's plays, the surface relationships of the characters are indicative of a more dynamic relationship in the play's sub-text or dialectic. Travesties is the author's full-scale treatment of ideas and techniques which he had worked upon in the radio play Artist Descending A Staircase. Travesties deals with the question

of the role of art in life and the artist in society, a position which Stoppard as an artist has felt bound to variously assert or excuse at different stages in his own career. (2) In this, his first major stage play after Jumpers, Stoppard examines in greater depth the statement by Beauchamp in Artist Descending A Staircase:

"The artist is a lucky dog. That is all there is to say about him. In any community of a thousand souls there will be nine hundred doing the work, ninety doing well, nine doing good, and one lucky dog painting or writing about the other nine hundred and ninety-nine."

(3)

By making greater use of the historical perspective which was introduced in the radio play, Travesties also gives fuller treatment to the ideas and impulses behind anti-art and the Dada movement. Lenin, the World War and Dada had all featured in the radio play but their interrelationships were not fully explored; their juxtaposition there served the humour mainly by highlighting the surreal aspects of memory. Travesties is Stoppard's affirmation of his belief in the importance of the artist in society. Art may make little immediate impact on social and political injustice in the world, but it has a vital long-term role: "It is important because it provides the moral matrix, the moral sensibility, from which we make our judgments about the world." (4) At the same time this play is a dramatic illustration of his rejection of the statements and postures of so-called committed art according to which, "because art takes notice of something, it's claimed that the art is important. It's not....When Auden said his poetry didn't save one Jew from the gas chamber, he'd said it all." (5)

Stoppard is more vulnerable to questions about the justification of art by virtue of the nature of the plays he writes. Running counter to the prevailing trend in the decades immediately after Look Back

(6)

In Anger he cultivated a Wildean posture of non-commitment and

Travesties is a dramatic illustration of this stance: <sup>the</sup> comedy of ideas  
^

presents different approaches to questions of art and politics without sacrificing its own aims and methods.

An attempt to summarise Travesties will sound either incredibly absurd (if one tries to focus on plot and character) or terribly earnest (if one tries to itemise the various stages in the development of the dialectic). Stoppard skilfully avoids the dangers of this particular Scylla and Charybdis by creating a world on stage which, like that of The Importance Of Being Earnest, insists on being taken only on its own terms. With its delicate blend of sense and nonsense it remains true to its own logic. As in Stoppard's most successful stage plays, Travesties interweaves form and content, farce and dialectic to create a theatrical event.

To create this world on stage as the vehicle for his argument on the relationship of art and artist, artist and life, Stoppard chooses a minor consular official, Henry Carr, and filters the whole through his erratic and all-too-fallible memory. In Artist Descending A Staircase and Where Are They Now? he had examined the use of memory as a technique to illustrate perspective. There it had been functional. In the stage play it is a masterly stroke because it immediately absolves the playwright from the demands of merely historical, factual, verisimilitude. Stoppard aims at a degree of psychological accuracy which is vital if his characters are to support the role with which they are entrusted in the argument, but the playwright is free to re-arrange events, interweaving literature and fact to serve his play. Like all Stoppardian characters Lenin, Joyce and Tzara are important as representatives of different aspects of the play's argument. As such, Stoppard tries to capture the spirit and not the historical, literal truth of their part in the argument. It is one of the many strands of paradox in the play that the details which are indeed historically accurate appear in the most absurd

light and are responsible for a great deal of the humour. The historical James Joyce was notoriously careless of his appearance, he suffered from serious eye-troubles and in fact described himself as "an international eyesore"; he relied greatly on loans and donations; he invited Henry Carr to play Algernon in a production of The Importance Of Being Earnest and the two men later quarrelled and resorted to the courts to settle a dispute in which Joyce claimed money for tickets which Carr had sold and Carr claimed money for his expenditure on clothing for the role of Algernon; Joyce was fond of composing limericks and songs either favourable or damning depending on the situation; he made notes on odd scraps of paper and, most important, his method of composition for Ulysses involved the unusual combination of a Greek epic and the Dublin Street Directory for 1904. (7) The historical Tristan Tzara cut poetry with scissors and gave absurd exhibitions (8) and Lenin himself was not entirely free from the absurd - his letters record how he considered returning to Russia disguised as a Swedish deaf mute. To be precise, there were to be two Swedish deaf mutes (9) because Zihoviev would accompany him, also in disguise.

By setting his whole play within Carr's memory, Stoppard exploits memory itself as a theatrical technique. Since memory is fallible and at the mercy of the individual's prejudices, weaknesses and age itself, like dreams it can accommodate much that in the bright light of day appears surreal and absurd. But the apparent incongruities may, as shown by Freud, adhere to another, less literal logic. By viewing the past through the memory of an aggressive, obstinate, biased old man, Stoppard can juxtapose a variety of incidents and forms which at once unleashes the absurd in the dream-like realms of memory and harnesses it to serve his play. Stylistically, he benefits from the comic potential and surprises of Dada's methods, but avoids Dada's artistic anarchy. The Importance Of Being Earnest

is juxtaposed with World War I, surrealism with the Russian revolution, the Shakespearean sonnet with the limerick, Beethoven with music-hall, the Odyssey with poetry cut into a hat, duets and arias with lectures. The artist selects and juxtaposes in order to highlight the greatest contrast but there is a degree of truth in the result. It is the truth of dreams. The Narrator in a later television play, Squaring The Circle(1984), describes a similar effect when he says of the events in his story, "Everything is true except the words and the pictures." (p.27) Stoppard establishes early in the play that characters and their actions are not intended to be naturalistic or of straightforward documentary nature. The play opens with a tableau which seems to be reassuringly naturalistic - a section of the Zurich Public Library. But although the actions are by and large consistent with what is expected of people in a library (we have reservations about the man who is cutting pieces of paper into his hat) the language is totally unexpected. It ranges from Dada French, Latin and very idiosyncratic English, to Russian and German, with a smattering of polite phrases in other languages. It is three pages into scene one before we hear anything approaching ordinary English and even then it is in limerick form. When Tristan Tzara and James Joyce make their first appearance after the tableau, summoned by Henry Carr's memory and confused with The Importance Of Being Earnest, they are a Rumanian and Irish nonsense respectively and the whole episode is in limerick form. The scene is cleverly amusing in its travesty and parody of Wilde and it immediately establishes the bias of the perspective - Carr's.

Much of the play's humour, the success of its studied triviality of tone, derives from the treatment of memory and Carr's acknowledged fallibility. Scenes are repeated with variation, there is a fast-rewind, fast-forward element in the repetition of certain phrases

as Carr's memory journeys through the past but frequently goes off the rails and has to be restarted. On one level this is farcical and highly entertaining. On deeper levels it conducts a debate on art, political activity and revolution. Most importantly, it creates a multi-faceted frame or structure to accommodate various perspectives on the central question which Travesties sets out to examine. It continually challenges the audience's perceptions and re-directs their attention.

The Importance Of Being Earnest is itself a philosophical farce which dons the guise of studied triviality to entertain and challenge its audience. Subject matter and style are inseparable as the play successfully creates its own world, establishes its own rules and is true to its own logic. By its inversion of conventional attitudes towards seriousness and triviality it affords a new perspective which criticises society's behaviour whilst simultaneously seeming to reject any seriousness of aim. By exploiting the absurdity of established conventions the play supports its author's belief in the morality of the pleasure principle and his faith in art. Mistaken identities, secrets from the past, incriminating articles were the stock-in-trade of much 19th century theatre, and indeed go as far back as the plays of Plautus and Menander. But whereas 19th century playwrights employed these conventions with sentimental and melodramatic results, masking or toning down their inherent absurdity, Wilde focuses on the absurdity itself and adjusts the audience's perspective. Any attempt to question that perspective and its resultant logic, to persist in viewing the characters and their actions in wholly naturalistic terms, lays the audience open to the charge of earnestness - a condition laughed out of countenance by the play itself. Of course there is always a certain degree of naturalism which lends verisimilitude and which throws into greater relief a complementary degree of absurdity.

Actors may take advantage of the measure of freedom this allows when re-creating the characters in their performance. This was admirably demonstrated by Judi Dench in the 1982 National Theatre production of The Importance Of Being Earnest in the Lyttleton. Her youthful Lady Bracknell was stylised but a much less caricatured figure than the memorable Edith Evans whose interpretation had been taken as definitive in theatrical tradition. Judi Dench's more naturalistic interpretation made the idea of Gwendolen growing to be like her mother highly probable and more alarming since it was likely to take place in less than the one hundred and fifty years which Worthing fears.

By enmeshing Carr's memory of the past with his memories of the performance of The Importance Of Being Earnest Stoppard constructs a form which serves Travesties on different levels. He pursues the dialectic whilst entertaining the audience with a stage play that is truly a theatrical event. He makes full use of the space of the stage and exploits the audience's experience of theatre; movement is choreographed, dialogue set to music, song and dance combine with linguistic humour as the relationship with The Importance Of Being Earnest is developed. At the same time, Wilde's play assumes further importance as a metaphor for - not earnestness, but - serious humour, the spirit in which Travesties is presented and with which it empathises. It is not merely coincidental that the play which most deserves George Bernard Shaw's comment that Wilde was the "only thorough playwright", playing "with everything: with wit, with philosophy, with drama, with actors and audience, with the whole theatre"<sup>(10)</sup> should inspire Stoppard's most theatrical play. The relationship is as vital as that between Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead and Hamlet or between Jumpers and that play's linguistic metaphor. The literary parody is accessible to the audience on various levels depending

on their own literary and theatrical experience. They do not need to understand all the allusions to appreciate the play's refined frivolity but they do need at least a nodding acquaintance with both Wildean philosophy and his most famous play. This is not an unreasonable expectation of any modern theatre audience, even less so of the Aldwych audiences during the theatre's occupation by the Royal Shakespeare Company. The Importance Of Being Earnest is as familiar a part of the theatrical repertoire as Hamlet or Midsummer Night's Dream. Its familiarity helps the counterpointing in Travesties of farce and serious debate concerning art and revolution. Members of the audience with more substantial knowledge of both Wilde and The Importance Of Being Earnest may respond to the deeper relevance of both within Stoppard's play. They will appreciate, for instance, the aptness of Stoppard's selection of particular lines from The Importance Of Being Earnest to mark the time-slips in Travesties. For example, the exchange between Algernon and Worthing at the start of Wilde's play is used to mark one of the time-slip sequences in which Carr recalls Tzara. Not only is this amusing in its reflection of Dada's own methods of juxtaposition, but it also makes a connection between the pleasure principle and revolution: "How are you my dear Tristan? What brings you here? Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring anyone anywhere?" (p.36&41)

The first time this exchange is used the travesty is so marked that it cannot escape notice: "Plaizure, plaizure! What else? Eating ez' usual, I see 'Enri?!" (p.32) Another time-slip sequence is introduced by Carr's man servant, Bennett, whose deadpan expression and superior knowledge of political events proves him to be as much a match for his employer as Algernon's man, Lane, is in The Importance Of Being Earnest. The third time-slip is Cecily's, "I don't think you ought to talk to me like that during library hours. However, as the reference

section is about to close for lunch I will overlook it. Intellectual curiosity is not so common that one can afford to discourage it"(p.76, 78). Those members of the audience who recognise the allusion to Cecily Cardew's "I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like that. Miss Prism never says such things to me"(Act II) will appreciate not only how it draws attention to the delicate blend of seriousness and farce but also the fact that Lenin is more successful in encouraging Cecily's intellectual interest in Travesties than Miss Prism was in Wilde's play.

The Importance Of Being Earnest provides a framework for the parody and a structure within which the ideas in Travesties can operate, thereby offering opportunities for different levels of response from the audience. Stoppard uses the time-slips to underline the moments at which Carr's memory and The Importance Of Being Earnest plot intersect so that the repetition itself serves the parody and is a way in to the argument: the characters return to the same point of departure and take off in other directions, introducing other strands of the argument. For example, Carr/Algernon's "Is there anything of interest?" is the cue for Bennett's information about the war between the Allies and the Germans(p.26); its local and international dimensions(p.30) and the introduction of Tristan Tzara(p.28); it introduces the Russian Revolution, Marxist philosophy and Lenin(p.29&31). Thus it establishes the historical political background and at the same time the patterns and rhythms of speech reinforce the context of The Importance Of Being Earnest: when Bennett reports on the "general rumour put about Zurich by the crowds of spies, counter-spies, radicals, artists and riff-raff of all kinds" and in the next breath mentions "Mr Tzara called, sir", he makes a connection between art and revolution. Carr's response recalls Algernon's observations about the moral responsibility of the lower classes and also contains

an element of self-parody: I'm not sure that I approve of your taking up this modish novelty of "free association", Bennett. I realise that it is all the rage in Zurich-...to try to follow a conversation nowadays is like reading every other line of a sonnet - but if the servant classes are going to ape the fashions of society, the end can only be ruin and decay."(p.30)

Stoppard's stage directions indicate clearly that the audience should recognise the fact that the time-slips act as an alienation device, drawing the audience's attention away from one perspective and taking in others. He states that the time-slips should be "heavily marked by using an extraneous sound or light effect, or both."(p.27) The first Aldwych production followed Stoppard's suggestion of using a cuckoo clock, artificially amplified to accompany the key phrases - the sounds of the cuckoo clock allude very obviously to both time and Switzerland where the Travesties action is set. The Oxford Playhouse Company achieved a most effective result in their 1986 production by adjusting the lighting and having the characters move rigidly backwards to their original starting point, like moving figures on a Swiss Clock being re-set.

In The Importance Of Being Earnest the young people lead a double life as a way of coping with the restrictions and pressures imposed on the individual by society, its social and moral laws. Jack Worthing invents a younger brother to give expression to the trivial side of his nature denied him in the country where his responsibilities oblige him to adopt a high moral tone. By the end of the play he finds an identity which was always his but of which he had been unaware. Algernon Moncrieff invents Bunbury to condone his absences when town and society prove too much. Cecily and Gwendolen both use their diaries to compensate for the tediousness of everyday life and to give rein to their imagination. Each wants to realise his/her own

character fully, to give expression to its various aspects. Worthing's search for his real identity is comedy's illustration of a philosophical quest and is the heart of Wilde's play. The historical characters in Travesties, each a revolutionary figure in his own sphere, insist on one exclusive viewpoint or mode of expression. Their interaction with The Importance Of Being Earnest leads to deceptions and misunderstandings, exploiting the comedy on the surface, and forces the exclusive viewpoints into dynamic opposition.

James Joyce enters the comedy via his connection with the English Players and Carr. His presence in the argument is assured by his position in the tradition of English literature and his composition of Ulysses. For James Joyce, art for art's sake is validity enough. In his dispute with Tzara the anti-artist he prefers to change the perspective and asserts that the pains and pleasures of life acquire some validity if they contribute to the sum of the world's artistic experience. Unruffled by life's inconsistencies and horrors he maintains that the only real issue is the existence of art. Wars "from Troy to the fields of Flanders" may have been prompted by materialism and all that was ignoble but that is unimportant: "If there is any meaning in any of it, it is in what survives as art." (p.62) Without the artist one of the most inspiring wars of antiquity would have been forgotten, known only to archaeologists via "a minor re-distribution of broken pots." The artist is an important member of society; he is "a magician put among men to gratify - capriciously - their urge for immortality." His creation of what Wilde would have called "beautiful untrue things", and which Joyce calls heroes, enriches man's life. Joyce himself was then concerned with the (to him) quintessential hero: "Ulysses, the wanderer, the most human, the most complete of all heroes - husband, father, son, lover, farmer, soldier, pacifist, politician, inventor and adventurer...." Early drafts

of this speech in which Joyce defends art, indicate that Stoppard wanted to emphasise that Ulysses clearly understood the real, materialistic causes of the war and even tried to avoid participating in the war which was to provide the context for his fame and the adventures he bequeathed to literary history. Despite this knowledge and as far as Joyce is concerned, the Trojan war was in some way justified because it produced the Ulysses of literature.

"Who is the man, when all the gallant nations run to war,  
Goes home to have his dinner by the very first cable car,  
And as he eats his cantaloupe contorts himself with mirth  
To read the blatant bulletins of the rules of the earth?

Who is the furious fellow who declines to go to Church  
Since pope and priest and parson left the poor man in the           lurch  
And taught their flocks the only way to save all human         souls

(p.49-50)

Even in Carr's dreams where the minor consular official can re-write history and give himself the best lines, Joyce the artist refuses to be cowed by official disapproval of his stance:

"I dreamed about him, dreamed I had him in the witness box, a masterly cross-examination, case practically won, admitted it all, the whole thing, the trousers, everything, and 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)

This attitude to the authorities and the implied rejection of accepted morality - i.e. honour, loyalty - is similar to that of the Dadaists. But whereas Tzara's nihilism was an end in itself, Joyce could proceed to more positive acts. Stoppard gives an amusingly literal and visual illustration of the difference between artist and anti-artist: replacing the pieces of Tzara's cut poem (originally Shakespeare's sonnet) in his hat, Joyce conjures a white paper carnation. And during his catechism of Tzara on the origins and examples of Dada he proceeds to pull silk hankies and then flags out of the same hat. (p.60) Tzara is infuriated by his showing off and patronising attitude to Dada and explodes into expletives which are especially colourful and even rhythmically insulting: "You supercilious streak of Irish puke! You four-eyed, bog-ignorant, potato-eating ponce!" (p.62). Tzara accuses Joyce of turning literature into a religion: "and it's as dead as all the rest, it's an overripe corpse and you're cutting fancy figures at the wake. It's too late for geniuses! Now we need vandals and desecrators, simple-minded demolition men to smash centuries of baroque subtlety, to bring down the temple, and thus finally, to reconcile the shame and the necessity of being an artist! Dada! Dada! Dada!". To illustrate his point, Tzara proceeds to smash whatever crockery is to hand whilst Joyce maintains a dignified silence. When Tzara finally stops, Joyce deflates him with restrained and

civilised acerbity:

"You are an over-excited little man, with a need for self-expression far beyond the scope of your natural gifts. This is not discreditable. Neither does it make you an artist."

He then proceeds to define his own perspective on the term "artist" - "the magician put among men to gratify - capriciously their urge for immortality" - and draws the whole episode to a close with an apt reminder of the Wilde connection:

"I would strongly advise you to try and acquire some genius and if possible some subtlety before the season is quite over."

Bringing both argument and conjuring to a climactic finish, he now produces a rabbit out of his hat. This done, he dons his hat and leaves, holding the rabbit: "Top o' the morning, Mr Tzara!" (p.63)

Despite the fact that it is Joyce's view with which Stoppard empathises, Tzara remains the more likeable figure. This may be partly accounted for by the fact that Joyce, in representing the traditional artist's view of his role, takes on the Lady Bracknell/Establishment role in The Importance Of Being Earnest connection. Joyce as the establishment figure is particularly ironic, in view of the adverse criticism attracted by Ulysses and the problems its author faced in attempts to publish. On the other hand, Joyce as the establishment figure is quite plausible if viewed from a 20th century perspective; the episode is therefore an interesting example of Stoppard's control of perspective and his relationship with the audience. He assumes that some of his characters know (in the play's present of 1917) what he and his audience have learned with the help of history and hindsight in 1974. This forms part of the structure inviting levels of response: the argument between Tzara and Joyce is self-explanatory to a certain degree and therefore accessible to all the audience. Others will be able to benefit from greater familiarity with the

historical figures to respond to Stoppard's exploitation of their double knowledge of Joyce as he was to his contemporaries and as he appears in the latter half of the 20th century. An awareness of this ambiguity triggers the humour and full impact of Joyce's retort to the official's criticism of the artist's non-participation in political events: "I wrote Ulysses....What did you do?"(p.65)

There is a further intriguing ambiguity available to those who note that despite Joyce's work for the neutralist press and his statement reported in Richard Ellmann's biography that "as an artist I am against every state", it was Joyce who suggested the very patriotic name The English Players and supported its first theatrical venture with a very English play, The Importance Of Being Earnest.

In fact, the introduction of the art v anti-art debate via the interest in The Importance Of Being Earnest, is a notable example of Stoppard's invitation of levels of response. The debate is introduced with the familiar and sonorous, "Rise, sir, from that semi-recumbent posture!"(p.55) and interrupts the embrace of Tzara/Jack and Gwendolen. Joyce then proceeds to question Tzara about Dada, its identity and eligibility, in imitation of Lady Bracknell's cross-examination of Jack Worthing about money, identity and eligibility. The question and answer sequence is itself amusing for its tone and rhythms, Joyce's pedantically precise, clipped questions contrasting with Tzara's concise answers.

For example, Joyce asks about the inventor of a Dadaist game:

- |       |   |  |
|-------|---|--|
| Joyce | : | By what familiarity, indicating possession and amicability in equal parts, do you habitually refer to him? |
| Tzara | : | My friend Arp.   |
| Joyce | : | Alternating with what colloquialism redolent of virtue and longevity?                                      |
| Tzara | : | Good old Arp.  |

(p.57)

At the same time, the whole episode acquires an extra dimension for

members of the audience who appreciate the imitation of the catechistic style of the Ithaca episode in Ulysses.<sup>(12)</sup> There is a further layer of irony in the ambiguous similarity of the historical Joyce's well-documented cavalier attitude to money and Lady Bracknell's: neither had money of their own but neither allowed this to hamper a chosen career. Lady Bracknell married for money and Joyce's biographer describes him as the "master of loanship".

Whilst apparently talking of James Joyce, Stoppard makes a telling statement about the way he himself works:

"There is a secret in Art, isn't there? And the secret consists of what the artist has secretly and privately done. You will tumble some and not others. The whole process of putting them in, albeit unconsciously, gives Art that...texture, which sensibility tells one is valuable."  
(13)

The success of Stoppard's plays depends upon the audience's recognition of a good number of these ingredients because only then will the dialectic work. However, he does not expect his audience to take their seats armed either literally or metaphorically, with Richard Ellman's biography of Joyce, the Penguin Ulysses or the Complete Works of Oscar Wilde. When Act II of Travesties pursues the Wilde connection Joyce/Bracknell demands, "Miss Carr, where is the missing chapter?"(p.97) in imitation of Lady Bracknell's, "Prism. Where is that baby?". The chapter in question is Ulysses Chapter 14, 'The Oxen of the Sun'. Stoppard cannot expect his audience to possess the perfect instant recall that would enable them to appreciate the particular relevance of this chapter to the style of Travesties and the connection with The Importance Of Being Earnest. Therefore he has Joyce explain that it is a chapter which "uses the gamut of English literature from Chaucer to Carlyle to describe events taking place in a lying-in hospital in Dublin."(p.97) Of course the whole may be more finely appreciated by members of the audience who possess

a clearer knowledge of Ulysses, but the play will still work on its own terms as comedy and argument even without such knowledge because The Importance of Being Earnest/Travesties connection carries it through. For members of the audience who cannot respond to The Important Of Being Earnest clues, the scene will work on the superficial level of farce as misunderstandings and confusions are untangled. A similar process is at work in the reference to Shakespeare's sonnet which Tzara offers to Gwendolen, "uniquely organised" (p.53) as his own. It is not unreasonable of Stoppard to expect his audience to be familiar with the sonnets or to have Gwendolen remind them which is the eighteenth.

The effectiveness of the Joyce/Bracknell role, as of the Carr/Algernon, Tzara/Worthing parallels, rests mainly on audience appreciation of the craftsmanship which interweaves The Importance Of Being Earnest plot with the Travesties dialectic. Stoppard does not aim at the mechanical symmetries of an Ayckbourn plot - as in The Norman Conquests, for example - and it would be absurd to pursue the parallels too closely. Indeed, in performance, the problem does not arise. There may be some irony but no discrepancy in Tristan Tzara, representing the nihilistic anti-art view, taking on the Jack/Ernest Worthing role. Worthing may be the "most earnest looking person" of Algernon's acquaintance but there is a strong nihilistic streak in him too as revealed by his preference for doing "nothing" at the end of Act I in Wilde's play. Moreover, Jack resembles Tzara in his annoyance at cleverness and clever people: "The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left." (Act I).

The historical Tzara might well have been pleased with this representation of him in Travesties for he appears as lively and "charming" as his manifestoes claimed.<sup>(14)</sup> Stoppard gives full credit to Tzara's

role in the dialectic, allowing him to voice the rational impulses underlying the Dadaists' absurd behaviour. In his dispute with Carr on the role of art and the artist, Tzara vehemently rejects the "traditonal sophistries" which misrepresent and abuse words like "patriotism, duty, love, freedom, king and country"(p.39) in order to wage "wars of expansion and self-interest, presented to the people in the guise of rational argument set to patriotic hymns". When he changes the meaning of the words "art" and "artist" by drawing words out of a hat and calling it poetry or when he draws a line in the snow and calls it The Alps, he is challenging the authorities with their own logic: "music is corrupted; language conscripted. Words are taken to stand for opposite facts, opposite ideas. That is why anti-art is the art of our time..." He and his Dada colleagues set out to demolish such graven images and false idols, to challenge unthinking devotion to tradition. Therefore Tzara himself cut poetry (15) into a hat, Marcel Duchamp put a moustache on the Mona Lisa, Hugo Ball dressed in cardboard and delivered words of no fixed meaning, Tzara, Janco and Huelsenbeck recited simultaneous poems in French, German and English.

Tzara's determined rejection of earnestness results from what he considers a starkly realistic understanding of facts: "Wars are fought for oil wells and coaling stations; for control of the Dardanelles or the Suez Canal; for colonial pickings to buy cheap in and conquered markets to sell dear in. War is capitalism with the gloves off..." (p.39) The similarity of this view with Lenin's(p.77) may be overlooked until it resurfaces in The Importance Of Being Earnest connection when Tzara passes information to Lenin. His colleague Hans/Jean Arp would record this same perspective: "Revolted by the butchery of the 1914 World War, we in Zurich devoted ourselves to the arts.... We were seeking an art based on fundamentals, to lure the madness

of the age, and a new order of things that would restore the balance  
 (16)  
 between heaven and hell". In Tzara's view the artist contributes  
 to the chaos and absurdity by perpetrating the false ideals which  
 destroy mankind - it was the ideals of freedom, patriotism and loyalty  
 which led to the carnage of the war which he and the other revolution-  
 aries fled to Zurich to escape. Tzara's emphasis on Chance in his  
 poetry stresses his rejection of rationality - the rationality used  
 by authority to excuse inhuman acts. But Travesties does not allow  
 this exclusive viewpoint to go unchallenged. Carr, with his layman's  
 interest in both art and politics, insists the argument is not so  
 simplistic. Despite his arrogant and amusingly xenophobic attitude  
 he puts the opposite view. On the question of a definition for "art"  
 and "artist" he maintains (with admirable common-sense, and probably  
 voicing the objections of many of the audience):

"If there is any point in using language at all it is that  
 a word is taken to stand for a particular fact or idea  
 and not for other facts or ideas..."

(p.38)

His own experience in the war itself causes him to explode when re-  
 futing Tzara's assertions:

"My God, you little Rumanian wog - you bloody dago -  
 you jumped-up phrase-making smart-alecy arty-intellectual  
 Balkan turd!!!!...Do you think your phrases are the true  
 sum of each man's living of each day?...-do you think that's  
 the true experience of a wire-cutting party caught in a  
 cross-fire in no-man's land?...I went to war because I  
 believed that those boring little Belgians and incompetent  
 Frogs had the right to be defended from German militarism,  
 and that's love of freedom. And I won't be told by some  
 yellow-bellied Bolshevik that I ended up in the trenches  
 because there's a profit in ball-bearings".

(p.40)

There is an extra visual comic dimension in performance at the sight  
 of Tzara, elegant and very much the English, Wildean dandy, being  
 addressed as "you little Rumanian wog".

Both Tzara and Carr are right but neither has a monopoly on the truth.  
 The situation is complicated so they abandon argument and practically

compose their own Dada poème simultanée - Carr chants the familiar soldier's chant. "We're here because we're here because we're here..." and Tzara joins in murmuring "Da-da" to the same tune. It is an effective, theatrical comment on the argument. The perspective shifts yet again to expose the sentimentality in Carr's view as he talks about the "wonderful spirit in the trenches". But reality re-asserts itself and what began as a sentimental view of "the courage, the comradeship, the warmth", gives way to "the cold, the mud, the stench - fear - folly - Christ Jesu!, but for this blessed leg! - I never thought to be picked out, plucked out, blessed by the blood of a blighty wound - oh heaven! - released into folds of snow-white feather beds, pacific civilian heaven!, the mystical swissticality of it, the entente cordiality of it!, the Jesus Christ I'm out of it! - into the valley of the invalided - Carr of the Consulate!"(p.41)

In this speech Carr is seen struggling to escape from his unpleasant memories of the war into the more pleasing recollections of life in Switzerland and his involvement with Wilde's play. In an adroit exploitation of memory as technique, the serious and the absurd, philosophy and egotism are interwoven. Carr's prejudices and affectations are ever-present on the comic surface but the argument of the sub-text proceeds. Carr represents the little man in this world of revolutionaries but, as Travesties continually reminds us, he has the starring role on his own historical stage. The achievements of artists and the actions of political revolutionaries are of secondary importance. Stoppard amusingly emphasises the problems of perspective when, exploiting the comedy in Carr's arrogance and egotism, Carr states:

"I might have stopped the whole Bolshevik thing in its tracks, but - here's the point. I was uncertain. What was the right thing? And then there were my feelings for Cecily. And don't forget, he wasn't Lenin then! I mean who was he? as it were. So there I was, the lives of millions of people

hanging on which way I'd move, or whether I'd move at all..."

(p.81)

Lenin's role in the sub-text is crucial but his integration in the surface plot (Carr's memory) proved problematical.<sup>(17)</sup> Originally Stoppard intended that Lenin's viewpoint would be represented by documentary evidence. The action would be suspended whilst actors read the entire passage from clipboards and lecturns. It is clear that Stoppard wanted a striking change of tone and style to emphasise Lenin's uncompromising attitude and the stark contrast between his world and that of the artists. However, practical theatrical considerations led him to find a means of retaining the surface framework/link without sacrificing the change of tone. (Stoppard here acknowledges his debt to his director who pointed out the basically practical problem: it would be difficult to recapture the audience's belief in the plot or surface framework once it is interrupted.)<sup>(18)</sup>

He succeeds in this aim by keeping Lenin (and Nadya) effectively outside The Importance Of Being Earnest fantasy. At the same time he retains the documentary nature of the presentation of Lenin's viewpoint: almost everything spoken by Lenin and Nadya comes from his Collected Writings and her Memories Of Lenin. Thus when Cecily delivers her lecture on Lenin, Stoppard keeps both the framework and the contrast he required.

Act I firmly establishes the Wilde connection and the Dada style. The audience's perceptions and expectations are sharply jolted when they return after the interval and are confronted with Cecily delivering a serious lecture. The library set is easily identifiable though not identical with that of the Prologue; Cecily as the librarianess of Act I provides the necessary narrative link with The Importance Of Being Earnest framework and Carr's memory. The documentary information with which she opens Act II highlights the historical

connection between Lenin, Joyce and Tzara(p.69) and introduces another perspective into the examination of the question about art and the artist. The focus now is on the Russians, the third "movement" of the library overture or tableau. The first two movements, anti-art and the artist (Tzara and Joyce), have already been developed in Act I. The conversation we witnessed in the Prologue is now re-enacted with Cecily earnestly translating even the most obvious word into English. There is an extra comic linguistic dimension when the sounds we have come to associate with rejection and nihilism now mean 'Yes', for Cecily pedantically translates Nadya's earnest "Da,da,da!" as "Yes,yes,yes!". Cecily is now responsible for further developments in The Importance Of Being Earnest connection which lead to deception and pursue Lenin's role in the dialectic.

Carr, whose memory has promoted him to Consul General, disguises himself as Tristan Tzara, the decadent nihilist brother of Jack Tzara and enters the library intending to gain information about Lenin's plans. His encounter with Cecily is in imitation of Algernon's meeting with Cecily Cardew in the country. Thus whilst on one level developing The Importance Of Being Earnest parody and entangling the characters more deeply in farce, Travesties introduces another perspective to the debate on art and revolution. Cecily reveals that Carr's servant, Bennett, who has been entrusted with the consulate's business whilst the Consul himself devoted his attention to his performance in The Importance Of Being Earnest, has radical sympathies and has passed valuable information to Lenin via Carr's "brother Jack". In performance the speed with which all this parody, information and misinformation is introduced and fused, is breathtaking. Fortunately it does not really matter if the audience momentarily lose track of who is who - there is a similar problem with establishing identities the last Act of The Importance Of Being Earnest.

There remains a sense of the characters on stage as parts of an equation which is being gradually resolved. Everything is falling into position. At the back of audience's mind will be the awareness that there is something definitely "right" about the whole parody: Bennett's radical sympathies are consistent with his counterpart's (Lane's) latent irony and he is certainly in the spirit of Wilde whose servant exposes the absurdity of class barriers whilst supporting them most earnestly. Some members of the audience might appreciate a further layer of irony in the knowledge that the historical Tzara adopted communism in later life.

As Carr grows increasingly more interested in Cecily than in Lenin, their conversation revolves around the role of the artist in society. Cecily, as follower of Lenin, disapproves of "trivial" or uncommitted art: "the sole duty and justification for art is social criticism". Anything else is artistic decadence - "a luxury which only artists can afford." Carr with Wildean logic and sympathies as well as Wildean diction and appearance attempts to patronise her socialist earnestness. But Cecily convincingly stands her ground, the argument becomes heated and goes off the rails into another time-slip. When they resume, their dispute proceeds on more overtly socio-political lines. Cecily insists on the inevitability of a socialist revolution as envisaged by Marx and Carr insists on the opposite, explaining why "Marx got it wrong" and why Das Kapital was out of date by the time it appeared in print. (p.76-7) The seriousness of the subject matter is counterpointed by the humour of a Wildean dandy discussing Marxism, for Carr is more Wildean dandy than consular official. Practical, naturalistic objections to this incongruity do not arise because the confrontation is rendered particularly amusing by Stoppard's handling of the audience's double perspective on time, a perspective made possible by Carr's role as their guide into the past and into the

argument: Henry Carr of 1917 speaks confidently with the benefit of hindsight which might be expected of Old Carr in 1974. Members of the audience who can identify references to particular theories benefit from an extra dimension but the 1974 perspective on historical incidents will make the passage accessible to all. The audience's sympathies are not allowed to remain long with either character. Stoppard ensures objectivity by deflating his characters and their arguments with superb timing: Reaching the end of his creditable attempt rejecting Marxism, Carr resorts too smoothly to patronising compliment - "How sweet you look suddenly - pink as a rose" - thereby enabling Cecily to put him down in unladylike and most un-Wildean terms which emphasise that this Cecily is part of Carr's imagination and he is projecting his own predilection for invective onto her: "That's because I'm about to puke into your nancy straw hat, you prig" - you swanking canting fop..."(p.77) She rejects what she sees as Carr's simplistic notions of socialism but her spirited defence of Marx and Lenin is absurdly confused (in Carr's imagination) with her performance to the tune of "The Stripper" and leads to another timeslip. Theatrically this is very effective, juxtaposing the serious with the ridiculous. The aural qualities of Cecily's list of "-isms" blends absurdly with the accompanying tune of "The Stripper" and the flashing cabaret lights. The laughter is at the expense of Carr himself for this is part of the young Carr's fantasy and Old Carr's memory goes off the rails again at this climactic moment. At the same time the repetition deflates Cecily's earnestness as the mass of words themselves begin to sound meaningless:

"The only way is the way of Marx, and of Lenin, the enemy of all revisionism-of economism-opportunism-liberalism-of bourgeois anarchist individualism-of quasi-socialist ad-hocism, of syndicalist quasi-Marxist populism-...economist quasi-internationalist imperialism-...self-determinist quasi-socialist annexationism..."

(p.78)

As Carr and Cecily pick up the strains of their Importance Of Being Earnest relationship, the Lenins appear, in counterpoint as it were, and take over their own part in the argument: the triviality of The Importance Of Being Earnest parody blends with the seriousness of the documentary evidence. At the same time the whole scene is punctuated by bursts of pure Dada - Nadya's account of Lenin's plans to return to Russia sound as absurd as the preceding events: "The only possible plan is as follows: You must find two Swedes who resemble Zinoviev and me, but since we cannot speak Swedish they must be deaf mutes. I enclose our photographs for this purpose." (p.79) It is as amusing as the internal logic of The Importance Of Being Earnest. Tzara's entrance pursues further Wildean connections and it is clear that Wilde and Lenin cannot continue in harmony on the same stage: "Lenin and Nadya turn away and Lenin takes off his wig in disgust." (p.81) In an attempt to clear away this confusion in his memory Old Carr takes the stage again and tries to excuse himself: "I might have stopped the whole Bolshevik thing in its tracks, but - here's the point, I was uncertain. What was the right thing? And then there were my feelings for Cecily. And don't forget, he wasn't Lenin then! I mean, who was he? as it were." Questions of identity trouble Carr throughout. He is hardly the person to find out who was the "real" Lenin when he cannot even remember what role he himself played - "not Ernest, the other one" - and when his memory suggests he was the Consul.

In attempting to answer this existential question about Lenin, Stoppard now allows Nadya and Lenin to tell their own story, direct to the audience, eschewing the imaginative and fictional. Instead they provide documentary illustrations, complete with dates and times. In the 1974 Aldwych production Nadya illustrated her account with the help of visual aids - a film projector and screen. Throughout,

the playwright's sense of timing is important in highlighting both humour and theme: Oblivious to Nadya's "countdown" on the well-documented preparations leading to Lenin's return to Russia, Carr criticises Tzara's support for Lenin and continues the debate on art referring to their previous discussion about the privileged artist: "You're an amiable bourgeois with a chit from Matron and if the revolution came you wouldn't know what hit you..."(p.83) We hear the sound of the train on its way before Carr decides: "No, it is perfectly clear in my mind. He must be stopped." With his glib and cynical appraisal of the political situation he finally realises that Lenin is a danger. It is characteristic of Stoppard's methods of presenting his argument that he should allow Carr to make a correct deduction without attempting to disguise Carr's glibness:

"The Russians have got a government of patriotic and moderate men. Prince Lvov is moderately conservative, Kerensky is moderately socialist, and Guchkov is a businessman. All in all a promising foundation for a liberal democracy on the Western model, and for a vigorous prosecution of the war on the Eastern front, followed by a rapid expansion of trade..."

(p.84)

The comedy of Carr's mis-timing is reinforced by the audience's recollection that to the Zurich authorities of 1917-18, the exuberant exploits of the Dadaists seemed to pose greater danger than did the studios of the Russians. (19) The audience is again aware of the double perspective on time: to the Zurich authorities, the Russian who worked quietly in the library was Vladimir Illyich Ulyanov: to Old Carr and the audience he is the Lenin of history.

It is at this point when the historical perspective has been firmly established, that the audience recognises the real Lenin - i.e. the figure familiar from photographs and history. Lenin addresses the audience directly, delivering his argument from a rostrum or lectern. With no apparent awareness of inconsistency, he talks of freedom

and literature in ways which the audience has learned to associate with the Dadaists' use of language. Freedom means freedom from bourgeois anarchist individuals: "Everyone is free to write whatever he likes, without any restrictions" - but the Party is free to expel him if he holds anti-party views. (p.85) (Stoppard was to deal more fully with the implicit irony of this stance in his later plays, Professional Foul and Every Good Boy Deserves Favour which emphasise the human suffering resulting from such decisions.)

On the question of art for art's sake, Lenin's own words reveal a perspective which deliberately excludes part of human nature whilst attempting to be true to itself:

"I don't know of anything greater than the Appassionata. Amazing, superhuman music. It always makes me feel, perhaps naively, it makes me feel proud of the miracles that human beings can perform. But I can't listen to music often. It affects my nerves, makes me want to say nice stupid things and pat the heads of those people who while living in this vile hell can create such beauty. Nowadays we can't pat heads or we'll get our heads bitten off. We've got to hit heads, hit them without mercy, though ideally we're against doing violence to people...Hm, one's duty is infernally hard...."

(p.89)

The Beethoven Sonata accompanies this speech and fills the stage after Lenin's departure, providing eloquent counterpoint to the views stated. It is an effective theatrical demonstration of the argument and plays on the audience's reactions, relying on their historical perspective on Lenin to consider the above speech in a wider context. Once again, it is characteristic of Stoppard's methods of conducting the argument that he allows Lenin to state his own case forcibly. In performance, it is very effective when Act II provides serious relief from the parody and farce and theatricality of the first Act. But, as Stoppard suggests by contrast and counterpoint, it is a question of degree; unrelieved seriousness can be self-destructive. That there is a need for the irrational or "useless" is further emphasised,

indirectly, in Nadya's final account. She describes a time when the imprisoned Lenin asked her to stand on a particular square of pavement outside the prison so that he might catch a momentary glimpse of her: "I went for several days and stood a long while on the pavement there. But he never saw me. Something went wrong. I forget what." (p.89) The *Appassionata* which accompanies her memory is movingly eloquent on the demands of the emotions.

Once Lenin's contribution to the dialectic is highlighted little remains but to draw both play and argument to an end. Stoppard does this with panache as the *Appassionata* "degenerates absurdly into Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Sheen", ushering in the battle over the teacups. The contrast is in itself practically a riposte to Lenin and the earnestness of the preceding scene. It brings to the fore Wilde's defence of individualism and the pleasure principle and his assertion in The Soul Of Man Under Socialism, that "One should sympathise with the entirety of life, not with life's sores and maladies merely, but with life's joy and beauty and energy and health and freedom.... (20) Pleasure is Nature's test, her sign of approval."

George Bernard Shaw compared the writing of comedy to musical composition and W.H. Auden described The Importance Of Being Earnest (21) as "verbal opera". Travesties illustrates the truth of this observation and is itself true to the spirit of Wilde's play. Each character plies his own music (to paraphrase Polonius); scenes are characterised by music-hall, rag-time, jazz or Beethoven according to the prevailing mood or argument; The Prologue is composed like an overture introducing three movements; Characters deliver arias or comic duets; Cecily and Gwendolen share a Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Sheen number. More than any other Stoppard play, Travesties loses much of its effect if read as opposed to experienced in the theatre. The reason for this is that although its structure and logic are

as taut as any other Stoppard play, much of its effectiveness depends upon the power of the words and the music to emphasise tone and control the pace: It is important to hear the sonata during Lenin's rejection of beauty. And the tea-table duet of Gwendolen and Cecily is so much more effective when the music subtly punctuates the argument with its adjustments to tempo and tone.

In the 1974 production the routine began smoothly with an exchange of civilities and the music grew faster until positively frantic at the height of the women's misunderstanding. It proceeded in staccato as Gwendolen was momentarily taken aback; it became ostentatiously jazz-like as Cecily, believing she had triumphed attempted a deep-voiced impersonation of a cliché Louis Armstrong; it became jauntier and more regular in rhythm as Gwendolen rallied and finally achieved an abrupt and amusing climax with the arrival of Carr which put an end to the dispute. Running parallel to the music was the visual humour of the business of taking tea and the relationship between the actions and the song, between the comic routine and the parody of Wilde.

At the end of Wilde's play movement and speech are carefully choreographed as all misunderstandings are resolved:

Chasuble : (to Miss Prism): Laetitia! (Embraces her)  
Miss Prism : (enthusiastically): Frederick! At last!  
Algernon : Cecily! (Embraces her) At last!  
Jack : Gwendolen! (Embraces her) At last!

Travesties' resolution is in the same spirit. First there is an amusing, cliché, parody:

Gwendolen : (Aaaah)  
Tzara : (Ohhhh)  
Cecily : (Oops!)  
Carr : (Aaah!)

(p.97)

Then follows an equally choreographed denouement, reinforced by the accompanying rag-time music in Peter Woods' 1974 production:

(Stage directions)

"Gwendolen and Cecily swap folders with cries of recognition. Carr and Tzara close in. A rapid but formal climax, with appropriate cries of "Cecily! Gwendolen! Henry! Tristan!" and appropriate embraces..." Music...A formal short dance sequence...."

Lenin and Nadya have no share in this comic resolution and are conspicuous by their absence. In performance the audience is carried along by the sheer bravura of the reconciliation scene, by the fortuitous pulling into shape of the last threads of the structure which with such skill and absurdity interweaves historical incident and literature. The characters do not behave naturalistically or consistently - neither Carr nor Tzara has changed his opinions as desired by Cecily and Gwendolen but the ladies accept them nevertheless. The whole sequence moves so fast that there is no time for the audience to ponder pedantically on who has made which mistake. Such considerations do not really arise because the Travesties resolution of The Importance Of Being Earnest fantasy is faithful to its own logic: the wrong person gives a correct answer to the wrong question. (Stoppard exploited the same technique in Every Good Boy Deserves Favour.) If the question is itself based on a misunderstanding or misconception, it makes a nonsense of whatever follows: Cecily and Gwendolen make the initial mistake by confusing the folders containing the work of Joyce and Lenin. This leads inevitably and absurdly to the situation whereby Carr reads a chapter from Ulysses as social critique and Tzara reads Lenin's essay on imperialism as art for art's sake. The surface comedy is resolved without in any way compromising the argument of the sub-text. The question about the role of art and artist in society is shown to be multifaceted and complex. To achieve a definitive answer would be a feat, as Stoppard himself observed, comparable to squaring the circle.<sup>(22)</sup> Stoppard does not claim to have squared the circle but he has pushed out the sides. Each side

gives a different perspective but remains only one part amongst many. Stoppard's working title for the play -"Prisms"- points clearly to this concern with perspectives. Lenin, Joyce and Tzara are given equal weighting in the dialectic since each represents a different perspective on the central issue: by means of the artist, anti-artist and revolutionary, the play discusses attitudes to history, art and revolution. But Stoppard required something more. Artistic and theatrical considerations combined with the unashamedly practical to provide the character of Henry Carr. On a practical level it provided Stoppard with a bravura part (23) for the actor John Wood; whom he had in mind from the start of writing; on an artistic, theatrical level it gave Stoppard the freedom to exploit the stage as a medium, using it as a forum for the discussion of ideas without tying him down to mere historical verisimilitude. After all, a play which purports to deal with well-known figures who left their mark on history can hardly ignore the facts. He tackles the problem by refracting the debate and action through the parody of The Importance Of Being Earnest and the whole through the memory of Henry Carr.

Carr's memory is in many ways unreliable but this fact does not detract from the execution and validity of the debate itself. Instead, Carr's unreliability is emphasised and made to contribute in a positive way. Carr has some difficulty in remembering the name of the character he played. His "not Ernest, the other one," becomes a comic leit-motif in the play. On one occasion, strategically just before Lenin's turn to dominate the argument, he even forgets the title of the play - "The Imprudence of Being --". Stoppard exploits the comic technique of repetition to introduce a motif on the problems of identity which serves to remind the Travesties audience of how important is the

question of identity - more precisely, the various aspects of the single identity - to The Importance Of Being Earnest.

This particular motif surfaces in various ways throughout Stoppard's play: historical characters take on fictional identities - Tristan Tzara becomes Jack Worthing, James Joyce becomes Lady Bracknell, Carr becomes Algernon Moncrieff and the Consul General. In a different way, the man who is Vladimir Illyich Ulyanov in the Zurich library, becomes the Lenin of history.

The comic potential of this motif is not neglected. Carr first thinks Joyce is Gwendolen's respectably plain, bespectacled female companion and thereafter persists in giving him feminine names - Doris, Phyllis, Bridget (and Tzara contributes Deidre). His amnesia appears to have infected his wife who at the end of the play comments "I don't remember Joyce - not Joyce, the other one." (p.97)

More importantly, however, the weakness of memory is exploited to serve the characterisation of Carr himself and thereby to reinforce the play's concern with perspective. On his first appearance Carr's memory travels into the past but keeps stalling. He tries to find the right words and idiom to describe Lenin, Joyce and Tzara but is hampered and sidetracked by his own prejudices and affectations. His description of Joyce, for example begins in the idiom of Boswell but soon degenerates to the merely personal and is evidence of Carr's tendency to resort to vulgar abuse: "...To those of us who knew him, Joyce's genius was never in doubt....in short, a complex personality, an enigma, a contradictory spokesman for the truth, an obsessive litigant and yet an essentially private man who wished his total indifference to public notice to be universally recognised - in short, a liar, and a hypocrite, a tight-fisted, sponging, fornicating drunk not worth the paper, that's that bit done." (p.23)

Carr here reminds one of the attempts of Moon (in Lord Malquist And Mr Moon) who attempts to understand his experience by seeing it from different angles, in different idioms. It is immediately clear that on the stage he shares with such luminaries as Lenin, Joyce and Tzara, Carr has the starring role and that the audience can expect to see these figures in a new light, although certain facts remain unalterable. In fact, Carr introduces the audience to certain facts, historical details of which they might well be aware.

Lenin led the Russian revolution, Tzara was founder-member of the revolutionary Dada movement, James Joyce wrote Ulysses and Henry Carr took on the role of Algernon Moncrieff. It was a demanding role requiring at least two complete outfits (town and country) and occasioning certain expenditures in the cause of sartorial elegance. Carr takes his clothes as seriously as any Wildean dandy his cravat or buttonhole. The idea for this important aspect of his characterisation (probably suggested to Stoppard by Richard Ellmann's report of the court case and the chorus in James Joyce's song of vengeance (24) 'The C.G. Is Not Literary') is firmly established in the first time-slip sequence in Travesties. This is marked by Carr's instructions to his servant: "get me out the straight cut trouser with the blue satin stripe and the silk cutaway. I'll wear the opal studs." (p.26-7).

It is highly amusing when this consular official shows remarkable ignorance on both politics and geography: he asserts that Rumania and Bulgaria are the same country (p.73), confuses Sofia and Bucharest (p.53) and does not know who is the British Prime Minister (p.73). There is even a suggestion that he believes Switzerland is by the sea (p.73). These basic mistakes restore the audience's awareness of their own knowledge and of the double perspective on time within

the play itself. At times they must rely on Carr to guide them into the play's past; on other occasions they are invited to question his viewpoint. When his servant refers to the newspaper reports about a social revolution in Russia, Carr hazards "A Social revolution? Unaccompanied women smoking at the Opera, that sort of thing?..."

(p.29) But on the question of dress, Carr is very serious. He is a connoisseur with a keen appreciation of cut and style and he remembers the news of the outbreak of World War I because of the connection with his tailor:

"I was in Savile Row when I heard the news, talking to the head cutter at Drewitt and Madge in a hounds-tooth check slightly flared behind the knees, quite unusual. Old Drewitt, or Madge, came in and told me. Never trusted the Hun, I remarked. Boch, he replied, and I, at that time unfamiliar with the appellation, turned on my heel and walked into Trimmitt and Punch where I ordered a complete suit of Harris knicker-bockers with hacking vents..."

(p.28)

Carr poses as an aesthete and dandy and is as much a cliché as the best of Stoppard's characters, with sufficient individual traits to make him credible. A mere layman in literature and the arts, politics and revolution, he nevertheless manages to hold his own against the single-minded experts. In his imagination at least, he joins in discussions with all of them, upholding the view of the 'ordinary' man. With Tzara he discusses the need for commitment and the validity of traditional ideals - patriotism, duty, freedom. The tragi-comic nature of his account of experiences on the battlefield is characteristic of Travesties' fusion of frivolity and debate:

"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..."

(p.37)

On the question of the artist's role in society, Carr voices the philistine, reactionary view:

"When I was at school, on certain afternoons we all had to do what was called Labour-weeding, sweeping, sawing

logs for the boiler-room, that kind of thing; but if you had a chit from Matron you were let off to spend the afternoon messing about in the Art Room. Labour or Art. And you've got a chit for life?"

(p.46)

The Carr who could appear so knowledgeable in his criticism of Marxism, is here rather philistine. But there is no inconsistency. On both occasions he fulfils the demands of his role by offering the less knowledgeable members of the audience a way in to the argument. Whereas Tzara insists on the negative role of the artist when disputing with Joyce, Carr's attitude compels him to stress the positive:

"It's not the hunters and warriors that put you on the first rung of the ladder to consecutive thought and a rather unusual flair in your poncey trousers."

(p.46)

Carr cordially admits that art does not feature prominently in his line of work:

"You'd never say that a facility for rhyme and metre was the sine qua non of advancement in the British Consular Service."

(p.21)

Joyce recognises that Carr's interest in art is largely superficial: he tempts him to support the English Players' production of Wilde's play by describing the role of Algernon as "Aristocratic-romantic-epigrammatic-he's a young swell. He has all the best lines and gets the girl in the end." Finally, it is the offer of two complete outfits which convinces Carr to lend his support to the theatrical venture. After their dispute, Carr is a good foil for Joyce as the minor official who disapproves of the artist's neutralist stand.

When Carr discusses socialism and revolution with Cecily he shows more political acumen than he has hitherto proved capable of (p.76-7). This inconsistency, however, goes unnoticed in performance. He is still very much the dandy in appearance: "very debonair in his boater and blazer." He is growing increasingly interested in Cecily whose earnestness he (typically) tries to patronise: "No,

no, no, no, my dear girl- Marx got it wrong" and, "How sweet you look suddenly-pink as a rose." At the same time he is becoming more entangled in the farce of The Importance Of Being Earnest/Travesties connection. It would be pedantic and absurd to question his knowledge because by this stage in the play the audience does not expect to judge the characters on a strictly naturalistic level. Characters are, rather, parts of an equation and Carr makes various appearances as x,y,or z, depending on whether Stoppard wants Carr to provide the audience with information or to voice their possible doubts. The equation has been worked out once Lenin, Joyce and Tzara have stated and defended their differing views. The farce has been drawn to its natural conclusion and order is restored.

The final scene reinforces the fantasy and dream-like nature of the preceding events. Old Cecily strips away layer upon layer of the dream, forcing Carr to admit to his confusion of facts, surprising and amusing the audience by raising a point they may have missed:

Cecily	:	And you were never the Consul.
Carr	:	Never said I was.
Cecily	:	Yes you did.
Carr	:	Should we have a cup of tea?

He is irritated by her insistence on detail and tetchily insists on the claims of the truth of dreams:

"Oh, Cecily. I wish I'd known then that you'd turn out to be a pedant!(getting angry)Wasn't this-Didn't do that-1916-1917-What of it? I was here. They were here. They went on. I went on. We all went on."

Cecily persists but Carr refuses to be cowed by what Wilde described (25) as "careless habits of accuracy." Once the lights have faded until only a spotlight on him remains, he takes centre stage. John Wood, in the original 1974 production allowed an eloquent pause to pass before he resumed, unabashed and indomitable, as if in collusion with the audience against Cecily's insistence on historical fact:

"Great days...Zurich during the war. Refugees, spies, exiles, painters, poets, writers, radicals, experts of all kinds. I knew them all. Used to argue far into the night...at the Odeon, the Terrasse..."

The play ends as it began, emphasising the importance of perspective and the impossibility of squaring the circle:

"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 forget the third thing. (Blackout)

Travesties has succeeded in demonstrating the central argument and owes much to the choice of Henry Carr as hero. In his play inspired by Hamlet, Stoppard concentrated on two attendant lords; in his play about art and revolution he chooses a minor consular official with only a layman's interest in either art or politics. This idiosyncratic choice of perspective offers the audience a way in to the comedy of ideas and makes use of their participation to construct a new edifice from familiar material. The audience's own knowledge and theatrical experience contributes to the foundations of the new edifice and determines the level of their participation in the argument. Travesties needs a stage and audience as a musical score needs an orchestra. Reading the script alone loses much of the play's impact: much of its joy and humour lies in the aural qualities of the language counterpointed with the visual and linguistic sparks emanating from the literary parody. It is perhaps the most Stoppardian of Stoppard's plays.

In an interview in 1976 he expressed some concern that "A lot of things in Travesties and Jumpers seem to me to be the terminus of  
(26)  
the particular writing which I can do." In the same interview he observed, "I don't think I can do better than I have done with Travesties if one is going to write that kind of play in that kind

of idiom. In terms of trying to put together serious statement and witty expression, that's as good as I can do it, I think." But already he was thinking about moving beyond this point and developing his craft. He mused about writing a quieter play without "flashy mind-projections speaking in long, articulate, witty sentences about the great abstractions." He had in mind a television play, "probably historical, about Czechoslovakia." Almost exactly one year later Professional Foul would prove to be a true successor to Jumpers and Travesties combining a change of direction with a strengthening of his comedy of ideas.

## CHAPTER X

Stoppard and CommitmentEvery Good Boy Deserves Favour - Royal Shakespeare Company

(Director Trevor Nunn) and London Symphony Orchestra (Conductor André Previn). Single Concert performance in honour of The Queen's Silver Jubilee, 1 July 1977, Royal Festival Hall. Later at Mermaid Theatre, 14.6.78, RSC and Mermaid Chamber Orchestra - score adapted by A. Previn.

On a number of occasions Stoppard has admitted that he does not have a large collection of ideas for plays waiting to be written and that he likes to practise his craft by working on adaptations and unusual projects. When the composer/conductor André Previn offered the professional services of his own symphony orchestra, Stoppard immediately expressed interest. But the offer posed a particularly awkward problem in that the requirements of the form seemed to dictate the content - for Stoppard at first had no subject in mind and, on his own admission, had little interest in "serious music". He outlines the dilemma in his Introduction to the published text (Faber and Faber, 1978). Especially significant for this study is his basic insistence on the play's inner logic: for the play to avoid what he calls "folie de grandeur" and to constitute a feasible and interesting theatrical-musical event, the musicians must be inside the action, integral to the subject. Logical considerations at one point insisted that the orchestra belong to a millionaire, but the millionaire could be dispensed with once Stoppard decided that the orchestra could be an imaginary orchestra. With admirable logic he arrived at the absurd decision that the play could be about a lunatic triangle-player who thought he had an orchestra.

Despite this promising solution to problems of form, he still had no play. For Stoppard's comedy depends on the examination of ideas

and he had no reason for writing about a lunatic triangle-player or an orchestra. Music and triangles led him "into a punning diversion based on Euclid's axioms, but it didn't belong anywhere." His need for a reason was answered whilst reading about Russian dissidents during research for a television play he wanted to write about Czechoslovakia (Professional Foul was produced the same year). When he met Victor Fainberg he felt he had a play. Fainberg had been arrested in Red Square in August 1968 during a peaceful demonstration against the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia and had written about his experiences in the Soviet prison-hospital system. Victor Fainberg's persistence in his own campaign, as well as his active concern for fellow detainees like Vladimir Bukovsky "prompted the thought that his captors must have been quite pleased to get rid of him. He was not a man to be broken or silenced; an insistent, discordant note, one might say, in an orchestrated society." <sup>(1)</sup> Having thus hit upon the metaphor, Stoppard now had the required thematic-structural link for his play with an orchestra.

This background is vital for the understanding of why Stoppard's first two major plays after Travesties should have overtly political overtones. These later plays refer to specific situations in an identifiable real world, rather than in a mental landscape such as the logical positivist world of Jumpers or the Zurich of Carr's memory in Travesties. 1977 was Amnesty International's 'Prisoner of Conscience Year' and Stoppard's plays in that year were intended as a contribution to Amnesty International's efforts to draw public attention to the fate of political detainees. (He was himself a member of Committee Against Psychiatric Abuse). For this reason they refer directly to events taking place in Czechoslovakia or Russia. To this extent, Every Good Boy Deserves Favour and Professional Foul differ from Stoppard's previous plays but there are significant

similarities too: these plays are as much concerned with ideas as are Jumpers and Travesties; Jumpers and Travesties are as "political" as Every Good Boy Deserves Favour and Professional Foul - the former insists on the moral basis of all political action, the latter supports the freedom of the artist and the role of the revolutionary. For all their farce, frivolity and theatricality the two earlier plays are as "committed" as the later, more overtly political plays. In the earlier plays Stoppard deals with his themes objectively, taking the long-term view of the artist; the later plays have a more immediate application to the short-term realities because they refer directly to the particular behaviour of an existing system. It is in the adjustment of perspective and not in the seriousness of the issues or the playwright's attitude that the difference lies. Partly responsible for this difference was Stoppard's decision to experiment further with his comedy of ideas, adjusting the balance between seriousness and frivolity. This will be discussed more fully in the detailed examination of Professional Foul which was to apply his formula for a comedy of ideas to his first full-scale play in another medium.

A further contributory element must be the fact that Stoppard as an artist - and moreover, Czechoslovakian-born - is too close to the subject to want to write about it as a musical or spectacular. He does not even have the advantage of historical distance to enable him to handle the subject with the level of objectivity be maintained in Jumpers and Travesties. This closeness to the subject matter is highlighted by another biographical note included in Stoppard's reference to the rehearsals for Every Good Boy Deserves Favour: Vladimir Bukovsky, referred to as "my friend C" in Alexander's non-fictional account describing the fate of a group of dissidents, was finally released from prison and sent to the West. He accepted

Stoppard's invitation to watch the rehearsals of Every Good Boy Deserves Favour which were in progress in June 1977, but his presence proved 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 touching on the experiences of our visitor and found it impossible to continue." The artist was reminded, whilst enjoying his own freedom of choice and freedom of expression of fellow artists for whom such freedoms are not academic but a matter of life and death. It is the guilt of the free artist faced with today's man of political action. The unease was the result of Bukovsky's mere presence - a physical reminder of the difference between their play's fictional truth and the real pain and experience upon which their own work was based. (Stoppard's choice of the verb 'mimics' is eloquent.) Bukovsky's helpfulness (for Stoppard reports "He was diffident, friendly and helpful on points of detail in the production") must have contributed further to the company's embarrassment, reminding them of the stark contrast in their situations and experiences.

It is understandable, therefore that Stoppard cannot distance the dilemma of the political prisoner Alexander, as he does with fictional creations such as George Moore, Henry Carr or Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. But characteristically, Stoppard continues to employ comedy and even farce in order to serve his argument, to turn the spotlight onto the absurdity and the injustice which Every Good Boy Deserves Favour sets out to criticise. The basic absurdity lies in the imprisonment of men who have broken no law and in the incarceration in psychiatric hospitals of men who are sane. This absurdity is underlined in the play by giving the same name - Alexander Ivanov-

and the same cell to a genuine psychiatric patient and a political prisoner. The humour arising from this comic technique of nomenclature and its resultant confusion enables Stoppard to focus on the State's irrationality and to handle the subject with a degree of objectivity. Humour is a powerful weapon; by exposing the logical absurdities of the totalitarian system Stoppard also exposes its moral injustice. Those who refuse to examine their own irrational behaviour may avoid or sidestep rational argument but they are not impervious to ridicule. As in all of Stoppard's plays, the characters and events are juxtaposed to highlight the inter-relating layers of irony which derive, ultimately, from the play's central metaphor - in this case, the idea of the orchestrated society. Alexander is a political prisoner, detained in a psychiatric hospital for saying that sane men are put into psychiatric hospitals; Ivanov is a genuine psychiatric patient with delusions about possessing an orchestra. The former will be released if he agrees to play the tune the Authorities demand; the latter will be released when he admits that there is no music. In other words, Alexander must accept his assigned role in an orchestrated society whereas Ivanov must give up the notion that everyone in society is a member of an orchestra. To intensify the levels of irony and to underline the thematic-structural link, the Doctor is himself an eager though lowly member of the orchestra, a keen violinist. Ironically, the genuine lunatic provides welcome comic relief because his delusions are, on the whole, harmless. In his consultation with the Doctor, Ivanov's own coherent logic endows him with an engaging quality which sets the Doctor at a disadvantage: Ivanov has ordered the orchestra to be quiet but the string section persists:

Ivanov	:	(Shouts): I'll have your gut for garters!
Doctor	:	Sit down, please.
Ivanov	:	(Sitting down): It's the only kind of language they understand.
Doctor	:	Did the pills help at all?

- Ivanov : I don't know. What pills did you give them?  
 ...  
 Doctor : (Slapping his violin, which is on the table):  
But there is no orchestra.  
 I have an orchestra, but you do not.  
 Ivanov : Does that seem reasonable to you? (p.21)

Thus Stoppard skilfully harnesses the humour provided by Ivanov's condition to serve his theme - the Doctor's discomfiture is as amusing as the patient's delusions. And true to Stoppard's use of comic devices, a repetition of the consultation routine contributes further to the humour and simultaneously points to the horror: Ivanov's consultations with the Doctor, the representative of authority, parallel Alexander's meeting with the same and in both cases the "patient" and doctor are distinguished by the latter's irrationality. Although he would evidently like to help his patients, the Doctor is more interested in his own orchestra than in the hospital. Humour and argument combine as the Doctor is demonstrated to be a keen member of the orchestra and a willing, unquestioning servant of the totalitarian system. In both respects he is unlike Alexander who painstakingly tries to make him understand that he has no wish to fit into the system just as he tries to explain to Ivanov that he does not play an instrument and has no wish to do so. It is amusing when, despite Alexander's deliberately restrained and painfully clear attempts at explanation, Ivanov advises him "to practise!"; the humour is heavily coloured with tragic overtones when despite his recognition of Alexander's sanity, the Doctor insists Alexander should continue taking the prescribed pills. Alexander's own factual account of his treatment in the Special Psychiatric Hospital reminds the audience of the steps which are taken to "cure" political prisoners who have no other symptoms but opinions. Alexander's account is rendered most devastating and effective by being delivered calmly and unemotionally:

"I was given injections of aminazin, sulfazin, triftazin, haloperidol and insulin, which caused swellings, cramps, headaches, trembling, fever and the loss of various abilities including the ability to read, write, sleep, sit, stand and button my trousers. When all this failed to improve my condition, I was stripped and bound head to foot with lengths of wet canvas. As the canvas dried it became tighter and tighter until I lost consciousness. They did this to me for 10 days in a row, and still my condition did not improve."

(p.29)

The audience associate this account with what they know of other political prisoners - no-one, in 1977, 'Prisoner of Conscience Year', could be completely ignorant of the existence of such a problem except in the unlikely event that they read no newspapers, listened to no radio and watched no television. The horror speaks for itself and Stoppard has no wish to lessen its impact but he employs humour as a means of taking this knowledge further. He can control the audience's emotions by directing their attention to the wrongs of the system which is responsible for such suffering.

There is some humour in the figure of the joke-Doctor indiscriminately prescribing pills for coughs and schizophrenia but the humour is at the Doctor's expense, not the "patient's". Similarly, the humour arising from the Doctor's confusion with language and facts effectively betrays the State's attitude towards political prisoners:

"Look, let's get this clear. This is what is called an Ordinary Psychiatric Hospital, that is to say a civil mental hospital coming under the Ministry of Health and we have wards. Cells is what they have in prisons, and also, possibly, in what are called Special Psychiatric Hospitals, which come under the Ministry of Internal Affairs and are for prisoners who represent a special danger to society. Or rather patients..."

Colonel-or rather Doctor-Rozinsky, who has taken over your case, chose your cell-or rather ward-mate personally."

(p.27)

When the joke-Doctor is juxtaposed with the uncompromisingly human figure of Alexander himself, the latter's moral superiority as well as his vulnerability is reinforced.

The Doctor can no more understand why Alexander won't lie about being

"cured" if this will effect his release than the genuine lunatic Ivanov can understand that Alexander does not play a musical instrument. Alexander's attempt to explain his belief in personal integrity and moral justice - the belief which prevents him from fitting conveniently into a formula which would enable the State to persist in its injustices - successfully fuses the joke-Doctor routine with the seriousness of the issues at stake. Reverting to a method of utterance he had adopted in the attempt to maintain his own sanity and memory, Alexander states flatly:

- I want to get back to the bad old times when a man got a sentence appropriate to his crimes-ten years' hard for a word out of place, twenty-five years if they didn't like your face, and no-one pretended that you were off your head. In the good old Archipelago you're either well or dead-  
 And the-  
 Doctor : Stop it!  
 My God, how long can you go on like that?  
 Alexander: In the Arsenal'naya I was not allowed writing materials, on medical grounds. If you want to remember things it helps if they rhyme.  
 Doctor : You gave me a dreadful shock. I thought I had discovered an entirely new form of mental disturbance. Immortality smiled upon me, one quick smile, and was gone.  
 Alexander: Your name may not be entirely lost to history.  
 Doctor : What do you mean? -it's not me! I'm told what to do. Look if you'll eat something I'll send for your son.  
 Alexander: I don't want him to come here.  
 Doctor : If you don't eat something I'll send for your son. (p.31)

There is an element of vaudeville in the Doctor's words and in his sympathy for Alexander when he offers him a way out: "You can choose your own drugs. You don't even have to take them. Just say you took them," but this fleeting glimpse of the human face behind the official mask makes Alexander's case the more poignant. The Doctor is simply incapable of understanding the prisoner's insistence on truth and individualism. The point is underlined in the comic ending of the scene: Ivanov returns to the office to inform the Doctor that he no longer has delusions about the existence of an orchestra, but the Doctor is late for his performance:

The doctor grabs his violin case and starts to leave. Ivanov strikes his triangle.

Ivanov : There is no orchestra!

Doctor : (Leaving): Of course there's a bloody orchestra! (p.33)

This farcical conclusion steers the play away from the brink of tragedy. With the aid of the real orchestra which now strikes up, it reinforces the nature of the event in progress. The audience has been taken close to "the real thing" and the tension is released. They can again distance themselves from the emotions which threaten to overwhelm their attention and rob them of their ability to think clearly.

The constant shift from real to imaginary orchestra in the surface narrative draws attention to the metaphorical import of surface events and to the play's argument. The inclusion of a third Alexander Ivanov - Alexander's young son, Sacha - gives further illustration of the metaphor. Sacha is an unwilling recruit to the school band, yet another individual restricted within an institution which insists he conform. When Sacha subverts the band's performance by continuous sounding of the triangle, he is punished - his teacher makes him copy out Euclid's axioms on geometry. Mathematicians in the audience might appreciate the irony of this punishment with their knowledge that Euclidean geometry is no longer unquestioned in its dictums on concepts of space. When Sacha deviates from his set task and states truths which seem to him to be self-evident but with which Authority disagrees, it is not only the mathematicians in the audience who understand that Sacha, like his father, is rebelling against the State's perspective on truth:

Sacha : A plane area bordered by high walls is a prison, not a hospital.

Teacher : Be quiet!

Sacha : I don't care! - he was never sick at home. Never!

(p.26)

Whilst contributing to the play's dramatic illustration of the musical metaphor the character of Sacha also enables Stoppard to emphasise the human element in the situation, reinforcing with Sacha's youth and vulnerability, the idea of the individual as an easy victim of the State's authority. His presence demonstrates how all inhabitants of this system are subject to the restrictions of sub-sections of the same overriding institution - the State. Whether in school, society or asylum, individuality is suppressed. Ironically and sadly, only the genuine lunatic can enjoy the freedom of his imagination - for although the Doctor does try to cure Ivanov of his delusions, Ivanov is not regarded as a real threat to society or the system and is content in his madness. Stoppard brings the young boy face to face with the madman in order to demonstrate the darker side of the situation. Their meeting (p.33) begins with an amusing comic routine based on the confusion of names and identities. But when Ivanov goes through a lunatic translation of Euclid in orchestral terms their meeting takes on a nightmarish quality which effectively conveys Sacha's fear and vulnerability. Humour in a dynamic state of tension or contrast with its opposite is the means by which Stoppard both illustrates and criticises the dilemma of Sacha and his father. Exploiting a child's simplicity to elicit sympathy and suggest truthfulness is a well-known dramatic technique (2) and one to which Stoppard draws attention in Squaring The Circle. But it is a fair one in this argument because the Authorities calculatingly use the boy as emotional blackmail against the father. The schoolchild's musical mnemonic is adapted to serve this purpose when the Doctor tells Alexander, "What about your son? He is turning into a delinquent. (Doctor plucks the violin EGBDF). He's a good boy. He deserves a father." (p.29) It is a potent argument and Sacha may be voicing the reservations of some in the audience when

he pleads with his father:

"Tell them lies. Tell them they've cured you....  
If they're wicked how can it be wrong?"

(p.35)

The emotional and moral difficulty posed by the implied accusation of wilful intransigence is poignantly and dramatically expressed through Alexander's inability to complete the lines of his poem to his son:

Dear Sacha -  
be glad of -  
kiss Mama's picture -  
goodbye.

The Doctor's calls to "Ivanov" re-assert Alexander's awareness of the injustice against which he strives: the Doctor does not distinguish between the political prisoner or the madman. He summons the strength to voice another simple poem, bravely affirming his faith in himself:

(Rapidly as before)  
Dear Sacha, I love you,  
I hope you love me too.  
To thine own self be true  
One and one is always two.  
I kiss you now, adieu.  
There was nothing else to do.

(p.36)

An amusingly neat conclusion follows fast on the heels of this moving declaration, reminding the audience again of the self-contained reality of the performance in progress. In art, justice can triumph and the good end happily. The Colonel's mistake regarding his "patients'" identity keeps the play in the realm of comedy for it is a typical example of a well-worn comic technique. At the same time and by implication it directs our attention to the failure of justice in the real world. The release of the psychiatric patient and the political prisoner conforms to the absurdity of the logic which imprisoned them together in the first place - each gives the right answers to the wrong questions. The Colonel, highest representative of authority in the play, is a rather sinister joke-figure. From the Doctor we

have already learned that Colonel - or rather Doctor - Rozinsky is "proud to serve the state in any capacity, but he was not actually trained in psychiatry as such." His speciality is semantics. His own importance and the absurdity of the system he represents are parodied by the organ music which accompanies his impressive entrance and exit. When he confuses the two men and pronounces them both sane, the comedy is concluded satisfactorily in theatrical terms without undermining the seriousness of the situation which audience, actors and playwright know will continue even after they have left the theatre. The Colonel asks Ivanov if sane men are kept in lunatic asylums and he asks Alexander if he has an orchestra. Both men, surprised, return the right answer. Delaying only long enough to rebuke Alexander for not saying 'Thank You' (The humour about manners here reinforcing the absurdity of the situation) the Colonel informs the Doctor, "There's nothing wrong with these men. Get them out of here."

Significantly, Every Good Boy Deserves Favour does not end on this "high" note. The laughter dies down, the music takes over and the final words are given to ten-year-old Sacha:

Sacha : (Sings): Everything can be all right!  
(Music. Music ends)

The final mood is one of courageous, even desperate optimism tinged with pathos. Alexander wins the moral victory but the audience knows that it is only in the self-contained reality of the musical event before them that the evil of the system can be so cleverly defeated. The amusing absurdity which prompts Alexander's release is so obviously a dramatist's sleight of hand that there is no danger of confusing it with, or undermining, the real suffering of real political prisoners. Stoppard's own visit to Moscow with members of Amnesty International had shown him how the system deals with politically embarrassing inconsistencies: the Moscow Amnesty group (which works only for

prisoners of conscience in other countries) is legal. The Amnesty petition which the British group had taken to Moscow in order to obtain signatures from the Soviet Union was also perfectly legal and the plainclothes men with Passport Control at Moscow airport were forced to acknowledge as much for it was returned to Stoppard's companion, Peter Luff, assistant director of the British section of Amnesty International. But during a further security check when wallets were taken away the petition "disappeared" from Peter Luff's wallet. According to Stoppard's account, "The plainclothes man shrugs blankly and walks away. No one knows anything about a petition. The petition named no countries. It was merely a generalised plea for prisoners of conscience everywhere, but when it came to the point the KGB hadn't needed to embarrass the Soviet Union by officially confiscating it. They simply stole it." <sup>(3)</sup> Those members in the audience with knowledge or even personal experience of the totalitarian system will be acutely aware of the fact that the dramatist's sleight of hand may be an amusingly neat theatrical trick but, as sleights of hand go, it is not unparalleled in the real world. In the play it leads to justice; in life it subverts the same.

The presence of the orchestra on stage is an important element in the final success of the play. A great deal of humour derives from the visual and aural effects arising from the co-mingling of the real and imaginary orchestras. The music marks the changes in scene and punctuates the mood. Alexander's nightmare, for example, is conveyed through music, and music sets the tone for the Colonel's entrance and Sacha's pleading. Members of the audience who can respond to the more sophisticated aural qualities of the music itself may, like "The Times" reviewer, appreciate how André Previn's score conveys "the frustrations and hysterically suppressed anger beyond the scope of dialogue." <sup>(4)</sup> They might also recognise the "elegant...Shostakovich

pastiche" and the "Puccinian power" upon which another reviewer commented following the play's transfer to the Mermaid Theatre (14 June 1978).<sup>(5)</sup> But Every Good Boy Deserves Favour is more Stoppard's creation than Previn's and despite the playwright's acknowledgement of the composer as co-author in his foreword to the printed text, the play's success does not seriously rest upon the full symphony orchestra such as André Previn could provide for a single performance at the Festival Hall in July 1977. When the play transferred to the Mermaid Theatre, the eighty-strong London Symphony Orchestra was successfully replaced by the thirty-piece Mermaid Chamber Orchestra for whom the score was adapted. The orchestra's mere presence on stage is as significant as its musical contribution to the event because it serves to emphasise the nature of the play as a self-contained theatrical event. The three separate acting areas border the orchestra and the disposition of the characters at the end gives visual illustration to the play's central metaphor: When Sacha's Teacher, the Doctor and Ivanov leave their respective areas to join the orchestra, Alexander and Sacha walk up a centre aisle dividing the same and the playwright directs the audience's attention to the metaphor of the individual in an orchestrated society. Furthermore, the orchestra's miming to Ivanov's conducting, evading his control, supporting or commenting upon the action at climactic and comic moments contributes also to the maintenance of the comic spirit of the event. Often the action is pulled back from the brink of tragedy and the play sustains a mood of courageous optimism in the face of great odds. When the play was broadcast on television (BBC 2, 14.11.79) the need for the orchestra's constant physical presence was marked, by default. The performance was robbed of its sense of being<sup>a</sup> theatrical and musical event by the camera's need to focus individually on the three acting areas. And although more than one area could be kept in shot at

times the audience's awareness of the interrelationship of the various areas with the orchestra was mostly undermined. Consequently this led to a sombreness - even dullness - which was absent from the theatrical performance. The serious overtones of the subject overwhelmed the comic spirit and offered little more than an intensified sense of gloom in compensation. This adjustment in the balance between seriousness and humour proved (by default again) that the latter can, in fact, be a more constructive weapon. There is, of course, a question of degree at stake and I have already noted how the subject matter of Every Good Boy Deserves Favour was responsible for the changes in Stoppard's own handling of respective levels of seriousness and humour. Every Good Boy Deserves Favour could have ended neatly and amusingly with the Colonel's absurd mistake concerning the illness and identity of his "patients". But, determined to ensure that there should be no ambiguity about where his own sympathies lie, Stoppard immediately checks the audience's laughter by forcing them to look at the underlying issues: Sacha's final words and the accompanying music close the performance on a reflective note. André Previn might have been referring to just such a moment when he observed, "Stoppard makes you laugh at a brilliant joke and ten seconds later you're almost ashamed to have laughed because the joke's content was in fact tragic."<sup>(6)</sup>

The juxtaposition of tragedy and comedy is a device Stoppard employs to create his comedy of ideas and can be seen at work in the overtly political plays like Every Good Boy Deserves Favour and Professional Foul as well as in the apparently uncommitted plays which avoid definitive statements. "Ambushing the audience is what theatre is all about."<sup>(7)</sup> Every Good Boy Deserves Favour reflects the author's interest in theatre and intellectual gymnastics - an interest he had previously exploited to maintain an appearance of detachment. It is also

characteristically craftsmanlike in the fusion of form and content by which it invites the audience to follow the ideas beneath the comedy. However, the subject and the playwright's perspective on it are such that his support of Alexander is more overt than his support of, for example, James Joyce in Travesties. The same degree of detachment is not possible given the subject-matter and perspective in Every Good Boy Deserves Favour. In dealing with a specific situation in the real political world Stoppard cannot avoid making an overt moral and political statement, nor does he wish to. As a playwright he can still control his audience's attention and emotions but he cannot give Alexander's opponents any substantial argument to support their views because he sees none. Nor can he maintain a critical detachment from Alexander and laugh at him as he encourages his audience to laugh at George Moore in Jumpers, at Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, at Henry Carr or James Joyce in Travesties. Not that Alexander is intended to be a realistic psychological study of any particular individual - he is as much an element in the play's equation or argument as are Stoppard's other characters. But his experiences belong directly to the real world. Alexander's account of his treatment in the Arsenal'naya and the fate of the group of individuals identified alphabetically as A-M is taken from the magazine "Index On Censorship", a source which is strictly non-fictional.

Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth

(21.5.79, Inter-Action's British-American Repertory Company, Arts Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry. Later transferred to Collegiate Theatre, London.)

Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth indicates how Stoppard might deal with an overtly political subject on the stage yet retain his more characteristically detached perspective. A full exploration of this double-bill lies beyond the scope of this thesis on account of space

and the fact that the play does not fulfil its potential as a full-scale work - it is content to remain a well-executed exercise. A brief examination, however, is valuable for what it reveals of Stoppard's techniques. The first part of the double-bill is a conflation of Dogg's Our Pet and The Dogg's Troupe 15-Minute Hamlet, written and edited in 1971 and 1976 respectively for Ed Berman's Inter-Action group. It is an amusing exercise in language and meaning inspired by Stoppard's reading of Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations.  
(8)

and arising from his work on Jumpers which was then in rehearsal. Given certain circumstances, individuals can communicate despite the fact that they may be using two different languages. Thus the schoolboys talk in Dogg-language and Easy, the newly-arrived lorry-driver talks in ordinary English. Easy provides Stoppard with a means of introducing the audience to Dogg-language for we begin by sharing Easy's confusion in an alien linguistic environment. However, Easy and the boys succeed in constructing a platform using pieces of wood of different shapes and sizes. When Easy calls "plank" the boys understand "Ready" and throw him a plank; when he calls "Block" the boys understand "Next" and throw him another piece of wood. Sometimes the names of individual pieces for which he calls coincide with the pieces in front of the boys, at others they do not. It is some time before the audience realises that they have been doubly ambushed: Easy and the boys were talking in two different languages when it seemed to the audience as though both sides had fully understood each other. Context and repetition ensure that the audience gain some understanding of Dogg. Various situations are exploited to this end and for their comic potential. The rhythms of language and familiar inflexions inform us that the radio is broadcasting the football results; Headmaster Dogg counts as he hands out little flags to members of the audience in the front row - "sun, dock, trog,

slack, pan..."; the visiting speaker intones "Scabs, slob, yobs, yids, spicks, wops" as she might say, "Your Grace, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls." Before long Easy has succumbed to Dogg and introduces the boys' performance as "Hamlet bedsocks Denmark. Yeti William Shakespeare." The drastically edited Hamlet which follows consequently sounds as absurd and incomprehensible as conversations in Dogg and is nonsense to the non-initiated. Simultaneously, anyone who is familiar with Shakespeare's play can respond to the humour of the editing which reduces to a few quotations one of the most frequently discussed plays in world literature. Depending on the depth of their individual knowledge of Shakespeare's play, members of the audience may also reflect on the particular relevance of Hamlet to the modern play's examination of the theme of reality and appearance, language and meaning.

When the audience resume their seats for the second half of the programme, expectations are sharply jolted. Cahoot's Macbeth begins with extracts from another Shakespeare play and the audience, conditioned to laugh at extracts from Shakespeare, feel they should be laughing but there is nothing particularly amusing about the Witches. During one performance I witnessed, some members of the audience laughed when Macbeth and Banquo entered dressed in black trousers and polo-neck sweaters - an appearance seeming to confirm the audience's expectations of parody. This was immediately followed by a sense of unease and finally a settling down of the tension as they realised that they were not being presented with a parody but with an intelligently edited version of Macbeth, acted "straight". With the entrance of the Inspector, however, audience assumptions and expectations were again dislocated. Thus Stoppard introduces to the audience the Living Room Theatre of Pavel Kahoot, to whom the play is dedicated, and demonstrates the problems faced by artists forbidden

to perform their own work or in public. As the situation unfolds and the Inspector variously insults, compliments or questions the actors with nasty sarcasm, the connection between the two parts of the double-bill becomes clear. Both are concerned with words and the power of language and both give an extra dimension to the play-within-the-play device. The Inspector disapproves of this private performance of Shakespeare's play although the actors are well within the law. The Inspector, however, sees the performance as subversive and he voices the totalitarian state's distrust of literature and the artist when he comments that they have the freedom to complain about lack of freedom if they choose to do so:

"You get your lads together and we get our lads together and when it's all over...you're in gaol. That's freedom in action. But what we don't like is a lot of people being cheeky and saying they are only Julius Caesar or Coriolanus or Macbeth. Otherwise we are going to start treating them the same as the ones who say they are Napoleon."

(p.60-1)

This distrust of literature is testimony to the political threat posed by the individualism of the artist, even when the latter is making no overtly contemporary, political criticism. The Inspector senses the subversive overtones of the performance in question and casts a revealing light on the State's semantics when he accuses the Hostess of using her flat to entertain men:

Inspector : There is a law about that, you know.  
 Hostess : I don't think Macbeth is what was meant.  
 Inspector : Who's to say what was meant? Words can be your friend or your enemy, depending on who's throwing the book, so watch your language.  
 (p.59)

Professional Foul looks more closely on the interrelated questions of law, morality and semantics. In Cahoot's Macbeth, the Inspector's unease, his lack of control over meaning in the play-within-the-play is reflected dramatically in the changes of language. Lorry-driver Easy appears rather incongruously during Macbeth's speech about the murdered Banquo's ghost and informs the assembled company that he

is from "Buxton's cake hops...artichoke almost Leamington Spa." Easy, talking in Dogg, brings with him welcome linguistic humour reinforced by the realisation that the same delivery of "blocks" serves the performance of two Shakespeare plays. The actors immediately respond to Easy's interruption and they try to understand him with the use of a phrase book which includes (as is the fate of such books) such amusingly dated and absurd expressions as "my position has been struck by lightning." The actors help Easy to unload his lorry-load of wood and construct a platform and in the process demonstrate their moral victory over the Inspector who cannot do as they have done and adapt to Dogg. The final part of the Macbeth extract is delivered in Dogg, thereby highlighting, via linguistic humour, the Inspector's lack of understanding and his inability to control the language of the play or the meaning of the performance. Stoppard exploits the comic potential of the situation to shed further light on the strengths and absurdities of language when he alternates the Inspector's own code language with the Dogg Macbeth:

Malcolm	:	(To Macduff who is in the lorry with him) Jugged cake-hops furnished soon? [What wood is this before us?]
Inspector	:	(Into walkie-talkie): Wilco zebra over!
Macduff	:	Sin cake-hops Birnam, git. [The woods of Birnam, sir.]
Inspector	:	Green Charlie Angels 15 out.
Malcolm	:	State level filberts blacken up aglow... [ Let every soldier hew him down a bough...]

(p.76)

Easy's blocks of wood become the Czech actors' Birnam Wood. Macbeth is an especially apt choice for the play-within-the-play to demonstrate the suppression of the totalitarian state in which the actors live. Its contribution to theme and structure is as vital as that of Hamlet to Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead or The Importance Of Being Earnest to Travesties and could have been developed further to explore the numerous possibilities suggested by this relationship.

For example, the Birnam Wood extract concerning the interpretation of the Witches' prophecy is particularly interesting in the light of the modern play's concern with language and meaning and the examination of the State's semantics. But Stoppard had already dealt successfully in other plays with combinations of Shakespeare and philosophy, politics and semantics. In Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth he was content to stop once the surface action had come full circle and made clear the point about literature and state control, politics and semantics. It is a successful diagram which he does not intend to turn into a major painting. As the Inspector lies, "Yes, chief! I think everybody's more or less under control, chief..." the actors and Easy build a platform and the actors continue with their performance of Macbeth in Dogg. When the platform is completed the Inspector takes over and his speech echoes that of the visiting Lady in Dogg's Hamlet - but this time the perspective on the language has changed. When he talks of "scabs...stinking slob...punks...yobs...gits" he is not addressing them politely. With the help of his henchmen - a comic duo named Boris and Maurice - he builds a wall across the proscenium and the metaphorical import of this action is emphasised by the fact that the Inspector is the one who is now in control of language and meaning. He directs the operation, calling for "slab" and "block". But despite him, the actors' performance of Macbeth reaches its natural conclusion, still in Dogg. The Inspector finds this subversive; the audience are alternately amused and uneasy - their knowledge of Macbeth helps them sense what the actors are about but they cannot understand the meaning of each speech. It is appropriate that the unwitting Easy, whose main concern has been to fulfil his duties, should have the last sensible words. Reporting to his employer on the telephone, shouting to be heard above the voices, he quotes Shakespeare - "Double, double toil and trouble"

and observes, "Well, it's been a funny sort of week. But I should be back by Tuesday." His unexpected and incongruous appearance in the Living Room Theatre performance has been disturbing and has helped the dramatic illustration of the ambiguities of language and meaning. His lorry-load of wood has served such different performances as Dogg's Hamlet and Cahoot's Macbeth.

As was the case with Every Good Boy Deserves Favour, the audience can laugh with a sense of relief at the amusingly neat conclusion of the performance which has continually challenged their attention and thwarted their expectations. But the humour in Stoppard's comedy of ideas is dynamically related to the seriousness of the events and issues to which it is applied. The audience sense and applaud the actors' moral victory over the Inspector. They have asserted their right to self-expression through their art. The Inspector constructed a wall across the proscenium but they have mounted it as a platform upon which 'Malcolm' speaks the last, optimistic, words of Macbeth. But the wall remains. In practical terms the Inspector has the advantage. Stoppard succeeded in applying his comedy of ideas to a contemporary overtly political issue, doing justice to both its seriousness and its complexity.

CHAPTER XI Professional Foul

(BBC 2, 21 September 1977)

In an interview dated two days after the opening of Travesties at the Aldwych Theatre, Stoppard expressed the desire to write a quiet play. As if tired of cleverness he told his interviewer that he wanted to dispense with "flashy mind-projections speaking in long, articulate, witty sentences about the great abstractions"<sup>(1)</sup> and to write his "J.B. Priestley play" - a play of more traditional structure and style in which "sheer craftsmanship pays off." This statement in no way undermines the craftsmanship of his own more theatrical stage plays but it is interesting in that it indicates, rather, a state of mind. For when Stoppard stated that he wanted to write a play in which there was "observation, truth, no showing off" it is as though he wanted to test the strength of his comedy of ideas with the balance between the seriousness and frivolity slightly adjusted in favour of the former. Jumpers and Travesties had proved what he could do in "stage plays with all the stops pulled out";<sup>(2)</sup> he now wanted to test his comedy of ideas without the theatrical flamboyance.

It was three years before he wrote this play, and in the light of his above comments, it is understandable that he should turn to another medium, that of television, which encouraged him to tone down the theatricality of his style. The stylistic change of direction coincided fortuitously with the decision to write a play to mark Amnesty International's 'Prisoner of Conscience Year, 1977'. From the start this was destined to be a television play because as such it would reach a larger audience; and as far back as the June 1974 interview he had expressed the desire to write a television play about Czechoslovakia. A personal visit to Moscow and Leningrad and the Charter

'77 action in Czechoslovakia (in which a group of writers signed a charter asking their government to abide by its own Constitution and were imprisoned as a result) helped to 'unlock' the play Stoppard wanted to write. It was dedicated to Vaclav Havel a playwright imprisoned for his activities as a spokesman for Charter '77 and an artist whose work Stoppard admired. Two of Havel's own plays, Audience and Private View, were broadcast on BBC radio in April of the same year, even though Havel's work was banned in his own country. In his introduction to the 1981 Eyre Methuen edition of Havel's The Memorandum, Stoppard expressed his admiration for the inventiveness with which the "lifelike encounters" in Havel's plays explore the individual's experience within a totalitarian system. The Memorandum (1965) revolves around the invention of Ptydepe, an official language - "its grammar constructed with maximum rationality"(p.15) - which is adopted by an organisation despite the fact that not even Gross, the Managing Director, can understand it. Regulations decree that Gross cannot obtain a translation of the Ptydepe memorandum he has received until he knows the contents of the same. The world of Havel's The Garden Party (1963) is riddled with similar bureaucratic absurdities and that too is saved from mere nonsense by its internal logic. The hero is Hugo Pludek who poses as a bureaucrat so successfully that he is put in charge of liquidating the Liquidation Office. By the end of the play he will be put in charge of "a great new institution, a Central Commission for the Inauguration of Liquidation." (p.72) Havel adroitly exposes the shortcomings of totalitarian systems by parodying their bureaucratic procedures. By apparently taking them on their own terms, he subsequently exposes their rejection of individualism and imagination. The Party line on intellectual dissent is especially illuminating: "We mustn't be afraid of contrary opinions. Everybody who's honestly interested in our common cause

ought to have from one to three contrary opinions."(p.32) In Havel's plays absurdity is compounded by absurdity but the whole is rooted in contemporary anxieties and it is easy to see why Stoppard should harbour great admiration and respect for Havel's work. Stoppard provides a revealing comment on his own approach when, in his Introduction to Havel's play, he pays tribute to the comic spirit, the "playfulness", and the absence of any sense of righteousness or bitterness which characterises Havel's work. In fact, Stoppard's observation "here is a play about infallibility, logic and the system,"(p.vii) might well be applied to his own plays - not least to Professional Foul.

As in the best examples of Stoppard's comedy of ideas, the subject-matter and the medium determined the style of Professional Foul. Artistic considerations and practical decisions combined and led to what some regarded as a total change of direction for Stoppard - so much so that Stoppard admitted in 1979 that he began to flinch from their congratulations "which invariably took the form of 'At least you've taken this giant step forward.'<sup>(3)</sup>" Professional Foul does indeed differ from Stoppard's full-scale stage plays in the naturalism of its style. On the surface it is essentially a straightforward narrative about a journey of discovery. It uses the television medium in a conventional manner, not at all concerned with challenging its technical possibilities as he challenges the space of the stage in the theatrical plays. Technically speaking, anything is possible on television so there are fewer practical, physical or technical restrictions to contend with in order to achieve stylistic results. Stoppard chooses instead to exploit the basic strengths of the medium to tell his story as effectively and as economically as possible. With the greatest of ease he can present Anderson on his journey of discovery, changing location from an airplane interior

in European airspace to various parts of Prague. There are sixteen scenes of varying length, two of them with no verbal dialogue but all serving to advance the narrative and the argument. The camera eye replaces Stoppard's more usual theatricality. It focuses on facial expressions in close-up, it roams in order to register interesting contrasts and juxtapositions. This ability to focus on the silent but nevertheless eloquent obviates the need to underline important points in language. An adjustment of camera angle or cutting from one scene straight to another directs the audience's attention to whatever in the situation the dramatist wishes to emphasise. Lighting, sound and visual clues establish the tone and mood he wishes to convey, so his control over the audience's responses is as carefully-guarded as in the stage plays. Compared with the latter, Professional Foul is indeed relatively subdued in style but it makes its points as powerfully as they and its structure is as tightly-knit. It will be necessary in the following examination of the play to refer to the original production, directed by Michael Lindsay-Hogg. Like the best of Stoppard's stage plays, Professional Foul needs to be experienced in performance; a script giving the verbal dialogue alone cannot adequately convey the effects of the playwright's strong visual sense which is an important element in the comedy of ideas. Indeed, when the theatricality is replaced by naturalism, the visual element becomes even more important because its effects must be more subtle - a change of expression conveys as much as an exaggerated gesture. Michael Lindsay-Hogg's production was particularly successful because it was economical in its use of the television medium, using the strengths of the camera to chart the progress of the argument. The play's impact also owed much to the performance of Peter Barkworth in the role of Anderson who so convincingly conveyed the human interest within the argument.

Despite its naturalism, Professional Foul bears the distinctive hallmarks of a Stoppard play thematically and stylistically, translating Stoppard's comedy of ideas from stage to television. His audience is larger and more varied so he can make fewer assumptions regarding their common experience of theatre and literature, but this does not prevent him from broaching a philosophical subject via comedy. True to the best Stoppard tradition, he exploits the ambiguities and complexities of language to provide humour in the surface narrative whilst simultaneously contributing to the play's discussion on language and meaning, theory and practice. Moreover, he continues to challenge the audience's assumptions, employing changes in perspective as a means of involving his audience in the play's debate. Having said that he wanted to avoid the kind of play characterised by articulate discussion on the great abstractions, it might seem incongruous that Stoppard should choose a colloquium of philosophers upon which to base his play. But the incongruity is merely superficial because, as the play demonstrates so adroitly, philosophers are as capable of failure regarding language and philosophical issues as the layman. His choice of situation and characters was determined by the demands of his comedy of ideas: surface narrative must complement the dialectic; the idea must be illustrated dramatically:

"I began, as always, with an abstract thought: some innocent from a free society goes to a totalitarian society and just sort of gets dirty..."

The western visitors were at first ballroom dancers, but as the play developed its integrity and inner logic demanded that they be philosophers instead:

"...if somebody is going to be in Prague to tell you something about moral absolutes, then it doesn't do any harm if this professional is a moral philosopher" (4)

In fact, this would seem to be essential to Stoppard's comedy of ideas because it gives the dramatist something known and defined

to parody: The philosopher involved in a moral dilemma has integral entertainment value. If the dramatist is to demonstrate the importance of the application of philosophical theory to everyday life, he must be able to distinguish between the professional's theory and his practice. The fact that Stoppard originally intended Anderson to be a very old philosopher suggests that he wanted to emphasise the confrontation between theory and practice. The older the philosopher, the more likely is he to be confirmed in his ways - at least, this would be the case in theatrical tradition. After seeing Peter Barkworth (in another role) Stoppard decided that Anderson did not necessarily have to be so very old and that Peter Barkworth would suit the role. The decision, as already observed, was to prove most successful. Professional moral philosophers can hardly be said to feature as a prominent group in television and their concerns might not initially hope to attract a wide audience. But Professional Foul, like its predecessor Jumpers, asserts that philosophical theories are tested only when applied to Everyman and everyday life. The choice of situation and its presentation means that Anderson's dilemma can be understood by the layman watching BBC 2's Play For Today. Every member of the audience is a moral philosopher in so far as he/she thinks critically about his/her own moral views or those of others or ponders on their justification or compares them with rival attitudes. And Anderson's dilemma is a moral one: he has accepted the invitation of the Czech authorities to attend a Philosophy Colloquium. Is it bad manners, incorrect behaviour, to repay this hospitality by smuggling out of the country a philosophical thesis concerned with human rights - a thesis of which the state disapproves because it asserts a viewpoint which differs from its own? The situation is clearly outlined, the contents of the thesis are explained in terms accessible to the non-philosopher; everyone in the audience possesses all the relevant

information necessary to reaching an informed decision.

In the very first moments of the play Stoppard introduces the audience to an awareness of the ambiguity of language and its reliance on context. The philosophers Anderson and McKendrick talk at cross purposes and misunderstand each other - the first of a series of misunderstandings in matters both great and small. An examination of the opening scene illustrates Stoppard's use of humour as a means of controlling and directing his audience's understanding of the argument. The camera singles out one of the airplane's passengers and moves in on the impressive brochure he takes from his briefcase. The title "Colloquium Philosophicum Prague '77" and a glimpse of the photographs and short paragraphs by each on the inside pages immediately establishes the passenger's identity - he is a philosopher apparently on a professional trip. This is immediately succeeded by visual humour as his attention soon wanders to a girly magazine on the vacant seat next to him. As Anderson flips through the pages, the camera has McKendrick in shot. McKendrick has an identical brochure; his behaviour indicates that he wants to start a conversation. His first word, "Snap", momentarily nonplusses Anderson until he notices McKendrick's brochure. An adjustment of camera angle swiftly intensifies the visual humour - it shows that McKendrick's opening gambit is based on the mistaken, though understandable, assumption that Anderson is reading the philosophy brochure. At the same time the audience is further amused with the realisation that Anderson, consciously or unconsciously, has hidden the girly magazine inside the more august brochure. His deliberately <sup>restrained</sup> haste in placing the magazine under the lunch tray sustains the audience's interest in his embarrassment.

Their first misunderstanding having been unravelled - at least as far as Anderson and the audience are concerned - the philosophers'

conversation proceeds rather shakily, hampered by Anderson's apparent vagueness about matters philosophical and especially concerning the Colloquium they are to attend. McKendrick, by contrast, is eager to show off his knowledge and to indulge in "shop-talk". Before long, and in the course of a naturalistic conversation, they embark on an exchange which again sets them talking at cross-purposes. When McKendrick observes, "Marxists are a terrible lot of prudes. I can say that because I'm a bit that way myself"(p.48), Anderson finds their conversation awkward. He thinks that when McKendrick's talk moves to open-mindedness and extra-curricular activities this relates to sex magazines and, to the audience's amusement, tries to remain unabashed as their talk about "er-er-erotica, um girly magazines" continues. The fact that the one language supports both interpretations may particularly attract the attention of those interested in linguistics but it demonstrates to all the audience the point that language is rooted in context. At last McKendrick realises that they have had their wires crossed so he changes direction by asking Anderson if he has come across any of his articles. With a look of amazement and fascination, amusing to the audience because it seems about to precipitate the philosophers into further absurdity, Anderson understands that McKendrick writes for girly magazines. But this is so improbable that he suddenly pulls himself up and apologises, "Oh-your-er articles - I'm afraid as I explained I'm not very good at keeping up with the philosophical...." However, this time both Anderson and the audience have been ambushed because McKendrick takes another magazine - 'International' - from his briefcase and passes it to Anderson, drawing his attention to "page sixty-one. The Science-fiction short story. Not a bad life. Science-fiction and sex. And, of course, the philosophical assumptions of social science."(p.49) Sex, Marx, Science-fiction and philosophy - and football too will

soon be added - form as interesting and incongruous a combination as any in Stoppard's stage plays yet they are firmly rooted in a realistic situation. In a single scene Stoppard has introduced three of his major characters - Chetwyn, asleep in the background, has been pointed out as a colleague travelling to the Colloquium. He has explained their situation and allowed them to reveal something of their characters through their (unintentionally) amusing conversation. Both Anderson and McKendrick are identifiable types. The former, conventionally clad in a suit and showing signs of individuality in a bold-check shirt, is urbane, confident as befits a Cambridge don. We immediately register his air of detachment since it is amusingly contrasted with his colleague's brashness. As the play progresses, however, and he refuses to engage with philosophical issues in the real world, we come to question this same detachment. He is not especially interested in the Colloquium but was tempted on this occasion by ulterior motives which he won't reveal to McKendrick, or the audience. He is most at ease and in control of the situation when theorising and he clearly enjoys teasing McKendrick by outlining their impasse:

Anderson : You see, if I tell you [i.e. about his ulterior motive]  
I make you a co-conspirator whether or not  
you would have wished to be one.  
McKendrick : Then why don't you give me the opportunity?  
Anderson : I can't without telling you. An impasse. (p.47)

Peter Barkworth's (as Anderson) quiet, reflective chuckle at this stage showed his evident enjoyment of the Catch-22 situation and the audience enjoyed the joke against McKendrick - his curiosity was not to be satisfied. Thus Stoppard introduces to his audience the philosophical debate on ethical dilemmas. When, at the end of the play, Anderson decides, without consulting McKendrick, to involve the latter in his own moral dilemma, the audience will be able to

draw upon the words of both men to help them judge Anderson's behaviour. From the beginning, the audience is encouraged to laugh at McKendrick. John Shrapnel gave a superb performance as the philosopher from Stoke University. A rougher type than Anderson, he was khaki-clad, brash, extrovert. Younger - though not too young - his conceit and use of jargon soon marked him out as already past his prime as a philosopher and the lesser man. McKendrick, self-conscious about his profession, fishes for compliments but Anderson doesn't know his work. When he learns that Anderson will not be hearing his paper the following afternoon, he grows childishly petulant:

Anderson	:	That's exactly when I have to play truant. I <u>am</u> sorry.
McKendrick	:	(coldly): That's all right.
Anderson	:	I expect they'll have copies.
McKendrick	:	I expect so.
Anderson	:	The science of social philosophy, eh?
McKendrick	:	(Brusquely): More or less.
Anderson	:	(With polite interest): McCarthy.
McKendrick	:	McKendrick.

His brusque replies here contrast strikingly and amusingly with his expansive conversation and determined comradery preceding. Anderson perseveres with readiness to show interest in McKendrick's work and the latter is won round reluctantly by Anderson's philosophical joke: "my being seen dead in a place has never so far as I know been thought a condition of its excellence." McKendrick's grudging concession and admiration reveals a chip on his shoulder: "Wit and paradox. Verbal felicity. An occupation for gentlemen. A higher civilisation alive and well in the older universities." (p.48) Like a child, he is considerably cheered by being able to turn the tables on Anderson when he notices the sex magazine as the air-hostess removes the lunch tray and he observes, "I see you like tits and bums, by the way." Scene one is deceptively simple, its careful structure masked by the familiarity of its naturalistic surface. The contrast between Anderson and McKendrick, which will be an important element in the

dramatic dialogue, is smoothly introduced in the surface narrative. The younger, brasher man appears initially to be more in touch with his world whereas Anderson is rather vague in manner - witness his wary replies to straightforward questions about Prague and their fellow-traveller Chetwyn. Anderson even appears to have forgotten the subject of his own paper, as illustrated in the following brief exchange reminiscent of a music-hall routine:

- McKendrick : As a matter of fact I think there's a lot  
of juice left in the fictions problem.  
Anderson : Is that what you're speaking on?  
McKendrick : No - you are.  
Anderson : Oh, am I? (He looks in his brochure briefly)  
So I am.

McKendrick is consciously - even aggressively - the professional philosopher, looking forward to the Colloquium to which Anderson disparagingly refers as an "international bunfight." He is keen to be up-to-date and has a wary eye on the opposition. He studies his Colloquium brochure and his fellow passengers, recognises Anderson from his photograph and can sum up Chetwyn's stance: "His line is that Aristotle got it more or less right and St. Augustine brought it up to date." (p.46) It is largely his anxiety about keeping up to date which precipitates him into assuming that Crisp and Broadbent (known to both Anderson and Chetwyn) are philosophers. When Anderson and Chetwyn recognise the two footballers in the hotel lobby McKendrick immediately assumes they must be fellow philosophers. Concerned at his own ignorance and Crisp's youth, he looks after them with anxiety clearly written on his features. His, "My God, they get younger all the time" is especially amusing for being such a stock expression.

Anderson, by contrast, has the urbanity and calmness of the self-assured. He openly admits to not keeping up to date with the philosophical journals, observing, "They shouldn't call us professors. It's more like being the faculty almoner." (p.45) At the start of

his journey he shows himself to be professionally and theoretically awake to the ambiguities and complexities of language - he notes "little curiosities for the language chaps"(p.44) such as the use of the terms "old" and "young" when applied to photographs. He is objective and looks on such ambiguities as a game; he appropriately likens his own and his colleagues' interest in linguistic curiosities to handing round a bag of liquorice allsorts. As the play progresses, the audience comes to question the continuation of his objectivity. In scene one he can assert a willingness to believe colleagues who point out "that we don't always mean what we say, even when we manage to say what we mean."(p.44) but it is only towards the end of his journey that he apprehends the truth of the theory. Personal experience compels him to abandon his detachment and to act upon his professional knowledge. In scene one he states glibly, "There are some rather dubious things happening in Czechoslovakia. Ethically," and McKendrick hastens to agree with equal glibness, but neither shows any real concern. In fact, in their brief exchange of platitudes they resemble Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (or Vladimir and Estragon in their brief, abortive verbal flights) for they singularly fail to proceed beyond a certain point:

Anderson : There are some rather dubious things happening in Czechoslovakia. Ethically.  
 McKendrick : Oh yes. No doubt.  
 Anderson : We must not try to pretend otherwise.  
 McKendrick : Oh quite. I mean I don't. My work is pretty political. I mean by implication of course. As yours is. I'm looking forward to hearing you.  
 Anderson : Thank you. I'm sure your paper will be very interesting too.

(p.46)

Their politeness and mutual back-slapping is subtly amusing and the humour is Stoppard's way of directing our attention at their culpability. Neither man questions the ethics of tacitly supporting the status quo by attending a philosophical colloquium in a country which denies

basic freedoms to its own people. Chetwyn, we understand, does combine philosophy with political activity and we share McKendrick's surprise that Chetwyn is being allowed into Czechoslovakia. Anderson, characteristically, is completely ignorant of Chetwyn's work and political actions. McKendrick can summarise the latter briefly and cynically as "Letters to The Times about persecuted professors with unpronounceable names." Like many of McKendrick's apparently throwaway lines this alerts the audience to an awareness of the deeper significance of issues to which the characters seem blind. The audience will relate this to the many worrying reports about the treatment of artists and intellectuals denied freedom of speech - reports which they cannot fail to have heard in *Prisoner of Conscience Year*. Stoppard's own play Every Good Boy Deserves Favour had dealt with one such particular example only two months previously. But Anderson and McKendrick are content with platitudes and they move away from the subject as swiftly as is decently possible. It will require personal experience of the infringement of human rights to force Anderson to leave the ivory tower of philosophical speculation and to test his theories with practical application. At this early stage, Stoppard invites the audience to note Anderson's detachment by introducing an amusing leitmotif in the philosopher's rather cagey response to questions concerning his knowledge of people and places. "Not personally" is Anderson's answer to questions about Prague and Chetwyn in scene one. It is amusingly repeated in scene two regarding the footballer Crisp about whom (for once) Anderson knows more than McKendrick. It is an effective comic routine, and later developments reveal how it is also indicative of Anderson's reluctance to become personally involved. Stoppard's comedy of ideas gains from second viewing: with hindsight the audience can appreciate more keenly the ironies and ambiguities which at first sight appear to be straightforward

events in the surface narrative. McKendrick and the footballers, for example, make what seem to be the Western visitors' obligatory jokes about the hotel rooms and lift being bugged without any real concern for the underlying issues; Hollar's matter-of-fact attitude to precautions against such surveillance provides an effective counterpoint, forcing both Anderson and the audience to contemplate the reality of such fears.

The first stage of Anderson's education begins with gentle visual humour as he looks around his hotel room wondering what to do with McKendrick's girly magazine and is interrupted by a knock on the door. Despite the distant, distracted air which we have come to expect of him, he soon recognises Pavel Hollar and remembers him as a top student whom he taught ten years previously. Anderson's conventional polite enquiries elicit unexpected answers so that what begins as another example of absurd misunderstanding forces Anderson a step closer to looking at political reality in the state which is now his host. His failure to understand the unambiguous meaning of an unambiguous word highlights the fact that suddenly "the rules" are changed. When Hollar, who graduated with a First at Cambridge, informs his old professor that he is now "a cleaner", the latter assumes that the word has a special meaning as is often the case in philosophy:

- |          |   |   |
|----------|---|---|
| Anderson | : | (with intelligent interest): A cleaner? What is that?   |
| Hollar   | : | (Surprised): Cleaning. Washing. With a brush and a bucket. I am a cleaner at the bus station. |
| Anderson | : | You wash buses?   |
| Hollar   | : | No, not buses—the lavatories, the floors where people walk and so on.                         |
| Anderson | : | Oh I see. You're a <u>cleaner</u> .   |

(p.52)

The BBC 2 audience who will have read or heard about dissidents compelled to take on menial jobs and denied basic human rights will immediately understand the need for Hollar's precautions when he

produces a child's magic eraser pad or invites Anderson to talk in the corridor. The young man's calm determination contrasts strikingly with Anderson's nervous, half-embarrassed protest, "You don't seriously suggest that my room is bugged?"(p.65) Hollar's reply: "It is better to assume it," is disconcerting by being so matter-of-fact and the stereotype Western joke ceases to be even faintly amusing in reality. Anderson's slowness in understanding the situation testifies to the fact that in his experience freedom of speech is taken for granted. At the same time it might lead the audience to question whether such ignorance in one who professes to be a moral philosopher does not reflect an inexcusable lack of imagination. The urbanity which contrasted favourably with McKendrick's brash self-assertion is perhaps not so attractive a quality beside the youthful Hollar's sense of conviction.

Anderson at first shows interest in Hollar's thesis and expresses his readiness to read it. He clearly fails to understand Hollar's comment about a fellow Czech student, Peter Volansky, being a realist in not returning to Czechoslovakia and he cannot understand why Hollar should ask him to take the thesis to England for Volansky to translate. "But can't you publish it in Czech?..." is met by a silent yet eloquent look of surprise whose import even Anderson cannot fail to understand. His refusal to help Hollar is based on a theory of correct behaviour.

- Anderson : I mean it would be bad manners, wouldn't it?  
 Hollar : Bad manners?  
 Anderson : I know it sounds rather lame. But ethics and manners are interestingly related. The history of human calumny is largely a series of breaches of good manners...(Pause) Perhaps if I said correct behaviour it wouldn't sound so ridiculous. You do see what I mean. I am sorry... (p.54)

His sense of unease, of sounding "ridiculous" and "lame", is partly assuaged when he can take refuge in theory but the truth is that

he is unwilling to abandon his detachment and objectivity. His language and manner betray his reluctance to become involved. Hollar tries to persuade him, without stridency yet with determination, by outlining his thesis. It is itself concerned with what Anderson has called correct behaviour and their discussion makes clear the connection between the thesis and the behaviour of the state that refuses its author permission to publish. Of vital importance is the fact that Hollar's philosophical theory is rooted in personal experience and political reality. His hesitant though extremely good English means that he explains his thesis in non-technical language for the benefit of the audience. It is an effective technique, enabling Stoppard to convey abstract ideas in a linguistically simple form, introducing a lay-audience to the philosophical debate:

- |          |   |   |
|----------|---|---|
| Hollar   | : | Here you know, individual correctness is defined by what is correct for the state... I ask how collective right can have any meaning by itself. I ask where it comes from, the idea of a collective ethic...  |
|          |   | I reply, it comes from the individual. One man's dealings with another man...The collective ethic can only be the individual ethic writ big.  |
| Anderson | : | Writ large.   |
| Hollar   | : | Writ large, precisely. The ethics of the state must be judged by the fundamental ethic of the individual.<br>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. |

Anderson, who begins by listening politely, then with growing interest as the philosophy is expounded, immediately seizes on the theory and misunderstands Hollar's reference to safety, taking it to refer to the strength of the theory. In doing so he voices the arguments which might be offered in opposition to Hollar's theory. Once again Stoppard ensures that his audience is in possession of all necessary information:

"The difficulty arises when one asks oneself how the individual

ethic can have any meaning by itself. Where does that come from?..."

(p.55)

When Hollar repeats, "I mean, it is not safe for me", Anderson again misunderstands and suggests how Hollar may deal theoretically with the danger: "You could say that such an arrangement between a man and the State is a sort of contract, and it is the essence of a contract that both parties enter into it freely. I mean, that would be one line of attack."

This outline has been useful to the audience but Hollar does not need Anderson's reminder. His theory is coherent; the danger is personal and not abstract. The members of the audience who recall McKendrick's summary of Chetwyn's beliefs and can follow the references in "Aristotle got it more or less right and St. Augustine brought it up to date", will perhaps anticipate Hollar's reply. Hollar does not go as far as Chetwyn in asserting a Divine sanction but he shares Chetwyn's belief in "the idea of an inherent right....I believe that we have such rights and they are paramount." Responding to Anderson's insistence that he must justify his assertion that certain truths are self-evident, Hollar comments, "I observe my son for example," but the discussion is drawn to a close. The dramatist senses that there has been sufficient exposition and implies that Anderson, who has already decided not to become personally involved, does not want to embark on this area of philosophical theory. The assumptions behind Hollar's reference to his son might be fully appreciated by only a small number of the audience at this stage, but developments in the narrative action will help the non-academic to understand its relevance. The audience, like Anderson will encounter a practical situation that will prepare them to appreciate the theory when, in a later discussion Anderson, McKendrick and Chetwyn pursue the debate on ethics and Chetwyn echoes Hollar's observation: "A good rule,

I find is to try test situations out on men much less clever than us. I often ask my son what he thinks."(p.79)

The Colloquium scene showing very clever men being too clever for their own good, in addition to numerous examples of clever men (as philosophers presumably are) in absurd misunderstandings, reinforces Chetwyn's point. Hollar's main concern is simply stated. The determination and fortitude with which he faces real personal danger contrasts eloquently to the older man's reluctance to become involved:

"If I am picked up-on the way home, let us say-there is no fuss. A cleaner. I will be one of hundreds. It's all right. In the end it must change. But I have something to say-that is all. If I leave my statement behind, then it's O.K. You understand?"

(p.56)

In the face of this, Anderson's insistence on theory does sound hollow, particularly in view of his vagueness towards all matters philosophical in preceding scenes. He excuses his inaction on ethical grounds: He has accepted the State's invitation. "It is a contract, as it were, freely entered into. And having accepted their hospitality I cannot in all conscience start smuggling." Hollar makes one last desperate attempt to persuade Anderson on the latter's own theoretical terms:

Hollar	:	But if you didn't know you were smuggling it-If I hid my thesis in your luggage.
Anderson	:	That's childish. Also, you could be getting me into trouble, and your quarrel is not with me. Your action would be unethical on your own terms-one man's dealings with another man.
		I am sorry.

Peter Barkworth's tone and expression here clearly indicated a sense of relief that the discussion was drawing to a close and that he could use Hollar's own theory to excuse his refusal of help - a fleeting, half-embarrassed smile animated his face when he referred to Hollar's own words. Throughout most of this discussion the camera has shown the two men in close-up, registering each change of expression however

subtle or momentary. This intensity of concentration enables the viewer to follow the argument itself and simultaneously to note various clues concerning both characters and debate. As the conversation ends, the audience appreciates the irony implicit in Anderson's too-neat conclusion. He is the one who is being "childish", playing with theory; Hollar is in earnest: his philosophy has placed his life in danger. Anderson thinks they can now drop the matter and return to the point at which they began but Hollar explains why he cannot simply return home with his thesis. He takes further precautions against surveillance and asks Anderson another favour - ethical, as he reassures him with a faint smile. He requests Anderson to deliver Hollar's own thesis to him the following day. When Hollar has left, Anderson stands lost in thought, his elbow leaning against the wall, his hand smoothing his forehead. The footsteps in the corridor, the key in the lock next door sound strangely worrying. Such visual and aural details give expression to Anderson's growing unease, encouraging the audience to consider the professor's behaviour towards his ex-student.

Stoppard exploits to the full the power of the camera to control the audience's attention and to suggest ideas via non-verbal detail. In the stage plays he challenges the audience's suspension of disbelief, drawing attention to the theatrical nature of the performance itself, in order to highlight the ideas behind the comedy. In this television play he sustains a naturalistic style, relying instead on subtlety of observation - a subtlety made possible by the closeness and immediacy of the camera. Hollar, for example, is an unashamedly sympathetic character - that is, Stoppard and his director enlist our sympathy for him by meticulous attention to detail. Hollar is young, casually yet quietly dressed, his curly hair and honest expression contributing to an air of vulnerability offset by his determination and moral

strength. His soft voice and gentleness of manner, coping admirably with a foreign language, contrast eloquently with Anderson's voice and manner - equally gentle but at times too smooth and glib. Anderson might correct Hollar in a trivial matter of idiomatic expression but the latter's meaning is very clear. Despite his youth Hollar uncomplainingly shoulders burdens of responsibility whereas Anderson prefers to remain uninvolved. The contrast between Hollar and the other philosophers McKendrick and Stone is even more striking and it is appropriate that he should be most like Chetwyn. Chetwyn is of a similar age, quiet and respectful - he addresses Anderson as "Sir", to the latter's mild surprise. He wears a quiet suit with informality - tie slightly loose around the neck and top shirt-button undone. Like Hollar, he too has a young son and the play reveals how he shares with Hollar the distinction of applying his philosophical theories to his life.

Contrast, juxtaposition and stereotypes are techniques employed throughout the play and are well illustrated in the scene following the introduction of Hollar. This short scene serves a triple function: it lifts the mood with humour; gives further examples of the misunderstandings into which clever men precipitate themselves; introduces into the narrative the football interest which will add to the humour and develop the dialectic. When Anderson meets Crisp and Broadbent waiting for the lift he takes them and the audience by surprise with his knowledge about the Czech football team and his eloquence on tactics on the football pitch. The depth of his interest in ~~and~~ knowledge of the game is amusing because it is so unexpected of the philosopher type: one might be excused for thinking Anderson one of life's cricketers (as indeed McKendrick calls him) but football is not the urbane, gentlemanly game which springs to mind in connection with philosophers. The incongruity is reinforced by the verbally

inarticulate Crisp who accepts a professional compliment with the briefest of monosyllables - "Oh...ta" - chews gum continuously and stands with hands in pockets. He has little interest in Anderson. When joined by Broadbent they are both more concerned with the latter's lack of success with an unnamed woman the previous evening and they enjoy a private joke obviously connected with similar exploits during a previous international match. Much humour then derives from a stock comic situation and the confrontation of types. Once in the lift, the middle-aged philosopher whom they would prefer to ignore insists on giving them tips for the afternoon's match:

Anderson : (re-Jirasek): He scored both times from the same move, and came close twice more-

Broadbent : Oh yes?  
(Pause.)

Anderson : (In a rush): I realise it's none of my business- I mean you may think I'm an absolute ass, but-  
(Pause.)  
Look, if Halas takes a corner he's going to make it short-almost certainly-push it back to Deml or Kautsky, who pulls the defence out. Jirasek hangs about for the chip to the far post. They'll do the same thing from a set piece. Three or four times in the same match. Really. Short corners and free kicks. (The lift stops at the 3rd floor. Broadbent and Crisp are staring at Anderson)  
(Lamely): Anyway, that's why they've brought Jirasek back, in my opinion.

(p.59)

The footballers' silence and expressions are eloquent and the whole episode is an interesting variation on the stock comic routine whereby a captive audience is forced to listen to a complete stranger. This one tells them he has an honorary degree from Bratislava and knows all about the Czech player whom he saw play in Berlin when he (the speaker) was there "for the Hegel Colloquium - er bunfight." Surprised by the stranger's volubility, Crisp and Broadbent exchange glances which clearly indicate the professionals' attitude towards amateurs or armchair professionals. The humour and irony will be reinforced

when later events demonstrate how the professional can, in fact, learn from the amateur - the philosopher is proved right about football and he himself can learn about philosophy from his student or from a child. When McKendrick joins them in the lift his brazen manner, loud voice and philosophical name-dropping are scarcely calculated to encourage the footballers to take the philosophers seriously. If they had been inclined to regard Anderson's observations on football warily, what are they to make of McKendrick?

"You're Crisp. (Takes Crisp's hand and shakes it.) Bill McKendrick. I hear you're doing some very interesting work in Newcastle. Great stuff. I still like to think of myself as a bit of a left-winger at Stoke. Of course, my stuff is largely empirical-I leave epistemological questions to the scholastics-eh, Anderson?" (He pokes Anderson in the ribs)

(p.59-60)

Broadbent is incredulous - "Did you say Stoke?" - but McKendrick continues to bulldoze his way, talking of neo-Hegelians and Quinian neo-Positivists. Anderson understands his colleague's misapprehension and winces with embarrassment; the audience savours the absurdity of the situation, enjoys the brief confrontation of stock types and the sudden shift of perspective to the footballers' viewpoint. Much of the humour of the Colloquium scene derives from perspective-the non-academic's view of the stereotype philosopher's preoccupation with the meaning of (to the layman) the obvious. Statements like "Native Dancer ran well at Kentucky", "the show ran well on Broadway", or "'You eat well,' said Mary to John" adroitly capture this perspective. At the same time they demonstrate that language is not merely logical. It is rooted in context and therein lie its ambiguities as well as its strengths.

Stone makes a meal of the different meanings of the word "well"; he talks of "the qualifier taking its meaning from the contextual force of the verb it qualifies" and how "a sound theory therefore should take account of the general...particular...unique...and

hypothetical experience", but his lecture is not especially technical. The situations and examples with which Stoppard allows Stone to struggle make clear to all the audience the point he wishes to convey in this scene: the meaning of the hypothetical conversation between Stone's fictitious Mary and John would be unambiguous in context. To talk about it out of context is pointless and Stone makes himself ridiculous by so doing. If the audience find Stone's philosophical reasoning difficult to follow, the weakness is Stone's, not theirs. As the camera moves round the lecture hall it picks out many indications of boredom and loss of interest among the Colloquium members to reassure and amuse the audience. The interpreters are baffled by the absurdity of "You didn't eat very well, but at least you ate well"; the audience sink back into their seats like Anderson, play with the translation phones like Chetwyn or search for an attractive female face as McKendrick does. Stone's harsh American accent somehow reinforces the vacuity of the situation - at least to the British ear attuned to gentler vowel sounds - and exploits another comic stereotype: the American propensity for wordy articulation of the banal and for using fifteen words where five would do.

As Anderson and McKendrick continue their own conversation and clear up their own misunderstandings, the audience learn the real motives for Anderson's journey to Prague - it was to see the Czechoslovakia v. England World Cup qualifier. This revelation casts a new and amusing light on Anderson's volubility about football and at the same time it lays open to question the philosophical theories he opposed to Hollar's request for help. So much for courtesy to his hosts. There are no real scruples about revealing his motives to McKendrick and thereby, technically, making him a co-conspirator. As he opens his briefcase to put in a copy of McKendrick's paper which he will not hear, he sees Hollar's envelope and the thesis

he refused to take to England because it would be unethical and would entail deception of his hosts. The timing is excellent. Stone, in the background, talks of ambiguities and complexities in fictitious situations; Hollar's thesis reminds Anderson of the unambiguous facts in the real world. Their hosts will allow them to waste time discussing a fictitious Mary and John but will not permit one of their own citizens to discuss a philosophical thesis based on observation of political and social reality. The humour in Anderson's revelation entertains and in the same moment directs the audience's attention to serious flaws in the philosophers' reasoning. This counterpointing is developed to reinforce both the comedy and the idea as Anderson attempts to make a discreet exit but is caught by the spotlight. The Chairman addresses him, thinking he has risen to question Stone - much to McKendrick's and the audience's amusement. It constitutes yet another comic misunderstanding and is particularly valuable in that it forces Anderson to outline the important points about language and meaning. This not only extricates him from an awkward situation in the narrative but also ensures that the audience continue to participate in the dramatic dialogue. Gaining in confidence and ease as he talks himself out of an embarrassing situation, Anderson's observations are relevant to his own moral dilemma although he does not as yet make this personal connection:

"The importance of language is overrated. It allows me and Professor Stone to show off a bit, and it is 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."

(p.63)

His own experience in the following scenes will make him understand how he, no less than Stone, has ambushed himself with too great an emphasis on the logical elements of a verbal language. Verbal language is a technical refinement of our capacity for understanding

and communication. It is not the only source of either. To insist on a fixed meaning for "ethical behaviour" as Anderson has so far defined it could lead him to act unethically. McKendrick's "catastrophe theory" will help both Anderson and the audience to a clearer understanding of this ambivalence.

Anderson's education which began with Hollar's visit advances rapidly with his return visit to Hollar's flat, the occasion of direct personal confrontation with totalitarian state authority. As if to emphasise and illustrate Anderson's observations about language in the Colloquium scene immediately preceding, much of the first part of this scene is conducted in a verbal language which neither Anderson nor the audience understands. Yet the meaning is perfectly clear. Actions, expressions and tone of voice transcend international language barriers to communicate facts and atmosphere. Faces appear momentarily from behind doors held ajar, a little girl is pulled back abruptly into a neighbouring flat, an old man emerges from the lavatory and shuffles uneasily across the hall into his own room, silently observed by plainclothes policemen and a stunned Anderson. The camera points upwards and focuses on the stairwell showing a Babel-like triangle with a mass of heads and shoulders peering down round the balustrades and a concatenation of questioning voices accompanies the image. Discomfitted at first by the impassive man holding the door firmly against his entry, Anderson sees Mrs Hollar's anxious face trying to look at him over the man's shoulder. Anderson is clearly on alien territory, out of his depth. He finds he is not allowed to enter and cannot leave. In an almost pathetic attempt to assert himself he informs Man 2, "Now look here, I am the J.S. Mill Professor of Ethics at the University of Cambridge and I demand that I am allowed to leave or to telephone the British Ambassador." But his impressive declaration falls on deaf ears and he is propelled unceremoniously

into the flat. Once inside he notes details which intensify his feelings of anxiety and loss of control. Five men, faces impassive, are engaged in systematically turning the flat inside out. All ignore him. They clear the bookshelves and methodically leaf through every book; one man quietly dismantles a vacuum cleaner on the dining table. Mrs Hollar alone evinces emotion, nervously lights a cigarette and tries to withstand the intrusion as far as it is in her power to do so - she switches off the radio, then turns it back on when she understands that it is for Anderson's benefit, so that he can listen to the football coverage. His interest in football at this stage seems even more absurd than before - a fact which even he appears to feel as he hears the football commentary which the plainclothes searchers switch on for his benefit.

The passage of time is swiftly established by mixing two camera shots of a clock and explains Anderson's concern when reminded about the taxi driver waiting to be paid. When Anderson takes out his wallet to pay the taxi fare a policeman simply takes the wallet and Anderson is stung into uncharacteristic anger. The audience sympathises with Anderson's feelings of impotence as the impassive policeman calmly but firmly pushes him back into his chair and continues to search the wallet. When Man 6 finally arrives Anderson is relieved that he now has some control - he can at least talk to the man and state his case rationally. But he soon realises that although they understand each other verbally, they are far apart in the essentials of real communication. Man 6 listens calmly but there is a momentary look of pity for the philosopher as Anderson lists his credentials. The usually urbane Anderson is more like McKendrick when he claims, "My connections in England reach up to the highest in the land." His interlocuter's logical question, "Do you know the Queen?" precipitates him into further absurdity: "Certainly....No, I do not know the Queen

- but I speak the truth when I say that I am personally acquainted with two members of the government one of whom has been to my house."

(This is an amusing variation on the comic routine found in Wilde where Lady Bracknell asserts the acceptability of certain people on the ground that, "They dine with us. Or come in the evening at any rate."<sup>(5)</sup> As such it injects a moment of humour into a distinctly unfunny situation.) The audience is aware that Anderson would not seriously claim that his personal or social connections have any bearing on the rights of any particular situation. But he is now flustered, disconcerted and Man 6 takes control, exploiting the language barrier by pretending that he understood Anderson to be present of his own accord, as a witness for Mrs Hollar. He skilfully tries to lead Anderson into making incriminating remarks about Hollar, whilst giving the impression of the utmost reason. One such brief exchange dramatically illustrates the policeman's methods for both Anderson and the audience:

- |          |   |   |
|----------|---|---|
| Man 6    | : | Well, when a man is known to be engaged in meeting foreigners to buy currency-    |
| Anderson | : | I don't believe any of that-he was being harassed because of his letter to Husak. |
| Man 6    | : | A letter to President Husak? What sort of letter?                                 |
| Anderson | : | (flustered): Your people knew about it-   |
| Man 6    | : | It is not a crime to write to the President-                                      |
| Anderson | : | No doubt that depends on what is written.   |
| Man 6    | : | You mean he wrote some kind of slander?   |
| Anderson | : | (Heatedly): I insist on leaving now.  |

Anderson's feelings of being out of his depth, belittled by the whole situation and the policeman's treatment of him, provides an eloquent contrast to Mrs Hollar's brave attempts at assertion and her determination not to be cowed. Clearly Man 6 has little respect for a professor of philosophy: when he reads the titles of the Colloquium papers in Anderson's briefcase his expression indicates clearly that as far as he is concerned philosophy has little bearing on the present matter and philosophers not much of a role in the real world.

Philosophy poses no threat so he hands the papers back to Anderson. Anderson rejects Mrs Hollar's request to remain and leaves as soon as he is allowed to do so. Techniques of timing and contrast are again brought into play as his departure and rejection of involvement are juxtaposed with the "discovery" of hidden foreign currency and the sudden arrival of ten-year-old Sacha. Anderson and the audience are left with a moving visual image of the boy taking on an adult role. Mrs Hollar has finally broken down and he comforts her. Stoppard exploits similar techniques in Scene Nine when Sacha acts as interpreter between his mother and Anderson. First, the quietness of the park contrasts strikingly with the noise of the hotel dining room; the hollow joviality of tourist versions of Czech music and peasants, as presented by the singers and musicians, contrasts with the hushed tones and anxious expressions of a nervous Mrs Hollar-- "a country girl. No English. No philosophy"-- and her ten-year-old son afraid for their own safety and that of Pavel Hollar, now in custody. There is much pathos though no sentimentality in the sight of two adults relying on the boy to understand each other. The park is in darkness, a little light shines on their faces and outlines their silhouette; Sacha's face is pale and lean, struggling to communicate worrying details in a strange tongue. Anderson may correct the boy's English, as he had earlier corrected the father's, but Sacha's meaning is all too clear. Anderson almost forgets that he is talking with a frightened child and, rather pathetically, tries to calm his conscience by explaining his motives. When Sacha breaks into sobs and is comforted by his mother, Anderson accepts his responsibility for involvement and asks simply, "What do you want me to do?"

These two scenes involving the Hollar family are very important in establishing the human element in the moral dilemma facing Anderson

but Stoppard does not rely on sentiment as the crucial factor in his argument. The play's integrity requires that the various threads of inquiry should be satisfactorily drawn together. The linguistic term 'Profession Foul' is at the centre of the play's literal (narrative) and metaphorical concerns. When Stoppard jettisoned the idea of using ballroom dancers to demonstrate moral truths he replaced them with philosophers, which might seem a logical choice, but he added footballers too. Anderson's passion for football entices him to visit Prague because, as he informs McKendrick, "a World Cup qualifier is not just a football match." This in itself presents opportunities for humour and comic misunderstandings. At the same time, it helps Stoppard present philosophical issues in linguistically simple forms accessible to the lay-person. Physical and mental gymnastics were encompassed by the term "Jumpers" in a previous play; here the rules governing human behaviour in its ethical dimension are examined with the help of the rules of football.

Anderson does not succeed in watching the football match - he is detained by the police at Hollar's flat - but the match and its outcome are kept to the forefront of the audience's awareness, an awareness often reinforced by humour. In the lift (Scene Four) Anderson predicts the Czechoslovakian team's tactics; in Hollar's flat he hears the radio coverage. When Anderson returns to his hotel room the interest in football provides welcome comic relief whilst strengthening the interest in language. Anderson overhears two reporters 'phoning over copy and gains comic capital from their contrasting styles. Grayson's vivid style causes him to base his report on the extension of the metaphor of his opening line: "There'll be Czechs bouncing in the streets of Prague tonight as bankruptcy stares English football in the face...." The second reporter, Chamberlain, enjoys greater subtlety of style: "As with tragic opera, things got worse

after the interval." Between them they tell the audience and Anderson that the latter's predictions were proved true. The full relevance of this outcome is emphasised in Scene Ten where an enebriated McKendrick annoys members of the defeated England team by philosophising on the "yob ethics" of footballers. Broadbent had committed a professional foul to stop a certain goal but the Czech team scored with a carefully planned series of moves. With complete insensitivity to the feelings of the players McKendrick asserts that the game "attracts a certain kind of person, namely yobs," for whom "a dishonest advantage is as welcome as an honest one." He cites Broadbent's professional foul as an example. McKendrick's performance showing him at his worst is one source of humour; the idea of the urbane Anderson with his interest in football as a "yob" is another. At the same time this scene coincides with Anderson's decision to commit a "foul" in his own profession. His experiences in Hollar's flat has shown him how the authorities are not averse to obtaining an advantage through unfair means when there is more at stake than a football game. The same experience has exposed the falseness of his own position—he refused to take Hollar's thesis because this would have been discourteous to his hosts, yet he had agreed to attend the Colloquium in order to attend a football match. His fine distinction about having been invited to speak, not to listen is highlighted in all its insincerity. He had made a game of theory, exploiting the latter to excuse his own unethical behaviour. Parallels are drawn between the political situation and the football field. Is it simply a case of the end justifying the means and in what sense can a foul be said to be "professional"? Stoppard does not pursue the question in relation to football and he does not indicate whether he thinks Broadbent was justified in his behaviour except indirectly when in his own paper to the Colloquium Anderson distinguishes between rules and

rights. The parallel has served its purpose in helping to convey the moral issue which lies at the heart of Anderson's dilemma. It is to this dilemma that the interest now turns. If Anderson has learnt anything in Prague it is that no theory can be defended or rejected for all time. Each application of theory must be judged in context. His own behaviour has already demonstrated how one can use a theory of ethics to excuse wrong behaviour. He will now demonstrate how one can behave "unethically" in the interests of ethics. It is testimony to the surety of his control over his material that Stoppard can put into McKendrick's mouth arguments with which the play's denouement proves he empathises, whilst ensuring that McKendrick remains a lesser philosopher than Anderson. There is no doubt that McKendrick's explanation of his "catastrophe theory" contributes to Anderson's education, and it is significant that Chetwyn too should be present on this occasion. A comic routine of repetition draws attention to Chetwyn's absence from the Colloquium during McKendrick's paper:

McKendrick : (re. Anderson): He's being mysterious. I think it's a woman.  
 Anderson : (to Chetwyn): What were you doing?  
 Chetwyn : I was meeting some friends.  
 McKendrick : He's being mysterious. I don't think it's a woman.

For the benefit of both his colleagues who were absent from the Colloquium during his paper, McKendrick outlines his theory:

The mistake that people make is, they think a moral principle is indefinitely extendible, that it holds good for any situation, a straight line running across the graph of our actual situation...

Morality down here; running parallel to Immorality up there...and never the twain shall meet. They think that is what a principle means.

Anderson : And isn't it?  
 McKendrick : No. The lines are on the same plane...and if you twist the plane in a certain way, into what we call the catastrophe curve, you get a model of the sort of behaviour we find in the real world. There's a point-

the catastrophe point-where your progress along one line of behaviour jumps you into the opposite line; the principle reverses itself at the point where a rational man would abandon it.

Chetwyn : Then it's not a principle.

McKendrick : There aren't any principles in your sense. There are only a lot of principled people trying to behave as if they were.

When McKendrick argues that to treat 'principles' as God-given absolutes leads men into using a moral principle as an excuse for acting against a moral interest, "It's a sort of funk," Anderson uncharacteristically shows anger. McKendrick and Chetwyn are surprised by his vehemence but the audience understand how aptly the theory might be applied to Anderson's earlier refusal to help Hollar. McKendrick is good-naturedly prepared to change the subject and reverts to his other major interest - women. But Anderson has sufficient strength of character to admit, "You're right, up to a point. There would be no moral dilemmas if moral principles worked in straight lines and never crossed each other. One meets test situations which have troubled much cleverer men than us." Chetwyn's observation that it is helpful to try out test situations on children recalls Hollar's comment about his own son. Anyone in the audience who has still not grasped its full significance will be given further opportunity to understand the philosophy in Anderson's own paper to the Colloquium: "It is well to be reminded that you can persuade a man to believe almost anything provided he is clever enough, but it is much more difficult to persuade someone less clever. There is a sense of right and wrong which precedes utterance."(p.90)

Anderson's second meeting with Mrs Hollar and Sacha has reinforced this lesson and determines him to do more than simply talk about ethics in the abstract. In contrast to the philosophers in Stoppard's previous plays, whose insistence on certainty prevents them from ever taking action and who remain ineffectual in practical terms,

Anderson acts. He deviates from his approved paper without informing the Czech authorities and gives instead a paper in which he questions the state's infringement of its citizens' individual rights. This is the philosopher's "foul" in the course of his own professional duties. In his paper Anderson offers no definitive conclusions about ethics and ethical behaviour except to assert his belief in the existence of the same: "There is a sense of right and wrong which precedes utterance. It is individually experienced and it concerns one person's dealings with another person. From this experience we have built a system of ethics which is the sum of individual acts of recognition of individual right."(p.90) He distinguishes between the right of individuals and the rules of communities, pointing out that the former are upheld by the Constitutions of political systems as different as those of the United States and Czechoslovakia. Anderson's paper is not technical and can be followed by the non-academic but it does permit levels of response. The narrative so far helps the audience to follow the argument but references to Locke, Plato and divine sanction carry stronger associations for the learned to pursue the argument satisfactorily on a more professional level. They would appreciate more clearly why Chetwyn (teased by McKendrick for "believing in goodness and beauty" and for his support of Aristotle and St. Augustine) sits forward with a smile when Anderson speaks of those who invoke God's authority to support their belief in the concept of justice and human rights.(p.88)

In this Colloquium scene Stoppard juxtaposes Anderson's discussion on human rights with silent but eloquent scenes showing an infringement of the same - two plainclothes policemen search his room. The camera keeps in shot the Czech Chairman's troubled uncertainty when Anderson deviates from the approved paper he is expected to deliver. As Anderson's voice is heard through a P.A. system, the camera follows

the Chairman when he leaves the hall and telephones for instructions, his anxiety betrayed by his nervous smoking of a cigarette. The Chairman's return to the stage coincides with Anderson's comments on the embarrassment of totalitarian governments faced with the illogic of their own actions; the camera shows Anderson in the foreground, turning to his left to see an embarrassed Chairman resume his seat. The authorities sound the fire alarm - their own professional foul - but no-one is deceived, a fact emphasised by the almost leisurely manner in which the audience leave the hall, stopping to talk on their way to the exit.

In the light of Anderson's breach of the rules governing correct behaviour at the Colloquium, neither he nor the audience is surprised by the thorough examination accorded to his luggage at the airport. The camera focuses on the practised hands and impassive, unemotional expressions of the customs officials and the plainclothes policemen. Comedy is never far from the surface and here it is brought into play when a female customs official discovers the copy of "International" hidden in the suitcase lining pocket. Anderson's worried expression leads the audience to suspect that he has not returned the thesis to Hollar's friend as instructed in the park scene, but has hidden it in his luggage. His embarrassment when the woman discovers the girly magazine and impassively flips the pages, is doubly welcome comic relief. At the same time, the thorough search given to Chetwyn's luggage forces the audience to re-consider their attitude towards the philosophers yet again. They had probably applauded Anderson's action in the Colloquium, praised him for acting upon his philosophical theories, but Chetwyn, they are suddenly reminded, has been more active all along. Whereas Anderson had come to Prague to watch a football match, Chetwyn had come to visit political dissidents and to take back letters to Amnesty International and the United Nations.

Chetwyn had not needed the jolt of personal experience to encourage him to act upon his philosophical knowledge. Chetwyn has so far been on the sidelines of the main action - perhaps he is a more worthy subject for the play than Anderson who has needed to be taught a rather elementary lesson. As the cellophane is torn from a box of chocolates and the box emptied, and as a carefully folded shirt is searched to reveal the hidden letters and Chetwyn is silently led away by the Czech authorities, the play's serious content seems about to overwhelm the humour. Stoppard deftly avoids such imbalance by surprising the audience once again, using comedy to re-direct their attention. The camera cuts from the airport to the airplane taxiing towards take-off with Anderson and McKendrick sitting together. Anderson's words reassure the audience about Chetwyn. The Czech authorities couldn't treat him as though he were a Czech national and Chetwyn has not broken any law by being in possession of letters to Amnesty International and the United Nations. He will probably be put on the next plane. A comic routine then draws the audience's attention away from Chetwyn and back to McKendrick and Anderson. The latter reveals that he did, in fact, have something which the Czech authorities would have liked to discover in the search:

Anderson	:	A thesis. Apparently rather slanderous from the State's point of view.
McKendrick	:	Where did you hide it?
Anderson	:	In your briefcase.
		(Pause)
McKendrick	:	You what?

McKendrick's words and actions throughout the play have made him the perfect foil for Anderson here. The humour of McKendrick's blustering anger counterpoints the seriousness of the issue. It is amusing that Anderson can exploit McKendrick's own catastrophe theory - "I reversed the principle" - to excuse his involvement of his colleague. The humour is at the latter's expense and he so often deserves to be laughed at. But was Anderson's action ethical? When discussing

just such a situation with Hollar earlier he had said that to involve another against his knowledge in smuggling would be wrong: "Also, you could be getting me into trouble and your quarrel is not with me. Your action would be unethical on your own terms - one man's dealings with another man." (p.56) Stoppard does not ignore this perspective on Anderson's action but at the same time he directs our laughter at the blustering McKendrick, reminding us that the latter had expressed a desire to be involved in political activity. (p.47) The ambivalent ending ensures that while we might commend Anderson's action because it has turned out well, especially for Hollar, we must not lose sight of the fact that it raises other questions of ethics:

McKendrick	:	...It's not quite playing the game, is it?
Anderson	:	No, I suppose not. But they were very unlikely to search <u>you</u> .
McKendrick	:	That's not the bloody point.
Anderson	:	I thought it was. But you could be right. Ethics is a very complicated business. That's why they have these congresses.

If the play has demonstrated anything, it is that the means and the end must be examined in conjunction and in context. The purity of a theory may become soiled when put into action but a philosophical theory which fails to take into account the practicalities of the world outside the comfort of the philosopher's study or Colloquium is all but worthless. Anderson may have shown himself to be at times rather foolish and lacking in imagination but he has progressed - far more so than McKendrick.

Professional Foul has used the familiar literary device of a journey to chart Anderson's development. In his realistic, life-like encounter with totalitarianism Anderson demonstrates the need for a moral basis to all political actions - the same need which had been illustrated more exuberantly in Jumpers. Stoppard has said of Jumpers that the play "breaks its neck to be entertaining."<sup>(6)</sup> Whilst simultaneously

tackling philosophical ideas. In Professional Foul he proved that his comedy of ideas could work without striving for theatrically dazzling effects. He did not need to write a "J.B. Priestley" play in order to demonstrate how "observation, truth...sheer craftsmanship pays off."<sup>(7)</sup> Five years later he would successfully combine his comedy of ideas and a naturalistic style in a major stage play - The Real Thing.

By 1977 Stoppard ceased to be criticised for frivolity and non-commitment. With a shift in perspective which he must have appreciated he was praised for the devastating wit and humour which he brought to bear on aspects of totalitarianism. In his next full-scale stage work - the West End plays Night And Day and The Real Thing - Stoppard moved deliberately towards greater naturalism in the comedy of ideas; in his next overtly political work, the television film which he was invited to write about Solidarity, the trade union in Poland, he strove for "a qualified reality"<sup>(8)</sup> which emphasised, as he had done in Travesties, that "Everything is true except the words and the pictures."<sup>(9)</sup> Squaring The Circle (May 1984, TVS, C4) is especially interesting in its use of the narrators to introduce different perspectives and in the way it draws attention to the devices it employs. Time and space do not permit a full examination of the television film in this thesis, particularly in view of the fact, meticulously recorded in Stoppard's introduction to the printed text, that although the final version worked reasonably well in terms of television, he was not himself fully satisfied with the result and especially with the role of the main narrator. The intervention of the film's American partners led to decisions in production which undermined the internal logic which is vital in Stoppard's work. It is perhaps sadly ironic that in the one work in which Stoppard felt that he should be clearly identified with his Narrator (p.13.Introduction),

his open "commitment" should have been undermined:

"What was supposed to have been a kind of personal dramatised essay turned into a kind of play about an unexplained American in Poland. Later I was asked to fix up the script to explain what this American was doing there, but since I had no idea, I did nothing."

(p.14)

At about the same time that plans for the television film were well under way, Stoppard's most naturalistic comedy of ideas was already in performance at the Strand Theatre. In this stage play the author would deliberately and effectively identify himself with his leading character in order, paradoxically, to highlight, the nature of the fiction in which audience<sup>and</sup> actors are engaged. The movement towards naturalism in style does not lessen the emphasis on the essentially theatrical nature of the event in progress.

## CHAPTER XII

The Real Thing

(Night And Day - 8 November 1978, Phoenix Theatre)

The Real Thing - 16 November 1982, Strand Theatre)

Following the success of his television play Professional Foul, Stoppard was still intent on writing a quieter stage play. His next two major stage plays show him striving to apply his comedy of ideas to a more conventional West End situation, tempering theatrical frivolity with the demands of realism. He is still very much concerned with comedy of ideas but he tries to investigate the ideas through a realistic, less flamboyant style.

The first of these plays, Night And Day (8 November 1978, Phoenix Theatre), used a realistic setting and conventional narrative to discuss journalism and the need for a free press. It is a thought-provoking play and Stoppard's characteristic linguistic dexterity and humour often illuminate the central debate. There is, for example, a shrewd and witty comparison of a range of newspaper styles and a speech which adroitly and amusingly captures the ambivalent nature of attitudes towards the newspaper industry: "I'm with you on the free press. It's the newspapers I can't stand." The play as a whole presents a spirited and convincing defence of the need for freedom of the press and was generally well-received. It underwent three changes of cast before ending its successful run at the Phoenix Theatre. As comedy of ideas, however, Night And Day is Stoppard's least successful full-scale stage play. The demands of realism in the style create an imbalance between the ideas and the comedy. The play contains ideas and it contains humour but the relationship between the two is less than dynamic; the humour is more decorative than integral to the dramatic dialogue or the narrative. The seriousness of some of the issues and incidents with which it deals submerge the comic

spirit. Jacob Milne's death overshadows the mood of the play. Stoppard's treatment of this death differs markedly from his treatment of McFee's death in Jumpers, for example. Both deaths are necessary to the argument of their respective plays; but whereas the audience is encouraged to laugh at Dotty's attempts to hide the body and at the slickness with which Archie disposes of the corpse, they cannot laugh away or distance the horror of Milne's death which takes place in an identifiably 'real' world. Professional Foul, it is well to recall, avoided the dangers of tragedy in a realistic narrative by using comedy to steer away from the brink. Stoppard does not show Milne's death on stage and it is reported unsentimentally. But not even the lack of sentiment in Guthrie's account can minimise the effect of its tragic content. When he tells Ruth, "Don't turn him over-he'll come away in your hand", he leaves both Ruth and the audience stunned. This play may have comic moments but it is not a comedy. Night And Day is further weakened as a comedy of ideas in that its own internal logic is flawed and the various lines of investigation are not successfully drawn together in a linguistic joke. For example, the Union problem on which the two different journalist types, Milne and Wagner, disagree is not satisfactorily explored and contributes little to the central debate on the role of the press. It seems as though Milne and Wagner's discussion on the question of the union closed shop is intended to distinguish between the two journalist types - the young idealist and the hard-bitten older man who is more interested in the politics of his profession. This particular debate, however, is biased in favour of the younger man - Milne refused to join the strike call because he did not support the union's assumption that the journalists' pay should automatically be higher than that of the printers. When it comes to attitudes about the freedom of the press and the right of individual journalists to report the facts,

Milne and Wagner are essentially in accord. Their attitudes towards the worser aspects of their profession - the Lego-set gossip journalism of which Ruth complains - are practically identical: it is the price that must be paid to maintain the freedom which is important. Indeed, Ruth comes to see that the two men are much alike in their attitudes towards their profession, that the brash, arrogant Australian shares the younger, gentler man's idealism to some degree. As it stands, however, the union question introduces a line of interest which is not satisfactorily drawn into the main argument. Stoppard suggests an interesting parallel between freedom and responsibility in the press and freedom and responsibility in private life (via Milne's and Wagner's differing relationships with Ruth) but does not develop the idea. Another major problem lies in the fact that Ruth's story runs alongside the debate on journalism and fails to satisfy the interest it arouses. The fact that Stoppard was still making changes to the play, trying to account for Ruth's dissatisfaction with her personal life and marriage to Carson even after the play's official opening, indicates that the area was considered to be problematical. Stoppard revealed in an interview that he re-wrote six pages of Night (1) And Day after the play had been playing for three months. Changes made in the second edition of the printed play show how the author felt the need to distinguish between the interest in journalism and Ruth's story: he omitted four of Ruth's inner voice speeches where they interrupted the conversation on press freedom between Carson and Wagner; he added more background information about Ruth in her exchanges with Wagner and Carson, attempting to account for the dissatisfaction with her life by looking at her roles as mother and wife. The clearest indication of Stoppard's wish to distinguish the two lines of interest is in the fact that, in the second edition of the play, Ruth takes no interest in the debate on freedom of the

press between Wagner and President Mageeba - the implication is that she is preoccupied with her feelings towards Milne until the President directly invites her opinion. It is then made very clear that she has not been following their discussion. These changes suggest that Stoppard was working towards greater cohesion of form and content and that he was still concerned with applying his comedy of ideas to a more naturalistic drama. Comedy and serious debate in the above-mentioned episode are more successfully interrelated in the second edition. Once Ruth is roused from her reverie (presumably about Milne) her participation in the argument contributes to the central debate and simultaneously to her own characterization as a witty but disenchanted woman.

In the first edition she simply criticised what she saw as cant in Wagner's talk of rich proprietors and insisted, "The whole country is littered with papers pushing every line from Mao to Mosley and back again and I bet even Allie [her twelve-year-old son] could work out for himself that it is the very free-for-all which guarantees the freedom of each." (p.83) The fact that she took so prominent a part in the discussion was slightly at variance with the idea that she was more preoccupied with her own personal problems. It also meant that President Mageeba was obliged, somewhat unrealistically, to take a back seat during the discussion between his hostess and her guest, whereas this is the scene in which Mageeba, the beleaguered politician, can contribute his views on the central debate. In the second edition the President and the journalist conduct the debate between them and when Ruth is brought reluctantly into the conversation her first comments emphasise the underlying danger for the journalist in an unstable political situation:

Mageeba : ...Let the journalists close ranks and be answerable to no one but themselves.

- Wagner : Yes...well, they would be answerable to a democratically elected body representing the membership.
- Mageeba : That's what I said. What do you think, Mrs Carson?  
(Ruth hasn't been listening but she is equal to the occasion)
- Ruth : I think I'll have that drink after all.
- Mageeba : Yes, we should drink to Mr Wagner's freedom.
- Ruth : Is it in question?  
(She is momentarily concerned, but Carson explains)
- Carson : His freedom to report.
- Ruth : Ah, yes.
- (p.82)

When she does then participate in the discussion she succeeds in maintaining her distance whilst contributing to the debate. Inspired by the reference to her son and the even-a-child-would-know argument in the first edition, Ruth attributes her views to Alistair:

- Ruth : "Allie", I said, "how are things in London with all those millionaires controlling the freedom to report?" "I don't think I quite follow you, Mummy," he said. "The whole country is littered with papers pushing every political line from anarchy to Zen. His theory-Alastair's theory-is that it's the very free-for-all which guarantees the freedom of each. "You see, Mummy," he said, "you don't have to be a millionaire to contradict one. It isn't the millionaires who are going to stop you, it's the Wagner's who don't trust the public to choose the marked card. "Do you think he's got something, Dick?"
- Wagner : I was talking about national papers.
- Ruth : (Eagerly): That's just what I said to him. "Allie," I said, as I spread his Marmite...

She proceeds to elaborate the argument in this fashion until suddenly she and the audience are forced to contrast theory with political reality:

- Ruth : ...A state of affairs, Allie says, where only a particular approved, licensed, and supervised non-millionaire can have a newspaper is called, for example, Russia.
- Mageeba : Or, of course, Kambawe.
- [ Ruth ] : Geoffrey!
- Carson : I'm sorry sir-I know Ruth didn't mean-...
- Mageeba : Please don't concern yourself. I enjoy a free and open debate. It is a luxury which a man in my position can seldom afford.
- (p.84)

The effectiveness of this scene reinforces the idea that Stoppard did approach Night And Day as a comedy of ideas and supports the implication that the play as a whole does not fully satisfy as such because of an imbalance between comedy and ideas in the areas noted above. The imbalance arises primarily from the desire to unite the comedy of ideas with a more naturalistic style. The Real Thing (16 November 1982, Strand Theatre) was to redress the balance. The later play may owe as much to the ideas suggested by Ruth's incomplete story in Night And Day, as to what some contemporary reviewers rightly saw as Stoppard's wish to answer those who criticised him for avoiding emotion in his plays. In 1977 Stoppard acknowledged the fact that this was an area he avoided and commented, "I'm waiting until I can do it well."<sup>(2)</sup> His decision to make the attempt in 1982 is particularly intriguing because The Real Thing places considerable emphasis on the attempt itself and on Stoppard's own well-established reputation. The play constructs various levels of dialogue by drawing the audience's attention to their own expectations of a Stoppard play, then proceeding to variously challenge and reinforce the same.

The Real Thing uses the conventions of West End theatre to explore an issue of timeless importance - the nature of love within a sexual relationship. As a vehicle for the argument Stoppard chooses a conventional realistic situation and narrative and deals with what one of the characters refers to disparagingly as "love among the architect class. Again." Most contemporary reviewers commented on how both subject matter and style deviated from what had come to be expected of a Stoppardian play. One even observed that The Real Thing was "distressingly like other people's plays."<sup>(3)</sup> The play's naturalism does indeed distinguish it from plays like Jumpers and Travesties but it also bears the hallmarks of Stoppard's comedy of ideas: it explores an issue of timeless importance; the surface narrative is

complemented by a running intellectual commentary on the ideas being presented; the playwright challenges the audience's assumptions, employing humour to re-direct their attention or adjust their perspective on the debate in progress. Most importantly, despite the play's surface realism, The Real Thing continually reminds the audience of the essentially theatrical nature of the play in performance. Of all Stoppard's plays this offers the most involved illustration of the playwright's fascination with the power of the play-within-the-play device to question perspective and to suggest levels of fiction and reality. The device enables him to draw attention to the deliberate nature of the "lie" or fiction he is presenting and at the same time to pursue a conventional, naturalistic surface narrative. The device was employed in much of Stoppard's earlier work and is central to Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead, Travesties and The Real Inspector Hound. Its powerful allusive qualities are especially suited to Stoppard's comedy of ideas and the device evidently has a strong appeal for Stoppard - he later introduced it into Dalliance, his adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's Die Liebelei (Lyttleton Theatre, 27 May 1986). In an interview with Drama (Vol.3,1986) Stoppard acknowledged that it was Peter Wood's (the director's) idea to move the location in the final act to the wings of the theatre; interestingly, Stoppard acted on this idea by using a play-within-the-play to distinguish between the love that happens in an operetta and what really happens off-stage: when Christine hears the news of Fritz's death in a duel, her own story is effectively contrasted with the operatic dialogue of the lovers in the opera within the play. The distinction, between the on and off-stage relationships was further emphasised by the element of parody in the presentation of the former which served to temper the sadness in the latter. The play-within-the-play device is central to The Real Thing because the title refers

not only to Henry's and Annie's experiences which are designed to test whether their relationship is the real thing, but also to the ambiguity inherent in the very idea of the stage representing the real thing. Throughout the play Stoppard plays with variations on "the real thing" so that the phrase comes to act as a unifying theme. Stoppard had, to date, avoided dealing with the subject of love and emotion within a sexual or marriage relationship. There are many married couples in Stoppard's comedy of ideas but the marriage partners like Dotty and Moore, Albert and Kate, Jane and Mr Moon, Lord and Lady Malquist, Frank and Gladys, had served primarily to illustrate the individuals' failure to connect with their world and each other. The personal nature of the relationship itself had not been in the spotlight. In The Real Thing Stoppard turns his attention to the most personal of relationships. In one way it is the playwright's answer to his critics; in another way it answers his own wish to write a comedy of ideas using a conventional West End situation. The result is an intelligent discussion on the nature of love and the difficulty of writing about the same. The central debate on the nature of love between man and woman is pursued in conjunction with an investigation of other reciprocal relationships - between the writer and his craft, between work and life, between raw experience and its literary expression. Thus the play becomes, on one level of its dramatic dialogue, a debate between the playwright and his audience on the difficulty of defining and writing about love. It is most appropriate and dramatically effective that a play which tries to distinguish between "the real thing" and its shadow should revolve around the lives of people involved in the theatre. The four main characters are a playwright, two actresses and an actor. By showing this quartet in parallel relationships at work and at home, Stoppard distinguishes between the writer's work and his life,

his response to personal experience and his presentation of similar experience in his work. The play is structured to highlight such distinctions. In scene one, for example, Max greets his wife with many a neatly-turned phrase and is extremely witty at her expense when he reveals what he considers to be her infidelity. In the parallel situation of scene three, concerning a similar dilemma in his own life, he manages only vulgar abuse and undignified tears. Charlotte, wife of the playwright, Henry, in whose play both she and Max appear, complains that the depiction of life in Henry's plays is far from truthful. By this stage in scene two the audience have been abruptly jolted by the revelation that scene one, which we took for the real play was in fact only a play within the play, a scene from Henry's latest, House Of Cards. With our new, distanced perspective, we are therefore inclined to agree with Charlotte when she states, "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 truth of this observation is borne out later in the play when Henry does suspect his wife of unfaithfulness. When this happens in his own life, he becomes far from witty and dignified and is obsessed by a single idea. But the wife in question is his second wife, Annie, so Charlotte was probably wrong about Henry's possible reaction to her supposed infidelity. A little later in scene two the audience realises that Henry has ceased to care for Charlotte and is himself involved in an affair with Max's wife, Annie. The reversal of the original situation is almost complete; the audience's perspective has been adjusted twice in the same scene; each time we realise that we were prepared to take on its own terms and exclusively, what was presented on stage as only one of various planes of reality. It is at least

three pages into scene two before we can be certain of the relationship between Charlotte, Henry and Max. No sooner has this been established than our certainty is questioned with yet another revelation which causes us to question our recent rejection of scene one as total fiction. As the play progresses and the question of motivation is discussed, we gain further perspectives on the same scene. When Henry insists that a public stance is often the result of private, personal needs, we might question his motivation for attributing the supposed infidelity to the wife in his latest play. Despite alerting our suspicions about our own responses and assumptions so early in the play, Stoppard nevertheless succeeds in surprising us continually with new perspectives.

In this, The Real Thing resembles Pirandello's Each In His Own Way (1923) both stylistically and to a certain degree thematically too. Both plays begin with what appears to be a legitimate play in the individual playwright's acknowledged style, but the opening is then exposed as a fiction doubly-removed from reality - that is, a play-within-the-play. Perspective is continually re-adjusted until, by the end of each play the audience appreciates a level of truth in the fiction: In Pirandello's play, life imitates art when Delia Moreno and Baron Nuti imitate their stage counterparts and shock society by going away together, admitting that they had been lying about their motives and that the play had exposed the truth. In Stoppard's play, Henry's relationship with Annie resembles that of the couple in House Of Cards: the wife is the one suspected of infidelity and she allows the husband to misjudge her until the discovery which proves her fidelity and reveals her true motives. In both plays plausible explanations are given for motives but the apparently rational explanation is later exposed as a fiction. The play-within-the-play device makes possible the continual inter-

raction between playwright and audience and serves both surface narrative and intellectual debate. Members of the audience who relate the frequent references to "the real thing" in the surface narrative to the debate concerning levels of fiction and reality in the sub-text, may also note the stylistic allusions to Pirandellian theatre. They do not need to recognise the close correspondence between The Real Thing and Each In His Own Way in order to appreciate this relationship. In fact, it is highly unlikely that a majority in the audience will be familiar with Each In His Own Way since the latter was reprinted only once in the 1950's and is not now easily available. Stoppard makes no direct allusion to it in his play, but the majority in the audience may reasonably be expected to be familiar with the Pirandellian tradition in modern theatre and a knowledge of this tradition is all that is required for the allusions in the play-within-the-play technique to invite deeper levels of response and contribute further to the dramatic dialogue. As in the best examples of Stoppard's comedy of ideas, the play is strengthened by the audience's response to such allusions but it is also self-contained. Stoppard provides in the surface narrative much of the information required to enable the audience to participate in the deeper levels of debate. By choosing theatre folk for his characters, Stoppard accommodates the theatrical device within a conventional realistic setting. It allows him to introduce a variety of material which will be relevant to the central debate and simultaneously to pursue a conventional narrative in the manner of the familiar story-telling play. By making repeated use of the device he emphasises both its effectiveness and the audience's awareness of it. Here is a play about a playwright; in the course of an account of his work and life we see and hear extracts from his own play and plays of other dramatists both real and fictitious: Henry's House Of Cards, Strin<sup>d</sup>berg's Miss Julie, Ford's 'Tis Pity

She's A Whore, Brodie's television play. In the first production, designed by Carl Toms, the set drew attention to the device with its own stage-within-a-stage effects. The proscenium stage was hidden behind seven transparent panels which rose singly or together to reveal to the audience yet another piece of simulated reality: a stage, a living-room, a rehearsal studio, a train compartment. The stage directions in the printed text make no reference to these panels which were the idea of the director and the designer. Both Peter Wood and Carl Toms have worked with Stoppard on other plays over the years and the idea behind this particular design reflects their imaginative response to Stoppard's aims and style. It is another example of the way in which the playwright benefits from the individual skills of the other artists and craftsmen involved in the realisation of the play in performance. The stage-within-the-stage effect was further emphasised in the Hockney-type painting in the living-room of scene two. The painting featured a woman resembling Hockney's friend and model, Cynthia, sitting on a sofa; a man resembling the artist himself stood to one side. The disposition of people and objects reflected that in Henry's room; Henry's striped jumper resembled that of the painting's Hockney figure. When Charlotte appeared and sat on the sofa, the parallel between the set and the painting was complete and provided a visual clue to the audience trying to understand the relationship of the characters: is this a case of life imitating art or vice-versa? Are the couple just friends like the figures in the painting? In what way can Charlotte be said to be Henry's "model"? In the previous scene Charlotte was Max's wife - is Henry the man with whom she has been unfaithful? Did she go to Henry's house after leaving Max in scene one? The characters' conversation on the surface narrative is apparently straightforward, naturalistic and uncomplicated but the audience is kept

intrigued. According to the designer, both the director and he wanted  
 a "Hockney-look" to the whole production.<sup>(4)</sup> This suggests that they  
 wanted to juxtapose the clear outlines and uncomplicated colours  
 of a Hockney painting with the contrasting ambiguity of the play's  
 subject matter where light and shade fluctuate and the perspective  
 on relationships is continually re-focused and re-adjusted. The  
 surface narrative is re-assuringly realistic but what is going on?  
 Even if the audience do not recognise the Hockney and Cynthia figures,  
 the painting and set draw attention to the unanswered questions:  
 which is imitating the other? On a simpler visual level, the lifestyle  
 reflected in a Hockney painting is in keeping with the architect  
 and artist class of the characters who people The Real Thing.  
 The play begins with an amusing, distanced look at suspected infidelity.  
 Charlotte returns from a business trip to Geneva and Max, her archi-  
 tect husband, surprises both her and the audience with the revelation  
 that she left her passport at home. Stoppard plays with the aud-  
 ience's responses even within this scene, delaying the information  
 concerning the relationship of Max and Charlotte: he does not look  
 up when she arrives, he calls her "lover" then seems to withdraw  
 the appellation, suggesting momentarily that he has been having an  
 affair: "Oh, it's you. I thought it was my lover." Charlotte is  
 not offended so this must be a harmless joke. When Max launches  
 into his long monologue about the reliable Swiss with their fifteen-  
 jewelled movement and numbered bank accounts, he is a credible Stoppard-  
 ian hero. He seems to be defending style against materialistic progress  
 and clinical efficiency, represented in his argument by Japanese  
 technology: "Digitals have no class, you see. They're science and  
 technology. Makes nonsense of a decent pair of cufflinks." The  
 linguistic humour of "The days of the digitals are numbered" is suit-  
 ably Stoppardian, as is the joke about how adultery can be lifted

out of the moral arena and made a matter of style. The audience seems to be on familiar territory although some may be a little disappointed by the very familiarity - the set is a little too chic and there has, as yet, been little indication of depth beneath the glossy surface. Charlotte quietly takes her suitcase and leaves, pausing only to deliver a brief and dignified retort to Max's barbed comments. A pop song about love accompanies the scene change and reinforces either the disappointment or the appreciation of the slickness of scene one, depending on the audience's response so far. It is at least five minutes into scene two before the audience understand that this scene is not a continuation of the story of scene one - at least, not in the way they expected. Henry is the "real" husband, author of the first scene which we mistakenly took for the "real" play. With our attention more alert and our perspective re-adjusted we pursue the unfolding relationship and are surprised by the revelation that it is Henry and Max's wife, Annie, who are involved in an affair. Their partners were merely acting infidelity and are minor characters in the "real" play. Comedy is employed to emphasise the unexpectedness of the revelation and to direct our attention at the underlying seriousness with its implications concerning the relationship between experience and its literary expression. The characters talk about the discrepancy between Henry's work and his life and there is a great deal of humour in the incongruity of the intellectual playwright's most unliterary musical tastes. Henry spends the first part of the scene trying to compile his list for 'Desert Island Discs' on which he will be the next guest. He fully acknowledges the inconsistency in the fact that he, considered to be an intellectual playwright, cannot abide classical or serious music and enjoys pop:

Henry : I'm going to look a total prick, aren't I

announcing that while I was telling Jean-Paul Sartre and the post-war French existentialists where they had got it wrong, I was spending the whole time listening to the Crystals singing 'Da Doo Ron Ron'.

There are sufficient Stoppardian elements in Henry as a playwright for the audience to respond to this further as an in-joke if they know of Stoppard's alleged physical resemblance to the pop singer Mick Jagger and the love of cricket (often described as an "intellectual" (5) game) shared by the two men. The allusion to Stoppard's fondness for cricket will be brought into play again in a later scene when Henry uses a cricket bat to demonstrate his argument about writing a play. The first scene had presented us with one Stoppardian hero; here is another who appears to resemble the playwright himself. There is a ring of truth in the reference to Henry's earlier play concerned with existentialist philosophy - is this an allusion to Stoppard's own Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead? There is even a joke about Stoppard's favourite technique of allusion and association:

Henry	:	...Public postures have the configuration of private derangement.
Max	:	Who said that?
Henry	:	I did, you fool.
Max	:	I mean first.
Henry	:	Oh, first...

(p.33)

These allusions to what the audience take to be "the real" Stoppard are another variation on the play's unifying theme and contribute to the interest in the public versus private life.

The talk about Henry's unliterary musical tastes dominates most of the scene and firmly establishes the idea of discrepancy between the artist's work and his life with a great deal of humour. Max decides to join Charlotte (who is preparing dips and crudités in the kitchen) in order to avoid hearing one of Henry's pop songs. The audience think that they now have the right perspective on the situation and they know there is no affair, when, almost surreptitiously

via a crude sexual joke, they are surprised by the discovery of an affair between Henry and Annie:

Henry : Are you all right?  
 (Annie nods)  
 Annie : Are you all right?  
 (Henry nods)  
 Touch me.  
 (Henry shakes his head)  
 Touch me.  
 Henry : No.  
 Annie : Come on, touch me.  
 Help yourself.  
 Touch me anywhere you like.

(p.26)

The change of mood is sudden and surprising, their exchange a mixture of the comic and serious. When Max and Charlotte re-enter, Henry and Annie continue their private conversation under cover of the general conversation. The familiar technique of double-entendre common to comedies about adultery is a variation on the play-within-the-play device.

Our newly-acquired knowledge of the affair encourages us to look closely at the lovers' behaviour towards the present marriage partners and to appreciate how great is the discrepancy between the artist's work and his life. Max is likeable, vulnerable, protective towards Annie and very unlike the cool, suave character he portrayed in Henry's play. He respects Annie for her political conscience - reflected in her role on the committee campaigning for the release of a Scottish soldier named Brodie whom she met on her way to a CND demonstration. Brodie was imprisoned after setting alight the wreath to the Unknown Soldier on the Cenotaph. Annie is reluctant to talk about her involvement with Brodie; later in the play we understand the cause of her reluctance but at this stage it is an opportunity for Stoppard to demonstrate the contrast between Henry and Max, for Max's fervent support of Annie's campaigning on behalf of Brodie sets him up as an easy victim of Henry's wit. Henry raises the question of private motivation behind political activity and Max, unsophisticated and

a complete contrast to the urbane figure he portrayed in scene one, often fails to realise how Henry is teasing him. Brodie's involvement in the characters' lives will further assist the examination of the distinction between life and work, private motives and public actions. The importance of this line of interest is underlined by the humour in Henry's unmerciful teasing of Max upon learning that the latter will not, in fact, be accompanying Annie to her Committee meeting:

Annie	:	He's not coming.
Henry	:	(Savouring it): You are not going to the meeting?
Max	:	No, actually. Not that I wouldn't but it would mean letting down my squash partner.
Henry	:	Squash partner? An interesting moral dilemma. I wonder what Saint Augustine would have done?

(p.34)

The same scene also demonstrates that Charlotte is most unlike the gentle, uncomplaining woman of Henry's play in scene one. She is a match for Henry in wit, an intelligent woman who makes shrewd observations on the discrepancy between personal experience and its presentation in The House Of Cards. She complains justly that her role in Henry's latest play is insubstantial, that the husband figure in that play is a projection of Henry's own wish-fulfilment; his repartee is too smart and unlike real life. Her exit with a suitcase may be dramatically effective but that is because it is uncluttered by other, unstylish considerations - children, for example. Annie reminds us of the same discrepancy between art and life when later in the same scene she urges Henry to reveal their affair and adds with self-deprecating irony, "It's easy....It's only a couple of marriages and a child."(p.28) Charlotte is not content to play the minor "feed" part in her own life that she plays in Henry's work. Her agile wit entertains the audience with jokes at Henry's expense and at the same time reveals that there is something lacking in the off-stage marriage for the husband and wife never proceed beyond

the level of barbed sarcasm. This perspective on Henry's first marriage enlists our sympathy for his attempt to find "the real thing" with Annie.

The examination of the strength of the second marriage is closely allied to Henry's attempts to write his play above love. It takes a step further the debate on the relationship between the writer and his craft, raw experience and its literary expression so that the conventional narrative serves the development of the comedy of ideas. Stoppard spends no time on tracing the beginnings of falling in love and equally no time on the pain and trauma of divorce. He is concerned with trying to understand the nature of the emotion of love and not to examine the characters as examples of individual psychology. By continually challenging our responses to the play before us, Stoppard discourages us from concentrating too deeply on the feelings of individual characters. He encourages us instead to maintain an objective distance by drawing attention to the various structural interrelationships in the play itself as they pose questions and develop the argument. However, a degree of emotional verisimilitude must be established for the argument to invite our interest in the characters and their dilemma. Scene two has already established that the heart has gone out of Henry's marriage to Charlotte and that the latter is well able to take care of herself so we need not worry unduly about her future. Scene three adequately establishes the pain that can be suffered by the rejected partner: Max's language and behaviour contrast strikingly with the language and behaviour of scene one. When he calls Annie a "filthy cow" and sobs uncontrollably, begging her to lie about her feelings, his undignified surrender to emotion is almost embarrassing to witness. It is unattractive, despite our sympathy for his suffering and it helps us to understand and sympathise with Annie too when she later admits to feeling no

guilt but annoyance about his suffering. Charlotte's joking in scene two had made the point that Henry was protective towards their daughter, Debbie, and the difficulties involved in their changing relationship are noted in scene four when Annie declines to join Henry in his meeting with his daughter:

Annie : No. It was a mistake last time. It spoils  
it for her, being nervous.  
Henry : She wasn't nervous.  
Annie : Not her. You.

(p.42)

The humour of the misunderstanding - a stock comic technique - highlights, rather than undermines the seriousness. The play points to the pain involved in the break-up of a marriage but does not concentrate on this aspect. If Stoppard had wanted to examine this area he would have made Debbie, the couple's daughter, a younger or perhaps less self-sufficient character and the child would therefore have had a more prominent role in the argument. But that is not the question which The Real Thing sets out to investigate. Debbie's role, primarily, is to voice the "modern" attitude to sex, an attitude which Henry rejects. The main interest is the new relationship between Annie and Henry. Will this be "the real thing" referred to in the title or will it be another imitation?

Henry finds great difficulty in writing the real thing himself. He has promised Annie to write 'her' play about love but his attempts to do so are frustrated by the nature of the emotion itself. Henry (like Stoppard) is supposed to be an intellectual playwright and love is so unliterary: "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." (p.40) His first attempts are rejected as either childish or rude and he wonders whether he should approach the subject in a heightened poetic style of the "By my troth thy beauty makest

the moon hide her radiance" variety but it is not a style he finds congenial and he rejects that too. References to Strindberg's Miss Julie, in which Annie is rehearsing, draw attention to one mode of love and its expression in literature; references to 'Tis Pity She's A Whore will serve the same purpose later in the play. Neither is of much help to Henry in his attempts to write his own play because his own experience of love with Annie differs in nature from that in the other plays. It does involve physical lust but it involves friendship and companionship too. It also involves pain of a sort which takes his interest away from his work and further incapacitates his ability to write about so personal a relationship. Scene four, in which we see Henry and Annie when they set up house together soon after breaking out from their previous relationships, looks closely at their shared happiness and at the same time draws attention to the trials it must undergo. That they have a moral right to break out from previous unsatisfactory relationships is a point made via the humour of Annie's reference to the rejected Max and her lack of guilt on his behalf. With his characteristic skill in giving a new, unexpected perspective to the familiar, Stoppard has Annie complain to the playwright Henry, "You never write about that, you lot....Gallons of ink and miles of typewriter ribbon expended on the misery of the unrequited lover; not a word about the utter tedium of the unrequiting." The joke emphasises her selfishness but it also underlines her attempt to be honest about her feelings and she and Henry retain our sympathy despite Max's suffering. And honesty is a vital element for a successful marriage; in fact, the difficulties which she and Henry will have to face will stem primarily from the absence of honesty. Despite their happiness Annie is troubled by the green-eyed monster. Humour highlights the persistence and irrationality of jealousy as it is gradually revealed that Annie

is jealous of an actress in whom Henry has shown a professional interest. She combines personal and professional comments on the said actress and Henry is amused and bewildered by Annie's attitude:

Henry	:	What's up with you? I hardly know the woman.
Annie	:	You'll like her. She wears leopard-skin pants.
Henry	:	How do you know?
Annie	:	I shared a dressing room with her.
Henry	:	I don't suppose she wears them all the time.
Annie	:	I'm bloody sure she doesn't.

(p.42)

Annie's malicious, catty insinuation invites laughter at her irrationality and sympathy, or at least understanding, for the emotion with which she struggles. The same is referred to when she later complains, "I'm behaving normally. It's you who's abnormal. You don't care enough to care. Jealousy is normal." The happiness which makes her jealous of other women affects Henry differently; he is so content in their relationship that he suffers no pangs of jealousy. So much is made of this trait in Henry, both in the humour of this scene and Charlotte's comments in scene seven, that it prepares the ground for Henry's falling apart when he does succumb to jealousy once he is no longer secure in the knowledge that Annie has no interest in other men. In this scene the audience is encouraged to laugh at Annie whose jealousy is made to appear amusing because unjustified and irrational, but the darker aspects of the same emotion are also in evidence. When Henry leaves to pick up Debbie, Annie goes through the papers in Henry's desk, just as the husband in scene one went through his wife's things, and as Henry will do in scene nine. At this moment it is she who is betraying Henry and this new perspective opens the way for the example of her dishonesty which will pose the real threat to their relationship. As in Harold Pinter's Betrayal the audience is encouraged to question the identity of the one who betrays: is it the partners who are technically unfaithful or the one who is mentally so? Henry's complete trust in their relationship

at this stage is brought to the fore via the comedy of the narrative. Annie had been offended when Henry merely laughed on hearing that her co-star in Miss Julie took every opportunity to touch her and put his tongue in her ear. She had wanted Henry to be jealous, but he, secure in the knowledge that Annie was faithful, admitted he didn't mind:

"Why is that? It's because I feel superior. There he is, poor bugger, picking up the odd crumb of ear wax from the rich man's table....I like him, knowing that that's all there is, because you're coming home to me and we don't want anyone else."

(p.44)

The joke draws attention to Henry's feelings of contentment but it also underlines his dependence on the assumption that their initial commitment will bear all stresses and strains. Will he always be able to believe that their mutual relationship is sufficient? When the audience resume their seats for Act Two, the narrative and change of set swiftly establish that two years have passed. How strong is the relationship now? Henry is listening to Verdi's 'Madame Butterfly'. If the audience is disappointed that this is a rather obvious way of indicating that Annie has influenced his musical tastes, they are rewarded by the joke in the discovery that this is not the case; it is Annie who put on the record and Henry can still refer to Beethoven's Fifth as "one of your instrumental numbers. The big band sound. Da-da-da-dah." He spends time musing on the fact that many of the all time greats begin with B - he cites Beethoven, the Big Bopper and Buddy Holly as examples. Annie protests at the absurdity of equating Beethoven with the other two but Henry insists that they have more in common than the fact that they are all dead. He asks her to consider what Buddy Holly might have achieved if he hadn't died young, and the sequence climaxes with a punchline: "I mean, if Beethoven had been killed in a plane crash at twenty-two, the history of music would have been quite different. As would the history

of aviation, of course."(p.47) Even as the audience is still laughing, Annie's exasperated "Henry" and his equally brief response, "The play", startles us with the realisation that all this very clever frivolity has been Henry's deliberate attempt to avoid the script in his hand. It was to that, and not to the music that Annie had referred at the start of the scene, but Henry had seized upon the difference in their musical tastes as a way of avoiding the real subject. He was attempting to entertain her, not us. We then note that Henry tries to avoid commenting on the script. Another joke, one of repetition, draws attention to the underlying seriousness of the scene as Henry asks Annie to account for her interest in the play.

Henry	: Do you have a professional interest in this or is it merely personal?
Annie	: Merely?
	(Pause.)
Henry	: Do you have a personal interest in this or is it merely professional?

(p.47)

This variation on a stock comic technique is also a variation on Stoppard's technique of allusion and echo. The professional v. personal distinction in the routine ensures that the life v. art argument remains in the foreground and the audience can maintain their distanced perspective: they register the underlying seriousness of the episode but enjoy the humour of its presentation.

When Henry can no longer avoid the script we learn that it is not his own, as we may have expected, but was written by Brodie and is based on the writer's personal experience. But Brodie, despite his initials, is not one of the all time greats as an artist and is not to be ranked alongside Beethoven and Buddy Holly. Henry cannot understand Annie's interest in this obviously bad play. Annie accepts that the play has serious shortcomings as a piece for the theatre; it is not well-written but she insists Brodie should be given credit

for the personal experience from which he is writing. In another variation on the theme of the real thing, she compares Brodie's approach to Henry's and argues, "Even when you write about something you have to think up something to write about just so you can keep writing.... Why should that be it?"(p.52) Her question alludes to the perennial debate about the role of the artist, a debate in which Henry will be seen to support a Stoppardian view. In fact, the question recalls Stoppard's own comments two years before The Real Thing when he told a reporter, "When I started I wrote a play because I wished to be a playwright. Now I write plays because I am a playwright."<sup>(6)</sup>

There is a certain coherent logic in Annie's words but the more alert members of the audience may note that there is an inconsistency in the claims she makes for Brodie's play when it is revealed that the idea for the play was in fact, hers. The Justice For Brodie Committee seems to have lost both interest and support; Annie thinks that a television play will be harder to ignore and could revitalise the campaign which, after two years, has begun to flag. Henry can appreciate the logic of this argument but it does not alter the status of the play itself. Pressed to say what he really thinks, he replies:

"Well, I really think writing rotten plays is not in itself proof of rehabilitation. Still less of wrongful conviction. But even if it were, I think that anyone who thinks they are bored with Brodie won't know what boredom is till they've sat through his apologia."

(p.50)

Henry's use of rational argument is more than equal to Annie's and his summary is both amusing and apt, judging from the extracts we hear. Annie herself agrees that it is badly-written and Billy agrees with Henry that Brodie can't write so the assumption is that Henry's comments about Brodie's play are justified. It is not only the style (or lack of it) to which Henry objects but, more basically Brodie's confusion of language and meaning. Annie wants Henry to "cut it

and shape it" but Henry insists the play requires more than mere cosmetic surgery. Brodie may have something to say and he would no doubt like to be released from prison, but what he does say is extremely simplistic and bigotted:

"War is profits, politicians are puppets, Parliament is a farce, justice is a fraud, property is theft...You can't fool Brodie-patriotism is propaganda, religion is a con trick, royalty an anachronism...Pages and pages of it."

(p.53)

Most of all, Henry objects to the way in which Brodie mis-uses language to make words suit his own particular prejudices:

"Words don't deserve that kind of malarkey...If you look after them you can build bridges across incomprehension and chaos. But when they get their corners knocked off, they're no good any more and Brodie knocks corners off without knowing he's doing it. So everything he builds is jerry-built...I don't think writers are sacred, but words are...."

(p.55)

Some contemporary reviewers objected that Henry's own argument was weakened by the unworthiness of his opponent and they saw the debate to be between Henry the literary intellectual artist and Brodie the politically orientated writer who depends on the message rather than the medium. (7) If that were the issue, then Brodie is certainly a poor representative of the type. But that is not the issue and Stoppard is not here questioning the literary potential or validity of committed writing. Brodie's main function in The Real Thing is to contribute to the examination of the central relationship between Annie and Henry and to the life/art debate. For Brodie's own political motivation is questioned with Annie's startling revelation that the "symbolic action" which led to his imprisonment was nothing more than a misguided attempt to impress her. Annie will later admit that when Brodie followed her off the train, he knew nothing about a demonstration and was absenting himself from the camp where he was stationed, after some trouble: "By the time we got to London he would have followed me into the Ku Klux Klan."(p.82) It is Annie's interest in Brodie

which is the crucial factor, and its resultant effects on her relationship with Henry. Her lack of honesty about her own motivation will lead to a situation which will try the strength of the play's main relationship. This test, which will be crucial to the examination of the relationship will also contribute to another variation on the theme of the real thing - that is, the art/life and public/private interest.

Their discussion about good and bad drama is interesting in itself and helps establish Henry's credentials as a successful, intellectual playwright. Charlotte pointed out the weaknesses in his work and he has not had a chance to show his strengths. The memorable analogy of good writing and cricket bats is, moreover, an in-joke for those in the audience who know of Stoppard's fondness for cricket. The surprise of Henry's decision to fetch a cricket bat in order to persuade Annie in their argument about writing, is itself amusing. His vivid, apt analogy, comparing the well-crafted pieces of wood which contribute to making a cricket bat with a well-crafted piece of writing, is made more effective by being preceded and followed by a joke:

"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... Now, what we have here (i.e. Brodie's script) is a lump of wood of roughly the same shape trying to be a cricket bat, and if you hit a ball with it the ball will travel about ten feet and you will drop the bat and dance about shouting 'Ouch!' with your hands stuck into your armpits."

(p.52)

A return to the play's running joke about Henry's unliterary musical tastes amusingly and neatly draws the discussion to a close, as Annie insists she still wants to do Brodie's play and bitterly comments, "Well, I can see it's difficult for a man of your fastidious tastes. Let's have something literary. Something decent" and switches the radio on to pop music, definitely not the real thing as far as she is concerned. But the intellectual writer who defends words as "sacred" and whose sensibilities were offended by the mixing of metaphors

in Max's "hammered by an emotional backlash" is in fact fond of songs like "Um um um um um um" by Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders and "Da Doo Ron Ron" by the Crystals. The burst of humour is suddenly checked when Henry, sensing there is some point he has failed to understand, for he still cannot account for Annie's interest, asks, "Why Brodie? Do you fancy him or what?" and regrets the question as soon as it is uttered and the scene ends on an unsettled note. The narrative then proceeds to reinforce the implied suspicion in the question by showing the start of Annie's affair with Billy, a younger man acting opposite her in 'Tis Pity She's A Whore. Billy's first words to Annie as he follows her on the train to rehearsals in Glasgow initially suggest to the audience that this is a scene from Brodie's play. But Annie's shock on hearing the words implies that what we (and Annie) have come to associate with fiction (Brodie's play) is, apparently, happening "for real". When Billy drops the Scottish accent our perspective changes yet again. Stoppard's audience may echo the words of Pirandello's supporters in Each In His Own Way who comment on how the playwright keeps the audience alert by challenging their preconception that reality is fixed, "something definite".<sup>(8)</sup> After struggling to gain a clear perspective on the present scene, we concentrate on the unfolding narrative, amused at our own responses and alert. Billy has been asked to do Brodie's play and will do it if Annie will but his opinion of the play is much like Henry's - he thinks the play is rubbish and Brodie can't write. Annie tells him he shouldn't do the play for the wrong reasons but, by pointing out the questionable nature of some of her own arguments, Stoppard encourages the audience to question Annie's motives. Billy, like Henry in the previous scene, focuses on the logical absurdity of her reasoning: the rest of the company are travelling third class but Annie upped her train fare to first. When Billy

asks her if she believes in the class system she replies:

"There's no system. People group together when they've got something in common. Sometimes it's religion and sometimes it's, I don't know, breeding budgies or being at Eton. Big and small groups overlapping. You can't blame them. It's a cultural thing; it's not classes or system. (She makes a connection) There's nothing really there-it's just the way you see it. Your perception."

(p.58)

Despite his openly stated admiration for her, Billy points out, "The only problem with your argument is that you've got to be travelling first-class to appreciate it." He doesn't draw attention to the logical inconsistency of this argument in view of the fact that Annie is actually alone and not with any group in the first-class carriage, but he does make a joke about her reasoning which encourages the audience to look more closely at it:

"Where did you get all that from? Did you must make it up? It's daft, I prefer Brodie. He sounds like rubbish but you know he's right. You sound all right, but you know it's rubbish."

In this Billy recalls Henry's comment on the "stupidity made coherent" in Annie's defence of Brodie's play.

The beginning of the Annie-Billy affair is amusingly and effectively communicated through their reading rehearsal of Ford's play about the incestuous relationship between brother and sister. Moving in and out of the play-within-the-play, Stoppard encourages the audience to observe the correspondence between the on and off-stage relationships. Their reading, like their relationship, grows increasingly less discreet. Billy first embarrasses then amuses Annie by moving beyond the bounds of a reading rehearsal and making the brother's passionate declaration as if for real. The visual and aural contrast between the poetic language and the modern railway compartment helps to reinforce the humour in the situation. While she looks around to see if they are being observed by other passengers Billy, oblivious to all but her, opens his shirt wildly at the words, "And here's

my breast; strike home!" and is, like Giovanni whose words he speaks, "most earnest in his passion." The audience questions whether he has made Giovanni's words his own and whether he is addressing Annabella or Annie. Is the actor acting or in earnest? Humour, narrative and internal dramatic dialogue are inextricably fused and the scene succeeds in suggesting the sexual tension and emotional attraction in the forbidden relationship. That there is something forbidden in the off-stage affair has been emphasised by a joke which alludes to the affair in the play in rehearsal: Annie has tried to dissuade Billy from flirting with her by pointing out the discrepancy in their ages and voicing reservations about her suitability for the role of Annabella: "I'm going to look more like your mother than your sister." To which Billy replied, "That's all right, so long as it's incest." The humour in Billy's very obvious flirting with Annie ensures that the references to an incestuous relationship are taken in the comic spirit and are not overwhelmed by the potentially tragic implications.

The start of Annie's affair is juxtaposed with emphasis on the importance of sexual fidelity and a discussion on this aspect of a relationship. The whole takes place within a realistic situation so that the discussion on the narrative surface complements the play's inner debate. Henry's and Charlotte's seventeen-year-old daughter, Debbie, is going on the road with a fairground worker. Charlotte has taken this in her stride but Henry is greatly troubled and his reaction is emphasised by the humour in his dramatic exclamation that their daughter is going "on the streets." Charlotte teases the playwright for being "dramatic" and the linguistic humour draws our attention to the discrepancy between the playwright's sophisticated and urbane treatment of sexual infidelity in House Of Cards and the father's more emotional reaction to his daughter's sexual freedom. Roger

Rees, who played Henry in the first production, admirably conveyed through his slightly bewildered expression and tone of voice the impression of one trying to understand, but not at ease with the matter-of-fact attitude of his daughter and ex-wife towards a subject which for him was essentially personal and emotional. He even looked physically ill-at-ease in a place which was once his home. His unease is re-inforced in the narrative for the scene begins with amusing anecdotes concerning the loss of virginity. Charlotte attempts to remember who played Giovanni to her Annabella all those years ago on a British Council tour; when Henry objects that he cannot see why it matters and the actor will probably have forgotten her too, Charlotte amusingly persists, "It was my virginity, not his." Henry is also rather uncomfortable when Debbie talks lightly of her sex education at school and the loss of her virginity to the groom at the riding stables: "You don't get carried away in jodhpurs. It needs absolute determination." When Henry objects to this somewhat frivolous attitude and to being called "Henry" by his daughter, Debbie teases him for living in the past and for his nostalgia for the "happy days" of '60's pop. Commenting that he didn't much like Elvis Presley's later work, Henry wryly observes, "However, I suppose that's the fate of all us artists...People saying they preferred the early stuff." (p.62) This in-joke shared with the audience is particularly apt concerning the play in performance which not only comments on the correspondence between an artist's work and his life, but also deals with subjects which Stoppard had deliberately avoided in his own earlier work. The discussion with Debbie moves to Henry's latest work, The House Of Cards and to the debate on sexual fidelity in a relationship. Debbie insists that The House Of Cards was about "infidelity among the architect class. Again" and Henry insists it was about self-knowledge through pain. Debbie criticises her father

and his generation for equating fidelity and sex and for making such a mystery of the latter. She sums up her attitude with, "That's what free love is free of - propaganda." Henry rejects her argument as persuasive nonsense and affirms his belief in the romance and mystery of an exclusive sexual commitment in a personal relationship:

"Every other version of oneself is on offer to the public. We share our vivacity, grief, sulks, anger, joy...we hand it out to anybody who happens to be standing around...Our lovers share us with the passing trade. But in pairs we insist that we give ourselves to each other. What selves? What's left? What else is there that hasn't been dealt out like a deck of cards? A sort of knowledge. Personal, final, uncompromised. Knowing, being known. I revere that....knowledge is something else, the undealt card, and while it's held it makes you free-and-easy and nice to know, and when it's gone everything is pain."

(p.63-4)

Debbie suspects from his tone that this faith is being tested in his private life and asks about Annie. In an amusing reversal of roles the child consoles the parent for life's assault on his romantic nature, with the observation, "Exclusive rights isn't love, it's colonisation." Henry's reply closes their discussion and the humour adroitly highlights the underlying seriousness: "Christ almighty. Another ersatz masterpiece. Like Michaelangelo working in polystyrene." Although this particular conversation comes to an end, the debate will continue and Henry's love for Annie will have to cope with suspicions of her infidelity. Henry's opinions on love and marriage are romantic but there is something persuasive and touching in that. As Charlotte points out, in a tone combining regret, sympathy and admiration, Henry still has a virginity to lose. After Debbie's departure the ex-partners talk about Henry's apparent lack of jealousy regarding Annie's male colleagues and Charlotte reveals that she had been very concerned about this aspect of Henry's nature:

"It used to bother me that you were never bothered...so I decided that it wasn't supposed to matter. By the time I realised you were the last romantic it was too late. I found it didn't matter."

(p.65)

Henry cannot help believing in the strength of the initial commitment:

"It's a kind of idiocy I like. I use you because you love me. I love you so use me...your credit is infinite, I'm yours, I'm committed...It's no trick loving somebody at their best. Love is loving them at their worst. Is that romantic?"

(p.67)

His relationship with Charlotte was obviously not the real thing because it did not survive this test. Moreover, the revelation of Charlotte's apparent infidelities reminds the audience once more of the play-within-the-play which began the first act and which we later considered a total lie. Was there an element of emotional truth or correspondence between Henry's own life and his play? In House Of Cards the wife was discovered to be faithful - was there an element of wish-fulfilment in this fiction? We question again the identity of the one who betrays: is it Henry who left Charlotte for Annie, or Annie who, on her own admission, had several extra-marital affairs and was content to remain married to Henry? In his parodies of the detective story Stoppard had questioned the role of the inspector; in his play about love and infidelity he questions the distinction between the faithful and deceived partners.

This discussion is followed immediately by a scene showing Annie's mental infidelity. The play-within-the-play device again illustrates dramatically and effectively how fiction becomes reality of a sort. What begins as a rehearsal in which the actors speak the words of other characters, ends as a situation where the same words are made to serve the private story of the actors themselves and life imitates art. Almost the entire scene eight, all of nine speeches, is an extract from 'Tis Pity She's A Whore and charts Annie's submission to Billy's persistence. This is a doubly theatrical scene in that in the original production it was spoken twice, once as a word rehearsal and then as an acting rehearsal. (It is intriguingly ambivalent that a very theatrical device the play-within-the-play, should be

used to highlight planes of reality in fictions and it is in tune with the questioning tone of the play as a whole). The whole word rehearsal took place behind the transparent screens but during the second, acting rehearsal the lights suddenly changed and Billy and Annie were framed by the space of one, central, raised panel as they performed the scene "for real". Stoppard's stage directions to the printed text state that this double-take was for a technical reason, to accommodate a scene change but this practical consideration added to, rather than distracted from, the scene's effectiveness. It enabled Stoppard to illustrate passion and at the same time to keep passion at bay. For the repetition ensured the audience's detachment, drawing their attention to the nature of the medium and the reality it presents. Emphasis on the play-within-the-play device continues in the next scene whose situation parallels that in scenes one and three and which, by repetition and contrast engages the audience's attention on both the surface and inner debates. Annie returns from work to be cross-questioned about her movements by a husband who has gone through her things for signs of betrayal. Life imitates art as Henry's own suspicions reflect those of the character he created in House Of Cards. But unlike the fictional husband who suspects he has been deceived, Henry cannot parry with amusing and ironical speeches about style or technology. He simply wants to know if Annie slept with Billy; if she didn't, he wants to know if she had wanted to. Charlotte was right when she commented that Henry would fall apart and although Annie had previously resented his lack of jealousy she now cannot bear to see him so humiliated: the real thing is not as attractive as she had imagined. Henry's jealousy is itself a form of betrayal as far as she is concerned. Like Charlotte in House Of Cards, she compares his searching through her things to a burglary - Charlotte had called it "The same violation. Worse."(p.13) She tells Henry

"You have to find a part of yourself where I'm not important or you won't be worth loving."(p.72) With an attempt at self-control, acceding to her wishes, Henry agrees that she should continue with her plans to meet Billy in order to discuss Brodie's play. The painful but deliberate attempt to conceal his emotions is conveyed through the polite, conventional nature of the excuse he gives for not accompanying her, as he really wants to do: "Actually, I don't think I can manage the weekend. I hope it goes well." With an almost total change of perspective from that with which the scene began, it is now Henry who will be under observation, not Annie. Once again this echoes the first scene from House Of Cards where Max is surprised by the sudden change of perspective: "I think I just apologised for finding out that you've deceived me."(p.13) The audience knows that Max wasn't deceived in the play-within-the-play. Will the same be true of the parallel situation in the playwright's life? The visual effect which then ends the scene restores the play's balance between seriousness and humour. A potentially serious situation has been diffused. Henry takes his present out of the bag. Annie has brought him a tartan scarf from Glasgow and a tartan design is projected onto the screens as they descend onto the stage. This simple piece of theatre is visually stunning. The effect draws attention to its own theatricality and invites the audience's detachment from the passion and seriousness of the play's subject matter. When Henry is left alone on stage, suffering but silent, and the tartan descends, enveloping both him and the stage, it is as if his mind is obsessed by Scotland and what it means to him - Annie's suspected betrayal. The pop song about love which accompanies the stage effect and scene change further supports the delicate balance between Henry's suffering and the humour of its presentation. The effect enjoys an extra comic dimension from the fact of its repetition because it recalls the

snow-storm effect which enveloped the stage when Max looked at his present from Geneva at the end of scene one. Stoppard emphasises that both play and play-within-the-play employ the same devices. In both cases the presents are amusing by being so obvious - banal even - yet both allude to darker possibilities. The snow-storm was a most apt visual accompaniment to the tone and subject matter of scene one. The impact of the theatrical effect on both occasions illustrates the powerful yet delicate allusive qualities of visual detail which Stoppard exploits as a necessary ingredient in his formula for the comedy of ideas. The device takes many words to describe but in performance it is swift, silent and eloquent.

As Brodie becomes increasingly more prominent in the argument his play is used to indicate changes and developments in the narrative. Much fun has already been made of Brodie's opening scene, both by Henry and Billy, so the audience notes the changes which indicate that Henry has acceded to Annie's request to "cut it and shape it." But even at this late stage in his play, Stoppard can still ambush his audience's assumptions. They understand immediately that they are witnessing a play-within-the-play because Annie and Billy are saying the familiar lines. But not until the last few lines do they realise that they have been witnessing yet another plane or level of fiction. They are still one step behind the truth: this was not the actual play but the shooting of it and a few visual details indicate what is happening to Annie's "affair" with Billy:

(Stage directions) Annie gets up and moves away. Billy joins her. They exchange a few words, and she moves back to her seat, leaving him estranged, an unhappy feeling between them.  
(p.74)

They have been acting in a scene which shows the start of a relationship between them but their off-stage relationship is at a very different stage. Stoppard does not allow his audience to forget that, despite the realism of style in what is presented on stage, the play

is essentially a fiction; the comedy of ideas demands our active participation in the investigation in progress.

This passage of time and other narrative information having been established, Stoppard returns to the effects of time on Henry's suffering and one of the play's most moving scenes begins - as did scene five - with joking about pop and classical music. Henry is listening to Bach's 'Air on a G String' and Annie, preparing to go out, is obviously pleased with the interest he shows in Bach. He amuses both Annie and the audience by insisting that Bach stole the idea from the 20th century band Procul Harum. Henry apparently pays little attention to Annie's preparations to leave but tensions rise to the surface as soon as Billy telephones enquiring about Annie. Henry's interest in the music was merely an attempt to keep his mind from Annie's imminent meeting with Billy, for this is the last day of shooting for Brodie's television play. The uncovering of the underlying tensions catches us unawares once more, despite the fact that Stoppard has already alerted us to the idea that the characters' amusing talk about music invariably means something else. Henry is still trying to be calm and self-controlled but he cannot hide the pain. When Annie turns to him with, "I love you. Do you understand?" he says simply "No", but won't ask her to stop. "I won't be the person who stopped you. I can't be that. When I got upset you said you'd stop so I try not to get upset." Trying to control his emotion, he repeats Debbie's 'Exclusive rights isn't love, it's colonization' but he doesn't believe this comforting view on relationships. He is simply trying to behave as Annie wants - that was the only reason for his decision to change "Brodie's unspeakable drivel into speakable drivel". Annie criticises his motives but Henry's reply is disarmingly honest: "You think it's right. I can't cope with more than one moral system at a time." This makes Annie feel

that she has been selfish but she refuses to submit to what she sees as moral blackmail because she insists that she is trying to do what is right. Ironical as it may seem, she is trying to behave well. She tries to be honest about Billy and her explanation should remind us, and Henry, of the latter's own words in an earlier scene. She admits that she was attracted to Billy.

"It meant something. And now that it means less than I thought and I feel silly, I won't drop him as if it was nothing, a pick-up, it wasn't that, I'm not that. I just want him to stop needing me so I can stop behaving well."

Her "I have to choose who I hurt and I choose you because I'm yours,"(p.77) is akin to Henry's own statement, "I love you so use me...your credit is infinite."(p.67) Will their relationship bear the strains of such a test? In answer to just such a question from Annie, Henry admits, "It will go on or it will flip into its opposite." The scene ends in an ambivalent mood that could turn either way, tragedy or comedy. After Annie's departure, Henry starts the record playing Procul Harum's 'A Whiter Shade Of Pale', a mournful melody which is indeed a version of the Bach to which he was listening earlier. But Henry's smile, and the audience's, is overtaken by sadder feelings. Once Annie has closed the front door, Henry abandons his self-control and simply begs her to stop - an uncharacteristic emotional reaction for a Stoppardian hero and particularly effective for that reason. Brodie's play has stood between them since the start of their relationship so it is fitting that Brodie should now make a personal appearance before the discussion on their relationship comes to an end; Stoppard has demonstrated its joy and contentment, its pains and fears. The narrative now requires a resolution. Brodie's appearance helps resolve the play's inner dramatic dialogue as well as the surface narrative. And he ensures that the balance between comedy and ideas is maintained. The play has indicated the relationship's capacity for pain as well as joy but the debate will not be less effective for having a happy

ending. The humour of Brodie's contribution in the final scene ensures that the play of ideas remains in the realms of comedy.

Brodie's play has been finished and he is himself in Henry's and Annie's living room watching a video recording of the final television version - another variation on the play-within-the-play. The audience is as eager to see him as is Henry and both are surprised. How could Annie have taken such an interest in him? Brodie is aggressive, even loutish in behaviour; he thanks Henry neither for the scotch to which he helps himself liberally, nor for the latter's work on his play. He is determined to make Henry understand that he feels no sense of obligation to anyone. He dislikes Henry's contribution to his play and gives it no credit for his release from prison. There is a coherent logic to Brodie's argument, "I'm out because the missiles I was marching against are using up the money they need for a prison to put me in." (p.79) The explanation sounds plausible and rational but the revelation which follows will expose it as simplistic and lead the way to another ambush for the audience. In the original production Roger Rees as Henry observed Brodie with an air of detached, somewhat bewildered curiosity as he might have regarded a mixed metaphor come to life. When he turned to Annie, puzzled, and demanded, "Is this him?" it was a very pertinent question and one to which the audience too wanted an answer. Henry and Annie then talk to each other, ignoring Brodie, completing the play's discussion on the nature of love and cementing the foundations for their own relationship. Annie reveals that Brodie was no political activist when she met him on the train and her revelation calls into question the logic of Brodie's argument that "the missiles I was marching against are using up the money they need for a prison to put me in." Her interest in Brodie and his play derived not from her own political convictions or a support of Brodie's but from a personal sense of

responsibility towards him. In yet another variation on the unifying theme of "the real thing" she tells Henry that the real Brodie, for her, is not the figure before them, nor is it the political activist of the Brodie figure in the television play for which she enlisted Henry's assistance. The real Brodie was "helpless, like a three-legged calf, nervous as anything. A boy on the train. Chatting me up. Nice....He didn't know anything about anything, except 'Rosie of the Royal Infirmary'...He tagged on."(p.80) When they reached the Cenotaph his so-called symbolic act was nothing more than the idea of impressing Annie. After his imprisonment, Annie felt responsible: "What else could I do? He was my recruit."(p.80) Her admission points to further parallels with her involvement with Billy, another boy "acting daft on a train"(p.77). She felt responsible for Brodie as she felt responsible for Billy but she had not been completely honest with Henry about her motives and she had hurt him as a result. As Henry observes, referring to the play he had tried to write for her, "You should have told me. That one I would have known how to write."(p.80) Henry, the intellectual playwright had encountered difficulties in writing about love because its joys are so unliterary - "It is happiness expressed in banality and lust"(p.40) - but he could have approached the subject by examining the involved nature of the emotion. He could have shown how feelings are not subject to exclusively rational analysis. He could, in other words, have written The Real Thing. Annie's behaviour has given further illustration to Henry's insistence, as early as scene two, that "public postures have the configuration of private derangement"(p.33); motivation is an ambiguous, complex area. Max, as Annie's husband, had fervently supported her campaigning for CND but had unintentionally undermined her actions by commenting that part of the motivation lay in the fact that they owned a weekend cottage in Little Barmouth,

near the site housing the American nuclear missiles.(p.32) Perhaps we should have suspected Annie earlier, for didn't Stoppard direct our attention at her campaigning activities on her first appearance? Much was made in scene two of her work on the Justice for Brodie Committee yet at the end of the scene she arranged a meeting with Henry instead and in reply to his question about her intended visit to Brodie in prison had surprised and amused us by saying, "Let him rot"(p.35). The absence from the play of any character whose public/political actions are not questionable is a weakness in the argument because it could suggest cynically that altruistic, unselfish actions are impossible. But in performance no such danger arises because the audience's attention is focused primarily on the surprising new light which Annie's final revelation casts on her relationship with Henry. The mood is one of optimism, not defeatism, and the play ends on a high note of humour and affirmation of Faith. It is perhaps testimony to the strength of Stoppard's handling of the argument otherwise that such a question should concern the audience after they have left the theatre.

Annie's revelation gives rise to a great deal of humour and relief and sets the tone for the end of the play. She has satisfied Brodie's claims on her conscience and this arrogant, loutish young man seems well able to take care of himself. If the audience is concerned at Annie's responsibility in helping to create the Brodie who now boasts an uncompromising social and political attitude, the slapstick humour of what follows suggests that this line of argument does not really apply. Brodie now boasts that he is "a controversial TV author" (p.80) but experience will teach him the truth; Brodie must take responsibility for himself, particularly since he refuses to acknowledge help from others. It is now up to Annie to finish with Brodie and Henry watches with fascination as Annie ceases to behave well in

more ways than one and empties the bowl of dip into Brodie's face. The humour of this action provides welcome comic relief at a crucial moment and encourages the audience to accept the play's resolution in true comic spirit. Like McKendrick in Professional Foul, Brodie has been set up for the treatment he receives at the end. (They even share the same Christian name):

Brodie	:	Listen-I'm still here.
Annie	:	So you are, Bill. Finish your drink, will you?
Brodie	:	Why not? (Brodie finishes his drink and stands up) I can come back for some dip another time.
Annie	:	No time like the present. (Annie picks up the bowl of dip and smashes it into his face.)

(p.81)

Henry springs to his feet but it is clear that Brodie will not do anything. Brodie's parting words to Henry reinforce the idea of Brodie's questionable political motivation - it was Annie's attractiveness which spurred him on. Henry's polite, conventional host's remarks are especially amusing in the circumstances for their conventional nature and their understatement:

Henry	:	Well, it was so interesting to meet you. I'd heard so much about you.
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(p.81)

His discovery that Annie really does not care about Brodie lends an extra poignancy to Henry's and the audience's enjoyment of the comic conclusion. He now understands her interest in the play. Brodie's appearance has reassured him about his relationship with Annie and it has also fulfilled the internal demands of the comedy of ideas which decrees that all lines of enquiry should be satisfactorily pursued. Brodie's continued imprisonment would have upset the balance between comedy and ideas; his release and personal appearance preclude this danger.

What of Max, though? Whatever may be the reality in life - and Stoppard

has demonstrated the distinction between an artist's life and his work - dramatic and comic conventions insist on consistency. No one must suffer unnecessarily. Max was the most vulnerable deserted partner in the break-up of the first marriages and the last we heard of him he was still trying to punish Annie with his perspective on the situation. Max now contributes to the happy ending by announcing that he is in love again. He too has found "the real thing" and wants to talk about his happiness, to assure Henry that there are no hard feelings. As Annie turns out the lights in the apartment and finally admits that she, like Henry, is satisfied with their relationship, Henry listens to Max on the telephone. His own happiness enables him to bear with his impatience for Max to have done and to leave him alone with Annie. Stoppard emphasises the conventional nature of this satisfactory conclusion by inviting the audience's collusion in recognising the device, marking it with humour. Henry's, "Oh, I think you're very wise. To marry one actress is unfortunate, to marry two is simply asking for it,"(p.81) is a theatrical joke which he shares with Annie and the audience. The joke's allusion to The Importance Of Being Earnest is particularly apt in more ways than one: Wilde's play uses comedy as a vehicle for a serious investigation and it too proceeds with a surface narrative in which individuals search for the right partner. Should members of the audience fail to make this connection, the joke is amusing on a simpler level as a continuation of Henry's habit of teasing Max. Such is the case when Max's account of his meeting with his present beloved is filtered through Henry's, "Really? Across a crowded room, eh?" With another joke, Henry draws attention to the convention which demands that Max should be happy at the end of the play:

Henry : (To Annie): 'No hard feelings?' What does he mean? If it wasn't for me, he wouldn't be engaged now. (p.82)

This amusing allusion to his own earlier infidelity to Charlotte and betrayal of Max's friendship leaves the audience with the recognisable type of Stoppardian hero who began the play. There has been a circular progress away from the expectations and assumptions of the first scene and then back towards the same. Stoppard had audaciously started the debate with an example of self-parody which seemed (in scene two) to draw attention to the weaknesses of his style and approach. Now that the 'real' play is over we realise that the playwright has not compromised himself at all. He has maintained his characteristic detached perspective and has not sacrificed his predilection for wit and linguistic humour. What began as self-parody is now seen as bold self-defence. The play-within-the-play has been both criticised and vindicated as the situation in Henry's life now parallels that of the fiction he created in House Of Cards. The Real Thing answers Henry's intentions in writing his play: "It was about self-knowledge through pain." Like the rest of Stoppard's heroes, Henry had to experience his own ideas in action and he, like Professor Anderson in Professional Foul, has learned from the experience. In his impatience to leave the telephone Henry absently switches on the radio and the discussion of love ends with the affirmation in the pop song, "I'm A Believer". Faith in the existence of love is Stoppard's one certainty; much else about the subject, as he has demonstrated, is open to question. There is nothing especially new or profound in this declaration of belief - it is a faith propounded by many a three-minute pop song like those which punctuate the action throughout the play. What The Real Thing does offer is an intelligent and probing discussion on the most personal and complex of emotions. Stoppard questions whether one can write truthfully about love but accepts the challenge. He does so, moreover, without compromising his own predilection for humour and argument over sentiment and he

turns the conventional West End story-telling play into an intelligent comedy of ideas. The Real Thing is unashamedly entertaining. At the same time it invites the audience to look unsentimentally at the nature of the emotion which has interested every generation of artists and audiences - professionally and privately.

Intelligent and thought-provoking comedies about love (or about any other subject for that matter) are not often to be found and it is no inconsiderable achievement for a playwright to enjoy substantial commercial as well as artistic success in the non-subsidised sector of British theatre. Stoppard is one of the few modern dramatists who can attract large audiences - and not only to British theatres. Commercially-minded producers on Broadway, New York, apparently needed to spend little on promoting The Real Thing when it opened there in 1984. Stoppard will have been especially intrigued by the mathematical logic of a report which stated that in a particular week "the show played to 101.2 per cent capacity."<sup>(9)</sup> The original production of The Real Thing played at the Strand Theatre from 16 November 1982 until 16 February 1985 and, like Night And Day before it, underwent three changes of cast. It consolidates the change of direction which took place after Travesties and marks another milestone in the playwright's comedy of ideas. His latest, most naturalistic play is as full of challenges and refracted mirror images as the most theatrical Stoppardian play, Travesties, and proves that Stoppard's comedy of ideas works as effectively when bereft of the more dazzling theatricality with which it is predominantly associated. Stoppard's latest comedy of ideas is indeed the real thing.

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Chorus: Oh, the C.G.\* is not literary,  
 And his handymen are rogues,  
 The C.G.'s about as literary  
 As an Irish kish of brogues.  
 We have paid up all expenses  
 As the good Swiss public knows,  
 But we'll be damned well damned before we  
 pay for  
 Private Carr's swank hose.

\*C.G. = Consul General

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