

THE THEATRE OF TOM STOPPARD

The Spectator as Hero

by

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, at the
University of Cape Town. October 1979.

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Acknowledgment is made to the Human Sciences Research Council
for financial assistance received towards the completion of
this degree.

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INTRODUCTION

In examining the theatre of Tom Stoppard, I have decided to use only plays that have been written to be performed live before an audience. This excludes the radio and television plays and, of course, his only novel. This decision was made because of a desire to concentrate on the theatrical nature of the plays, how they are received by a live theatre audience, as opposed to the impression made on a reader who has only a text before him. The whole emphasis in Stoppard's theatre is on the theme of differing angles of perception, of the different ways a spectator can look at an idea and the varied truths that can result. The spectator is here both inside and outside Stoppard's created worlds; the stylist, removed from the world of action, fashions life to mirror art, but is caught in a dilemma when faced by the innumerable reflections he sees or thinks he sees.

Plays need to be studied with the eye of a director, and not simply as literature. As a playwright, Stoppard's conscious aim is to achieve that volatile quality that binds audience and actors together for a few short hours as a work of art is created. I have tried to keep this in mind while looking, in the mind's eye, at the plays.

Because the subject of this study is in his middle years there is the likelihood that, prolific as he is, he will continue to produce plays at his present rate and it is very possible that he will branch out into different areas. This cannot therefore be much more than an interim assessment, not even an interim

judgment. Already it seems that the challenge of naturalism is making itself felt and, in Night and Day, a strong movement can be perceived in that direction.

The most striking feature of Stoppard's theatre is the marriage of form with content, and it is this that provides a common link between the plays. Lesser themes come and go but I feel that the centre of interest lies in how the synthesis between form and content takes place in each individual work. This is the reason for a play-by-play treatment, rather than a broader thematic one. I have tried not to generalise beyond the border of each play, though this does occasionally happen. Generalisations can well be left to those of later years who, with the benefit of hindsight, will be able to draw larger conclusions than I have.

The last play considered here is Night and Day, although recently another two short plays have appeared - Dogg's Hamlet and Cahoot's Macbeth.

CHAPTER ONE

Some of Tom Stoppard's main pre-occupations as an artist are stated with considerable clarity, precision and maturity in the first of his plays, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, and, while there is some evidence, as one might expect, of the craftsman trying out his tools and the medium in which he has chosen to work, there is a sureness of conception about the play which makes it particularly fruitful in analysis.

✓ The concern with form, which will be traced throughout Stoppard's plays and his experimental attitude towards different literary styles have not surprisingly led to accusations of eclecticism and thence to frivolity in a theatrical climate that has tended to emphasise content (in this case the 'serious' examination of weighty social issues) rather than the form in which these matters are expressed. That Stoppard does not seek to teach while he entertains means also that he cannot conveniently be squeezed into the classical French mould of the satirist. The tendency of academics is perhaps naturally one of categorisation but this can lead as often as not to the kind of misunderstandings that followed the appearance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead.

The searching and delicate nature of Stoppard's exploration of dramatic form and structure is woven about with ambiguities and parodic inversions, poetic word-play and coarse puns, all grafted with startling robustness to a theatricality which is unrelenting and paramount. It is this seeming contradiction

which it is my task to fathom - a contradiction which is supported and encouraged by much of what Stoppard himself has written or said about his work. That he should write for the theatre, rather than novels or poetry, is put down to:

"Historical accident. After 1956 everybody of my age who wanted to write, wanted to write plays - after Osborne and the rest at the Court, and with Tynan on the 'Observer', and Peter Hall about to take over the RSC." (1)

Although this is a casual remark, it pinpoints the prolific activity amongst dramatists in the late 50's and the 60's, a minor renaissance in English drama that took place after the production of Osborne's Look Back in Anger at the Royal Court Theatre, a production that acted as stimulus and catalyst to writers, directors and actors. A new and closer relationship began to develop between young playwrights and the directors who mounted their plays which made it imperative that the playwright should have a thorough working knowledge of the mechanics of theatre. Someone of the stature of Harold Pinter rose from the ranks of the acting profession and is now as accomplished a director as he is a playwright - several others have followed suit. Groups of actors under strong directorial guidance began to write their own scripts, thus blurring the distinctions between the different accepted roles. Joan Littlewood's production of Oh What a Lovely War is a case in point, in which she "gave writing credits to a few hundred people, to indicate that nobody wrote it." (2)

Writing about English theatre since 1955, Ronald Hayman makes the following points:

"The change is radical, and it is puzzling that playwrights

- (1) 'Ambushes for the Audience', Theatre Quarterly 14, p4.
(2) 'British Theatre since 1955', Hayman, p134.

have not taken more advantage of it. To the extent that the scenic element has become less important and the verbal element more important, the development is in the writer's favour, but in the constant triangular struggle between writer, director and actor, it is the director who has gained most.... Generally, words have become less important, partly because of the widespread loss of faith in language. Artaud's influence has played its part, together with successive waves of anti-literary, anti-cultural, anti-verbal feeling. Songs have encroached further and further into 'legitimate' theatre, while dance, mime, gesture, posture, movement, and improvisation have bulked larger." (1)

This is the prevailing atmosphere into which "historical accident" placed Stoppard, and his response is characteristic. Consciously "verbal" as a playwright, his humour is frequently based on word-play and his sources are relentlessly literary, yet he focusses his attention on the medium of his choice, and continues to explore and exploit the possibilities provided by dramatic form in everything he has written. This has included an interest in the purely theatrical, non-verbal aspect of the art, an aspect which is so important for Stoppard that it cannot be overstressed. The student of his plays, therefore, must not fall into the trap of considering them simply as literature to be analysed as one would, say, a novel, but must constantly seek to discover how the given verbal content intermeshes with the often ungiven non-verbal content. As one can only come to an understanding of Chehovian theatre by studying the Stanislavskian method of producing it, and the working relationship between the two men, so one must see Stoppard on the stage, working with particular companies and particular directors, as well as in his study writing.

"I realised quite a long time ago that I was in it because of the theatre rather than because of the literature. I like theatre, I like showbiz, and that's what I'm true to.

(1) 'British Theatre since 1955', Hayman, p134.

I really think of the theatre as valuable, and I just hope very much that it'll remain like that as an institution. I think it's vital that the theatre is run by people who like showbiz." (1)

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead is an overtly theatrical play both in form and content. Taking from Hamlet the two shadowy, slightly incongruous attendant lords at the court in Elsinore, Stoppard magnifies two bit parts into major roles and then lets the two characters play a waiting game very reminiscent of Waiting for Godot, while the growing realisation that they may not be able to step out of the roles predestined for them by the author evokes the memory of Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author. The idea is ingenious enough, and on this there is general agreement; however, the execution of the idea, it has been alleged, is "derivative, and familiar, even prosaic." (2) Brustein, in the strongest attack on the play, terms it "a theatrical parasite.. - Shakespeare provides the characters, Pirandello the technique and Beckett the tone with which the Stoppard play proceeds." (3) He concludes by alleging that Stoppard "is achieving his success by offering a form of Beckett without tears. Waiting for Godot is the creation of a poet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead the product of a university wit." (4)

The allegation that the play is derivative seems a particularly misguided accusation. The intention is obviously to make familiar things new by a series of juxtapositions, so

- (1) 'Profile 9', Hayman, The New Review Dec. 1974 p18.
- (2) 'Waiting for Hamlet', Brustein, Plays & Players, Jan 68 p51
- (3) 'Waiting for Hamlet', Brustein, Plays & Players, Jan 68 p51
- (4) 'Waiting for Hamlet', Brustein, Plays & Players, Jan 68 p52

a condemnation of the use of the familiar shows an unclear understanding of what is being attempted in the play. Stoppard employs Hamlet as the kind of modern myth easily accessible to his audience in much the same way as the Greek dramatists used the myths surrounding the gods as a basis for their plots. The degree of comparable accessibility can be questioned, but it can be argued very convincingly that Shakespeare's works have assumed mythic proportions in the English-speaking culture. As a consequence, the action of Hamlet which is discovered to be continuing in the wings, or immediately off-stage, is seen not simply as a play which is well-known, but as a recognisable portion of life, so entwined has the idea of Hamlet become in the individual consciousness. The on-stage action receives an added stature in return, and the known Shakespearean fondness for the play-life metaphor begins to have relevance for the play. "All your life you live so close to the truth, it becomes a permanent blur in the corner of your eye, and when something nudges it into outline it is like being ambushed by a grotesque." (1) The nature of truth is not easily discernible and can produce surprises and P.C. Du.P. in a recent address to a postgraduate group on the role of the disorientation. *assist read the common but unhelpless important point that the idea of the other is to see beyond the reality to the heart or soul of the matter - to explore the "it" or common but unhelpful conception of himself and* Shakespeare does more than simply provide the characters *word* for the play, he also provides a representation of the world as a place where heroism and nobility are elevated to supreme heights, where moral values are ceaselessly debated, where inaction leads to action. It is a world that the absurdist tradition cannot come to terms with, where the mock-heroic

(1) 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead' p28

is a stance more easily grasped. The inversion by which the shadowy and ill-defined wings of Hamlet become the brightly lit stage of action reflects adversely on any attempts at heroism. Even "Hamlet becomes a slick conniver who drifts in and out of the action, adding to the general confusion." (1) One of the last views we get of him is "Beneath the re-tilted umbrella, reclining in a deckchair, wrapped in a rug, reading a book, possibly smoking." (2) With Hamlet's stature thus diminished, the mock-heroic eponymous characters assume an integrity of their own and their plight attracts sympathy.

It is the sympathy generated for two little men who find themselves out of depth in a big world. They can get the measure neither of it nor their position in it. The question of their future is further complicated by their inability to assess the values by which this world is run, and the most immediately productive action that springs to mind during this enforced wait is the playing of games, not simply to pass the time, but to try to come to grips with their situation. In the context of the play, therefore, acting is seen as a possible means of discovery. What starts as a pure game with no intentional aim at the beginning of the play - the contest of questions - becomes later an enactment of question and answer where the answer is positively sought and no longer penalised as a mere statement.

Already one can begin to see how Stoppard uses well-known

- (1) 'Views from a Revolving Door: Tom Stoppard's Canon to Date' Queen's Quarterly Vol 58, 1971, p436
- (2) 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead' p80

elements, not in a spirit of plagiarism or derivation, but to make statements of his own. That he uses a Pirandellian technique in order to extend it and make it more useful is also not recognised by Brustein. Pirandello's six characters try to get back into their defined universe in order to play out their assigned roles. Stoppard's struggle to convince themselves that chance is still a part of their lives and that Fate is not inexorable. It is the illusion of freedom that interests Stoppard and it is the desperate though comic struggle of his characters to maintain this illusion that gives them their humanity. It is the combination of this kind of illusion with the illusion of the theatre that gives Stoppard his distinctive voice. Seemingly, in theatre, there is an escape from logic into freedom, but in fact the formal laws that govern it are no less strict or immutable. This underlines the parody in Guildenstern's injunction to Rosencrantz to tie up the letter meant for the king of England, opened by him while playing that role: "They won't notice the broken seal, assuming you were in character." (1)

The debt owed by Stoppard to Beckett is immediately apparent, and is freely owned. There is another strong influence in T.S.Eliot's The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock, and the reference is helpful enough to quote in full:

"No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;

(1) 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead' p80

At times, indeed, almost ridiculous -
Almost, at times, the Fool." (1)

Here, if anywhere, one finds a key to the tone of the play, and character notes for the main protagonists - Stoppard has emphasised his dual allegiance: "There are certain things written in English which make me feel as a diabetic must feel when the insulin goes in. Prufrock and Beckett are the twin syringes of my diet, my arterial system." (2)

In Beckett's writing it is the reductive quality (almost a technique) that attracts Stoppard - he himself uses it frequently.

"It's only too obvious that there's a sort of Godotesque element in Rosencrantz. I'm an enormous admirer of Beckett, but if I have to look at my own stuff objectively, I'd say that the novels show as much as the plays, because there's a Beckett joke which is the funniest joke in the world to me. It appears in various forms but it consists of confident statement followed by immediate refutation by the same voice. It's a constant process of elaborate structure and sudden - and total - dismantlement." (3)

There are enough parallels between the play and Waiting for Godot to make it worthwhile to examine the similarities and to discover whether or not Stoppard loses stature as a result. The two characters in each play find themselves in a place of no particular description, a sort of no-man's land. They are not sure whence they have come, or at least how they got there, and they are unsure of the reason for staying but don't seem able to leave. The relationship between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is much the same as that between Estragon and Vladimir. Guildenstern is of a serious mind and is given to pondering his predicament in philosophical terms. When, at

- (1) 'The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot' 1969, p16
- (2) 'Profile 9', Hayman, The New Review, Dec 1974, p18
- (3) 'Profile 9', Hayman, The New Review, Dec 1974, p19

the beginning of the play, the law of averages seems in abeyance, he is "well alive to the oddity of it. He is not worried about the money, but he is worried by the implications; aware but not going to panic about it." Rosencrantz has a more childlike disposition, more easily hurt, more likely to panic but quicker to recover. In the same situation "he betrays no surprise at all - he feels none. However, he is nice enough to feel a little embarrassed at taking so much money off his friend." (1) Vladimir worries over the philosophical and theological problem presented at the crucifixion - "One of the thieves was saved. (Pause) It's a reasonable percentage." (2) Estragon's feet hurt him because of his boots, and this fact fills his entire world. The difference between their concerns is given symbolic weight when Estragon admits: "He has stinking breath and I have stinking feet." (3) Rosencrantz and Estragon are of the type to be made foolish by having their trousers fall down, a typically music-hall, vaudeville technique that creates laughter out of humiliation. And, when their companions become especially distraught, Guildenstern and Vladimir are the ones to dispense comforting words: "Don't cry...it's all right...there...there, I'll see we're all right." (4) "There...there...Didi is there...don't be afraid." (5) These are some of the more immediate correspondences in situation and character. The use to which the differentiation between each character is put is also very similar:

"So, for example, the lack of imagination of one partner is often the source of a good joke for he is capable of

- (1) 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead' p1
- (2) 'Waiting for Godot', Beckett, Faber 1972 edition, p11
- (3) 'Waiting for Godot', p46
- (4) 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead' p75
- (5) 'Waiting for Godot', p70

producing an amusing anti-climax by suddenly reducing a serious matter to a simple level. But this tendency is also a source of the increasing tension of the plays, for once the unimaginative partner does grasp the significance of the situation he characteristically reduces it to a simple but physical expression. So the plays can move from an abstraction on to a concrete and hence more intense evocation of the human condition." (1)

This is typified in the following exchange, where Guildenstern's remark is a comment also on the type of literary borrowing that has been discussed so far, indicating how aware Stoppard is of his method - a notable instance of content mirroring form.

GUIL (turning on him furiously): 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.
ROS: I can't think of anything original. I'm only good in support. (2)

There are a number of similarities, too, in the two authors' use of language in that they both employ repetition, pauses and stichomythia. There is more conscious poetry in Beckett, though Stoppard cannot be called prosaic in comparison. Lines like "He was just a hat and a cloak levitating in the grey plume of his own breath" (3) stand out, while the description of the atmosphere pervading autumn, with its allusions to both Eliot and Waiting for Godot, has an elegiac richness that is most effective.

"Autumnal - nothing to do with leaves. It is to do with a certain brownness at the edges of the day...Brown is creeping up on us, take my word for it... Russets and tangerine shades of old gold flushing the very outside edge of the senses...deep shining ochres, burnt umber and parchments of baked earth - reflecting on itself and through itself, filtering the light. At such times, perhaps, coincidentally, the leaves might fall, somewhere, by repute. Yesterday was

- (1) 'Stoppard's Godot', Callen, New Theatre Magazine Winter '69 p27. See this article for a full treatment of similarities
- (2) 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead', p75
- (3) Ibid. p28

blue, like smoke." (1)

There is a concern with light in this passage which is picked up elsewhere in the play and this is where Stoppard's emphases begin to emerge. Light comes from an external source and brings with it the possibility of understanding because of what it uncovers. The points of the compass impose a system of order (rather arbitrarily) to give a meaning to direction, and physical direction is an obvious metaphor for metaphysical and spiritual direction. Comic play is made of the fact that the two cannot place themselves without the position of the sun to help them. When they finally are able to, there are still objections to be raised as to the validity of the deduction. Two references show the life-giving quality that illumination could bring: "Fear! The crack that might flood your brain with light!" (2) and, while the Player discourses on death and his talent for portraying it, one of his motivations is that "occasionally, from out of this matter, there escapes a thin beam of light that, seen at the right angle, can crack the shell of mortality." (3)

The final scene of the play takes place against gathering gloom as the light fades. The two characters attribute this to the setting of the sun, but there is also a theatrical metaphor at work. The light disappears and they disappear into it; their end heralds the end of the play. No curtain falls dramatically, as one would expect from a play so theatrical in its essence - only the absence of light brings Hamlet to an inconsequential ending. The Player's romantic

(1) Ibid. p68

(2) Ibid. p10

(3) Ibid. p60

explanation and demonstration of death is superseded by the sleight of hand of theirs. If Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have achieved anything, it is the recognition that the time for their exit has come.

The motif of light that runs through the play points to what could be called a more optimistic tone than that usually associated with the absurdists with whom Stoppard has been bracketed. Perhaps this is a strange claim for a play whose title presupposes an ending in death, but the variety and richness of life that Stoppard's metaphor and style evoke does lead to this conclusion. Confusion is a constant factor but the result is never despair - rather an obsession with how the relativity of truth can be bounded by what seems to be a formal universe, a theme that will be traced through the plays. The creed that achieves prominence, however, is that of style, the thread running through most of the plays and present in Stoppard's only novel:

"I look around me and I recoil from such disorder. We live amidst absurdity, so close to it that it escapes our notice. But if the sky were turned into a great mirror and we caught ourselves in it unawares, we should not be able to look each other in the face.... Since we cannot hope for order let us withdraw with style from the chaos." (1)

Stoppard is not an existentialist and disclaims any allegiance: "I didn't know what the word 'existential' meant until it was applied to Rosencrantz. And even now existentialism is not a philosophy I find either attractive or plausible." (2) A comparison with Beckett shows this to be true. As has been pointed out by Callen (3), the emphasis on some external

(1) 'Lord Malquist and Mr Moon', p21

(2) 'Ambushes for the Audience', Theatre Quarterly 14, 1974 p6

(3) Callen, op. cit. p29

authorial hand whose control is ultimate, is central to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, while Beckett places the responsibility for man's actions squarely on his shoulders.

To categorise Stoppard as an absurdist, therefore, is misleading. He has taken the concept far enough along his own lines to be more of a post-absurdist, accepting part of the vision but expanding it and displaying other preoccupations and interests. Where other 'modern' playwrights have been concerned with the theatre as a medium in which to express their views of society Stoppard has, at his best, eschewed propagandising as inimical to art, siding with stylists (Orton, Pinter and Simon Gray) rather than with the propagandists (Osborne, Wesker, Bond and Griffiths). Although Beckett is in the former rather than the latter camp, there is a sense in which his pieces for theatre lack the essence of theatricality. The bleakness of his vision, for all the attempts at vaudeville colour and humour, is inclined to translate into a bleakness of viewing for the audience, and it is sometimes more rewarding to read his plays than to see them.

To describe Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead as "Beckett without tears" is to miss the point and to reduce the play to fewer elements than it has: "its strength lies precisely in the skill with which he has blended humour with metaphysical enquiry, the success with which he has made the play's theatricality an essential element of its thematic concern." (1)

(1) 'Tom Stoppard', Bigsby, p16.

A part of this theatricality is stated in the first line that Guildenstern speaks: "There is an art to the building up of suspense." (1) It is a tribute to Stoppard's skill as a playwright that he builds and maintains suspense while using a well-known plot and stating the denouement in the title; an achievement that, in analysis, clarifies the notion of theatrical form that has been alluded to. Guildenstern's line serves two functions: in the world of the play it refers to the improbability of the defeat of the law of probability while practical evidence confounds his statement, and it tells the audience clearly that they are in a theatre watching a play and that he, the character Guildenstern, is aware of the fact. No attempt is made to create the illusion of a fourth wall. This kind of alienation effect is employed throughout the play to reinforce the idea and keep it before the audience.

ROS (at footlights): 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...

GUIL: See anyone?

ROS: No. You?

GUIL: No. (At footlights.) What a fine persecution - to be kept intrigued without ever quite being enlightened... (2)

Here there are a number of different elements at work based on the reversal of roles. The audience for a moment wonders whether the action has stepped across the invisible wall of common consent that keeps them comfortable in their seats. The spectators become the spectated, which encourages a sympathy for the actors/characters having to play on in faith, and aids an understanding of the metaphysical conceit.

(1) 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead' p7

(2) Ibid. p30

The recognition by Rosencrantz of the "appalling" nature of being a spectatot has the same sort of duality, and he gains additional support by a sly allusion to the kind of modern drama in which nothing 'happens' and no new character appears - perhaps a reference to the non-appearance of Godot. The inter-play with the audience continues when Guildenstern asserts that he cannot see anyone across the footlights, and the roles are back to normal; but the "persecution" he describes now has a fuller meaning for the audience. Theatrical convention is parodied and re-instated in a constant flow, giving the audience at once an informed objectivity and an involved awareness.

When the two characters are next given a chance to ponder their position, Guildenstern is loath to take any action that might disturb the normal chain of events, still sure that such a possibility is open to him, but unsure enough not to want to put this proposition to the test. His hesitation is understandable: "Because if we happened, just happened to discover, or even suspect, that our spontaneity was part of their order, we'd know that we were lost." (1) Rosencrantz characteristically misunderstands this fear and initiates another exchange with the audience:

"(A good pause. ROS leaps up and bellows at the audience.)

ROS: Fire!

(GUIL jumps up.)

GUIL: Where?

ROS: It's all right - I'm demonstrating the misuse of free speech. To prove that it exists. (He regards the audience, that is the direction, with contempt - and other directions, then front again.) Not a move. They should burn to death in their shoes." (2)

(1) Ibid. p42

(2) Ibid. p43

This puts added strains on Guildenstern's supposition as well as stating the hermetically sealed nature of the play - there are spectators on all sides. The audience know instinctively because of this, that they should not, indeed must not respond, and understand that they are as unable to make a truly spontaneous move as the characters in the play, producing in turn further sympathy for and involvement in the action.

The same kind of ambiguity occurs in a scene with the players in which Alfred is the payment offered for a lost bet. The sexual innuendo is strong, almost electric when Guildenstern, looking around at the audience, says:

"You and I, Alfred - we could create a dramatic precedent here.
(Alfred, who has been near to tears, starts to sniffle.)
Come, come, Alfred, this is no way to fill the theatres of Europe." (1)

This use of the alienation technique feeds the conflicting emotions of the audience. There is both intrigue at the possibility that the convention might be broken and discomfort at the thought; both a wish that the world of the play be overreached and a knowledge that it will not. By the same method, therefore, but in a variety of ways, Stoppard opens the door of freedom only to slam it shut, for the spectators as well as for the spectated.

The introduction of the players into the action achieves another duality for the audience. There is firstly the use of the effect to create the idea of disjunctive reality - the illusion of spectators watching an action becomes complicated and bewildering when those in the action in turn become

(1) Ibid. p23

spectators. The spectating role of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is brought to the fore and the passivity of their function is emphasised, as is the more disturbing idea of mirrored images. Naturally this leads to the questions: what is the true image, and then is there a true image, or is the process circular and self-perpetuating? - questions that are particularly pertinent to the two central characters' dilemma. Secondly, and producing a contrasting effect, is the use of the players to state the more traditional face of theatre, "the blood, love and rhetoric school." (1) In their motley, they are curiously familiar figured, whose position in society is set, and whose right to entertain is accepted. The Player makes several statements which define this position in an unambiguous way.

Their presence increases the hope the two main characters entertain that there is a possible escape for them because now the audience sees a troupe who are really limited by the roles they play in a confined repertoire. Next to them, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seem to be outside any prescribed action and therefore comparatively free to decide their own fate. In the duality and thus tension that has been set up (between disjunction and reality), the familiar is more immediately grasped by the audience, putting a degree of emphasis on the role and pronouncements of the Player that has been largely ignored by critics.

The objectivity and controlled vision that the Player

(1) Ibid. p23

introduces adds to his position of authority. He is at home in the court at Elsinore, moving through the intrigues skillfully, explaining patiently to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern how to survive. He is clear about his own function and states it without intellectual qualms: "We're actors - we're the opposite of people!" (1) and "We pledged our identities, secure in the conventions of our trade; that someone would be watching." (2) He willingly accepts the strictures placed on him by form in return for the security it offers, implying that although "Uncertainty is the normal state" (3) it is easier to live in this state peacefully than constantly to fight and question. He and his players only exist for themselves when they are watched, while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern desperately seek to prove the contrary - that they are not encapsulated by the form of the play (and therefore are not watched) and that spontaneity, chance and freedom of action are a possibility.

The Player's advice to them in their predicament is: "Relax. Respond. That's what people do. You can't go through life questioning your situation at every turn." (4) This creed of acceptance and resignation would lead Rosencrantz and Guildenstern straight back into Hamlet and death; while they continue to question and debate there is hope for that moment, as questioning indicates some sort of struggle and struggle affirms the presence of life. The whole notion of questioning and argument is central not only to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

- (1) Ibid. p45
- (2) Ibid. p46
- (3) Ibid. p47
- (4) Ibid. p47

Are Dead, but to most of Stoppard's plays, as might be expected from a playwright interested in the theatre of ideas.

("What I try to do, is to end up by contriving the perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce or perhaps even high comedy." (1)) A dialectic is set up which produces tension, but there can be no resolution of this tension if it is obvious that there are no answers or if the questions are asked merely for their own sake. Indeed, the assumption that there is an answer somewhere is vital even though the journey towards it seems impossibly tangential. It is not a characteristic of Stoppard's theatre to ask only rhetorical questions, and never to assume a possible solution.

That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will not accept the answers proffered by the Player is understandable from a human point of view because everything he says leads them nearer to destruction. As the articulate observer somehow removed from the danger of implication in the tragic plot (he has no ending in Hamlet, and thus no ending at all) his omniscience and his ability to transcend natural laws by magical and theatrical means (for example, the impossible emergence of the tragedians out of the barrels in Act 3), the Player represents the position and preoccupations of the artist, and becomes the mouthpiece for authorial comment on art:

"PLAYER: ... There's a design at work in all art - surely you know that? Events must play themselves out to aesthetic, moral and logical conclusion.

GUIL: And what's that, in this case?

PLAYER: It never varies - we aim at the point where everyone who is marked for death dies.

GUIL: Marked?

PLAYER: Between "just desserts" and "tragic irony" we are given quite a lot of scope for our particular talent. Genrally speaking, things have gone about as far as they can possibly go when things have got about as bad as they reasonably get. (He switches on a smile.)

GUIL: Who decides?

PLAYER: (switching off his smile) Decides? It is written. We're tragedians, you see. We follow directions - there is no choice involved. The bad end unhappily, the good unluckily. That is what tragedy means." (1)

These pronouncements are followed by an enactment of a mime of the rest of the action in Hamlet ending in the death of the Spies who wear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's garments. The implications of imminent death are heavily underlined by a discussion on the differing treatments of death found on the stage and in real life. Guildenstern's understanding of death is bounded by the prescience of his own "exit, unobtrusive and unannounced, a disappearance gathering weight as it goes on, until, finally, it is heavy with death." (2) The Player's understanding, on the other hand, revolves around the melodramatic precepts and onstage reality of the "blood and rhetoric school".

Stoppard has deliberately created an opposition between the Player and the tragedians, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in order to draw attention to certain theories about art and the theatre, and the differences detailed present the audience with two points of view that resolve themselves into attitudes about form in the theatre. The one point of view is that design and style provide an aesthetic framework from which moral conclusion can be drawn; the other point of view

(1) 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead' p57

(2) Ibid. p62

fights against the idea of design as restrictive and limiting, as impinging on freedom of expression. These two contrary and opposing standpoints can be seen as metaphors for the traditional and conventional theatre compared with the modern and determinedly unconventional theatre. The old school accepts its' forms gracefully and works within them, perfecting and refining; the new argues against the restraint of form and overturns convention seeking to avoid the creation of new conventions, but never quite succeeding.

When, in the closing moments of the play, Guildenstern grabs a dagger and stabs the Player, he is making one last attempt to escape the confinement decreed for him within the framework of Hamlet, by what he sees as an unpredictable act. This comes seconds after the realization that the boat bearing them to England is not a safe haven away from the action but is, in fact, an illusion of freedom and movement "contained within a larger one that carries us along as inexorably as the wind and current..." (1) As things close in on him, the destruction of a figure who represents everything that is leading him to death is also an attempt to destroy the sort of theatrical illusion that surrounds enacted deaths. In the greatest irony of the play, the Player simply utilizes Guildenstern's desperate move as a further display of his talents. His triumph represents the triumph of artifice and design.

(1) Ibid. p89

CHAPTER TWO

The Real Inspector Hound and After Magritte are problem-solving plays for both Stoppard and for the audience. For Stoppard they were specifically written as short, nuts-and-bolts plays and were "an attempt to bring off a sort of comic coup in pure mechanistic terms." (1) The challenge in both cases is to find a logical solution for an improbable event or image; the body on stage at the beginning of The Real Inspector Hound and the opening tableau of After Magritte. The jig-saw has to be pieced together until the one final section gives meaning to the whole - this leads to the conclusion that there is an overall pattern or scheme that is discovered to be intact however chaotic or misleading the original spectacle might be. The two plays share this common ground, as they share in the parody of the detective thriller genre, and the theme of spectatorship or the ways of seeing.

In The Real Inspector Hound Stoppard makes overt use of the detective thriller as the known base on which to build his play, repeating what he had done with Hamlet in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead but granting himself more freedom to manoeuvre by writing the blueprint 'whodunnit' to his own specifications. The audience has certain assumptions when watching a play of this genre, and these Stoppard pushes to ludicrous extents without overstepping the mark and resorting to fantasy. The main assumption is that the audience will find out who murdered the man lying on the floor in front of

(1) 'Ambushes for the Audience', op. cit. p8

the sofa, even though for a good deal of the play we do not know who the man is. There is the assumption that, in the style of Agatha Christie, the mystery must have a logical solution - although red herrings are permissible and expected - and that there are likely to be clues along the way. Stoppard parodies the concern with narrative in the genre in a number of passages in which overabundant information is fed to the audience:

"MRS DRUDGE (into the phone): Hello, the drawing-room of Lady Muldoon's country residence one morning in early spring?...Hello! - the draw - Who? Who did you wish to speak to? I'm afraid there is no one of that name here, this is all very mysterious and I'm sure it's leading up to something, I hope nothing is amiss for we, that is Lady Muldoon and her houseguests, are here cut off from the world, including Magnus, the wheelchair-ridden half-brother of her ladyship's husband Lord Albert Muldoon who ten years ago went out for a walk on the cliffs and was never seen again - and all alone, for they had no children." (1)

The run-on style of the language, breathlessly under-punctuated, comments not only on the overriding preoccupation with narrative, but also, in a theatrical sense, parodies the kind of bad amateur dramatics found in village halls and suburban theatres. The radio is switched on and just happens to pick up news of the madman approaching Muldoon Manor, the telephone doesn't ring when it is meant to, and the set has a pair of ubiquitous french windows.

The audience is asked not only to watch this play, but to watch others watching and commenting on it. These two spectators, in the shape of the critics Moon and Birdboot, provide material for the parody of theatre critics and their criticism, and reflect the multiplication of mirror images which is a

(1) 'The Real Inspector Hound', pl5

comment on the nature of reality. When the audience enter the auditorium they "appear to be confronted by their own reflection in a huge mirror." (1) Moon and Birdboot are not simply figures of critical fun distanced from the audience but are, more uncomfortable, part of the audience's reflection and thus the representatives of the audience. Their subsequent involvement in the action with its fatal conclusion condemns not only the critics for their wordy bombast but warns (in Stoppard's own words) against "the dangers of wish-fulfilment". (2) It is a danger from which he wants to protect the audience as well - as spectators, if they become involved in the action they lose their objectivity. In this way Stoppard delivers his critique on the detective thriller, and on the melodrama and escapism on which it feeds. This is a new kind of alienation technique ensuring that the audience do not forget the structure of the artifice into which they have sent the two representative critics - the structure is so powerful that it lures the participants to their death. There is an obvious parallel between this theme, and that of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, with the difference that here the choice to participate or not is open. Whereas in the earlier play the two characters are caught within a play from which they cannot escape, in The Real Inspector Hound, the critics actually climb into a play from which they should have maintained more objective a distance, as spectators as well as in their professional role as critics.

It is important to put the stress on overall structural

(1) Ibid. p9

(2) 'Ambushes for the Audience' op.cit. p8

intention, otherwise the use of theatre critics as protagonists could overshadow this emphasis. Stoppard has claimed that the "one thing that The Real Inspector Hound isn't about, as far as I'm concerned, is theatre critics." (1) The reason he gives for his choice is simply "that it would be a lot easier to do it with critics, because you've got something known and defined to parody." (1) Seen this way about, the play does have a serious centre although this is well disguised by its comic exterior.

However, despite Stoppard's disclaimer, the use of theatre critics as a source of parody is characteristic for a playwright so concerned with the function and mechanics of the artistic process. Those who accept the role of spectator accept with it responsibilities to that which is viewed, though inevitably these responsibilities are taken either too seriously or not seriously enough. A fine balance is required, and a sense of order and design ought always to be forward in the critic's mind, as he should discern before him the sense of order and design in the work he views. Stoppard simply plays with the possibilities and consequences of blindness in this regard. "He has created a real situation, and few will doubt his ability to resolve it with a startling denouement" says Birdboot. "Certainly that is what it lacks, but it has a beginning, a middle and I have no doubt it will prove to have an end" (2), little realizing how ironic this inadequate grasp of structure will be for him. A great deal of the parody surrounding the critics concentrates on their use of

(1) 'Ambushes for the Audience', op.cit. p8

(2) 'The Real Inspector Hound', p35

cliché language and tired critical jargon - they are the architects of their own imprisonment within the confines of a hackneyed world. This is reinforced by the spent nature of the detective thriller which becomes their other captor.

The critic of Stoppard's theatre can find himself staring uncomfortably at his own reflection in this play, a salutary lesson that any artist might rejoice at delivering successfully. Moon, the more floridly pretentious of the two gives a thumb-nail sketch of the play that captures the earnest pronouncements and hesitations that beset bad criticism:

"MOON: If we examine this more closely, and I think close examination is the least tribute that this play deserves, I think we will find that within the austere framework of what is seen to be on one level a country-house week-end, and what a useful symbol that is, the author has given us - yes, I will go so far - he has given us the human condition -..... Faced as we are with such ubiquitous obliquity, it is hard, it is hard indeed, and therefore I will not attempt, to refrain from invoking the names of Kafka, Sartre, Shakespeare, St. Paul, Beckett, Birkett, Pinerio, Pirandello, Dante and Dorothy L. Sayers." (1)

This wide-ranging list must surely be comment by Stoppard in the light of the reception of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, where source-calling seemed to be a favourite critical pastime. At the risk of falling into the same trap by invoking the name of Nabokov, his comments on parody show a similar approach to Stoppard's.

"While I keep everything on the very brink of parody, there must be, on the other hand, an abyss of seriousness and I must make my way along this narrow ridge between my own truth and the caricature of it." (2)

There are other similarities between the two authors that

(1) Ibid. p35

(2) 'Nabokov since Lolita', Willa Petchek, 'Observer' Magazine, 30th May 1976, p17.

are of interest, such as English not being their native tongue, the concern with linguistics, with style and with the differing perceptions of reality. In Nabokov's novel Pale Fire, for instance, the problem of spectatorship is addressed by presenting an entire world seen through the eyes of a deranged critic, where the different images of reality are so subtly arranged that no reality is certain and it seems that no critical comment can be made without a contradicting angle presenting itself. Stoppard's affinity with Nabokov has led him to adapt for film another of the novels, Despair, in which the main character is mistakenly convinced that he has found (in a man completely unlike himself) his exact double or mirror image. In The Real Inspector Hound Stoppard emphasizes the "dangers of wish-fulfilment" by using the same idea in a more generalized way so that Birdboot becomes imprisoned in the identity of Simon Gascoigne for the re-run of the first half of the detective thriller, while Moon becomes another Hound. This loss of identity becomes another "useful symbol" of displacement in reality. Indeed, the very name of Moon, used several times by Stoppard in different works originates in the film Left-Handed Gun, at one point of which "there's a reflection of the moon in a horse-trough. They're all drunk as I remember, and suddenly they shoot the reflection of the moon, the water explodes, and Newman is also shouting the word Moon, which is the name of one of the characters in the film."

(1) The appearance of Simon and Hound in the critics' seats completes the reflection and condemns Moon to imprisonment in the play. The title of the play itself indicates that appearances are not what they seem and that Hound is not the "real"

(1) 'Ambushes for the Audience', p17

Hound. The "real" Hound turns out to have no less than four identities, which are peeled off one by one: Major Magnus, the real Inspector Hound, Albert Muldoon and finally Puckeridge. It is a nice twist that the denouement leaves the critic Puckeridge triumphant while about him lie the corpses of three other critics: Higgs, Birdboot and Moon, giving substance to Moon's original exhortation, "stand-ins of the world stand up!" (1) The best-hidden and most unlikely solution is the one that the audience is left with, parodying the detective thriller for its obliquity but also commenting on the uncertain nature of reality.

If After Magritte is a problem-solving play for Stoppard on a technical level, it also parodies the obsession with solving problems that characterises the detective thriller. The solution is always there, but it can either be ludicrous, or fatal (as in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead and The Real Inspector Hound). The audience is not directly involved as in these two plays but is invoked simply in the role of spectator. The play is primarily about ways of seeing and interpreting: depending on the angle from which something is viewed, a myriad of conclusions can result, each substantially different from the other. Stoppard achieves his point by presenting the audience, and P.C. Holmes (who acts as the audience's representative as the largely passive spectator) with a complex and seemingly surreal picture in the opening scene. The final scene is equally complex and surreal to P.C. Holmes who is in the same uninformed state at the end of the play as he and the audience were at the beginning.

(1) 'The Real Inspector Hound', p11

The audience, however, have discovered the process whereby the first scene was constructed and how logical though extraordinary this process was. The conclusion of the play, by presenting a pictorially logical solution that excludes Holmes from the necessary extra information, puts him back in the original position of the audience, thus producing a circular effect to the action - which could, it seems, start all over again. At no fixed point, Stoppard says, will all the viewpoints converge at the same time to observe the inherent order behind the chaos.

This point is also made in the play by the divergence of opinion over the figure seen by Harris, Thelma and Mother after leaving the Magritte exhibition. Their descriptions all differ radically, and the confusion is deepened by the fourth portrait painted by Inspector Foot, using information reported by yet another witness, to which he adds a distillation of P.C. Holmes' observations. The conflation of these two descriptions into one image parodies the deductive and reasoning powers that are central to the detective thriller genre, and makes of the hapless Inspector a figure of ridicule whose intuitive guesses lead him only into trouble. The final sight the audience have of him, with one bare foot, wearing sunglasses and eating a banana, completes this ridicule.

One would not like to go the way of one enthusiastic critic who, referring to the use of puns in the play, observed: "The name Foot also parodies, on both the thematic and generic levels, the name of the theatre's first great detective, Oedipus." He adds helpfully that "we have, in Foot of the Yard,

a schoolboy pun which nominally implies a 'flat-foot' and a smaller unit of measurement within a larger one." (1) However, the pun is ever-present in Stoppard's work, and is particularly evident in After Magritte. The contradictions and double-vision contained in the use of the pun are neatly expressed in the opening lines of the play. Harris has been blowing on a hot light bulb prior to removing it:

"THELMA: It's electric, dear.
HARRIS: (mildly) I didn't think it was a flaming torch.
THELMA: There's no need to use language. That's what I always say." (2)

Two differing attitudes and view-points sharply juxtaposed produce the spark of humour that characterizes the pun. If this is so, it can be seen that the pun achieves in micro-cosm what the play does on a larger scale. Thelma's injunction about language, apart from the obvious contradiction it contains, indicates that the play will attempt to depict pictorial puns as well as describe pictorial puns verbally, but that the emphasis is always to be on ways of seeing.

The title of the play naturally leads one to the work of the surrealist artist Magritte, and his habit of attaching unlikely and startling labels to his paintings. Hayman describes one of the artist's works entitled The Human Condition :

"which shows a canvas on an artist's easel standing in front of a window. The three legs of the easel, the studded side of the canvas and the clip which holds it in place are painted with meticulous realism, as is the landscape on the canvas and the landscape we see through the window... But why is the painting called The Human Condition? Since we are looking at a painting, the 'real' landscape outside the window is only an image. The landscape on the canvas

- (1) 'An Investigation of Stoppard's Hound and Foot', Brian Crossley, *Modern Drama* Vol 20 March 1977, p81
(2) 'After Magritte', p 11

is an image of an image. But when we look directly at a real landscape, do we ever possess more than an image of it?.... Magritte often used the painting-within-the-painting to make statements about perception which are also, indirectly, statements about the human condition. This is probably one of the reasons he fascinates Stoppard, whose use of the play-within-the play is comparable." (1)

Stoppard must also have been attracted by Magritte's devotion to the visual pun. He achieves in painting what Stoppard frequently achieves in his plays, by placing together two contradictory images, such as "Tubas on fire, tubas stuck to lions and naked women, tubas hanging in the sky - there was one woman with a tuba with a sack over her head as far as I could make out." (2) The kind of interaction that takes place is defined by fellow surrealist Andre Breton: " For me the only real evidence is a result of the spontaneous, extra-lucid and defiant relationship suddenly sensed between two things which common sense would never bring together." (3) The creation of tension and the forging of this sort of relationship is integral to Stoppard's vision of the theatre, as can be seen not only in his plays, but in his statements about the theatre.

The audience, as it watches After Magritte has its attention drawn constantly to the theme of perception, the sense of sight and pictorial images. The visual aspect of the play is its most pronounced quality, and this emphasises for the audience that they are the onlookers for whom the pictures are being painted. This fact, with the added feature of P.C. Holmes as the audience's proxy in the action, makes the idea of spectatorship a prominent one and underlines once

(1) 'Tom Stoppard', Hayman, H.E.B. 1977, p83

(2) 'After Magritte', p37

(3) 'Tom Stoppard', Hayman, p84

again the conscious relationship with the audience which is the common denominator in Stoppard's theatre, with some exceptions.

It is useful to consider Dirty Linen and New-Found-Land in the light of The Real Inspector Hound and After Magritte, as they can be bracketed together as nuts-and-bolts comedies, but a comparison with these plays shows what a relative failure Dirty Linen is, in terms of the theatricality already referred to. It establishes no special relationship with the audience, nor does it make use of particular theatrical conventions, or even parody to any great extent the genre of the sex farce, surely fruitful ground for Stoppard's ironic talent. Instead, the play is a fairly straightforward duplication of a recognisable type, with the slight difference that assumptions about the dumb blonde usually prominent in this kind of play are overturned. Even this is not successfully achieved as Stoppard has admitted: "Dislocation of an audience's assumptions is an important part of what I like to write. It operates in different ways. Even Dirty Linen was in my own mind really a play about presenting a stereotype dumb blonde and dislocating the assumptions about the stereotype - although it's possibly not near enough to the centre of the play's focus to register." (1) The main problem with the play is that the centre of its focus is hard to find, if not non-existent.

The central theme deals with the morals of Members of Parliament and whether or not they are answerable to the public

(1) 'Tom Stoppard', Hayman, pl40

or more particularly to the press as the guardians of public morals, for actions committed in their capacity as private citizens. The answer, formulated and finally dictated as the findings of the Select Committee by Maddie, is that they are not. The press come in for a fair amount of criticism in the play, raising a theme that is close to Stoppard's heart, as can be seen in Night and Day. The theme is not developed beyond the implication that Maddie, the embodiment of good sense, owes her opinions to the experience gained with editors of the leading newspapers.

The play was written to order in that it was to celebrate the naturalization as a British subject of Ed Berman, the American director and initiator of community projects, and was to be part of a season called The American Connection, mounted at the Almost Free Theatre in London, a theatre with which Stoppard has close ties. New-Found-Land had to be inserted to correct the exclusive Britishness of Dirty Linen. The circumstances of the play's genesis explain something of the frivolous, ready-made nature of its structure. It is nevertheless characteristically neat, concentrating largely on the pun, sexual innuendo, and the clever manipulation of props. The best example of the conciseness and economy achieved when a verbal and visual pun are married, comes as Withenshaw wipes the blackboard clean with his underpants and puts them back into his brief case.

FRENCH: What is that?
WITHENSHAW: Pair of briefs.
FRENCH: What are they doing in there?
WITHENSHAW: It's a brief case. (1)

The innuendo present in the long lists of restaurants, pubs and rendezvous is at first skilfully handled, but with the repetition needed to produce the tongue-twisters that are the other source of comedy, the device becomes laboured and top heavy, a virtuosic exercise with no substance.

The lack of direction that one experiences when either watching or reading Dirty Linen is borne out by a comment made by Stoppard: "I had no interest in writing about the House of Commons actually. I wouldn't have written the play at all but for the necessity to fulfil a promise." (1) This is one case in which the technician superseded the artist.

New-Found-Land proves more successful mainly because it is tightly built around the single conception of the travelogue and uses the cliché as a constant weapon. Both of these tactics encourages a critical attitude in the audience, thus establishing a rapport which does not exist between audience and Dirty Linen. The introduction to the play is purely anecdotal and surrounds the old five pound note given Bernard by Lloyd George. Unlike many other Stoppardian characters whose memories are constantly blurred and muddled, the old man relates, in the style of the true raconteur, a story before which the audience can relax into the comfortable role of passive listener - a role they have undoubtedly inherited from Dirty Linen. When Arthur begins his monologue on America, it seems that the same uncritical response is required - this is to be a purely descriptive picture for the delectation of the onlooker. However, the adjectival enthusiasms soon begin

(1) 'Tom Stoppard', Hayman, pl37

to take on a suspiciously extravagant ring, moving from "a multitude of tongues silenced now in the common language of joyful tears" (1) to "Behind us a body plummets to the ground - a famous millionaire, we later discover, now lying broken and hideously smashed among the miniscule fragments of his gold watch and the settling flurry of paper bonds bearing the promises of the Yonkers Silver Mining and Friendly Society." (2)

With the addition of every cliché the audience are awakened to the change required in their response. They now have to acknowledge the parody of the travelogue that is taking place and adjust their attitude accordingly. The gradual revelation of Arthur's partisan feelings is continued with the Stars and Stripes socks, the American cigarettes and the sheriff's badge, all concrete indications of how Americans supposedly "wear their hearts on their sleeves." (3) By giving a junior Home Office official this eulogistic account of America, and preceding it with Bernard's clichéd British view of Americans, Stoppard overturns the prejudices of the audience and makes them re-examine what had been an unthinking role. His achievement is considerably more successful here than in Dirty Linen, even though his comment about stereotypes refers to that play:

It is this thing of stereotypes. I hate 'em and love 'em. I hate the cheapness of cheap television portrayal, where Frenchmen are like Maurice Chevalier and journalists wear trilby hats and drink a lot, but what's fascinating to me is that many Frenchmen are like Maurice Chevalier, and not many journalists go around with rimless glasses saying, 'No thank you. I'll have an orange juice'." (4)

(1) 'New-Found-Land', p60

(2) Ibid. p61

(3) Ibid. p60

(4) 'Tom Stoppard', Hayman, p141

It is in New-Found-Land that a dislocation of the audience's assumptions takes place, indicating that in a piece from which overt theatricality is absent can still achieve a relationship with the audience which is essentially theatrical.

There is a moment in the second part of Dirty Linen which is a good example of the kind of richness Stoppard works for when arranging the use of props. The five pound note, the history of which has been so lovingly reconstructed in New-Found-Land by Bernard, and which is the only thing that gives meaning to his presence in the play, is destroyed when it finds its way into Dirty Linen, where it is mistaken for just another incriminating note. The use of something like the five pound note in more than one way reveals a consideration for the value of an object that makes it multi-dimensional and grants it life of its own. "The effect of elegant economy is something we all respond to. If you can use the same thing in three different ways it's artistically satisfactory." (1) The destruction of the five pound note can also be seen as a subtle metaphor for the fate of a fragile evocation in the presence of the rude unsubtleties of the sex farce, a metaphor certainly not consciously intended by the author, but at work all the same.

Rounding off this clutch of short plays, tightly constructed, is Every Good Boy Deserves Favour, a piece written for actors and orchestra, showing all the signs of vintage Stoppard, and displaying the preoccupations that have been discussed in connection with his other plays. For this reason, but for a

(1) 'Tom Stoppard', Hayman, pl42

few points, I do not wish to discuss it in any detail, as this would entail simply reiterating points already made. The idea of using an orchestra on stage is an unusual one, and the play benefits from this novelty. But as a point in Stoppard's writing career it is chiefly interesting for the fact that social and political issues form the main substance of the content, and that inspiration came from the example and trials of two Soviet dissidents, Fainberg and Bukovsky. By placing the action in a mental hospital, where one of the inmates is truly insane and in imaginary possession of an orchestra, and the other is a political prisoner who is perfectly sane though he holds views about freedom which seem insane to a totalitarian society, Stoppard is able to continue his favourite conceit about points of view.

"The idea that all people locked up in mental hospitals are sane while the people walking about outside are all mad is merely a literary conceit, put about by people who should be locked up. I assure you there's not much in it. Taken as a whole, the sane are out there and the sick are in here." (1)

It all depends from which angle one looks at things. The ironic ending in which both of the men are freed because they do not hold the views of the other makes this point very clearly.

The main point of view that emerges, however, is that of the author, whose objection to the suppression of individual freedom, such as the freedom of expression and of thought, is made quite apparent. The objection is on moral grounds, however, and follows Stoppard's feelings about art being a moral matrix from which to make judgments about

(1) 'Every Good Boy Deserves Favour', p27

the world. One discerns, in his later plays, a growing concern with moral issues. The dispassionate, intellectual examination of art, its role and function, is perhaps moving on to areas of greater application. The play is a good example of the fine balance that can be achieved between the commitment to a moral principle and an ambivalent artistry in the expression of it.

CHAPTER THREE

In considering the plays so far, there has been an emphasis on the sense of structure behind each play, and how this is apprehended by the spectator, how the idea of spectatorship and a point of view is a common thread discernible in different forms in Stoppard's work. This leads on to the question of whether myriad points of view are directed towards any particular end, whether there is a meaning to life which is mirrored in the structure or pattern of a work of art and whether, if there is to be a Final Solution, this can be traced back to a First Cause. It is evident that the detective story holds a fascination for Stoppard, and that mystery in its least exalted form has a symbolic value which points to its deeper forms, so that the idea of a solution takes on significance as well.

In Jumpers, paradoxically, there is a crystallization of issues which makes the play an advance on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead and the nuts-and-bolts detective plays. The sense of disintegration and dislocation is more acute and finds its way both into the characterizations of George Moore and his wife Dotty and into the theatrical fabric of the play. Indeed, the prime theatrical image of the play is that of a human pyramid teetering and finally collapsing because of the removal of one of its number, the perfect pattern disintegrating because of one small but fatal flaw. And whereas the detective mystery demands satisfaction in the form of a solution, in Jumpers the mystery of who killed McFee, the

Professor of Logic, is never solved. When, in the Coda, Archbishop Sam Clegthorpe suffers the same fate, one gets the impression that the next circle will complete itself again without the murderer being discovered. There has been a change of emphasis in the basic principles of the genre which has a parallel in the world of moral philosophy: "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." (1) This turning of tables is exemplified in a small way by Inspector Bones who finds himself accused of compromising Dotty when he should be playing the role of accuser himself. The search for the cause of the murder is as abortive as George's search for a philosophical First Cause.

In a detective thriller there are usually a number of theories surrounding a number of suspects, each equally as plausible as the next. These run concurrently, keeping pace with each other until the final selection of the culprit takes place. In Jumpers Dotty, George, Archie and the secretary are all suspects, each with a different attitude to McFee and thus a different motive for killing him - it all depends on your point of view. The philosophical equivalent of the uncertainties and ambiguities that arise from such a situation is voiced by George in a reference to the world of physics: "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

(1) 'Jumpers', p25

certain propositions, such as that God made the Heaven and the Earth..." (1)

Astutely picking up this idea and developing it, Clive James has produced a cogent argument that centres around different points of view. About Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead he writes that one of its themes is "that Chance, while looking deterministic if seen from far enough away, is random enough from close to." (2) Looking through Newtonian eyes, both views are real while it can "even be assumed that each viewpoint is fixed."

"But physics, to the small extent that I understand it, ceased being Newtonian and started being modern when Einstein found himself obliged to rule out the possibility of a viewpoint at rest. Nobody could now believe that Einstein did this in order to be less precise - he did it in order to be precise over a greater range of events than Newtonian mechanics could accurately account for. Mutatis mutandis, Stoppard abandons fixed viewpoints for something like the same reason. The analogy is worth pursuing because it leads us to consider the possibility that Stoppard's increasingly apparent intention to create a dramatic universe of perpetual transformations might also spring from the impulse to clarify." (3)

This analysis, though at first glance it might seem a little too neat, brilliantly illuminates the problem and provides a solution that Stoppard approves:

"There is no safe point around which everything takes its proper place, so that you see things flat and see how they relate to each other." (4)

Put yet another way, this time more graphically, George tells the story of Wittgenstein, the author of Philosophical Investigations, meeting a friend:

"Tell me, why do people always say it was natural for men to assume that the sun went round the earth rather than that the earth was rotating?' His friend said, 'Well, obviously, because it just looks as if the sun is going round the

(1) 'Jumpers', p75

(2) 'Count Zero Splits the Infinite', James, Encounter Nov 75 p71

(3) Ibid. p71

(4) 'Tom Stoppard', Hayman, pl41

earth.' To which the philosopher replied, 'well, what would it have looked like if it had looked as if the earth was rotating?'" (1)

Stoppard characteristically does some double-folding with this and it appears a few minutes later adorning George's suspicions about the examination of Dotty by Archie:

"GEORGE: Well, everything you do makes it look as if you're ... (Pause)

ARCHIE: Well, what would it have looked like if it had looked as if I were making a dermatographical examination?" (2)

The question of viewpoints, observers and ways of seeing returns one to the problem of how the audience are accounted for in this scheme of things and how the bond between audience and actors is kept intact, for, although the Relativity theory sounds well enough in the context of science and philosophy, in the immediately living context of the theatre it might be seen to produce nothing but confusion. The first instinct of any audience member is to distinguish certain points and "see how they relate to each other" and if this instinct is dislocated, is confusion the aim or does the dislocation lead on to another, more fruitful synthesis? It seems that the latter, in Stoppard's work, is the achieved aim, even though the synthesis must dissolve and then evolve into something new again:

"Critical talk about 'levels of reality' in a play commonly assumes that one of the posited levels is really real. By the same token, it would be reasonable to assume that although everything in a Stoppard play is moving, the play itself is a system at rest. But in Stoppard's universe no entity, not even a work of art, is exempt from travel." (3)

A correlation can be discerned between what James has to say here, in the particular context of Stoppard's writing, and

- (1) 'Jumpers', p75
- (2) 'Jumpers', p78
- (3) James, op. cit. p72

comments made in a more generalized way about the need for constant flux in the theatre, by Peter Brook:

"Life is moving, influences are playing on actor and audience and other plays, other arts, the cinema, television, current events, join in the constant rewriting of history and the amending of the daily truth.... A living theatre that thinks it can stand aloof from anything so trivial as fashion will wilt. In the theatre, every form once born is mortal; every form must be reconceived, and its new conception will bear the marks of all the influences that surround it. In this sense, the theatre is relativity. Yet a great theatre is not a fashion house; perpetual elements do recur and certain fundamental issues underlie all dramatic activity. The deadly trap is to divide the eternal truths from the superficial variations; this is a subtle form of snobbery and it is fatal." (1)

Brook's point is that stasis, preservation or anything that smacks of the museum piece produces only the Deadly Theatre that he warns against. Living theatre is in a constant flux of renewal and transformation, it "is always a self-destructive art, and it is always written on the wind." (2)

Laying the statements of James and Brook side by side in the context of Stoppard's theatre, one sees again how the marriage between form and content has taken place, how the ideas he chooses to express, the method of formulating them and the form in which he expresses them, have been so well integrated.

Jumpers is so structured that the audience's expectations are challenged at every turn. All of the usual labels come unstuck as musical variety act becomes a gymnastic display, modulating into a philosophical lecture interspersed with charades, which gets involved in a detective mystery. A dream-like Coda brings the play to a surrealist close. The audience has to maintain equilibrium throughout these bewildering

(1) 'The Empty Space', Peter Brook, p19

(2) Ibid. p18

changes, and has to cope with the suggestions of relativity - for if the theories behind the play do not manifest themselves practically for the audience, the conclusion can only be that the play is unsuccessful. Although the play seems to be made up of fragments, and to have Dotty's disintegrating mind as a motivating image, the links between the different themes and styles are so strong as to present a whole rather than parts of the whole.

The way the stage is used mirrors the movement of the play in that it opens on an empty space for the introductory scene, changes to the clear divisions of Dotty's bedroom on stage right, George's study on stage left, with the hall separating the two, and then for the coda returns to a kind of no-man's land in the chapel-turned-gymnasium, thus graphically stating the circular nature of the play. The division of study from bedroom indicates that two worlds are in existence, personified by their main occupants, and that in certain ways they are opposed to each other. The domain of supposed rationality in one, supposed irrationality in the other - the distinctions become blurred, as do George's arguments. This opposition also gives the impression of the dialectic which is at the heart of the philosopher's method, though it too falters and crumbles. Links between the two worlds are maintained, sometimes in surprising ways, to show that what happens in one affects the other. Dotty, in a desperate attempt to attract attention and help, yells "Fire!" which looses from the bow the arrow George has at the ready to demonstrate a point in his lecture. Extravagant sounds accompany the meeting between Bones and Dotty, but they are found later to have emanated from

a tape-recording of sound effects for the lecture. Perhaps the most effective use of this technique comes in the midst of George's attempt to bring together into one entity, the God of Creation and the God of Goodness:

"GEORGE: But when we place the existence of God within the discipline of a philosophical inquiry, we find these two independent mysteries: the how and the why of the overwhelming question: -

DOTTY: (off) Is anybody there?

GEORGE: (pause) Perhaps all mystical experience is a form of coincidence. Or vice versa, of course." (1)

These gratuitous displays put Dotty rather madly at the heart of the problem and tend to reinforce the fact that her intuitive female sense has a logic which competes favourably with George's.

George, a professor of moral philosophy, tries for the duration of the play to write a lecture on the subject, 'man-good, bad or indifferent?' which leads him to attempt a proof of the existence of God, and moral absolutes. He "had hoped to set British moral philosophy back forty years, which is roughly when it went off the rails" (2) but he cannot find the language to express his ideas: "Even the most generalized truth begins to look like special pleading as soon as you trap it in language." (3) His is an embattled position in every sense: in the philosophical world he is regarded as a quaint anachronism struggling to prove values that are no longer fashionable, in the university his chief merit is that a number of students are under the impression that he is the G.E. Moore, author of Principia Ethica; in the political world the Radical-Liberal party is dismantling the society he

(1) 'Jumpers', p26

(2) Ibid. p46

(3) Ibid. p46

knows, while his religious convictions are scandalized by the news that not only will the new government pull down all the churches, but that they have already appointed their spokesman on agriculture as Archbishop of Canterbury. In his personal life, his wife is suffering from a mental breakdown which excludes him from her bed, while a suspiciously close relationship has developed between her and Sir Archibald Jumper, under the guise of dermatographical and other examinations. His lecture has been impeded by the riotous victory celebrations of the Rad-Lib party, necessitating an anonymous call to the police, and he ends the play with all his pets, goldfish, hare and tortoise, dead.

George's disarray is symbolic of the siege under which the old world finds itself, a world which held the principle of moral absolutes as almost self-evident. Now the ringmaster is Archie, whose chameleon qualities include the profession of logical positivism, and the ability as a gymnast to jump rapidly in any direction. George is no match for the suave Archie but his dogged adherence to belief makes him an endearing character, the most constant factor in a sea of inconstancies. As such he is especially attractive to the audience who can identify with his need for belief, or a fixed point of view as they see relativity in everything else.

Dotty's distressed state of mind is because of the landing of men on the moon, which has destroyed for her the poetry that is essential to her work as an artiste. It not only does that, but changes her perspectives, challenges all her assumptions and leaves her disoriented: "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." (1) Dotty suffers from a deprivation that Stoppard considers significant: "I felt, that the destruction of moon mythology and moon association in poetry and romance, superstition and everything, would be a sort of minute lobotomy performed on the human race, like a tiny laser making dead some small part of the psyche." (2) Dotty is so strongly identified with the moon that an image of her magnified skin is thrown onto the giant TV screen, to fill it in the same way that the moon surface had done, and her final appearance in the play is made on a crescent moon. She is shattered when, in a reversal of the chivalry displayed on such expeditions in the past, the astronauts Scott and Oates fight for the one place left on their damaged space-ship, and Oates is sent to his death instead of magnanimously sacrificing himself. Dotty's values have been so violated that she finds herself in the same position as Oates, floating forlornly out into space, completely detached from what was his reality and his natural element. Her mind has been raped far more successfully than her body has by Bones.

Stoppard creates with these two figures of George and Dotty a comic apocalyptic vision of a world that has reached a turning point of great moment, and has already already begun to discompose itself, rather like a kaleidoscope, into new unrecognisable patterns. The surrealist Coda gives a view of this world that is mad, funny and optimistic. Archie's opening

(1) 'Jumpers', p75

(2) 'Ambushes for the Audience', op.cit. pl7

statement is made in a pastiche of Joycean and Beckettian language, particularly reminiscent of Luck's speech in Waiting for Godot, combining a kind of linguistic stream of consciousness with faintly discernible logic. In this dream world, it earns great applause as the epitome of rationality. Clegthorpe's martyrdom in the style of Becket results from what is seen as his irrationality. Dotty can sing again in this reversed universe and her rationality extends to the proposition that "two and two make. roughly four". (1) George attempts to point out the inconsistency between the meticulously rational and some of their irrational claims, which are the claims he upholds, but he descends into a muddle. Archie's irrepressible optimism collects the pieces together and asserts that there is always a bright side. "No laughter is sad and many tears are joyful". (2) Beckett's pessimism found in "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams and instant, then it's night once more." (3) is transformed and lightened to "At the graveside the undertaker doffs his top hat and impregnates the prettiest mourner." (4)

In Jumpers one senses that Stoppard is confident enough of his craftsmanship to allow the anarchy in his play freer rein than heretofore. The structure is as carefully fashioned, but within it the main characters are allowed to take on a full dimension, to seem perhaps more human than some of his characters have been. This is the element in the play that is important for the audience, who can use humanity as a touchstone when much else of constancy is denied them. Stoppard realises

(1) 'Jumpers', p86

(2) Ibid. p87

(3) 'Waiting for Godot', Beckett, p89

(4) 'Jumpers', p87

that "Human kind cannot bear very much reality." (1) and he regulates his doses with sensitivity. The audience are cast for the most part as spectators of a hermetic unit, sealed in behind a fourth wall, indicated by the imaginary mirror into which George gives his lecture. At first, however, the audience is treated as such, so that the "ladies and Gentlemen" of the opening line refers to them as well as to the unseen gathering on stage. For a moment, the lecture could impose its form on the audience, but the mirror removes them from that. The objectivity gained adds the impression of watching a debate between the two sides of the stage, though the supposition that there is a winner is dispersed by the end of the play: "The truth to us philosophers, Mr Crouch, is always an interim judgment....Unlike mystery novels, life does not guarantee a denouement; and if it came, how would one know whether to believe it?"(2)

Jumpers is less consciously fragmented than its successor, Travesties, and less eclectic than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, but as a mid-point between the two it seems the right context in which to quote from an article by Robert Martin Adams about what he calls a "literature of modernism":

"Thus Joyce, Eliot and Pound, when they set about creating a literature of modernism, unanimously turned to a texture, if not a structure, of tags, allusions, quotations, mis-quotations, and phrases at second hand. What Eliot's personage calls "fragments shored against my ruin" are for Joyce and Pound the very stuff of history and psychology, the depth and movement of which are only to be measured by matching fragment with fragment. By patching together the rags of fable, folklore and fiction, the writer in this vein may hope to suggest the seamless garment of total history,

(1) 'The Complete Poems and Plays' T.S. Eliot, op cit p271
(2) 'Jumpers', p 81

or some image of it. He readily avoids the appearance of preaching and makes tangible use of the past as something more than the merely picturesque. For visibly second-hand materials inevitable create ironic duplicity because the object is seen simultaneously in two contexts, with a third meaning blossoming out of the distance or difference between them. How that meaning actually comes out matters, perhaps, less than that past and present have conspired in making it. And inherently eclectic age like our own aware of several pasts in almost every present act, self-conscious and thought-bound like Prufrock, could hardly find a more appropriate style, whether in prose or verse." (1)

Or, it might be added, in the theatre.

(1) 'Rags, Garbage, and Fantasy', R. M. Adams, 'The Hudson Review, vol XXIX, no 1, Spring 1976, p60

CHAPTER FOUR

Travesties is a play that makes full use of the fragmentary method, and, in order to come to grips with this, the intention is to concentrate tightly on the points of view of the four main characters, and to analyse the interaction between in specifically theatrical terms.

Any discussion of the central concerns of Travesties inevitably finds itself up against Stoppard's own assertion of the issues at stake. The play "asks whether the words 'revolutionary' and 'artist' are capable of being synonymous, or whether they are mutually exclusive, or something in between." (1) He seems to use the word 'revolutionary' in its strictly political sense, because elsewhere he declares that the "play puts the question in a more extreme form. It asks whether an artist has to justify himself in political terms at all." (2) It is the use of the word 'artist' itself that, of course, raises the questions that are most consistently asked, and are as consistently debated and rebutted. What is the role of art and the artist in society?

Outside the world of the play, Stoppard has firmly expressed his position. "Briefly, art - Auden or Fugard or the entire cauldron - is important because it provides the moral matrix, the moral sensibility, from which we make our judgments about the world." (3) Art therefore sets itself up as a moral yardstick by which society judges itself, and one does not have

(1) 'Ambushes', op. cit. p11

(2) Ibid. p16

(3) Ibid. p 14

to travel very far to see the apt application of Tzara's accusation, to Stoppard - "You've turned literature into a religion..." (1) Given that this is levelled at Joyce, and knowing Stoppard's admiration for Joyce's work, one begins to see where his emphases must lie.

Sensing the possibility of too easy an identification with any one point of view, he has been careful to conceal his commitment both with the device of Carr's erratic and uncertain memory as the enveloping structure, and a determined effort to be fair to every one of the four arguments. It is here, I would suggest, that the very cause for concealment reveals itself.

Carr, as has been pointed out by Bigsby, is "in a real sense a playwright. He 'creates' the drama in which he casts himself as the central character (as, essentially does each individual). He claims the same right to refuse social liability as he believes the true artist must do." (2) As the hedonistic dandy he sees art in an impeccable cravat or an irreproachable buttonhole - its duty is "to beautify existence", (3) and preferably his own at that. Life consists of certain clear-cut immoveables - "feelings of patriotism, duty", "love of freedom", "hatred of tyranny and my sense of oneness with the underdog". (4) In the same way, language is seen to be strictly functional and straight forward: "If there is any point in using language at all, it is that a word is

(1) 'Travesties', p62

(2) 'Stoppard', Bigsby, op cit p28

(3) 'Travesties', p37

(4) Ibid. p38

taken to stand for a particular fact or idea and not for other facts or ideas." (1) It is the attitude of the unquestioning bourgeois, comfortably ensconced amongst beautiful things, and vaguely aware that beauty is preferably to ugliness. Although he is not a complex character, his mental muddle makes him human in a way reminiscent of George Moore, and this creates a centre of warmth for the play which belies the intellectual coldness Stoppard is often accused of.

Joyce, seen balefully through Carr's jaundiced eye, appears as the conventional stage Irishman, a blackguard full of blarney in his encounters with Carr, and a Lady Bracknellian quizzer, half intellectual and half conjuror in his scene with Tzara. Not unnaturally it is the intellect and mind that interest Stoppard, and it seems strange that this aspect should receive short shrift at his hands, leaving Joyce one speech in which to state his case and supposedly demolish his opponent. Recalling Stoppard's statement about being in playwrighting for the theatre rather than for the literature, the following attitude is strange: "A lot of people who've read the play like that scene best as a piece of writing. I almost like it best. It exists almost on three levels. On one it's Lady Bracknell quizzing Jack. Secondly the whole thing is actually structured on the chapter in 'Ulysses', and thirdly it's telling the audience what Dada is, and where it comes from. I worked extremely hard on it." (2) (My underlining.) The scene is problematic in that, as an advancement for Joyce's statements on art, it says too little too suddenly.

(1) Ibid. p38

(2) 'Profile 9', op. cit. p21

It is as if Stoppard has fallen into the trap of regarding Joyce's argument as so self-evidently right, that it needed no development. Joyce is given the last word but this does not necessarily give him victory, and the force of Tzara's own argument would seem to indicate two diametrically opposed positions talking firmly past each other, with neither conceding an inch.

To quote Hayman, "If anyone came to the play without any knowledge of Joyce, Dada or Lenin, he would learn quite a lot about Dada and Lenin but almost nothing about Joyce." (1) Stoppard seems to err here in his over-confident depiction of a respected position. With Tzara and Lenin, on the other hand, he had to proceed with far more caution, and, arguably, with far more success.

The sweep of the scene between Tzara and Joyce includes a large emphasis on the origins and exploits of Dada. Joyce is bound by the convention of the catechism, while Tzara is free to range where he will. The conjuring tricks, far from upstaging Tzara, are accepted as quite natural an adjunct to the Irishman's showmanship. The final outburst by Tzara is on a grand scale, and the smashing of crockery makes his point with a highly theatrical climax. Joyce is given one speech in which to counter the accumulative effect of the Dadaist's nonchalance, exuberance and eccentricity, and he begins very well with his first cutting sentence -"You are an over-excited little man, with a need for self-expression far beyond the scope of your natural gifts."(2) Silkily, he defines his own credo in

(1) 'Profile 9', op.cit. p21.

(2) 'Travesties', p62.

succinct terms. "An artist is the magician put among men to gratify - capriciously - their urge for immortality... If there is any meaning in any of it, it is in what survives as art."(1) The rest of the speech consists of a description of Homer's epic, and of how Joyce's epic will "double that immortality". The description, however, is not evocative enough for this boast to amount to much; indeed, it consists of two lists, the second of which unsuccessfully attempts to portray the 'completeness' of the hero Ulysses, ending with the defiant self-conceit of "yes by God there's a corpse that will dance for some time yet and leave the world precisely as it finds it". (2) The fact that this particular Joyce is the refraction of Carr's unreliable and antagonistic memory produces a subjective image: his personality irks Carr, and his ideas about art are not so important in Carr's eyes, so it is the former aspect that is fed to the audience.

In the monologue at the beginning of the play, Carr provides the audience with a fore-warning of the uneasy mix he has concocted. At first Joyce is an "Irish lout", then he becomes:

"A prudish, prudent man, Joyce, in no way profligate or vulgar, and yet convivial, without being spendthrift, and yet still without primness towards hard currency in all its transmutable and transferable forms and denominations"

but soon this changes to:

"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,

(1) 'Travesties', p62
(2) 'Travesties', p63

fornicating drunk not worth the paper, that's that bit done." (1)

James writes that it "is a measure of the play's robustness, incidentally, that it could survive weak casting among the principal roles. In the second run James Joyce could neither sing nor dance and threw away his key speech on the first night."(2) An alternative argument might be that because the character and his arguments make a comparatively small impact, poor playing would escape especial notice and not harm the balances in the play.

Lenin's ideological position on the relation between art and politics is propounded by his earnest disciple Cecily. Dramatically, this is justified by the fact that Carr never meets Lenin, and thus does not have the chance of setting up a dialectic with him, as he does with the other revolutionary protagonists. The argument between Carr and Cecily(3), couched as it is in the Wildean language apposite to the parodied form it is part of, is conducted in the same artificially precise language of the Carr-Tzara debate.(4) By doing this, Stoppard gives the Marxist-Leninist argument equal weight, even before Lenin appears on stage for any length of time. This undercuts the possible criticism that, being himself opposed to the Leninist doctrine, he could not preserve an uncommitted attitude. He states his opposition thus:

"People tend to think of Stalinism as being something else, a perversion of Leninism. That is an absurd and foolish untruth, and it is one on which much of the Left bases itself. Lenin perverted Marxism, and Stalin carried on from there. When one reads pre-revolutionary Lenin, notably What Is To Be Done? but also all the letters and articles in

- (1) 'Travesties', p23.
- (2) James op. cit. p74.
- (3) 'Travesties', p74ff.
- (4) Ibid. p36ff.

which he railed against the early Marxists who had the temerity to disagree with him, one can see with awful clarity that ideological differences are often temperamental differences in ideological disguise - and also that the terror to come was implicit in the Lenin of 1900." (1)

Stoppard's determination to be fair in his depiction of Lenin led him at first to an untheatrical, didactic solution. "I wanted the play to stop - to give the audience documentary illustration of what Lenin felt about art and so on, and then carry on the play." (2) That he changed his mind does not mean that his intention was lost.

Cecily's statement that the "sole duty and justification for art is social criticism"(3) is the crux of the matter, and forms the springboard for Lenin's climactic oration on art and artists:

"Today, literature must become party literature. Down with non-partisan literature! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become a part of the common cause of the proletariat, a cog in the Social Democratic mechanism..." (4)

What follows becomes a compounding of contradictions and inconsistencies. The argument goes around in circles, and the oratorical rhetoric serves to provide bogus logical climaxes where there are none. In theatrical terms, a large part of Lenin's argument is simply his presence, redolent of everything he stands for, and the enormous, almost incalculable, effect he has had on twentieth century history and thought. It is the presence of this power that critics, James for one, have contested. Writing in the light of the two productions that he had seen, he says:

"But even if Lenin had been played up to the full power inherent in the role, he would still have stood revealed as a

- (1) 'Ambushes for the Audience', op. cit. pp12-13.
- (2) 'Profile 9' op. cit. p22.
- (3) 'Travesties', p74.
- (4) Ibid. p85.

personality conceived in terms of show-biz meanness, with a built-in conflict to suggest complexity.... Stoppard emphasizes Lenin's self-contradictions at the expense of playing down his monolithic purposefulness - a purposefulness which we can scarcely begin to contemplate without raising the question of Evil. There is less to the complexity, and more to the force, of Lenin's personality than Stoppard allows." (1)

On the contrary, Stoppard has allowed the untheatrical, didactic man of history to stand with all his force of authority, and the contradictions that abound in his character lend an unrepentant roughness to the portrayal, which adds to the force of his presence. One sees the idealist unmistakably at odds with realism, and the two states are part of Stoppard's interest. In Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon, the death of a great hero provokes the following observations from Malquist:

"His was an age that saw history as a drama directed by great men; accordingly he was celebrated as a man of action, a leader who raised involvement to the level of a sacred duty, and he inspired his people to roll up their sleeves and take a militant part in the affairs of the world. I think perhaps that such a stance is no longer inspiring nor equal to events - its philosophy is questionable and its consequences can no longer be put down to the destiny of the individual. For this reason, his death might well mark a change in heroic posture - to that of the Stylist, the spectator as hero, the man of inaction who would not dare roll up his sleeves for fear of creasing the cuffs." (2)

In Travesties Lenin and Carr occupy the two opposing poles described here.

Within the world of Wildean word-play, the sudden intrusion of realism comes as a rude shock, and thus Stoppard backs up stylistically what he wishes to state about men of action and inaction. The equation of the man of inaction with the artist is a Wildean tenet of faith, and one which gives emphasis to Carr's role as the dramatist-artist, using memory

(1) James, op.cit. pp74-75

(2) 'Lord Malquist and Mr Moon', p79

to create a world of artistry, as opposed to one of reality.

Wilde's theories of aestheticism undoubtedly hold some interest for Stoppard, and it is not surprising, in The Critic as Artist, to find much that is apposite to his theatre. On the subject of action, Wilde writes:

"It is a thing incomplete in its essence, because limited by accident, and ignorant of its direction, being always at variance with its aim. Its basis is the lack of imagination. It is the last resource of those who know not how to dream.. ..When we have fully discovered the scientific laws that govern life, we shall realize that the one person who has more illusions than the dreamer is the man of action. He, indeed, knows neither the origin of his deeds nor their results....It is because Humanity has never known where it was going that it has been able to find its way." (1)

The equation of the dreamer with the artist is another indication of Carr's role: in his case, his dream is his memory.

Stoppard believes that "all political acts must be judged in moral terms, in terms of their consequences." (2) This judgment presumably extends to the politicians that perform these acts. By putting Lenin where he has in the structure of the play, outside the artificial world created by art, Stoppard has extended his moral judgment into a theatrical one, by an inverse action that had originally sought to have the opposite effect.

For a member of the audience, the name of Tristan Tzara might not mean very much, and would certainly mean much less than that of Joyce and Lenin. The details of the Dadaist

(1) 'The Works of Oscar Wilde' ed. G.F.Maine,(1948) p962

(2) 'Ambushes', op.cit. pl2

revolution are not as commonly known as those of the other revolutions, artistic and political, that were taking place in the first two decades of the twentieth century. It is natural, therefore, that Stoppard should spend more time on this character and the ideas he represents, than on the others. Tzara is prominent in the first Act, and when one looks at the connection between him and the structure of the play, his importance takes up a central position.

The Dadaists, whose manifestoes and disagreements were legion, agreed on one thing, and that was Chance. With this slippery, subversive weapon they assailed and easily undermined the conventional views of the Carrs of this world:

"TZARA: ...The clever people try to impose a design on the world and when it goes calamitously wrong they call it fate. In point of fact, everything is Chance, including design.

CARR: That sounds awfully clever. What does it mean? Not that it has to mean anything, of course.

TZARA: It means, my dear Henry, that the causes we know everything about depend on causes we know very little about, which depend on causes we know absolutely nothing about. And it is the duty of the artist to jeer and howl and belch at the delusion that infinite generations of real effects can be inferred from the gross expression of apparent cause.

CARR: It is the duty of the artist to beautify existence.

TZARA (articulately): Dada dada dada dada dada.... " (1)

The stage direction to Tzara's last speech in this extract is revealing. It would have been possible to portray him as an eccentric Rumanian buffoon, a feed and partner for Joyce in vaudeville patter style, and an outrageous irritant to Carr's good breeding. The reason that this was not Stoppard's solution goes further than his disclaimer: "I can't bear the thought

(1) 'Travesties', p37

of an actor doing a Maurice Chevalier accent. I can't bear Maurice Chevalier." (1) The Wildean scheme of things naturally calls strongly for a Jack Worthing as a companion for Algernon, and we are given a Jack of astounding logic and a range of convictions that were never those of his prototype. As Carr strikes absurd dandified positions about his clothes and his patriotism, Tzara weaves patterns of words around him, and at the end of the first 'time-slip' he has won Carr over to the causally reductive: "We're here because we're here... because we're here because we're here..." (2) while he chants "da-da" in the background to ram his point home. At the end of the second 'time-slip' Tzara is given a climactic speech, beginning with a strong list of insults and ending with the water-tight argument of a self-enclosed system: "Without art man was a coffee-mill: but with art, man - is a coffee-mill! That is the message of Dada." (3)

Theatrically, the prospect of a character whose aim is to "jeer and howl and belch" with abandon on stage is inevitably the centre of great interest, and one whose creed is of such patent unpredictability, creates with the audience the exciting frisson of dramatic tension. This is a more generalised use of a device used elsewhere, as in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead when Guildenstern contemplates creating a dramatic precedent with Alfred. A further attraction is the disturbing combination of a lucid, logical mind bent on the deification of the illogical. The Dadaists are recognizable enough in the genealogy of the Absurdists for their

- (1) 'Tom Stoppard', Hayman, p3
- (2) 'Travesties' p40
- (3) Ibid. p47

methods to ring many bells. The purveyors of logic, defined frames of reference, and a single point of view seem vaguely ridiculous in comparison.

Tzara's creed of Chance brings him into inevitable conflict with his two revolutionary counterparts. His kind of art cannot serve society and the movement of history - its nature and essence is completely contrary to subservience of any kind, and Lenin saw this clearly enough when he "lashed into the Dadaists". (1) That Lenin was temperamentally opposed to the new art only compounds the force of the clash. After his tirade against Tolstoy and Nadya's qualification that "he respected Tolstoy's traditional values as an artist"(2), he allows an almost cheerful philistinism to surface: "Bosh and nonsense! We are good revolutionaries but we seem to be somehow obliged to keep up with modern art. Well, as for me I'm a barbarian. Expressionism, futurism, cubism... I don't understand them and I get no pleasure from them." (3) As Lenin sweeps anything irrelevant to his design for society aside, so does Joyce sweep aside everything but himself and the manifestation of himself in his life art-work, Ulysses. The clash is quite clearly explained by the metaphor of the temple: Joyce steadily building, and Tzara as fervently destroying it. Very neatly, intellectual conflict becomes dramatic conflict.

Chance makes nonsense of the idea of a grand design for

- (1) Ibid. p45
- (2) Ibid. p86
- (3) Ibid. p87

history. Whether such a thing can exist is explored by the hapless Moon in Lord Malquist and Mr Moon with no satisfactory result:

"'But if it's all random then what's the point?'
'What's the point if it's all inevitable?'
She's got me there." (1)

Moon is a precursor to Tzara in his hope that destruction will bring some kind of meaning out of the chaos which passes itself as order, and the ever-present bomb in his pocket remains a symbol of such hopeful destruction throughout the novel. When his own bomb has turned out to be the kind of elaborate joke that he has been hoping to demolish, he is rewarded ultimately with one that destroys his world by removing him from it. Moon wants something decisive:

"... we require an explosion. It is not simply a matter of retribution, it is a matter of shocking people into a moment of recognition - bang! - so that they might make a total re-assessment, recognise that life has gone badly wrong somewhere, the proportions have been distorted..." (2)

whereas Lenin's explosion is planned, Tzara's outbursts are rendered more immediately volatile by the chance laws that govern their detonation.

Moon's unhappiness results from being an historian with no orderly subject. Tzara's more refined problem stems from the impossible position of the artist, a position over which Stoppard has pondered consistently. The moral problem encountered by Tzara (and Tzara alone of the revolutionary figures) is the same in essence as that encountered by Stoppard - "whether an artist has to justify himself in

(1) 'Lord Malquist and Mr Moon', p140.

(2) Ibid. p116.

political terms at all." (1) For Tzara, the problem is expressed in purely artistic terms:

"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!" (2)

When considering the climate in which Stoppard first started writing, after the explosion of anger at the Royal Court and the consequent insistence on socially committed theatre, it is not surprising that these questions should dog him. More surprising, perhaps, is the fact that so many of his contemporaries should evade these same questions, or at any rate not confront them with such persistence as has Stoppard.

Stoppard's dilemma first raised its head in Artist Descending a Staircase where Donner's solution was to make his art edible.

"... for the first time I feel free of that small sense of shame which every artist lives with. I think, in a way, edible art is what we've all been looking for." (3)

Couched in this comically ironic way, there is less of the driving force found in Tzara's speech, but it makes its point nevertheless, using the reference points of Duchamp's own artwork effectively. The problem even finds dramatic expression in the action involved in getting the breast of Martello's sugar-statue into a cup of tea, and stirring her around.

"The question remained: how can one justify a work of art to a man with an empty belly?" (4)

Beauchamp's answer was that one could not and that one should

- (1) 'Ambushes' op. cit. p16.
- (2) 'Travesties' .62.
- (3) 'Artist Descending a Staircase' p26.
- (4) Ibid. p25.

stop bothering to try.

"In a 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." (1)

These words and sentiments are echoed closely by Carr.

The theme of the "shame and necessity of being an artist" suggests duality - caught between the absolute poles of social commitment on the one hand, and artistic solipsism on the other, Tzara's character is necessarily schizophrenic, as witnessed in the Jack Worthing - Mad Rumanian Artist admixture. A like malady is adduced by Stoppard as one of the reasons for writing for the theatre:

"Why do I write comedy? Because it's inextricably bound up with my own temperament. I find it hard to take a serious stand in public because I can always see everyone else's point of view. I'm so schizophrenic I can play chess with myself." (2)

It is when looking at the structure of Travesties, with this statement in mind, that one sees the pervasive influence Tzara has on the play. As is usual in a Stoppard play, form and content are firmly fused, so a Dadaist poet who opens the play by cutting up a poem into a hat and reading the jumbled remains as his new work of art, is a natural metaphor for the play as a whole. "I did intend, through-out, a minor anthology of styles-of-play, styles-of-language" Stoppard has said,(3)

- (1) 'Artist Descending a Staircase', p43
- (2) Interview with Sheridan Morley, quoted in Dirty Linen programme notes, 1977 South African production.
- (3) 'Tom Stoppard - The Theater's Intellectual P.T.Barnum', New York Times, 19 Oct.1975, sec.2,p5

and it is no accident that the chapter Joyce is writing during the action of the play, is the Oxen of the Sun episode which parodies literary styles "from Chaucer to Carlyle". (1)

This is one of those inevitable slow fuses in Stoppard's theatre, laid in the mystifying first scene of the play as absurd dictation for the dutiful Gwendolen, which only bears fruit at the very end of the play, when the whole gamut of styles has been run through.

By taking as a working basis The Importance of Being Earnest, redrafting the characters in some cases and using actual lines of the text or conflating them with his own in a different situation for comic effect, Stoppard is doing the same as Tzara does when re-writing the Shakespearean sonnet. A comparable instance in the world of graphic art is when Duchamp scribbles a moustache on the Mona Lisa and calls it L.H.O.O.Q (an obscene tag when read in French). This is not only a gratuitous act made out of a desire to challenge the conventional ways of perception, but also a search for new perceptions. Duchamp's graffiti is not only a desecration of the high point in traditional art, but is also, through parody, a sly re-interpretation of La Gioconda's famous smile.

When the Dada revolution came to an end, many of its adherents became involved in the Surrealist movement, who:

"sought to restore imagination to its central role... to redeem language, to investigate the potential of the unconscious and to seek that mystical point at which contradiction resolves itself into synthesis." (2)

(1) 'Travesties', p97

(2) 'Dada and Surrealism', C.W.E.Bigsby, p56

Stoppard cannot be termed a surrealist, though there are similarities. His concentration on the nature of contradiction is what takes him nearest to the surrealists, and his desire to create synthesis, however temporary, from the clash of opposites. In Travesties, the balance of weight is unevenly distributed between the protagonists, but the redeeming feature is Carr's memory, which encompasses the action and constitutes a dream world of uncertain proportions. It is in the uncertainties and contradictions that Stoppard finds a metaphor for his view of life, and it is here that the play is most successful.

CHAPTER FIVE

Two of Stoppard's least successful plays are Enter a Free Man and Night and Day, and it seemed right to consider them side by side in order to determine on what levels they do and do not work. Having noted already the circular nature of a number of the plays it is interesting to compare the naturalism in Enter a Free Man (which, as Walk on the Water, was Stoppard's earliest play - the extent of its revision and its appearance after Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead have made it seem later than it is) with that of his latest full-length play to date. In between the two plays there has been a period of experimentation with form which has led him away from naturalism, and the return to Night and Day seems to be an attempt to prove his mastery of this form as well. He has expressed a certain longing to be able to write a play "about a middle-class family having a crisis... I felt I was sick of flashy mind-projections speaking in long, articulate, witty sentences about the great abstractions. I suddenly thought it would be rather nice to write about a professor or a doctor with a grey-haired wife and a problem child, and the maid comes in with the muffin dish and they talk about the weather a bit." (1) The awareness of the challenges that this kind of play presented presumably encouraged him to write Night and Day, where the overall tenor is naturalistic, but for a dream and night-mare sequence. The insertion of these two sequences betrays an inability to concentrate solely on the naturalistic

(1) 'Tom Stoppard', Hayman, pl37

form, as though Stoppard does not trust the form or his manipulation of it to produce enough reaction or sympathy from his theatre audience. This uncertainty erodes the confidence of the spectator - it does not dislocate assumptions to some useful end, or indicate the existence of other realities. The device is a trick, with no motive other than an attempt to thicken the texture of the play, which could have been achieved within the demands of the form.

Enter a Free Man yields up its weaknesses more readily than does Night and Day. Technically it is a first play, though for the purposes of this study I have chosen to regard Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead as such. It appeared first as a television play and was staged much later, which could explain the anti-naturalistic fades between the two sets on stage. The plot is derivative and freely acknowledged as such, so much so that Stoppard refers to it as Flowering Death of a Salesman, a conflation of Bolt's Flowering Cherry and Miller's Death of a Salesman. This is a fair assessment, as is his attitude to it: "A great deal of gratitude and affection, and a certain amount of embarrassment. I don't think it's a very true play, in the sense that I feel no intimacy with the people I was writing about. It works pretty well as a play, but it's actually phoney because it's a play written about other people's characters." (1)

The problem extends beyond the treatment of the characters, and is bound up with the relationship between the form

(1) 'Ambushes', op cit p5

and the structure of the play. The overriding impression one gains from characters, dialogue and situation, is a naturalistic one, and yet the structure within which these elements move is too neatly circular for credibility. The first act ends where it started, Riley entering the pub on one side of the stage, while Linda comments on his detachment from reality on the other side. The second act also circles back on the action, to where George once again writes down the amount he owes his daughter, his self-delusion undented. Within this framework, Linda embarks on a similar expedition to her father's, sporting an identical illusionary idealism about her latest boyfriend as he does about his latest invention. They are let down simultaneously and return to the security of the family hearth from which they have both abortively attempted to fly. This adds a parallel movement to the otherwise circular structure but does not lead further than the jejune iteration of the 'like father like daughter' cliché.

The technique of having two localities on one stage, sometimes functioning at the same time, is an attempt to juxtapose two worlds and to gain added depth by their proximity. In practice nothing more than a rather unsuccessful cinematic effect is achieved. The tightness of the structure of the play militates against the naturalistic form it encompasses, not allowing that depth of characterisation and the development of emotional and psychological relationships between characters which is at the basis of naturalism.

At the heart of the play stands George Riley, a dreamer and an idealist who attempts to go against his nature by

inventing things, a most practical occupation. The dissatisfaction he feels for his way of life is expressed in a long speech in which he describes his typical day, and the sterility of it: "It's not a question of liking or disliking, it's what it does to you.... it's nothing, absolutely nothing. I give nothing, I gain nothing, it is nothing..." (1) His relationship with his wife is composed of hackneyed phrases that keep the minutes ticking by. It is here that some of the flaws in characterisation can be detected. Persephone is portrayed as a sensible, colourless woman with a true understanding of her husband, while he is given to continuous self-deception. In the form Stoppard has chosen for the play, this results in hardly any reaction and tension between the two. In the pub scenes, there is likewise insufficient evidence of distinct characters. They are all simply foils to Riley, and although the weakness of Able and Brown is part of their character, even Harry and Florence have no life of their own.

Another of the problems in the play is the dialogue, which can be very banal, as demonstrated by the following passage:

"PERSEPHONE (defiantly): We've got on very well together in our way. I know plenty of women whose husbands have taken to drink or gambling or well - you-know-what, and it's not much comfort to say that at least they're all there in the head.

LINDA: He just hasn't grown up all over the same speed. He's getting worse and personally I don't think we're helping him by treating it all as normal.

PERSEPHONE: I know, it's very difficult. Without hurting him. You don't want to hurt him, do you?

LINDA: He's hurting himself in the long run.

PERSEPHONE (unhappily): Well, I don't know.

LINDA (pause): Shall I call him again?

PERSEPHONE: You'd better. Perhaps he dropped off. He had a

(1) 'Enter a Free Man', p34

very restless night.
(LINDA goes to open the door.)
I hope he's washed his hands." (1)

The meandering conversational tone is Stoppard at his worst, as he tries for natural dialogue between mother and daughter. This adds nothing to our knowledge of either of them, nor of their interaction with each other.

George Riley, the predecessor of George Moore, lives in a world of dreams outside the bounds of reality: "George Riley recognises no social obligations at all. He inhabits his own 'definitely odd' world and thus the psychological and social realism of other sections of the play seem not merely irrelevant but fragments of a different work." (2)

The discrepancies discussed here are the signs of a playwright not yet able to marshal his material into firm enough order, so that form and content remain at odds with each other. A jump to Night and Day shows what improvements in craftsmanship have taken place in the decade that separates the two plays. In the dialogue alone there is a concision and economy that is immediately apparent in the opening moments of the play. Everything said adds some information about the characters of Ruth and Guthrie, the one cool and ironic, the other tough with an air of no-nonsense about him, annoyed at the interference with his bag.

"GUTHRIE: Please don't touch that.
RUTH: I'm sorry.
GUTHRIE: Christ. That wasn't nice at all.
RUTH: I thought you were asleep.
GUTHRIE: I thought I was dead.
(He has barely moved and now doesn't move at all.)

(1) 'Enter a Free Man', p60

(2) 'Tom Stoppard', Bigsby, pl0

RUTH looks at him.)
RUTH: Are you all right now? (Pause) That's good.
(Pause) I don't think we've met.
(GUTHRIE half sits up, then relapses.)
GUTHRIE: Uh? Sorry do you want to sit down?
RUTH: (Drily) Thank you. (She moves up the steps to the
small table on the verandah and sits down.
GUTHRIE seems to be coming to. He sits up slightly.) You shouldn't sleep in the sun. (GUTHRIE
squints up at the sky.)
GUTHRIE: It moved.
RUTH: It does that. It's called night and day." (1)

The tension created by Ruth's personality and her attitude to the intruder on her doorstep gives a burst of electricity to these moments, and the impetus of this carries the audience into a plot that is reminiscent of the kind concocted by best-selling writers with an eye on the topicality market.

The setting of the play is Kambawe, a fictitious African country, recently independent from Britain, which is experiencing internal troubles as the result of a bid for secession. The turmoil has brought the journalists of the world to the country. Two of them, and the photographer Guthrie descend on the Carson household, which becomes the proposed meeting place between the President of the country and the rebel leader. Against this background a debate takes place about the freedom of the press and the power of the unions in Britain - this is the central core of the play, and it is a departure for Stoppard in that for the first time he addresses a specifically political problem.

The form of the play, as has been said, is largely naturalistic, but for the opening nightmare of Guthrie, the imagined

(1) 'Night and Day', p18

love scene between Milne and Ruth, and the device whereby Ruth occasionally airs her private thoughts in an 'aside' voice directed only to the audience. Although the mixture of styles is a stock-in-trade of Stoppard's, particularly noticeable in Travesties, when the main ingredient is naturalism the exercise has less point and is less effective, and seems more of a short-cut than an attempt to enlarge characterisation. It does add to the theatrical diversity of the play, but this is not the point in this particular play, in which Stoppard has the chance to concentrate on one form. That he has not been able to do this so far supports the idea that diversity and fragmentation are natural modes of expression for Stoppard's world-view. Although this is not his play "about a middle-class family having a crisis" it is telling that, speaking of a Priestley play he had seen, he has said "it's somehow quite reassuring that sheer craftsmanship still pays off. Observation, truth, no showing off." (1) The element of display is persistently at the heart of Stoppard's work and so far he has not been able to write a play that meets the above requirements.

It is the content of Night and Day which seems so at odds with what has come before it. Whereas the major concern has always been the different ways of seeing a situation, a problem or an idea, with the lack of commitment to any one angle a feature of prime importance, now an almost partisan spirit is allowed to dominate, and by various means the audience is left in no doubt as to the author's opinions on the subjects debated.

(1) 'Tom Stoppard', Hayman, p137

The characterization makes use of the usual stereotypes, but instead of surprising audience expectations, the stereotypes reinforce audience prejudices.

Wagner is a middle-aged hard-bitten Australian journalist who swears, drinks and is something of a womanizer. His coarse direct speech is colloquial and full of professional jargon, and an element of egotism is never far from the surface. He prides himself on being in the forefront of action, and despises the more elegant style of the foreign correspondent: "I am a fireman. I go to fires. Brighton or Kambawe - they're both out-of-town stories and I cover them the same way. I don't file prose. I file facts." (1) The suggestion is that because he is an Australian and a colonial he is therefore naturally boorish - a common British stereotype. His seduction of Ruth comes across as sordid, especially in the light of her husband's 'gentlemanly' behaviour. As villain of the piece he is cast as a strong union man, whose jargon included such risible lines as "Is it your principle to betray your fellow workers when they're in confrontation with management?" The reply is witty put-down: "My God, you'd need a more supple language than that to describe an argument between two amoebas." (2)

The speaker is Milne, who is young and described as "definitely attractive in a way that is called boyish" in a character note. He has ideals and a youthful enthusiasm for his career that enables him to defend eloquently the freedom of the press even in its worst moments: "Junk journalism is

(1) 'Night and Day', p40

(2) Ibid. p39

the evidence of a society that has got at least one thing right, that there should be nobody with the power to dictate where responsible journalism begins." (1) The romantic glow he radiates captivates Ruth, who, with her witty, flippant asides has wooed the audience to her side. Milne is also elevated by the altruism he is seen to have practised, when he suffered victimization by the union and resigned in order not to encumber his management with another strike.

Ruth has been embittered by her experience of journalists "under one's bed or outside the law courts" (2) after her divorce. She joins forces with Milne in his absence in an attack on Wagner and the indiscriminate power of the unions:

"WAGNER: We have a mutual friend who believes that the freedom of the journalist is safer in the hands of the proprietors than in the hands of his fellow journalists.

RUTH: Well, of course it is, you fool. Even Northcliffe could only sack you from his own newspapers, and nowadays he'd be answerable to one of those industrial tribunals which make banks compensate their sacked embezzlers...and he'd have to think twice if you were anything special because he'd know that in short order you would be working for the competition. But you'd better be damned careful if you cross your fellow journalists because they would stop you working for any newspaper in the land, no matter how good a reporter you are; and they are answerable to nobody.

WAGNER: They are answerable to a democratically elected body representing the membership.

RUTH: Wagner, are you completely daft?" (3)

The argument is weighted heavily in her favour, and Ruth and Milne together show Wagner to be petty and rather distasteful. The irony of the final telex message diminishes him completely.

As a play, it is a powerful argument for a particular

- (1) Ibid.p61
- (2) Ibid.p50
- (3) Ibid.p82

point of view, well aimed at the targets it sets up. But seen against Stoppard's work as a whole, it undermines many of the statements he has made overtly, as well as the intrinsic statements inherent in his major plays. Before this play, Stoppard had begun to consider issues of a more socially 'relevant' nature, most particularly the totalitarian suppression of free speech as in Every Good Boy Deserves Favour and Professional Foul. These were large topics, more concerned with ethics than with politics, but in this play the subject is that bit more political, written as it was against the background of industrial strife in Britain. A movement may be perceived from the general to the more particular.

Stoppard provides for himself his own caveat: "The plain truth is that if you are angered or disgusted by a particular injustice or immorality, and you want to do something about it, now, at once, then you can hardly do worse than write a play about it. That's what art is bad at." (1)

(1) 'Ambushes for the Audience', op cit pl4.

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