

ATILIM UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DIVISION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

M.A. THESIS

**THE DIVERSITY OF TOM STOPPARD'S APPROACHES IN CREATING  
THEATRICAL MATERIAL FOR HIS DRAMA**

**SEVİLAY BİÇİCİ**

Ankara, 2004

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Thesis Advisor

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## ÖZET

Bu tezin amacı, 20. yüzyılın önde gelen drama yazarlarından biri olan Tom Stoppard’ın oyunlarında kendi döneminden önce yazılan oyunların konusundan ve/veya tekniğinden yararlanmasının yanısıra kendi oyunlarında kullandığı materyallerden de birden çok kez yararlanıp, oyunlarında kullandığı her türlü gösteri biçimini tiyatral bir kavram haline getirip, tamamiyle ‘Stoppard’ tadı bırakan oyunlarla karşımıza çıktığını vurgulamaktır.

1954 ve sonrasında, İngiliz Tiyatrosu dikkate değer bir değişim süreci içerisine girdi. Bu süreç içerisinde, sonraki yazarları da etkileyecek bir çok eser Londra’da sahnelenmeye başladı. Bunların başında hiç kuşkusuz John Osborne’nın *Öfke* ve Samuel Beckett’in *Godot’yu Beklerken* eserleri gelir. Bu dönem sadece İngiltere’yi etkilemekle kalmayıp, İngiltere dışındaki sahnelerde de etkisini hissettirdi. Her ne kadar Stoppard’ı daha çok etkileyen Beckett olmuşsa da – özellikle *Rosencrantz ve Guildenstern Öldüler*’de – Stoppard’ın oyunu bir çok yönden Beckett

tiyatrosundan farklılık göstermektedir. Bu tezde Stoppard'ın *Rosencrantz ve Guildenstern Öldüler*, *Akrobatlar* ve *Travestiler* oyunlarında kullandığı her türlü gösteri biçimini nasıl bir araya getirdiği ve bunları belirtilen oyunlarda tiyatral öğeler olarak nasıl kullandığı incelenmektedir.

Bu tez bir giriş, üç ana bölüm ve bir de sonuç bölümünden oluşmaktadır. Giriş bölümünde dört alt başlık yer almaktadır. Giriş bölümünün ilk kısmında, I. ve II. Dünya Savaşları'ndan sonraki siyasi, ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel değişiklikler ve bu değişikliklerin insanlar ve dolayısıyla da yazılan eserler üzerindeki etkisi hakkında kısa bir bilgi veriliyor. Giriş bölümünün ikinci alt başlığında, 1945 sonrasındaki İngiliz Tiyatrosu'nun gelişimine değiniliyor. Üçüncü alt başlıkta ise, 20. yüzyılın popüler akımı olan ve Beckett'in eserlerinden sonra Stoppard'ın eserleri için de kullanılan *Absürd Tiyatro*'ya değinilmektedir. Dördüncü bölümde ise yazarın yaşamı ve eserleri tanıtılmakta ve Stoppard'ın oyunlarında kullandığı tiyatro öğelerinden kısaca bahsedilmektedir. Gelişme bölümünde ise; tezde savunulan düşünce, yukarıda bahsedilen oyunların kronolojik sıralamasıyla verilmektedir.

Tezin sonuç bölümünde giriş ve gelişme bölümlerinde tartışılan konuların kısa birer özeti yer almaktadır.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to show that Tom Stoppard, one of the leading dramatists of his age, not only employs the previous dramatists' plots and/or techniques but also uses the same materials of his own plays in different ways. He brings the different theatrical materials together in his plays and enables us to watch plays which are uniquely Stoppardian in every sense.

Starting from 1954, the English Theatre was in the process of a great transformation. During 1950s and 60s, many plays having a great influence on the later dramatists were staged in London. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* are the most notable examples. This period had a great influence on the drama not only in England but also in other countries. However, it is Beckett who affected Stoppard most strongly – especially in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* -, but Stoppard's theatre has many different characteristics that are different from Beckett's. In this thesis, Stoppard's use of diverse theatrical styles is analysed in three of Stoppard's plays; *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Jumpers* and *Travesties*.

The thesis consists of an introductory chapter, three main chapters, and a conclusion. The introductory chapter includes four sub settings. The first part of the Introduction gives some brief information concerning the political, economic, social and cultural changes which occurred after World Wars I and II, and the impacts of these changes on people and so on the works written in

these periods. The second part of the Introduction, entitled ‘Drama After 1945’, gives information about the changes and the improvement which occurred in the English Theatre after 1945. The third part of the Introduction briefly gives information about the popular trend of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Absurd Theatre*. In the fourth part, the life and works of Stoppard and the diverse theatrical materials Stoppard uses in his drama are discussed. In the main chapters, the argument of the thesis is analysed, by looking at the three plays in chronological order.

The conclusion gives a brief summary of the material presented, and draws the material together.

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## INTRODUCTION

I'm not actually hooked on form. I'm not even hooked on content if one means. I'm hooked on style.<sup>1</sup>

'Hooked on style', but what kind of a style is that? Although it is extremely difficult to classify Stoppard's style, this thesis will attempt to find an answer to this question. Stoppard uses diverse theatrical materials to establish his peculiar style. Although Stoppard is not the first playwright who employed these diverse materials, which will be analysed in detail in the following three chapters, his art made these formerly used materials unprecedented in the field of drama. All these Stoppardian materials will be shown in his plays titled; *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Jumpers* and *Travesties*.

Stoppard juxtaposes different elements like intertextuality, play within a play technique, linguistic gymnastics, silence and pauses in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*; intertextuality, acrobatics, circus, music, farce, whodunit in *Jumpers*; intertextuality, play within a play technique, high comedy in *Travesties*. Although the use of intertextuality seems alike in all the plays, the use of intertextuality in *Jumpers* is rather different from in the other two plays. While *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* uses *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot* as intertextual bases for its source, *Travesties* uses another well known play as its subtext – *The Importance of Being Earnest*. However, *Jumpers* intertextualizes *After Magritte*, which is one of Stoppard's own plays. When Stoppard's ingenious written plots are tinged with all these different Stoppardian theatrical materials, the utmost feeling on the part of the audience is such a delight could be taken from a theatrical play.

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<sup>1</sup> Delaney, Paul, Ed., **Tom Stoppard in Conversation**, The University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1997, p. 23.

## I. THE GENERAL EFFECTS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR ON LITERATURE

Both World Wars I and II were times of unusual unrest for the western world. While the world was still trying to recover from the effects of World War I, the most extensive war ever fought in terms of people killed, property destroyed, and the number of countries involved, 'World War II', broke out.

The Second World War, like the first, interrupted the theatre's normal patterns. "The war also raised serious doubts about a world that had created such horrors as the Nazi extermination camps and such destructive weapons as the atomic bomb."<sup>2</sup> This spirit of doubt led to many innovations in the theatre.

Many of the problems of World War I caused the rise of totalitarian governments with their denial of civil liberties, programmes of genocide, and the territorial ambitions of such countries as Germany, Italy, and Japan. Europe was divided into sectors at the end of the Second World War, with the east dominated by the Soviet Union, and the west dominated by the United States. There followed a 'cold war' as the two nations sought to maintain or extend their influence. As a result, the world seemed under the threat of an atomic age capable of ending life on earth. It was an age of anxiety and stress.

British influence was in decline from the end of the Second World War, especially with the newly developing economies of the world. In England itself there has also been a decentralisation in terms of the regions competing with London for economic, social, and cultural influence. That is the reason why regional accents are heard on BBC television and radio programmes as much as standard English.

The variety and richness of post-modern literature can in some ways be attributed to the decline of English influence after the Second World War. Even within England, decentralization could be observed in terms of regional awareness in economical, social, and cultural aspects.

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<sup>2</sup> Brockett, Oscar G., **History of the Theatre**, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1991, p. 540.



London spoke for Britain in the impeccable southern English intonations of the radio announcers of the state-owned British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), but from the 1960s this changed. Regional dialects were admitted to the airwaves. Regional radio and television stations sprang up. The Arts Council, which had subsidized the nation's drama, literature, music, painting, and plastic arts from London, delegated much of its grant-giving responsibility to regional arts councils. This gave a new confidence to writers and artists outside London and has since contributed to a notable renaissance of regional literature.<sup>3</sup>

After the Second World War, the world witnessed a great change in the society as it became more evident that the world we live in is fragile and the end of the human race may not be as far away as we had thought before (as demonstrated by the explosion of the atomic bomb). These ideas also led to the questioning of people's identity. Thus the literature of the 20th century started exploring individuality, variety in cultures, languages, and expressiveness.

The term 'Post-Modern' is used to define the attitudes and creative production that followed the Second World War. But first of all the meaning of the word 'post-modern' should be examined. Although the prefix 'post' means 'after', here it is more applicable to say 'being inspired by modern' for the prefix 'after'. Thus, 'Post-Modernism' can be called an art movement which is inspired by modernism; however, it has different characteristics from modernism. Modernism is a movement which is used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts and styles of literature and the other forms of art, or in a more general meaning it is the approach which aimed to oppose the tradition of 19<sup>th</sup> century's art and culture. The products of the post-modern era defy classification because there is tremendous diversity in the various forms of post-modern art such as architecture, cinema, music, and literature. The evolution of arts in this era has produced more variety than ever seen before. This is also indicated by the increasing occurrence of the terms post-Darwin and post-Modern as a mixture. Identity is the main stream of thought in post-modernism, as can be observed in forms of sexual identity, local identity, national identity, racial identity, spiritual identity, and intellectual identity. Post-modernism also attracts attention to the disappearance of individualism. According to post-modernism we only exist as long as we belong to a group, and our identity is only important as long as we are of that group.

In post-modern literature we very often find other sources' being used in another literary work, which is called 'inter-textuality'. It is a term introduced by French semiotician Julia Kristeva

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<sup>3</sup> Abrahams, M. H., Ed., **The Norton Anthology of English Literature**, Sixth Edition, Volume 2, W. W. Norton & Company, New York & London, 1993, p. 1685.

in the late sixties. As defined in *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia*<sup>4</sup>, it is a technical term in literary theory to describe the way in which later texts echo earlier ones. In traditional models of influence, a text comes to rest on a prior text which functions as a stable source which is retrieved and made present by a study of allusion, quotation, and reference.

Post-modern literature accommodates the past, the present, and the future. A new look into history has been established by our changing ways in understanding and expressing the world in which we live.

## II. DRAMA AFTER 1945

The war years were also turbulent years for the theatre. Those years brought many changes to world theatre and so to the British theatre.

The British theatre between the world wars was highly commercial. Lots of little theatres arose as a reaction to growing commercialisation. It is noticeable that the actor-manager system virtually disappeared, to be replaced by the commercial producers.

The most significant occurrence of the Second World War years was the emergence of the 'Old Vic'. This theatre was built in 1818 "as the principal producer of English classics".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Preminger, Alex and T.V.F. Brogan, Ed., **The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics**, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993, Volume I, p. 285.

<sup>5</sup> Brockett, op. cit., p. 539.

By 1939 the Old Vic was the most respected troupe in England. With its own theatre, a permanent company, and a policy of producing the finest plays at reasonable prices, it set a standard for the entire country.<sup>6</sup>

In London, several other producers helped to raise the level of performance between the wars. Between the war years the Lyric Theatre and the Gate were the most important ones.

Until the 1950s the commercial theatre was dominated by well-made plays and had a highly stylish and elevated language, and thus it was mostly addressing middle and upper class audiences. The plays of T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) and Christopher Fry (b 1907), in particular, contained 'poetic language'<sup>7</sup>. The language of drama in the twentieth century has gone through crucial changes. Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930), John Millington Synge (1871-1909) and Sean O'Casey (1880-1964) applied a more middle class language to drama. Then we see the same trend in language in the plays of Beckett (1906-1989), Osborne (1929-1994), Pinter (b 1930) and Orton (1933-1967) in the 1960s. A colloquial and slangy language modelled on ordinary conversations emerges.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, the English theatre was at a standstill. The Old Vic, which later was the foundation of the National Theatre in 1963 was the most respected company in England. The festivals, such as the ones at Edinburgh, Chichester, Malvern and Canterbury brought a considerable improvement to the English theatre.

### **The Old Vic**

After Drury Lane (1663), Covent Garden (1732) and the Theatre Royal Haymarket (1720), the Old Vic is London's oldest theatre, with a continuous history since 1818. The Old Vic has been an important driving force in the development of stage drama.

In 1880 Emma Cons, a leading Victorian social reformer, bought the Old Vic and ran it successfully for 32 years. After her death, in 1912 the theatre passed to her niece Lillian Baylis. Under the management of Lillian Baylis, the Old Vic became the centre of Shakespearean performance in Britain.

The Theatre was the first permanent home of opera in English, as well as British Ballet. Above all it was the birthplace of the world-famous Old Vic Company, directed by Laurence Olivier (1907-1989). Among the actors to perform at the Old Vic were Ralph Richardson (1902-1983), Charles Laughton (1899-1962), and Vivien Leigh (1913-1967).

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<sup>6</sup> Brockett, op. cit., p. 540.

<sup>7</sup> Carter, Ronald and McRae, John, **The Routledge History of Literature in English**, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p. 451.

The significance of the Old Vic lies in its role as the cradle of Britain's National Theatre (1963), Royal Ballet (1931) and National Opera (1904), as well as launching the careers of some of Britain's most notable actors and actresses, including John Gielgud (b 1904), Richard Burton (1925-1984), Peggy Ashcroft (1907-1991) and Judi Dench (b 1934), Anthony Hopkins (b 1937). John Gielgud was in charge of the first company in 1929. Lillian Baylis died in 1937, and the directorship passed to Tyrone Guthrie. The Old Vic was badly damaged in the Blitz and had to be closed for a while, however the Old Vic companies continued to tour, and the Old Vic was for a period set up in Liverpool. It was reopened in 1950 by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. In 1963, the Old Vic became the home of the new National Theatre, starting with a production of 'Hamlet', played by Peter O'Toole. Lawrence Olivier was the first director at the National Theatre.

### **III. THEATER OF THE ABSURD**

The term, 'theatre of the absurd', was first used by Martin Esslin in 1961 to describe works by Eugène Ionesco (1912-1994), Jean Genet (1910-1986) and Samuel Beckett (1906-1989).

Although as a term, it was Martin Esslin who used the Theatre of the Absurd first, the origins of the Absurd Theatre go back much further. Alfred Jarry is the precursor of the Theatre of the Absurd with his writing of *Ubu Roi* (Ubu the King) in 1896. Jarry's *Ubu Roi* is a parody of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. *Ubu Roi* is a caricature, a terrifying image of the animal nature of man and his cruelty. *Ubu Roi* makes himself the king of Poland and kills and tortures. Jarry expressed man's psychological states by objectifying them on the stage. The play caused outrage when it was performed at the Theatre de L'Oeuvre in 1896. No one had ever seen anything like it before.

After World War II, a rebellion against essential beliefs and values both of traditional culture and traditional literature appeared. The crisis in belief after World War II is defined by Albert Camus (1913-1960) in a very clear way:

A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life . . . is properly the feeling of absurdity.<sup>8</sup>

...  
I said that the world is absurd, but I was too hasty. This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart.<sup>9</sup>

...  
The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.<sup>10</sup>

After World War II, people felt a deep sense of loss, despair, and hopelessness. People felt that the world is an absurd and meaningless place. And so did the literary world. It became the topic of many dramas of the age. Thus the writers reflected the feelings of the age in their writings. Ionesco described the effect of World War II on people's beliefs thus:

There was a time, long, long ago, when the world seemed to man to be so charged with meanings that he didn't have *time* to ask himself questions, the manifestations was so spectacular. The whole world was like a theatre in which the elements, the forest, the oceans and the rivers, the mountains and the plains, the bushes and each plant played a role that man tried to explain to himself, and gave an explanation of. But the explanations were less important: what was essential, what was satisfying, was the evidence of the presence of the gods, it was plenitude, everything was a series of glorious epiphanies. The world was full of meaning . . . We were abandoned to ourselves, to our solitude, to our fear, and the problem was born. What is this world? Who are we?<sup>11</sup>

These writers differ from play to play, but they are all preoccupied with the loneliness of people; they share a number of characteristics:

- The plays are 'theatrical' rather than realistic, often setting forth obviously impossible situations with obviously unheroic characters who say funny things.

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<sup>8</sup> Camus, Albert, **The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays**, translated from the French by O'Brien, Justin, Vintage Books, New York, 1955, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Camus, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Camus, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Ionesco, Eugène, **Present Past, Past Present: A Personal Memoir**, translated from the French by Helen R. Lane, Grove, New York, 1971, p. 116.

- The plays are serious, but they may contain extravagantly comic scenes to depict a reality that is absurd, illogical, and senseless – a world of futility and meaningless clichés.
- The basic themes are loneliness in a world without God, inability to communicate, the dehumanization and impotence of individuals in a bourgeois society, and the meaninglessness of life.

The dialogue of an absurdist play often includes puns, nonsense patter, jokes, or babble that seem unrelated to the stage action. The characters may be tramps or misfits – almost subhuman types who seem to live outside law and society.

The dictionary definitions of absurd are: “ridiculously senseless, illogical, or untrue”. But the meaning suggested by Ionesco is more applicable to our topic: ‘Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.’<sup>12</sup>

Beckett’s tragicomic *Waiting for Godot* (1953) epitomizes the enigmatic form of the Absurd Theatre. There is no movement in the play, no catharsis, no denouement. His characters typically engage in fruitless and repetitive actions that underscore the meaninglessness of their existence.

In most of the absurdist plays, characters cannot communicate. Language becomes a barrier rather than an aid to communication. These communication problems are the most important problems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And another characteristic of the absurdist plays is that the audience cannot simply sit back in ease but are continually challenged to grasp the play’s meaning.

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<sup>12</sup> Abrahams, M. H., **A Glossary of Literary Terms**, Harcourt Brace College Publishers, New York, 1993, p. 1.

#### IV. LIFE AND WORKS OF TOM STOPPARD

Parodist, wit, ringmaster to a wild troupe of performing words, Stoppard's is a theatre as complete as anything since Ben Jonson, with whom he has much in common, as he does with other great Elizabethan masters as he works for the 'marriage of the play of ideas and ... high comedy'.<sup>13</sup>

Let us begin by examining Stoppard's life, since it is very clear that his life story has had a great influence on his plays. The first eight and a half years of Stoppard's life are a story of twentieth-century displacement and loss. Before he moved to England with a British stepfather, he had lived in three countries; he had been a refugee thrown into a variety of different cultures: Czech, Chinese, Hindi, and finally English. Certainly his past has had an important influence on his works.

Tom Stoppard spoke English from an early age and has lived in England since he was nine.

I spoke only toddler's Czech. I went to [an] English-speaking school in India, and I was educated in English. English has been my first language ever since I could talk.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, his origins were elsewhere. Tom Stoppard, whose original name was Tomáš Straußler, was born on July 3, 1937 in the twilight of the first Czechoslovakian Republic.

I was born in 1937 in a town called Zlin in Czechoslovakia; it's now called Gottwaldow, but I have no memories of Czechoslovakia.<sup>15</sup>

His father, Eugen Straußler was Jewish – or at least acknowledged that one of his grandparents was Jewish, and in 1939 the Bata Shoe Company for whom his father worked felt that this was reason enough to remove the family from the Nazi threat. They went to Singapore. Then, shortly before the Japanese invasion of Singapore in 1941, Stoppard fled to Darjeeling, India, with his mother and elder brother. His father, however, remained behind in Singapore and was killed during the invasion.

In Darjeeling, in northern India, his mother worked for the Czech shoe company Bata, who had employed his father, where he boarded at an American multi-racial school. In 1946,

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<sup>13</sup> R. Hudson, Ed., **Ambushes for the Audience: Towards a High Comedy of Ideas**, *Theatre Quarterly*, IV, 14 (May-July 1974) pp. 3-17.

<sup>14</sup> Nadel, Ira, **A Life of Tom Stoppard**, Methuen, London, 2004, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> Jenkins, Anthony, **Critical Essays on Tom Stoppard**, G.K. Hall & Co., Boston, 1990, p. 15.

Stoppard's mother married Major Kenneth Stoppard and the family moved to England. He went to a boarding preparatory school in Nottinghamshire, and a grammar school in Yorkshire. Stoppard left school in 1954 -aged seventeen - and did not attend a university.

Thoroughly bored by the idea of anything intellectual ...  
alienated by everyone from Shakespeare to Dickens.<sup>16</sup>

Although he did not have a formal education, he has used the English language excellently, and written about people involved in philosophy, advanced mathematics and physics, and Latin and Greek studies.

In 1954, when Stoppard left school, English theatre was about to be transformed. The next five years brought to London Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, Bertolt Brecht's *Berliner Ensemble*, Joan Littlewood's *Theatre Workshop*, and plays by Harold Pinter, Arnold Wesker and John Arden.

. . . the English theatre went through a rather extraordinary period of change; I mean in the late fifties and early sixties a quite disproportionate amount of attention was paid to the English theatre as opposed to English novelists. And consequently a lot of people of my generation turned to writing plays, because they felt that people were interested in what playwrights were doing much more than what any other kind of writers were doing.<sup>17</sup>

After leaving school, Stoppard joined *the Western Daily Press* in Bristol and worked as a cub reporter. As a journalist, he felt fraudulent.

I felt I didn't have the right to ask people questions. I always thought they'd throw the teapot at me or call the police. For me, it was like knocking at the door, wearing your reporter's peaked cap, and saying: 'Hello, I'm from journalism. I've come to inspect you. Take off your clothes and lie down.'<sup>18</sup>

For nine years he worked as a journalist.

My first job was the West of England tennis tournament. I only had to get the results, but I got there half an hour before play – and found I had no paper to write on. I walked two miles to borrow some from a friend. The real reporter from my paper arrived 15 minutes from the end, having been to the cinema all afternoon.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Hunter, Jim, **Tom Stoppard**, Faber and Faber, London-New York, 2000, pp. 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Jenkins, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Delaney, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>19</sup> Nadel, op. cit., p. 57.



But when he was bored with the job, he moved on to the *Bristol Evening World* in 1958 as a theatre critic. He attended and commented on the plays in the theatres of Bristol for two years (1954-1958).

Stoppard started writing plays in 1960. His first play was for television, *A Walk on the Water*, which was shown in 1960. It did not arouse a lot interest. For two years he worked as a freelance journalist. His work included critical articles and Stoppard wrote weekly columns using pseudonyms. The pseudonyms that he chose for himself were interesting. One was Tomik Straüssler – his childhood nickname – and the other one was William Boot. Boot was a character in Evelyn Waugh's novel, *Scoop* (1938).<sup>20</sup>

I've always been attracted to the incompetence of William Boot . . . . He was a journalist who brought a kind of innocent incompetence and contempt to what he was doing.<sup>21</sup>

In 1963 Stoppard moved to London. He wrote for *Scene* as a drama critic. During seven months he saw 132 plays. He wrote short stories, three of which were bought by Faber. Stoppard wrote a novel in 1966, but as he explains, it was only because a publisher – Anthony Blond - wanted him to write one, and Stoppard himself adds that it 'was a surprising thing to do, to me, so I did write one, though I wouldn't have written one otherwise'.<sup>22</sup> This was followed by plays for BBC Radio and a few short stories which appeared in magazines. But it was *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* that made his name. It was originally put on by the Oxford Theatre Group at the Edinburgh Festival in 1966. It was called 'the most brilliant debut since John Arden' by *The Observer*. Stoppard received a telegram from Kenneth Tynan<sup>23</sup> saying that the National Theatre wanted to read the play.

So when I got on the train to come south on Sunday morning, and opened the *Observer* and saw a photograph of myself captioned 'Most promising debut since Arden' [.]<sup>24</sup>

Stoppard became the youngest playwright they had ever taken on. After *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, a string of Stoppard's successful plays started to appear. The following year, Stoppard produced *Albert's Bridge* (1967), this play concerns a philosophy graduate whose intellectualizations bring him into sharp conflict with the realities of life. Later came *Enter a Free Man* (1968) which is a stage adaptation of Stoppard's first television play – *A Walk on the Water*

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<sup>20</sup> Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop* (1938) is a satire on journalism.

<sup>21</sup> Delaney, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> Jenkins, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Tynan (1927-1980) was chiefly known as a journalist, finding fame with his work as a theatre critic with *the Evening Standard*, *The Observer*, and *The New Yorker*, and the literary manager of the National Theatre.

<sup>24</sup> Nadel, op. cit., p. 173.

(1963) - and one of his most traditionally realistic works. He wrote a one-act spoof on detective thrillers called *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968), and next, *After Magritte* (1970). Stoppard's second major dramatic success came in 1972 with *Jumpers*, and was followed by *Travesties* in 1974. *Dirty Linen* (1975) is a light comedy about sexual indiscretions in Parliament, and was followed by a play on human rights; *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1977). It has a full scale orchestra on stage and was written in collaboration with André Previn.<sup>25</sup> The repressive situation in Czechoslovakia led Stoppard to support Charter 77<sup>26</sup> and the writing of *Professional Foul* (1977). It was inspired by the political position of the Czech playwright, Vaclav Havel. It was written for television to celebrate Amnesty International's Prisoner of Conscience Year. The play concerns a professor of ethics in Prague for a professional meeting. Next came *Night and Day*, in 1978, which was followed by another play which has the themes of literature and love, *The Real Thing*, in 1982, in which a married playwright debates whether his love for an actress is the 'real thing' or not. Other works such as *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979) and *Squaring the Circle* (1984) are direct attacks on the oppressive old regimes of Eastern Europe. Shakespeare has an enormous effect on Stoppard, and Stoppard uses Shakespeare's works as sub text in *Dogg's Hamlet* and *Cahoot's Macbeth* as well. *Hapgood* in 1988 and *Arcadia* in 1993 came next. *Hapgood* mixes a Cold War spy drama and science. *Arcadia* is Stoppard's most intellectually ambitious play since *Travesties*, with which it shares an impressive range of riddles and arcane references. *Arcadia* is an intriguing mystery that takes place in both 1809 and the present day. It is about literary detection, about people speculating about what happens and in theory the fun is seeing how wrong they can be, because Stoppard has been here and the characters have not. *The Invention of Love* (1997), examines the relationship between the famous scholar and poet, A.E. Housman, and the man he loved throughout his entire life, Moses Jackson – a handsome athlete who could not return his feelings.

Stoppard earned many honours, such as a knighthood in 1997 – the first British playwright knighted since Terence Rattigan<sup>27</sup> (1911-1977) – and was celebrated as the first living foreign playwright ever to have a work performed at the Comédie-Française, winning an Oscar for co-writing the film *Shakespeare in Love*, and in May 2000, was elevated to the prestigious Order of Merit, bestowed by the Queen. While Stoppard described that film as 'a happy experience', he also said that theatre is his first love.

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<sup>25</sup> André Previn (1929-) German-born American pianist, composer, and conductor.

<sup>26</sup> In January 1977, 230 prominent Czech intellectuals signed and published a manifesto announcing the formation of Charter 77, a 'loose, informal and open association of people' committed to human rights. Signatories included the playwrights Vaclav Havel and Pavel Kohout.

<sup>27</sup> Rattigan was knighted in the early seventies.

I can say movies are not as close to me, they're just not.  
Theatre is there to serve the writing; in the movie world the  
writing is there to serve the movie.<sup>28</sup>

Stoppard has scripted the screenplays of many films; his experience of Singapore found expression through his work on the screenplay of J.G. Ballard's novel, *Empire of the Sun*, which Steven Spielberg released in 1987. Although set in Shanghai, it contained numerous parallels with Stoppard's life in the devastated city of Singapore which forced his family's evacuation and the death of his father. *Russia House* (1990) and *Billy Bathgate* (1991) are other films which Stoppard scripted. Currently Mr Stoppard is busy writing another screenplay.

Stoppard prefers to keep a low public profile, but emerged in the 1970s and 1980s to be politically active in human rights protests against Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In 1997 he made his first return visit to Czechoslovakia, and became a friend of the dramatist Vaclav Havel, who at that time had just been released from prison and eventually became the country's first president after Communist rule.

When Stoppard is asked about his political beliefs, he describes himself as conservative, and is half-way religious.

I approve of belief in God and try to behave as if there is  
one, but that hardly amounts to faith.<sup>29</sup>

For Stoppard, theatre is 'first and foremost a recreation' and in his plays he intends to make us smile or laugh.

It should be a better way to spend an evening than staying  
home and watching whatever is on television. I don't think  
of theatre as night school. I want people to have a good  
time.<sup>30</sup>

In Stoppard's plays, although there are many elements which amuse the audience, there are also many serious questions. As Hunter states<sup>31</sup>, when Guildenstern is confused about death, or George about God, or when Joyce pontificates about art, the human inadequacies of the characters can be smiled at but not their concerns. But still they remain plays, entertainments, inviting us to smile.

In a Stoppard play we can expect to find certain particular elements. As Stoppard himself states, he is a wordsmith and writes plays which are very wordy but quite entertaining as well. Stoppard also adds that he writes plays because dialogue is the most respectable way of contradicting himself. Brilliant language and well-constructed dialogues are the most remarkable

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<sup>28</sup> Kellaway, Kate 'Tom's Foolery', *The Observer*, Sunday July 6, 1997.  
<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/review/story>

<sup>29</sup> Hunter, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> An article by Robin Pogrebin, *Theatre, For Stoppard, a Play Must Be Just That: Play*.

<sup>31</sup> See Hunter, pages 20-134.

among these elements. The speeches of the Player in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the dialogues of Dotty and George in *Jumpers*, or the speeches of all the characters in *Travesties*, are written in an incredibly witty way.

Farce, high comedy, whodunit, play within a play technique, circus, acrobatics, music, silence, linguistic gymnastics, intertextuality are the important theatrical materials Stoppard uses successfully in his plays. We see the plot of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* in *Travesties*. *Jumpers* is about philosophy, but opens with an acrobatic display and has the plot of a murder story.

Stoppard makes use of a great variety of theatrical forms and these theatrical materials will be analyzed in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Jumpers* and *Travesties* in the following chapters.

## ***ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD***

‘It is the most brilliant debut by a young playwright since John Arden’.<sup>32</sup>

This is what the *Observer* weekend review journalist, Ronald Bryden, says about Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, a view held by many other critics.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* was first performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1966, before it was performed in London at the Old Vic Theatre in 1967.

The writing of the play began in Berlin during 1964 when Stoppard was participating in a colloquium for six months for young playwrights sponsored by the Ford Foundation.

I began writing *Rosencrantz* in 1964. ... Charles Marowitz<sup>33</sup> was asked by some Germans if he knew any promising young playwrights, because the Ford Foundation was financing a kind of annual cultural picnic in Berlin – the part of the general effort around that time to keep Berlin alive in every sense, I suppose. So between May and October they had this colloquium, which in 1964 was to be for young playwrights. We were fed and housed in great comfort and just asked to get on with it.

Stoppard found the situation too comfortable, but he did complete a one-act burlesque called *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear*, in addition to several radio plays at the end of his six month’s tenure.

. . . what I wrote in Germany, if I remember – and I’m trying to forget - was just a sort of Shakespearian pastiche. It was Kenneth Edwing who gave the idea, driving back from some abortive attempt to get ABC Television to commission a play from me – all my ideas were ‘too downbeat’, they said. But he suggested that it should take place in England, and I remember writing a version – may be the one Charles read - in which they got to England, and King Lear was on the throne – I mean, the whole thing was unspeakable.<sup>34</sup>

Stoppard was encouraged by his colleagues to pursue the idea, so he expanded the play into two acts on his return to England. And, by 1966 the one-act play had been completely revised as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, and was produced by the Oxford Theatre Group at the Edinburgh Festival in August 1966. After the disappointment of an almost empty house on opening night, Bryden’s review appeared in the *Observer*, and aroused the interest of Kenneth

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<sup>32</sup>Bryden, Ronald, *The Observer Weekend Review* (from review of the Edinburgh Festival premiere), 28 August 1966.

<sup>33</sup>Marowitz, Charles (1934), American dramatist.

<sup>34</sup>‘Interview with R. Hudson, S. Itzin & S. Trussler’, taken from T. Bareham’s **Tom Stoppard: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Jumpers & Travesties**, p. 65.

Tynan who was the literary manager for the National Theatre Company. As a result Stoppard met with Kenneth Tynan (1927-1980), Laurence Olivier (1907-1989), and director Derek Goldby<sup>35</sup> (1940). The aim of the meeting was to produce Stoppard's play. After some rewriting,

We worked a lot on the ending with the National Theatre actors in the last two or three weeks of rehearsal. And, furthermore, between Edinburgh and London I added a scene. It was suggested by Sir Laurence, who pointed out that I had omitted a key scene where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern accost Hamlet after he has hidden Polonius' body. It arose because Olivier pointed out that when Claudius came on and instructed them to find Hamlet, who happened to have killed Polonius, it was the one time in the play when they were given an actual specific duty to fulfil [...]<sup>36</sup>

Derek Goldby directed an expanded version of the play, which opened at the Old Vic in London in April 1967, and travelled to the Alvin Theatre in New York in October of the same year. The play brought Stoppard great success and awards: the *Evening Standard Award* for Most Promising Playwright, the *Plays and Players Best Play Award*, and the *John Whiting*<sup>37</sup> *Award* in England. And in America the play earned the *Tony Award* for the best of the season and *The New York Drama Critics' Circle Award* for the Best Play of the year.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is generally considered to be a play which has "fed off *Hamlet* (c.1601) by Shakespeare, *Waiting for Godot* (1948) by Samuel Beckett and *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) by Pirandello".<sup>38</sup> It is often said that Stoppard has rewritten Shakespeare in the style of Beckett.<sup>39</sup>

Shakespeare provides the characters, Pirandello the technique, and Beckett the tone with which the Stoppard play proceeds. Like Pirandello, Stoppard tries to give extra dramatic life to a group of already written characters, introducing elements of chance and spontaneity into a scene previously determined by an author<sup>40</sup>.

There is also the important influence of T. S. Eliot (1888-1965). As Ronald Hayman says "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were wooed out from the shadow of *Godot* by 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.'" <sup>41</sup>

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,

<sup>35</sup> Directed the original production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* for the National Theatre, as well as on Broadway.

<sup>36</sup> Stoppard, Tom, "Tom Stoppard" **Behind the Scenes: Theatre and Film Interviews from the Transatlantic Review**, Rinehart & Winston, New York, Holt, 1971, p. 83.

<sup>37</sup> Whiting, John, (1915-1963) English dramatist and actor, famous for his *The Devils*.

<sup>38</sup> *The Third Theatre*, New York, 1969, pp. 149-150, 151-153.

<sup>39</sup> Roger, Sales, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Penguin Books, England, 1988, p. 139.

<sup>40</sup> Stoppard, Tom, "Tom Stoppard" **Behind the Scenes: Theatre and Film Interviews from the Transatlantic Review**, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1971, p. 83.

<sup>41</sup> Hayman, Ronald, **Tom Stoppard**, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Heinemann, London, 1982, p. 6.

Deferential, glad to be of use,  
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;  
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;  
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous –  
Almost, at times, the Fool.<sup>42</sup>

Ronald Hayman also alludes to Stoppard's own words:

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.<sup>43</sup>

However, Stoppard's play is absolutely not an attempt to rewrite *Waiting for Godot* within the framework of Shakespeare's drama. He completely writes his own play.

When Stoppard was asked why he chose *Hamlet* and the two minor characters of *Hamlet*, he explained that *Hamlet* is the only play and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the only characters, which he wanted to write a play about. Since Stoppard is dealing with modern man, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern reflect many characteristics such as ambiguity and meaninglessness of life and the dilemma of life that contemporary man faces – especially when they are not sure how to behave after they discover that Hamlet is going to be executed on their arrival in England. Hence they are the best fit characters for Stoppard's play.

They chose themselves to a certain extent. I mean that the play *Hamlet* and the characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the only play and the only characters on which you could write my kind of play. They are so much more than merely bit players in another famous play. *Hamlet* is the most famous play in any language, it is part of a sort of common mythology.<sup>44</sup>

And he continues to explain in another interview as follows:

By this time I was not in the least interested in doing any sort of pastiche, for a start, or in doing a criticism of *Hamlet* – that was simply one of the by-products. The chief interest and objective was to exploit a situation which seemed to me to have enormous dramatic and comic potential - of these two guys who in Shakespeare's context don't really know what they're doing. The little they are told is mainly lies, and there's no reason to suppose that they ever find out why they are killed. And, probably more in the early 1960s than at any other time, that would strike a young playwright as being a pretty good thing to explore. I mean, it has the right combination of specificity and vague generality [...]<sup>45</sup>

What he did intend, he explains in the same interview, was “to entertain a roomful of people” with the combination of the two courtiers and the events at Elsinore.

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<sup>42</sup> From *The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Abrahams, M. H., Ed., **The Norton Anthology of English Literature**, Sixth Edition, Volume 2, W. W. Norton & Company, New York & London, 1993, p. 2143.

<sup>43</sup> Hayman, loc.cit.

<sup>44</sup> Giles Gordon's interview in *Transatlantic Review*, (1968), pp. 17-20.

<sup>45</sup> Jenkins, Anthony, **The Theatre of Tom Stoppard**, Cambridge University Press, London, 1987, p. 38.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is a play about a play – within a play. It is often thought that Stoppard was given this idea by Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921)<sup>46</sup>, although Jim Hunter claims that Stoppard had not read the play at this point.

Rosencrantz was indebted to Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Stoppard had in fact no direct knowledge of Pirandello, but may have absorbed him at second hand from *Next Time I'll Sing to You* by his friend James Saunders<sup>47</sup> (who is credited with suggestions to Stoppard the expansion into a full-length play of his original verse-sketch about R. and G.).<sup>48</sup>

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are two minor courtiers. But in Stoppard's play they are the central characters, always on stage. The rough idea had been used almost a century earlier by W. S. Gilbert<sup>49</sup> - later famous with Arthur Sullivan for their comic operas - in a play called *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*. Although the play was produced in 1874, it was not performed in public until 1891. It is interesting that a performance which took place in 1904 had a cast that included Gilbert himself as well as Shaw and Anthony Hope<sup>50</sup>.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* uses *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot* as inter-textual bases for its structure and characters. Stoppard borrows two secondary characters from *Hamlet* and transforms them into the anti-heroes of a twentieth century play.

Before starting to examine the play, the parts of *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot*, which are directly relevant to Stoppard's play, should be dealt with.

*Hamlet* is a five-act play, which is set at the Danish court. The Danish King, Hamlet's father, has recently died, and his brother Claudius has taken the throne and hastily married Hamlet's mother, Gertrude.

HORATIO: My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.

HAMLET : I prithee do not mock me, fellow-student;  
I think it was to see my mother's wedding.<sup>51</sup>  
(p. 49)

The former King's ghost tells Hamlet he was poisoned by Claudius, and demands revenge.

GHOST : Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

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<sup>46</sup> Pirandello, Luigi, (1867-1936) is famous in twentieth-century theatre for his use of the play within a play, a technique of embedded dramatic episodes that maintain a life of their own while serving as foil to the overall or governing plot. 'Who am I?', 'What is real?' are the questions that underline Pirandello's plays.

<sup>47</sup> English playwright (b. 1925), won the *Evening Standard* award for Most Promising Playwright with *Next Time I'll Sing To You* (1962-63).

<sup>48</sup> Hunter, op. cit., p.29. According to Jacky Matthews, Stoppard's personal assistant, Stoppard has said that he did not have Pirandello's work in mind. (Personal communication with Jacky Matthews)

<sup>49</sup> Gilbert, William Schwenck (1836-1911) who started his writing career first as a full time writer of ballads and plays for London theatre. Gilbert's skills as a writer of light verse, together with his experience in devising plays for the London theatre, were responsible for his triumphant success as a librettist in a series of light operas that he composed in collaboration with the eminent musician Sir Arthur Sullivan. Gilbert was knighted in 1907; Stoppard received the same honour in 1997.

<sup>50</sup> English novelist, famous for his *The Prisoner of Zenda*.

<sup>51</sup> All quotations from this play are Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, Wordsworth Classics, Kent, 2002.



(p. 59)

Although Hamlet swears to the ghost of his father to take revenge, he hesitates. He is unsure whether to trust his father's ghost. Hesitation is something very modern and fits in Stoppard's play perfectly. Hamlet conceals his knowledge by pretending he is mad. Pretending to be mad is a very clever way to conceal the truth. In this way even extreme emotions and behaviours are interpreted as madness. And one of the interpretations of Hamlet's madness comes from Polonius - Denmark's devious chief minister -, he believes that Hamlet's actions are those of somebody who is mad for love.

POLONIUS: This is the very ecstasy of love,  
Whose violent property fordoes itself  
And leads the will to desperate undertakings  
As oft as any passion under heaven  
That does afflict our natures.

(p. 68)

Claudius summons Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to the castle to engage Hamlet in conversation to find out what is in his mind. Although Claudius does not put his ideas into words, we can feel that he is very worried about the possibility that Hamlet might be suspicious of his being the murderer of his brother. Therefore, to discover the truth he uses Hamlet's old school fellows, but Hamlet is too clever for them. Instead of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, it is Hamlet who questions them and is sure that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are at the castle because of the ultimatum of the King.

GUILDEN.: My lord, we were sent for.

HAMLET : I will tell you why. So shall my anticipation  
prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the  
King and Queen moult no feather. I have of  
late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my  
mirth, forgone all custom of exercise; and  
indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition[.]

(p. 76)

A group of travelling players arrives at the castle. On the arrival of the troupe of professional actors, Hamlet sets up a play, 'The Murder of Gonzago', which closely resembles the murder of his father. It is very interesting to see that Shakespeare uses 'The Murder of Gonzago' as an inter-textual basis for *Hamlet*. The details about 'The Murder of Gonzago' will be analyzed in the following pages.

HAMLET : Dost thou hear me, old friend, can you play  
*The Murder of Gonzago?*

PLAYER I: Ay, my lord.

(p. 82)

At the performance of the play, Claudius who has been acting innocent is guiltily shocked, and establishes his guilt by walking out of the play. Hamlet does not blame him in public and wants to kill him in private. Instead of Claudius, he kills Polonius mistakenly thinking he is Claudius.

Claudius sends Hamlet on a voyage to England, along with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who carry a sealed letter ordering that on arrival there Hamlet is to be killed. Hamlet manages to get the letter, rewrites it and instead of his death, he asks for the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. After this, he escapes from the ship during a pirate attack. In the final scene, Hamlet finally kills Claudius just before dying himself. The title of Stoppard's play is quoted from the last pages of Shakespeare.

AMBASSADOR I: The sight is dismal,  
And our affairs from England come too late.  
The ears are senseless that should give us  
hearing,  
To tell him his commandment is fulfilled,  
That *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*.  
Where should we have our thanks?  
(p. 151)

The other play which is said to have influenced Stoppard is *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. Stoppard's own words explain Beckett's importance for him very clearly.

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 Beckett novels show as the plays, because there's a Beckett joke which is the funniest joke in the world to me.<sup>52</sup>

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) was Irish by birth, but spent most of his later life in France. *Waiting for Godot* like many of his other works was written in French, and is a tragicomedy in two acts. It was first performed in Paris in 1953. He believed that French forced him to be more disciplined and to use the language more wisely. It is the same for Stoppard as well. Stoppard is a brilliant master of English language, but if we think about his origins, English is his second language. As Stoppard himself says: "At one time I thought perhaps I enjoyed playing with the English language because I came to it late."<sup>53</sup> Discipline of using a foreign language makes someone think for the second time thus makes the writers clearer. *Waiting for Godot* was translated into English by Beckett himself. With this play, he was the first of the absurdists to win international fame. He brought popular attention to absurdism, both in France and elsewhere. His conversation with a friend of his clearly explains his sense of life.

Beckett: It's a beautiful day, isn't it?  
The friend: Yes, it makes one glad to be alive.  
Beckett: Aw now, I wouldn't go that far...<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Hayman, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Delaney, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>54</sup> [www.gradesaver.com/ClassicNotes/Authors/About\\_Samuel\\_Beckett.html](http://www.gradesaver.com/ClassicNotes/Authors/About_Samuel_Beckett.html)

His sense of depression is evident in much of his writing, especially in *Waiting for Godot* where there is a struggle just to get through life.

The modern classic, *Waiting for Godot*, focuses on two tramps whose lives seem to summarize the feelings of many people today – hopelessness, meaninglessness, lack of communication and the futility of the human condition. The setting is a country road, and a tree. In the second act, four or five leaves have appeared on the tree. The play revolves around Vladimir and Estragon and their pitiful wait for hope to arrive.

ESTRAGON: He should be here.  
VLADIMIR : He didn't say for sure he'd come.  
ESTRAGON: And if he doesn't come?  
VLADIMIR : We'll come back tomorrow.<sup>55</sup>  
(p. 6)

Vladimir and Estragon – also known as Didi and Gogo - are two tramp-like clowns who meet on a country road in the evening hoping that someone named Godot will come to save them. And most probably 'hope' is named for *Godot* who never shows up in the play, but gives strength to our characters to live. At least waiting for something is the only meaning in their meaningless life.

ESTRAGON: Let's go.  
VLADIMIR : We can't.  
ESTRAGON: Why not?  
VLADIMIR : We're waiting for Godot.  
(p. 6)

Godot's identity is never revealed and he never appears. Instead of coming, Godot sends his messages via a boy, and the boy promises that Mr Godot will arrive tomorrow, but he never appears.

BOY : [*In a rush.*] Mr Godot told me to tell you he  
won't come this evening but surely tomorrow.  
[*Silence.*]  
VLADIMIR: Is that all?  
BOY : Yes, sir.  
[*Silence.*]  
(p. 44)

From the beginning of the play the theme of hopelessness is established. Actually, it is the hopelessness of modern men who is conveyed by Estragon and Vladimir.

ESTRAGON: [*Giving up.*] Nothing to be done.  
VLADIMIR : . . . I'm beginning to come round to that  
opinion.  
(p. 1)

Although the play is classed as an avant-garde play, it became a classic in a short time<sup>56</sup>. Alan Schneider<sup>57</sup> when directing *Waiting for Godot* in America, wrote to Beckett asking the perplexing

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<sup>55</sup>All quotations from this play are Beckett, Samuel, **Waiting for Godot**, Faber and Faber, London, 1965.

question, which we all ask, ‘Who is Godot?’ Beckett responded that if he wished us to know he would have revealed the answer in the text.<sup>58</sup> It makes us think that even Beckett himself did not know who Godot was, or he wanted us to enjoy making our own interpretation on the identity of a so called character – Godot. And also, as in Stoppard’s plays, if a play has an easily compressible meaning then it would not be enjoyed that much. Ambiguity is the most significant characteristic element of both Beckett’s and Stoppard’s plays.

*Waiting for Godot* epitomizes the absurdist form. The characters are absurd; they have problems in communication and in dealing with their environment. The action in the play appears to start again, with nothing having changed. The closing lines and stage directions suggest the absurdity of the universe.

VLADIMIR : Well? Shall we go?  
ESTRAGON: Yes, let’s go.  
[*They do not move.*]  
(p. 87)

Vladimir and Estragon, who do not have a relationship with anyone else, are lost and unhappy characters. Their only pleasure is language and the games they play with words.

ESTRAGON: [*Feebly.*] Help me!  
VLADIMIR : It hurts?  
ESTRAGON: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!  
VLADIMIR : [*Angrily.*] No one ever suffers but you. I don’t count. I’d like to hear what you’d say if you had what I have.  
(p. 2)

VLADIMIR : Suppose we repented.  
ESTRAGON: Repented what?  
VLADIMIR : Oh ... [*He reflects.*] We wouldn’t have to go into the details.  
ESTRAGON: Our being born?  
(p. 3)

Beckett’s play is both desperate and funny. Most of the time we see the two characters doing nothing and complaining about boredom. The dialogue makes use of a form of crosstalk and we shall see the same type of dialogue in Stoppard’s play. I think the cross-talking characters and the use of ‘silence’ in the play are the most significant characteristics which Stoppard borrows from Beckett. Both Beckett and Stoppard resort to silences and pauses, reflecting the language problems of modern man. Both Vladimir and Estragon and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern want to

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<sup>56</sup> When the play was shown at San Quentin prison, the prisoners felt a strong connection to men waiting to be saved, as the prison was established in response as a State Prison in 1851 in response to increased criminal activity brought on by the sudden influx of men seeking their **fortune** in the gold fields. The prisoners liked Beckett’s tramps.

<sup>57</sup> American theatre director who staged the U.S. premiere of *Waiting for Godot* in 1956.

<sup>58</sup> Wilson, Edwin and Goldfarb, Alvin, **Living Theater**, McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, New York, 1983, p. 340.

assert themselves through their silences. Silence in modern plays is an emotional form of communication

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is probably Stoppard's best-known and most produced work. Stoppard uses inter-textuality, 'the play within a play' technique, linguistic gymnastics, silence and pauses, wit, and metaphor which constitute enjoyable aspects of his play.

According to Stoppard, 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is a play about two Elizabethan courtiers in a castle, wondering what's going on.'<sup>59</sup> Like in *Waiting for Godot*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* revolves around two characters – Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – and their endless tad of Hamlet till they die.

Stoppard puts two *attendant lords*<sup>60</sup> on the stage, but unlike heroes they are deprived of freedom of action; they know they are being used, but they do not know for what purpose. Shakespeare provides little information about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Stoppard emphasises their ignorance and their impotence. I think the reason Stoppard emphasizes their ignorance and impotence is because he is writing about modern man.

They are told very little about what is going on and much of what they are told isn't true. So I see them much more clearly as a couple of bewildered innocents rather than a couple of henchmen.<sup>61</sup>

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is a three-act play. The play opens with the title characters alone on stage. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are two Elizabethan gentlemen, betting on the toss of a coin while travelling towards Elsinore. Rosencrantz keeps winning over and over again, each time calling 'heads'. The number of times the coin lands on heads is no surprise to Rosencrantz, who is simply excited about his 'new record'. He also feels a bit bad about taking so much money from his friend.

*The run of 'heads' is impossible, yet ROS 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. Let that be his character note.*<sup>62</sup>

(p. 9)

Since the play begins with a game of gambling, it can be said that the theme of chance is introduced at the very beginning of the play. However, the gambling element can be thought of in two ways. As in most of Stoppard's plays, there are always some other interpretations which lie

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<sup>59</sup> Bareham, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>60</sup> Just as in T. S. Eliot's *The Love-Song of Alfred J. Prufrock*, line 112.

<sup>61</sup> Hayman, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>62</sup> All quotations from this play are Stoppard, Tom, **Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead**, Faber and Faber, London, 1967.

behind. The other explanation is that money determines the world and is the basis of everyday life and modern man is the captive of this premise.

Guildenstern, on the other hand, is shocked at the improbable results of the spins – the coin has come down heads eighty-five times in a row. He wonders what it means about the nature of the universe – does probability really exist?

*GUIL 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 – his character note.*  
(p. 9)

Unsure of where they are going – and even who they are and where they come from - they try to remember what they are doing, and finally recall that they were awakened that morning by a man summoning them to the King. They do not know what he wants, but they know it is urgent. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are completely ignorant of the King's order, and their ignorance seems to be important to Stoppard. As Stoppard insists upon the ignorance of the characters, he is in a sense worried about the modern man's ignorance stance of the facts. The characters' ignorance or their indifference to the actions will actually result in their death at the end of the play. Although the death cases which happen because of man's ignorance seem to be rare in today's world, the wars and tensions between the countries are all because of man's ignorance and/or indifference to the issues.

*GUIL: (Tensed up by his rambling) Do you remember the first thing that happened today?*

*ROS : (Promptly) I woke up, I suppose. (Triggered) Oh – I've got it now – that man, a foreigner, he woke us up –*

*GUIL: A messenger. (He relaxes, sits.)*

*ROS : That's it – pale sky before dawn, a man standing on his saddle to bang on the shutters – shouts- What's all the row about?! Clear off! – But then he called our names. You remember that – this man woke us up.*

(p. 15)

Their blankness is the whole point. They exist only to be occasionally involved in great events. When they are not wanted they are left together in a bare anteroom of the palace, spinning coins and playing games to pass the time until the next call comes. And their only freedom lies in playing games.

*ROS : (Dramatically) It was urgent – a matter of extreme urgency, a royal summons, his very words: official business and no questions asked – lights in the stableyard, saddle up and off headlong and hotfoot across the land, our guides outstripped in breakneck pursuit of our duty! Fearful lest we come too late!!*

(Small pause.)

GUIL: Too late for what?

ROS : How do I know? We haven't got there yet. (p. 15)

The negative things which happen to our characters are a mixture of their bad luck and ignorance. Stoppard is trying to reflect the naivety of the two characters as well. By using their ignorance he not only makes reference to today's societies but also adds comic elements to the play.

GUIL: The sun came up about as often as it went down,  
in the long run, and a coin showed heads about as  
often as it showed tails. Then a messenger arrived.  
We had been sent for. Nothing else happened.

(p. 14)

And the music approaches. Music is one of the very often used theatrical materials of Stoppard. It is used not only in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* but also is an effective element at the beginning and end of *Jumpers*.

A group of actors appears, led by the Player. The problem of mistaken identity first appears in the play when Rosencrantz is introducing himself and his companion to the Players. Rosencrantz first introduces himself as Guildenstern, and his friend as Rosencrantz. After that he corrects his mistake. As is seen in the continuation of the play, although Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seem that they do not care people's mixing their name, they actually do care. People are denying their identity. Their identity is taken from them. So that really matters if they are called the other way around. Again Stoppard is pointing out the identity problem of man especially came out after the world wars. Stoppard is saying that everything is in name as an important sign of our identity.

ROS: My name is Guildenstern, and this is Rosencrantz.

(GUIL confers briefly with him.)

(Without embarrassment) I'm sorry – his name's  
Guildenstern, and I'm Rosencrantz.

(p. 18)

The players want to perform a play for them, but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not very interested in watching it. The scenes where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are alone recall some scenes in *Waiting for Godot*. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are similarly the two characters who never separate from each other in *Waiting For Godot* – Vladimir and Estragon. Both plays present two little men, with a lack of knowledge and power, who are trying to struggle with a universe full of uncertainty. Similarities in characterisation and in the relationships between the two main characters in each play are striking.

The plot of *Hamlet* becomes a metaphor for human destiny in Stoppard's play: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern accede to a destiny which is predetermined for them by Shakespeare. Stoppard emphasizes the possibility that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern could change their fate by choosing

not to be so passive in obeying Claudius' orders. In Stoppard's play there is predestination. Guildenstern and Rosencrantz's destiny is directed by a palace messenger who appeared at dawn.

GUIL : Who decides?

PLAYER: (*Switching off his smile*) Decide? It is written.

(pp. 58-59)

We hope that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are Hamlet's childhood friends, can find out what is wrong, and perhaps do something to cheer Hamlet up. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern agree at once, but as soon as everyone leaves, they become very disturbed. They want to go home, they do not know what they are supposed to do about Hamlet, and they are afraid. Everyone, also, keeps confusing their names, including themselves.

CLAUDIUS: Welcome, dear Rosencrantz ... (*He raises a hand at GUIL while ROS bows – GUIL bows late and hurriedly*) ... and Guildenstern.

(*He raises a hand at ROS while GUIL bows to him – ROS is still straightening up from his previous bow and half way up he bows down again. With his head down, he twists to look at GUIL, who is on the way up.*)

(p. 27)

Guildenstern convinces Rosencrantz to stay around and try to relax. They will help Hamlet, and when they are done they will leave and be well rewarded. But what kind of a reward are they going to have? Is death the reward? And will Rosencrantz really like that reward?

ROS : I want to go home.

GUIL: Don't let them confuse you.

ROS : I'm out of my step here –

GUIL: We'll soon be home and high – dry and home – I'll –

(p. 29)

ROS : We cheer him up – find out what's the matter –

GUIL: Exactly, it's a matter of asking the right question and giving away as little as we can. *It's a game.* (p. 31)

As Guildenstern remarks, life is a game as well. Life is a game where you can never know the end. Will it end in happiness or sadness? The probability of both ends is equal. But sometimes the law of probability might be astonishing as it is to Guildenstern at the beginning of the play. They play a game of 'questions' to practice what they will say to Hamlet. The game consists of never making a statement. They have a conversation entirely composed of questions. Guildenstern pretends to be Hamlet and Rosencrantz represents both of them, so that they can practice questioning him further. At this point, through their conversation, they summarize the plot of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The first act ends as in Shakespeare; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern greet Hamlet.

GUIL : (*Calls upstage to HAMLET*) My honoured lord!

ROS : My most dear lord!

(*HAMLET centred upstage, turns to them.*)

HAMLET: My excellent good friends!



Act Two starts again as in Shakespeare's act II scene II. Hamlet leaves Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on the stage quite confused. Even Rosencrantz demonstrates free speech by yelling 'Fire' at the audience – and commenting that nobody has moved. This is a good metaphor of Stoppard showing how people indifferent to serious matters. In this speech, the audience do not move because they know that this is a play and this "fire alarm" must have been a part of the play. In real life we are also often indifferent to many serious matters that do not immediately concern us. So that is what Stoppard is criticising. Sooner or later the things that we are indifferent to might become our problems.

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.

(p. 44)

Hamlet asks the Tragedians if they know the play, 'The Murder of Gonzago'. *The Murder of Gonzago* is the play-within-the-play of *Hamlet*, which is also the play within the play of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. The Player agrees to perform that play the next night with some lines added by Hamlet.

It is interesting that Tom Stoppard like Shakespeare uses different sources in his plays. When we analyze the sources of Shakespeare's works in detail, they show that Shakespeare also used some existing plays in his plays; Shakespeare's basic source for *Hamlet* was the *Ur-Hamlet* (c. 1588). *Ur-Hamlet* is a play on the same subject that is known to have been popular in London in the 1580s, but for which no text survives. This work is believed to have been written by Thomas Kyd (1558-1594). Kyd apparently derived the story from a tale in François Belleforest's (1530-1583) collection *Histories Traiques* (1580). That story was derived from a ninth-century saga about a pre-Viking prince called Amleth.

As mentioned in Deborah James's study<sup>63</sup>, the saga was recorded by Saxo Grammaticus in his *Chronicles of the Danish Realm*, written around 1200 and first published in 1514. The word 'amleth' means 'dimwit'<sup>64</sup> or 'simpleton'<sup>65</sup> – a reference to the Prince's feigned madness, which he

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<sup>63</sup> From a study guide which was researched and written by Deborah James for the National Arts Centre English Theatre, December 2003.

<sup>64</sup> Dimwit: (*Informal*) a stupid person.

<sup>65</sup> Simpleton: (*Old-fashioned*) a weak-minded trusting person.

assumed to protect himself from his uncle who killed his father. Feigned madness is mentioned to have been a popular theme in Icelandic and Viking folk tales.

A real event inspired the story of the murder of Hamlet's father. In 1538 the Duke of Urbino, one of the leading military and political figures of the day, died. His barber-surgeon confessed that he had killed the duke by putting a lotion in his ears, having been hired to do so by Luigi Gonzaga.<sup>66</sup>

Hamlet leaves Rosencrantz and Guildenstern alone with the Player. The Player approaches them; he is very angry that they abandoned him and his actors in the middle of their performance. He claims that the only reason actors have to live is that someone might be watching them, so that when they discovered halfway through the play that no one was watching them, it was an enormous shock to them. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern show no reaction. They only hope that seeing a play will be good for Hamlet.

PLAYER: (*Bursts out*) We can't look each other in the face!  
(*Pause, more in control.*) You don't understand  
the humiliation of it – to be tricked out of the  
single assumption which makes our existence  
viable – that somebody is *watching* ... The plot  
was two corpses gone before we caught sight of  
ourselves, stripped naked in the middle of  
nowhere and pouring ourselves down a  
bottomless well.

(p. 46)

When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern complain that they do not know what to do next, the Player advises them:

GUIL : But for God's sake what are we supposed to *do*?!  
PLAYER: Relax. Respond. That's what people do. You  
can't go through life questioning your situation  
at every turn.

GUIL : But we don't know what's going on, or what to  
do with ourselves. We don't know how to *act*.

PLAYER: Act natural. You know why you're here at least.

(pp. 48-49)

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern lyingly assure the King and Queen that their meeting with Hamlet went well.

A figure dressed as the Queen enters and Rosencrantz puts his hands over her eyes and says 'Guess who?' It turns out to be the boy-player Alfred, and the rehearsal of 'The Murder of Gonzago' starts. A discussion promptly comes after the rehearsal, about whether real death is more convincing than an actor's rendering of it. Life is theatre itself, and we are so used to this theatre that sometimes it is hard to differentiate between the real and unreal. There are so many people

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<sup>66</sup> For other sources which may have contributed to *Hamlet*, see Boyce, page 239.

wearing invisible masks and they are so good that sometimes they believe that the play they are in or acting is real. I really am not sure if this is supposed to be something that I should applaud or feel sad the way we all have become. And I suppose Mr Stoppard has the same concern that he reflects to his play.

Stoppard questions the meaning of tragedy in this scene with the Player's words. He examines life by using the device of a game. Stoppard underlines the differences and the similarities between life and the theatre.

GUIL : Wasn't that the end?

PLAYER: Do you call that an ending? – with practically everyone on his feet? My goodness no – over your dead body.

GUIL : How am I supposed to take that?

PLAYER: Lying down. (*He laughs briefly and in a second has never laughed in his life.*) There's a design at work in all art – surely you know that? Events must play themselves out to aesthetic, moral and logical conclusion.

(p. 58)

He emphasizes that the play seems more real than reality itself. In other words, to Stoppard, the play is more convincing than the reality.

GUIL : . . . 'One day you are going to die.' (*He straightens up.*) You die so many times; how can you expect them to believe in death?

PLAYER: On the contrary, it's the only kind they do believe. They're conditioned to it. I had an actor once who was condemned to hang for stealing a sheep – or a lamb, I forget which – so I got permission to have him hanged in the middle of a play – had to chance the plot a bit but I thought it would be effective, you know – and you wouldn't believe it, he just *wasn't* convincing!

(p. 62)

But for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the situation is very interesting. While they are watching the play, there are two actors dressed just like them, who on their arrival in England are immediately killed. Here Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are thought either naive or stupid. However, there is not even a single explanation about their feeling so any kind of interpretation is welcomed here. They may even be under a great shock and not know what to do or not want to believe what they see. Claudius interrupts the play and sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to seek Hamlet. When everything is finally calmed down in this scene, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hope that their work is done, but hesitate to leave.

ROS : He said we can go. Cross my heart.

...

ROS : We don't want to come back.

GUIL: That may very well be true, but do we want to go?  
ROS : We'll be free.  
GUIL: I don't know. It's the same sky.  
(p. 70)

Again this dialogue between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is fascinating. Now, they have the chance to go and be free, but if it is the same condition that they will have afterwards, then is it really worth changing the place but having the same things? The Shakespearean basis for Act Three is minimal. Act Three begins in pitch darkness.

*Opens in pitch darkness.*  
*Soft sea sounds.*  
(p. 71)

After the sound effects, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern eventually comprehend that they are on a boat. As Hayman states<sup>67</sup>, sea travel is a theme which helps to develop the central idea. Sea is a fascinating image. Modern man does not want to take responsibilities.

Hard a larboard!  
Let go the stays!  
...  
Easy as she goes!  
Keep her steady on the lee!  
Haul away, lads!  
...  
ROS: We're on a boat.  
(p. 72)

They have a purpose – to deliver ‘the letter’ to the English King from Claudius.

GUIL: . . . we are brought round full circle to face again  
the single immutable fact – that we, Rosencrantz and  
Guildenstern, bearing a letter from one king to  
another, are taking Hamlet to England.  
(p. 74)

And they notice that Hamlet is sleeping nearby. Although for the first time in the play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern know what to do next – to escort Hamlet to England and give the letter to the English King – they are in need of a sign which is going to show them what to do. The dialogue between Guildenstern and Rosencrantz reminds us of Beckett's characters waiting for Godot to be told what to do.

GUIL: Give us this day our daily cue.  
(*Beat, pause. Sit. Long pause.*)  
ROS : (*After shifting, looking around*) What now?  
(p. 75)

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<sup>67</sup> Hayman, op. cit., p. 44.

Although Stoppard's characters are not as frequently silent as Beckett's tramps, these silences and pauses are more meaningful than so many long speeches in Stoppard's play. Actually silence in his play is an ambiguous sound.

In this scene, in addition to seeing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's characters vividly, we also witness our characters' witty dialogue on originality. Can we really talk about originality?

GUIL: Why don't you say something original! No wonder the whole thing is so stagnant! You don't take me upon anything – you just repeat it in a different order.

ROS : I can't think of anything original. I'm only good in support.

GUIL: I'm sick of making the running.

ROS : (*Humbly*) It must be your dominant personality.  
(*Almost in tears*) Oh, what's going to become of us!  
(*And GUIL comforts him, all harshness gone.*)

(p. 76)

There is the letter that they are supposed to give to the English King, but they are not sure what exactly the letter is about. They start making assumptions about the contents of the letter and practise what they are going to say to the King on their arrival in England.

ROS : (*Furiously*) He won't know what we're talking about  
- What are we going to say?

GUIL: We say – Your majesty, we have arrived!

ROS : (*Kingly*) And who are you?

GUIL: We are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

ROS : (*Barks*) Never heard of you!

GUIL: Well, *we're nobody special* –

(p. 79)

There is more than greetings in the letter, and their curiosity wins and, Rosencrantz opens the letter.

GUIL: We've got a letter –  
(*ROS snatches it and tears it open.*)

(p. 80)

They find that the letter asks the English king to execute Hamlet. Their conscience is troubled. Hamlet is their friend. They all grew up together. And now, they are taking Hamlet to his death. It is a question of conscience. The play is about how man reacts and why modern man does not know what to do. Maybe these characters are saying to us that modern man will not stand up for the right, but just accepts things as they are. If there are values that we care about then we should stand up for them. However, here the characters stand back and do not stand for life. Instead of standing up, they become passive victims. Guildenstern tries to comfort Rosencrantz just the way we comfort ourselves.

GUIL: Well, he is a man, he is mortal, death comes to

us all, etcetera, and consequently he would have died anyway, sooner or later. . . . – he’s just one man among many, the loss would be well within reason and convenience. And then again, what is so terrible about death? As Socrates so philosophically put it, since we don’t know what death is, it is illogical to fear it. It might be . . . very nice. Certainly it is a release from the burden of life, and, for the godly, a haven and a reward. . . . – we are little men, we don’t know the ins and outs of the matter, there are wheels within wheels, etcetera – it would be presumptuous of us to interfere with the design of fate or even of kings.

(pp. 80-81)

As Jim Hunter says<sup>68</sup>, if Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had warned Hamlet about the contents of the letter, Hamlet would probably have been grateful and would not have put Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s names in the letter, and the line ‘Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead’ would never have been spoken. Since they are supposed to do whatever the orders say, they are emotionally frozen.

Guildenstern also mentions Rosencrantz’s characteristic here once more. Guildenstern likes doing things in the best order. They are actually not only tying up ‘the letter’ but also their destiny.

GUIL: Tie up the letter – there – neatly – like that –  
They won’t notice the broken seal, assuming you  
were in character.

(p. 81)

According to Hayman<sup>69</sup>, something at last depends on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s choice. Should they go ahead or confide in Hamlet? They seem to be in control in this scene. After they discussed Hamlet’s being taken to England and being executed there, Rosencrantz wants to summarize the things which have happened from the beginning of their being called to the castle.

ROS: The position as I see it, then. We, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, from our young days brought up with him, awakened by a man standing on his saddle, are summoned, and arrive, and are instructed to glean what afflicts him and draw him on to pleasure, such as a play, which unfortunately, as it turns out, is abandoned in some confusion owing to certain nuances outside our appreciation – which, among other effects, a high, not to say, homicidal, excitement in Hamlet, whom we, in consequence, are escorting, for his own good, to England.

(p. 81)

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<sup>68</sup> See Hunter, pages 20-43.

<sup>69</sup> Hayman, op. cit., p. 45.

When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fall asleep after this very philosophical conversation, Hamlet, who has heard their conversation, takes the letter and changes it, asking for their death.

Music is heard – first a pipe and then a drum. And there the tragedians are. The characters start popping out of the barrels one by one. And, finally the lid of the middle barrel opens and the Player appears.

PLAYER: Aha! All in the same boat, then!  
(p. 83)

Rosencrantz complains about not having enough ‘action’ just before their conversation with the Player. The Player’s words about life are very charming and applicable to our century.

PLAYER: Life is a gamble, at terrible odds –  
(p. 84)

Instantly, the pirates attack, and now there is certainly enough action. When the attack is over, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern realize that Hamlet has gone. They need Hamlet for their release. They re-open the letter in a great panic, and this time, they find their own names written in it for execution. It is very witty of Stoppard again, because now there is more than enough action.

GUIL: (*Reads*). ‘As England is Denmark’s faithful tributary ... as love between them like the palm might flourish, etcetera ... that on the knowing of this contents, without delay of any kind, should those bearers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, put to sudden death - ’

...  
(*He double takes. . . . They read it again and look up . . .*)  
(p. 89)

They cannot understand anything. What does all this mean? They are just two ordinary men who do not have anything to do with this. Guildenstern once more protests their helplessness and bewilderment as little men.

ROS : They had it in for us, didn’t they? Right from the beginning. Who’d have thought that we were so important?

GUIL : But why? Was it all for this? Who are we that so much should converge on our little deaths? (*In anguish to the PLAYER.*) Who are *we*?

PLAYER: You are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. That’s enough.

GUIL : No – it is not enough. To be told so little – to

such an end – and still, finally, to be denied an explanation –

(p. 90)

After Guildenstern's words, the Player brings up the subject of 'death' which makes Guildenstern talk angrily about the difference between the reality of death and the theatrical illusion of it. All these sentences reflect Stoppard's interest in language. His characters are absolutely free to play with words, throw messages and argue through language. He is fascinated by language.

PLAYER: In our experience, most things end in death.

GUIL: (*fear, vengeance, scorn*): Your experience! – *Actors!*

*He snatches a dagger from the Player's belt and holds the point at the Player's throat: the Player backs and Guil advances, speaking more quietly.*

I'm talking about death – and you've never experienced *that*. And you cannot *act* it. You die a thousand causal deaths - with none of that intensity which squeezes out life ... and no blood runs cold anywhere. Because even as you die you know that you will come back in a different hat. But no one gets up after *death* – there is no applause – there is only silence and some second-hand clothes, and that's – *death* –

*(And he pushes the blade in up to the hilt. The PLAYER stands with huge, terrible eyes, clutches at the wound as the blade withdraws: he makes small weeping sounds and falls to his knees, and then right down:*

*While he is dying, GUIL, nervous, high, almost Hysterical, wheels on the TRAGEDIANS - )*

If we have a destiny, then so had he –

(p. 90)

But this is just an impressive theatrical death. The Tragedians applaud, and the Player stands up with a pleased smile on his face. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are now totally confused.

ROS: . . . We've done nothing wrong! We didn't harm anyone. Did we?

(p. 92)

Guildenstern tries to find a meaning in this chaos, but he fails to do so. So here we are in the reality of an absurd world and trying to find a meaning and hope in life, questioning the existence are the characteristics of the theatre of absurd. Guildenstern calls Rosencrantz – trying both of their names – then he also disappears. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern die, or in theatrical terms merely disappear, as they do because in one sense they have failed to do save Hamlet and themselves.

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

*(He looks around and sees he is alone.)*

Rosen - ?



Guil - ?  
(*He gathers himself.*)  
Well, we'll know better *next time*. Now you see me,  
now you –  
(p. 92)

Guilkenstern mentions 'next time', but will they have a next time? Shakespeare has the last word, and the play fades out with Shakespeare's own words. It is clear to see that in some points Stoppard uses his own words and in some points he uses Shakespeare's own words. When Stoppard talks about the modern man, it is completely Stoppard's own words. But whenever he wants to make the transition he alludes Shakespeare's own words. Stoppard completes his play with Shakespeare's own words.

AMBASSADOR: The sight is dismal; and our affairs from  
England come too late. The ears are  
senseless that should give us hearing to  
tell him his commandment is fulfilled,  
that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are  
dead*.  
(p. 93)

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* ends with the announcement of the deaths of the title characters.

Stoppard uses every scene from Shakespeare in which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern appear. Although he often uses Shakespeare's own words, the stage directions which give great pleasure to the audience are Stoppard's own.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern represent modern man for Stoppard. Although they are seemingly alive we – the audience – know that they will die.

In terms of language, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is clear and understandable. The play addresses all classes of society. The way Stoppard treats the language is very powerful. He makes use of the language in such a way that the characters convey the meaning verbally and again contradict with each other verbally. Only once we witness a physical attack by Guildenstern to the Player, but again that attack is embellished with beautiful words. The characters' using words as weapons instead of real weapons is again very charming theatrical material of Stoppard's theatre. As Stoppard has always been aware of the treacherous nature of words, he does not allow any disorder in the meaning.

Like *Waiting for Godot*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is written in such a way as to leave itself open to almost every kind of interpretation. And again viewing the play through *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* cannot be said to be a tragedy, because during the play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have at least two chances to say 'no'. Instead of being tragic characters, they are simply mirrors of modern man's fears at the

thought and experience of death. For Stoppard, modern man is materialistic. Money determines every value and there is a great loss of the values of the earlier ages. Indifference, inability to feel strong about having the decisions, loyalties are some of the loss values in the play.

I agree with Mr. Hayman who says of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*:

Stoppard appeared at the right moment with his beautifully engineered device for propelling two attendant lords into the foreground, while Hamlet became a minor character. Stoppard was not the first playwright to incorporate generous slabs of Shakespearian dialogue into a modern text, but he was the boldest and the cleverest.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Hayman, op. cit., p. 34.

## *JUMPERS*

Stoppard's second major dramatic success came in 1972 with *Jumpers*, premiered for the National Theatre at the Old Vic, a play which he states "reflects my belief that all political acts have a moral basis to them and are meaningless without it"<sup>71</sup>.

Stoppard juxtaposes different elements of show business – acrobatics, striptease, dance numbers, singing, performance by a band, the use of video and film – with a whodunit sort of plot through this theatrical medium. He conducts a discussion on moral philosophy expressed through verbal and visual gymnastics.

The starting point of the play is very interesting as it is in most of Stoppard's plays. The philosopher, A. J. Ayer,<sup>72</sup> was sitting side by side with the performer Eartha Kitt<sup>73</sup> in a TV chat-show in the late 1960s:

That is, they were side by side to begin with, but Miss Kitt gradually edged in, absent-mindedly laid a tender palm on the Professor's knee and looked up into his face with calculated awe every time he uttered a long word ... Mr Stoppard saw this and said to himself ... 'Some day I can write a play about a philosopher and an actress: brain and gut.'<sup>74</sup>

*Jumpers* takes its starting point from the lines in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.

ROS : Shouldn't we be doing something – constructive?  
GUIL: What did you have in mind? ... A short, blunt  
human pyramid ...?<sup>75</sup>

In his interview with Ronald Hayman, Stoppard says:

I did begin with that image. . . . I thought: 'How marvellous to have a pyramid of people on a stage, and a rifle shot, and one member of the pyramid just being blown out of it and the others imploding on the hole as he leaves'. I really like theatrical events, and I was in a favourable position. Because of the success of *Rosencrantz* it was on the cards that the National Theatre would do what I wrote . . . I was in a fairly good position to indulge myself with playing around with quite complex – not to say expensive – theatrical effects and images, and I was taken with this image of the pyramid of gymnasts.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> "Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers: The Separation from Reality*, Bulletin of the West Virginia Association of College English Teachers, 1975, p.49.

<sup>72</sup> Sir Alfred Jules Ayer (1910-89) British philosopher who influenced the development of contemporary analytic philosophy. His television and radio appearances made him Britain's first 'media philosopher'.

<sup>73</sup> Eartha Kitt (1927) American actress and singer.

<sup>74</sup> Hunter, Jim, **Tom Stoppard**, Faber and Faber, London-New York, 2000, p. 64.

<sup>75</sup> Stoppard, Tom, **Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead**, Faber and Faber, London, 1967, p. 31.

<sup>76</sup> Hayman, Ronald, **Tom Stoppard**, Fourth Edition, Heinemann, London, 1982, p. 4.

He explains in the same interview that having only these acrobats was not enough, he also wanted to write about a moral philosopher, but the question was how to bring these two things together in the same play:

One of the threads was the entirely visual image of the pyramid of acrobats, but while thinking of that pyramid I knew I wanted to write a play about a professor of moral philosophy, and it's the work of a moment to think that there was a metaphor at work in the play already between acrobatics, mental acrobatics and so on.<sup>77</sup>

With the verbal connection between mental acrobatics and the pyramid of acrobats, and with the multiple meanings of the word 'jump', Stoppard evolved his plot.

*Jumpers* combines farce with burlesque, political satire, philosophy and murder mystery to create what Tom Stoppard calls his 'theatre of audacity'. As Hunter states, "Stoppard has always spoken of *Jumpers* as 'serious' as well as 'funny' "<sup>78</sup>. The play opens at a house party celebrating the political victory of the Radical Liberal Party, hosted by a manic-depressive former singer. When one of the acrobats entertaining the party is murdered, the hostess must hide the body in her bedroom at the request of her gymnastic physician. And the husband, a professor of moral philosophy, who is desperately trying to finish his lecture on the question of 'Is there a God?', 'What is good?' and 'Why do we want the good?'. And there is a detective and cabaret numbers to the play's more serious questions about faith, morality and modern science. Stoppard believes there is an absolute 'ceiling of a situation'<sup>79</sup>, and who is looking down from the ceiling? So he leans towards God.

In order to understand the play, we should start by examining the central concept of the play, which is a philosophical and political debate. All the characters are involved in some way in this debate, not just the character George Moore who is a professional philosopher and is writing a lecture.

There was a kind of philosophical crisis at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which seemed to start in Austria, and appeared in Britain with the philosophies of Ludwig Wittgenstein<sup>80</sup>, Bertrand Russell<sup>81</sup> and Alfred Whitehead.<sup>82</sup>

The School of Logical Positivism was inspired by David Hume<sup>83</sup>, the mathematical logic of Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*<sup>84</sup> (1921). It is

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<sup>77</sup> Hayman, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> Hunter, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>79</sup> Delaney, op. cit., p.31.

<sup>80</sup> Ludwig Josef Johann WITTGENSTEIN (1889-1951), Austrian philosopher.

<sup>81</sup> Bertrand Arthur William RUSSELL (1872-1970), British philosopher, mathematician, and social reformer.

<sup>82</sup> Alfred North WHITEHEAD (1861-1947), British mathematician and philosopher.

the modern school of philosophy that attempted to introduce the methodology and precision of mathematics and the natural sciences into the field of philosophy.

The school, which was formed by Moritz Schlick (1882–1936)<sup>85</sup> in 1922 at the University of Vienna continued there as the Vienna Circle until 1938.<sup>86</sup> Their idea was that philosophy did not exist as an independent discipline. The only meaningful statements were scientific propositions: a statement could only be said to be true or false if it could actually or possibly be verified according to the methods of the physical sciences.

The movement soon had a widespread following in Europe and the United States. Among the philosophers whose work was influenced by the Vienna Circle is A. J. Ayer. Some logical positivists, notably A.J. Ayer, held that assertions in ethics ('it is wrong to steal') do not function logically as statements of fact but only as expressions of the speaker's feelings of approval or disapproval toward some action.

The Vienna Circle disintegrated after the Nazis took control of Austria in the late 1930s. The influence of the movement, as a movement, ended c.1940.

In the rehearsals for *Jumpers*, Tom Stoppard felt the necessity of an explanation about this debate.

In rehearsal room I had the advantage of feeling fairly sure that there were no professional philosophers in the room. . . . When *Jumpers* opened in 1972, [Freddie] Ayer was a famous, distinguished and venerable, though not particularly elderly philosopher. He wrote about *Jumpers* quite generously, and I was very thrilled about this. . . . 'Two and two is four' was undoubtedly true, but it's a circularity. 'I think that stealing my wallet is wrong' was somewhat different. It was an emotional expression of vested interest which was unverifiable.

Stoppard uses philosophy as the background to the play. It is clear that he had done a great deal of research in the subject before starting to write the play.

With *Jumpers* I was reading stuff I'd never have dreamed of getting round to. The books on ethics and moral philosophy that went into *Jumpers* I found immensely enjoyable. I think

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<sup>83</sup> David HUME (1711-1776), Scottish philosopher, historian and economist.

<sup>84</sup> The Vienna Circle in general subscribed to Wittgenstein's dictum in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that the object of philosophy was the logical clarification of thought; philosophy was not a theory but an activity.

<sup>85</sup> Schlick was founder and leader of the German *Wiener Kreis*, a group of philosophers, scientists, and mathematicians which was formed in the 1920s, and met regularly in Vienna to investigate scientific language and scientific methodology. The philosophical movement associated with the Circle has been called variously logical positivism, logical empiricism, scientific empiricism, neopositivism, and the unity of science movement.

<sup>86</sup> **The New Encyclopaedia Britannica** Volume 12, Ready Reference 15<sup>th</sup> Edition, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. USA, 2002. Chicago, London, New Delhi, Paris, Seoul, Sydney, Taipei, Tokyo, pp. 357-358.

I enjoyed the rules that philosophers play by.<sup>87</sup>

However, *Jumpers* is not the only play which has the subject of moral philosophy in it, *Professional Foul* (1977) – one of Stoppard’s plays for television – which was written five years later than *Jumpers* has also the same subject. So in a sense, in Stoppard’s plays there is the great element of “intertextuality”. They are both about professors of moral philosophy, but the treatment is entirely different in each play. *Jumpers* is a farce, while *Professional Foul* is a sort of realistic look at a real situation happens in Prag. Stoppard continues to explain the influence of Ayer on him in the same interview:

. . . before he died, Ayer appeared on a rather good series on television, conducted by Brian Magee, who spoke to different philosophers about the history of philosophy and their contribution. At one point, Brian said to Freddie Ayer ‘What would you consider to be the main defect of logical positivism now?’ and Ayer said ‘Well I suppose the main defect was that it wasn’t true.’ That has always been my favourite moment on television [.]<sup>88</sup>

*Jumpers* is a two act play, and there is also a six page Coda. When Stoppard was asked what the play was about, he said that it is about ‘a man trying to find the answer of how to behave morally and ethically’<sup>89</sup> and he also added in another interview that, ‘I wanted to write a theist play, to combat the arrogant view that anyone who also believes in God is some kind of cripple, using God as a crutch.’<sup>90</sup>

A British electoral victory has been won by the Radical Liberals, and in the luxury flat of George and Dotty Moore a celebratory party is being held, attended by local ‘Rad-Libs’. Stoppard gives George and his wife the names of an earlier real-life professor of moral philosophy, G. E. Moore<sup>91</sup>, and his wife Dorothy.

ARCHIE: (*Unseen*) And now, ladies and gentlemen, on the occasion of a momentous Radical Liberal victory at the polls, may I present your hostess and mine,

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<sup>87</sup> Hayman, Ronald, **Tom Stoppard**, Heinemann 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, London, 1982, p.1.

<sup>88</sup> Simon Russell Beale and Tom Stoppard: interview concerning *Jumpers*, Lyttelton Theatre, 22 July 2003.

<sup>89</sup> As stated by Prof. Nina DaVinci Nichols, New York, May 02, 2004.

<sup>90</sup> Kerensky, Oleg, **The New British Drama: Fourteen Playwrights since Osborne and Pinter**, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1977, p. 170.

<sup>91</sup> George Edward MORE (1873-1958), a distinguished and hugely influential English philosopher. He agrees with Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein. He is one of the fathers of the analytic philosophy tradition that now predominates in the English-speaking world.

making a most welcome reappearance, the much-missed, much-loved star of the musical stage, the incomparable, magnetic Dorothy Moore!

(p. 9)

‘Dorothy’, shortened to Dotty (also slang for mentally unbalanced) is a ‘prematurely-retired musical-comedy actress’<sup>92</sup>, who leads the spontaneous cabaret by breaking into song. Music, which exists in most of Stoppard’s plays, takes place in *Jumpers* as well. Music has the power of conveying the mood of that scene and the character. It is much easier to create the atmosphere with a suitable piece of music. Since Dorothy’s mood is as changeable and unpredictable as the states of the moon, the name of the song - ‘Shine on Harvest Moon’- is very appropriate to the situation. Then the entertainment is taken over by someone who later turns out to be George’s secretary, performing a *striptease* while swinging from the chandelier. When Stoppard was asked what a nude lady on a trapeze had to do with moral philosophy, Stoppard replied that it was an ‘isolated image I wanted to drag in. I love the idea. It’s very theatrical. The only way I really work is to assemble a strange pig’s breakfast of visual images and thoughts and try and shake them into some kind of coherent pattern.’<sup>93</sup> And the effect of this ‘pig’s breakfast’ makes us not know what to expect.

*Cries of disappointment change to cries of delight.  
Like a pendulum between darkness and darkness, the  
SECRETARY swings into the spotlight, and out. She is on a  
swing, making an arc from wing to wing, in sight for a  
second, out of sight for a second . . . back and forth. The  
swing itself hangs from a chandelier.*

*Cheers.*

*Each time she reappears she has taken off some clothing.  
Grateful cheers.*

...

*The SECRETARY is nearing nakedness, obscured.*  
(pp. 9-10)

Meanwhile, George, a Professor of Moral Philosophy, remains in his study trying to compose his lecture for a forthcoming symposium and even calls the police under a false name to complain about the noise. The pseudonym which is chosen by George and the way he spells it out is very cunning: ‘Wittgenstein’.

GEORGE: (*On telephone*) . . . Well, I’d like to make a complaint about a disturbance of peace at – I’d prefer it to be an anonymous complaint. Well, do you accept pseudonymous complaints? . . . Never mind, my name is *Wittgenstein* and the party – the guilty party in fact is at – What? Oh,

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<sup>92</sup> All quotations from this play are Stoppard, Tom, **Jumpers**, Faber and Faber, London, 1986, p. 7.

<sup>93</sup> As stated by Roger Sandall, *The Salisbury Review*, 2003.

<http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~salisbury-review/articles>

good God – ‘W’ as in *Wagner*, ‘I’ as in *id* ... no  
ID – ‘I’, ‘D’ as in *dog* [.]  
(p. 10)

At one point, Stoppard said: ‘I think that Wittgenstein said that philosophy wasn’t a subject; it was an activity.’<sup>94</sup> And maybe that is the reason we have a striptease secretary swinging up in the ceiling. The party atmosphere changes with the arrival of the Jumpers, a Rad-Lib-yellow<sup>95</sup>-wearing team of amateur gymnasts. And again we start to have enough action in our philosophy based play with the activities of the Jumpers.

VOICE: (*Archie’s voice*) ‘And now! – ladies and  
gentleman! - the INCREDIBLE – RADICAL!  
– LIBERAL!! - JUMPERS!!’  
(p. 10)

They somersault and tumble their way around the ballroom, finally creating a human pyramid. Suddenly one of them is shot and dies, and this fatal gunshot interrupts the party. What follows is partly a whodunit but more about how the murder is covered up. The whodunit is another theatrical device that Stoppard uses. It is a popular form of murder mystery like in Agatha Christie’s works and is actually one of the most hackneyed forms of the commercial theatre. Dotty, who has been rapidly losing her self-control, finds herself clutching the dead body as the guests quickly leave the party.

*The party hubbub comes back, at a higher pitch. DOTTY  
does not move, holding the JUMPER.*  
ARCHIE: (*Voice only*) ...Quiet please ... the party is over...  
(p. 13)

Her friend Archie reassuringly tells her to keep the body out of sight till the morning.

ARCHIE: There’s no need to get it out of proportion. Death  
is always a great pity of course but it’s not as  
though the alternative were immortality.  
(p. 13)

We may think that Archie is very cruel and this speech reminds us of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz’s dialogue on page 38. As Guildenstern says death comes to all of us so there is no need to get upset with the idea of death. The audience’s feelings about Archie replace with the thoughts of Archie’s being right. Maybe he is just more coolheaded and reasonable than most of us.

Dotty is left alone in her bedroom holding the dead Jumper, whom she recognizes as McFee.

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<sup>94</sup> Delaney, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>95</sup> The colour of yellow was the colour of the labour party.



DOTTY : It's Duncan.  
ARCHIE: Yes – poor McFee.  
(p. 13)

On the moon two astronauts fight for the one place in their damaged space capsule. Selfishness is evidently in fashion. This is the most vivid characteristic of the modern man. Modern man's attitudes show a great selfish disregard for others.

*Millions of viewers saw the two astronauts struggling at the foot of the ladder until Oates was knocked to the ground by his commanding officer ...*  
(p. 14)

All these events are watched by Dotty on her television set. Later, we hear that the Rad-Libs have taken over the broadcasting services and appointed their former spokesman on agriculture as the new Archbishop of Canterbury. We are faced with one of the most common matters of this century – the misuse of authority. Here we have with an excellent example of Stoppard's; especially one who is in politics knows well enough the importance of owning a broadcasting service. And that is the why the Rad-Libs' having the power of media is very cunning. The visual media affects people more than the written media.

The arrival of his secretary wakens George from his study; and he starts the dictation of his lecture. He is unaware of the murder.

*The SECRETARY enters the study, closes the door behind her, hangs up her hat and coat in the wardrobe, sits down at her desk, and arranges her notebook and pencil.*

*... he then dictates to the SECRETARY who will type them out. He does not take much notice of the SECRETARY.*

(p. 15)

We realize that there is no verbal communication between the Secretary and George except in the dictation. The lack of communication is one of the major problems of modern man. All you are asked to do is to do your job perfectly and nothing else. George continues to work on his lecture. He defends his intuitions of the existence of God, the notion of goodness and the origins of moral values. But, in the first part of his paper, George is having difficulty in finding the exact words to describe indescribable things. The argument George develops in his lecture mostly reflects the point of view which was most famously articulated around the turn of the century by the philosopher G. E. Moore in a book called *Principia Ethica*. Stoppard says in an interview; 'George

Moore represented a morality that I embrace.’<sup>96</sup> Readers or the audiences of the play may be so fascinated by the picture of an academic philosopher at work.

GEORGE: To begin at the beginning: Is God? (*Pause.*)  
I prefer to put the question in this form because  
to ask, ‘Does God exist?’ appears to presuppose  
the existence of a God who may not [.]  
(pp. 15-16)

After a certain point he feels the need to prove things. At this point the following speech of Wittgenstein is helpful:

If someone who believes in God looks round and asks ‘Where does everything I see come from?’, ‘Where does all this come from?’, he is *not* craving for a (causal) explanation; and his question gets its point from being the expression of a certain craving. He is, namely, expressing an attitude to all explanations. – But how is this manifested in his life?<sup>97</sup>

GEORGE: . . . I don’t claim to *know* that God exists,  
only claim that he does without my knowing it,  
and while I claim as much I do not claim to know  
as much; indeed I cannot know and God knows I  
cannot.  
(p. 62)

Therefore, we can say that the murder is not the only thing that is never solved; George’s paper never reaches a conclusion, either.

He is planning to enliven his lecture by the use of a bow and arrow, which he misfires into the study wardrobe after Dotty yells another concentration-shattering appeal from the bedroom.

(*He closes his door, and from behind it produces a quiver of arrows and a bow.*)

...

(*He extracts an arrow from the quiver.*)

...

DOTTY : (*Off*) *Fire!*

(*GEORGE fires, startled before he was ready, and the arrow disappears into the top of the wardrobe.*)

Help – rescue – fire!

GEORGE: (*Shouts furiously*) Will you stop this childish  
nonsense! Thanks to you I have lost the element  
of surprise!

The comedy of George’s hapless attempt to prove the existence of God through the paper application of philosophical logic, but the funny thing lies in the reality of his not seeing the fact

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<sup>96</sup> Delaney, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>97</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig, **Culture and Value**, translated from German by Peter Winch, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984, p. 85.

that his wife's nervous breakdown under his own nose, how can he possibly expect to resolve the central problems that have confused philosophers for many years?

*(He tosses the bow away, tries to peer on tiptoe  
over the wardrobe, which is too high, and desists[.] )  
(pp. 18-19)*

It is very congruous that George does not look over the wardrobe; otherwise the mysterious loss of Thumper would not create such a comic chain in the play. He then tries to make a list of his pets – a tortoise (Pat), and a hare (Thumper) –, but Thumper has escaped from his box and George goes off to search for him. As Prof. Yüksel<sup>98</sup> says: ‘Stoppard takes one step further and intertextualizes his own plays’, and the idea of tortoise actually comes from *After Magritte* (1970) which was written two years before *Jumpers*.

GEORGE: . . . ,and a tortoise given a head start in a race with, say, a hare, could never be overtaken – and by way of regaining your attention I will now demonstrate the nature of that fallacy; to which end I have brought with me a specially trained tortoise – *(which he takes from the smaller wooden box)* – and a similarly trained, damn and blast! – *(He has opened the larger box and found it empty. He looks round.)*  
Thumper! Thumper, where are you, boy?  
(p. 21)

George's journey takes him to the bedroom where Dotty stages a charade for George to guess. McFee's corpse is hidden from his view whenever he enters the bedroom.

DOTTY : Stay with me!  
( . . . GEORGE is now at the door, ready to leave. DOTTY has sat up on the bed.)  
GEORGE: *(Hesitating)* Now ... ?  
DOTTY : I mean *games* [.]  
(p. 21)

Here we are once more face with the element of *games*. Playing games is very common in modern man's life. Since life is a game itself if you are practising it enough, then you are ready for the real game – life itself. Their relationship seems affectionate, but she has refused to have sex with him since her mental breakdown.

DOTTY : Georgie! – I'll let you.  
*(He halts.)*  
GEORGE: I don't want to be 'let'. Can't you see that it's an insult?  
(p. 23)

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<sup>98</sup> Yüksel, Ayşegül, **Aesthetic Distancing in Tom Stoppard's Drama**  
<http://members.tripod.com/~warlight/aysegul2./html>

When things are hard then we complain about the hardness of them, but when things are easy and served us, this time we complain about the easiness of them and even take the offer as an insult. Dotty is, however, repeatedly visited in her bedroom by Archie, who is a distinguished psychiatrist, Vice-Chancellor of George's university and an exponent of Rad-Lib relativism.

DOTTY : Oh God ... if only Archie would come.

GEORGE: Is he coming *again*?

(p. 23)

A police inspector, Bones, arrives.

*It is INSPECTOR BONES. He carries a bunch of flowers.*

(p. 34)

And here with the name of the character –BONES–, we witness Stoppard's typical play with words. From the moment when inspector Bones enters, the stage of whodunit starts. Bones' absurd appearance at the front door, carrying a bouquet of flowers and with one of Dotty's records in his raincoat, comically undercuts the seriousness of the whodunit plot being introduced.

*It is INSPECTOR BONES. He carries a bunch of flowers.*

...

BONES: Yes – no. Bones' the name, as in dem bones,  
dem Bones ... (*Pause.*) ... dem dry bones [.]

(p. 34)

BONES: . . . I will take my leave, perhaps with her  
autograph on the cover of this much played loved  
gramophone record – (*from a capacious inside-  
pocket of his raincoat*)[.]

(p. 35)

Bones is not the only one who has an absurd appearance, so does George. The way George opens the door is very interesting.

*The door is opened to him by a man holding a bow and  
arrow in one hand and a tortoise in the other, his face  
covered in shaving foam. BONES recoils from the  
spectacle [.]*

(p. 34)

This scene has a real-life story behind it. One of Stoppard's rich friends had peacocks in his garden<sup>99</sup>. While he was shaving, he saw one of them jumping over the garden wall. He interrupted his shaving and rushed out to follow the bird – still with his dressing gown on –, which had crossed to the other side of the street before he caught it. Catching the bird, he had to wait to cross a busy road. Stoppard asked himself, 'how do you make sense of a man standing on the pavement in a dressing gown with shaving cream on one side of his face and a peacock under his arm?' Thus, we see a replay, occurring in *Jumpers* when George opens the door to Inspector Bones.

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<sup>99</sup> Hayman, op. cit., p. 86.

However, a part of this replay had already occurred in *After Magritte* with some changes before it did in *Jumpers*.

FOOT: . . . I had to stop half way through shaving . . .  
I flung down my razor and rushed into the street [.]

FOOT: I couldn't move fast because in my haste to pull up  
my pyjama trousers I put both feet into the same  
leg.<sup>100</sup>

(pp. 45-46)

An anonymous phone call has alerted him to the murder, and he has come in person because he is a big fan of Dotty's singing.

BONES: . . . If the telephone call which set in motion this inquiry was the whim of a lunatic, as I myself suspect, then I will simply take the opportunity of presenting this token tribute to a fine actress, a great singer and a true lady – after which, I will take my leave, perhaps with her autograph on the cover of this much played much loved gramophone record –  
(*from a capacious inside-pocket of his raincoat*) [.]  
(p. 35)

George thinks Bones is only there because of his own phone call about the noise, and amazes Dotty by saying he will take the blame. This misunderstanding adds comic elements to the play.

GEORGE: Inspector! – I think I can help you in your inquiries. I'm your man. I am the mystery telephone caller.

(p. 37)

GEORGE: . . . Don't worry, I'll smooth him over.

DOOTY : *Smooth him over?*

GEORGE: He's gone to inspect the scene of the crime.

What an absurd fuss.

DOTTY : George ... you knew about it?

(GEORGE *mistakes her gratitude for suspicion.*)

GEORGE: Look, I'm perfectly willing to take the blame.

(p. 40)

While Bones is entranced by Dotty in her bedroom, George returns to his lecture attacking his expected opponent at the symposium, the Professor of Logic, McFee – and we all remember that McFee was the name of the Jumper shot dead in the first scene. At the end of Act One, unseen by

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<sup>100</sup>Stoppard, Tom, *After Magritte*, Faber and Faber, London, 1971.

Bones and George, Archie's Jumpers smuggle the corpse out in a large plastic bag, moving in rhythm to a song sung by Dotty.

Act Two starts with Bones' assuring George that there is a body in the bedroom, but they find it gone.

BONES : (*Staggered*) I don't know, you bloody philosophers are all the same, aren't you? A man is dead and you're as cool as you like [.]

GEORGE: Excuse me –  
(p. 50)

Instead, within the curtained bed, Archie is applying intimate therapy to Dotty, using a machine which analyses skin sensations. Dotty is the wife of a Professor of Moral Philosophy, and the things that George sees absolutely against his moral concept. George does not like what he sees and disgustedly goes back to work on his lecture.

Archie introduces himself to the Inspector by his full name: Sir Archibald Jumper. He is supposed to be an academic, but his behaviour and especially his talk with Crouch is far from being an academic. He is not entirely sure of any of his titles.

BONES : (*Reading off card*) 'Sir Archibald Jumper, MD, DPhil, DLitt, LD, DPM, DPT (*Gym*)'. ... What's all that?

ARCHIE: I'm a doctor of medicine, philosophy, literature and law, with diplomas in psychological medicine and PT including gym.  
(p. 52)

He begins negotiations with Bones to save Dotty from prosecution. Archie is a lawyer and coroner as well as having many other roles. And his theory will be that McFee shot himself in a public park, where the body was found by a team of amateur gymnasts. Hearing Dotty's cry, Bones goes into the bedroom to help her; meanwhile, Archie slips into George's study and informs him of McFee's death by telling the same story that he just told Bones.

DOTTY : (*Off*) MURDER!  
(BONES *rushes to the bedroom, which remains dark. ARCHIE looks at his watch and leaves towards the kitchen. In the study, GEORGE resumes.*)

(p. 56)

ARCHIE : . . . Ah! – I knew there was something! – McFee's dead.

GEORGE: What?!!

ARCHIE : Shot himself this morning, in the park, in a plastic bag.

(p. 59)

The way Archie tells about McFee's death news is so cruel. For him, death is that easy; people are born and they die. It is a part of life. He sounds like the Player in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.

When Archie comes back in the bedroom, he comes upon Bones in the middle of a game of charades, and threatens to disclose what he has seen if Bones does not want to co-operate. Life is a game and the game element in the play emphasizes that there are rules of games and morality is one and the most important of these rules in *Jumpers*. However, what Archie is trying to do is immoral. He is not following the rules of the play.

*(The bedroom lights up. The dermatograph and the lights have been put away. The bed is revealed as before. BONES is wearing a frock, a headdress, and black-face. He is using a wastebin as a bongo drum.)*

...  
(BONES *does an African war-cry.*)

DOTTY : Zulu's back in town!?

BONES : No, no. *(He minces about.)*

DOTTY : The African Queen!

BONES : That's the one!

*(DOTTY squeals with delight. ARCHIE has entered the bedroom and is standing behind BONES.)*

ARCHIE: Tush ... tush, Inspector. I am shocked ...  
deeply shocked.

BONES : No – no – no – I was just ...

ARCHIE: What will they say back at the station?

BONES : No – no – we were just ...

ARCHIE: What a tragic end to an incorruptible career.

BONES : No – please!

ARCHIE: Do not despair. I'm sure we can come to some  
arrangement.

(pp. 61-62)

George is left bewildered and confused back in his study. He attempts to complete his lecture by exploring the mathematical notion of the 'limiting curve'. He also considers the news of McFee's death. Since he is dead, someone is supposed to take his place. We see that the passion of rank is important for George and so for modern man. With these thoughts in his mind, he goes to the bedroom to talk to Archie about it and finds him dining with Dotty and no sign of Bones.

GEORGE: . . . As a matter of fact, I came to ask you  
... Vice-Chancellor, about the Chair of Logic.

*(GEORGE is unsettled by the lunch-party atmosphere. Nothing about ARCHIE or DOTTY suggests that there is anything unusual about it. They continue to eat and drink.)*

ARCHIE : Yes?

GEORGE: You probably have had very little time to think  
about McFee's successor ...

George has lost his hare and Dotty tricks him into believing she is eating Thumper. George complains about this to the caretaker, Crouch, but they are at cross-purposes and Crouch confesses that it was he who telephoned the police about the murder, and finally George learns what has happened. The dialogue which is based on misunderstanding between George and Crouch again adds comic elements in the play.

CROUCH: I got to know him quite well, you know ... made quite a friend of him.  
GEORGE: You knew about it?  
CROUCH: I was there, sir. Doing the drinks. It shocked me, I can tell you.

(p. 68)

Crouch is talking about McFee while George is talking about Thumper.

GEORGE: Who killed him?  
CROUCH: Well, I wouldn't like to say for certain ... I mean, I heard a bang, and when I looked, there he was crawling on the ground ...  
(GEORGE *winces.*)  
... and there was Miss Moore ... well –  
GEORGE: Do you realize she's in there now, *eating* him?  
CROUCH: (*Pause*) You mean – *raw*?  
GEORGE: (*Crossly*) No, of course not! – *cooked* – with gravy and mashed potatoes.  
CROUCH: (*Pause*) I thought she was on the mend, sir.  
GEORGE: Do you think I'm being too sentimental about the whole thing?  
CROUCH: (*Firmly*) I do not, sir. I think it's a police matter.  
GEORGE: Yes! No – They'd laugh at me ... There *was* a policeman here, but he's gone.  
CROUCH: Yes, sir, I saw him leave. I thought that would be him. You were wondering, sir, who brought them round.  
GEORGE: No. I telephoned them myself.  
CROUCH: You're an honest man, sir. In the circumstances I don't mind telling you I also phoned them myself, anonymous.  
GEORGE: Did you? ... Well, it's all right now, he's gone. Lot of fuss about nothing. I know things got a bit out of hand but ... I'm surprised at your puritanism, Mr Crouch. ... A little wine, women and song ...

(p. 68)



Finally, this comic misunderstanding ends and George learns about the details of McFee's death. He hurries to the bedroom to confront Dotty and Archie, and is horrified to find them watching pictures of Dotty naked on the TV. George believes Dotty has killed McFee, but she refutes the accusation and asks whether George did it.

GEORGE: Crouch says McFee was shot! – here – last night  
- He thinks Dorothy did it –

DOTTY : I thought Archie did it. *You* didn't do it, did you,  
Georgie?

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

(p. 69)

George is wrong; George himself accidentally killed the hare, although the murder, around which the play is structured, is never solved; nothing is verifiable and no truth is knowable.

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

(p. 69)

Even more confused, George again returns to the study and catches Crouch reading his lecture and showing himself to be a keen amateur philosopher. We learn that Crouch's knowledge is the result of a friendship with Professor McFee. What is more, McFee was having an affair with George's secretary, but was too afraid of her possible reaction to admit he was already married. Crouch also reveals that McFee had been so disgusted by the astronauts fighting on the moon that he had suddenly developed round a belief in altruism, decided to enter a monastery and revealed all to the secretary. In the meantime, we have heard a crucial conversation between Crouch and Archie.

ARCHIE: I see you're something of a philosopher, Mr  
Crouch.

CROUCH: Oh, I wouldn't call it that, sir – I just picked up a  
bit ... a bit of reading, a bit of chatting, you  
know.

ARCHIE: Isn't that the academic life? Whom would you  
describe as your mentor?

CROUCH: It was the late Professor McFee. (p. 70)

After this conversation the Secretary also seems a murder suspect. Archie invites Crouch to chair the symposium, where Archie himself will take McFee's place.

CROUCH: And now he's dead.  
(SECRETARY *snaps her handbag shut with a  
sharp sound.*)

(p. 71)

ARCHIE: I've been *looking* for a caretaker to take the chair  
at a little symposium I'm running. Are you busy  
this evening?

CROUCH: Me? I haven't got the *qualifications*.  
ARCHIE: Oh, *I'll give you those*. Does Divinity interest  
you at all?  
(p. 72)

Having the right qualifications or not unfortunately does not pay an active role sometimes. As Archie says, instead of working and getting these qualifications, they are given by people. In modern world, this is the problem which is faced with very often and very clearly Mr Stoppard is criticising this unfair situation by giving excellent examples – Crouch's being the chairman of a philosophical symposium and Rad-Libs' taking over the broadcasting services and appointing their former spokesman on agriculture as the new Archbishop of Canterbury.

When his secretary is leaving, George sees blood on her coat and checks and realises that it must have come from above his wardrobe. He checks the top of his cupboard, where he finds his hare, Thumper, impaled on the arrow he himself accidentally fired earlier. As he steps down from his chair, he crushes his tortoise and kills that too.

*SECRETARY is also leaving, now wearing her (white) coat - which has a bright splash of blood on its back.*  
*GEORGE sees the blood as she leaves the study, and the flat. GEORGE realizes that the blood must have come from the top of the cupboard, i.e. wardrobe. He needs to stand on his desk or chair. He puts Pat, whom he had been holding, down now and climbs up to look into the top of the cupboard; and withdraws from the unseen depths his misfired arrow, on which is impaled Thumper. The music still continues. Holding Thumper up by the arrow, GEORGE puts his face against the fur. A single sob. He steps backwards, down ... CRRRRRUNCH!!!*  
*He has stepped, fatally, on Pat. With one foot on the desk and one foot on Pat, GEORGE looks down, and then puts up his head and cries out, 'Dotty! Help! Murder!'*

These are almost the same words Dotty had cried when George began dictation his paper in Act I. A clear parallel emerges between the death of McFee and George's pets.

*GEORGE falls to the floor.*  
(p. 72)

As Bareham states<sup>101</sup>, the significance of this scene is many-sided. It is horrific at the shock of sudden death; it is tragic because of the loss of two creatures with whom we had become so well acquainted; and even comic, at George's clumsiness and helplessness as he attempts to bring order to his world. We are not sure whether to cry, laugh or pity. Funnily enough, we see that more grief is shown for the deaths of the goldfish, the hare and the tortoise than for the death of McFee. The act ends in George's sobs.

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<sup>101</sup> Bareham, T. Ed., **Tom Stoppard: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Jumpers & Travesties**, Macmillan, London, 1990, p. 135.

The Coda is the symposium. Archie's unintelligible speech is awarded scores as if in a gymnastic contest. Then he calls witnesses as if in a court: an astronaut to testify to mankind's 'natural' selfishness; Tarzan of the Apes to show that moral values are 'merely the products of civilisation'; and the new Archbishop of Canterbury to indicate 'an unfair favour of politics'. In the play, the political spokesman for agriculture, Sam Clegthorpe, is made Archbishop of Canterbury. This is presented as an act of political 'rationalization' in the play, and stuns George, who protests that Clegthorpe does not believe in God. And Dorothy's simile explains the situation perfectly: 'It's like the Chairman of the Electricity Board believing in gas.'<sup>102</sup> Archie's final witness is Dotty, who sings a song of philosophical relativism where two and two makes only 'roughly' four.

*The symposium – in bizarre dream form. CROUCH is the Chairman. ARCHIE stands to one side.*

...

CROUCH: How many witnesses do you intend to call, Sir Archie?

ARCHIE: Three, Mr Chairman, and I shall also be making a song and dance.

(p. 73)

DOTTY : (*Sings*) . . . Show me where to stand, and I'll tell you my Philosophy.

Here is my consistent proposition,  
Two and two make roughly four –  
Gentlemen, that is my position,  
Yours sincerely, Dorothy Moore.

(p. 77)

George gives part of his lecture, claiming that even relativists are intuitionists at heart. Archie's last speech states that all truth is relative to individual perception.

ARCHIE: Do not despair – many are happy much of the time; more eat than starve, more are healthy than sick, more curable than dying; not so many dying as dead; and one of the thieves was saved. Hell's bells and all's well – half the world is at peace with itself, and so is the other half; vast areas are unpolluted; millions of children grow up without suffering cruelties, and millions, while deprived and cruelly treated, none the less grow up. No laughter is sad and many tears are joyful [.]

(p. 78)

The play ends with a sad one-line solo from Dotty who is still mourning the violation of the moon.

DOTTY: (*Sings without music*) Goodbye spoony Juney

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<sup>102</sup> *Jumpers*, p. 28.

Moon.  
(p. 78)

Stoppard in an interview in *Sunday Times*:

‘When philosophy becomes academic, it can seem absurd ... the entire operation seems to be taking place in a large plastic bubble – though, on the other hand, I enjoyed the rules that philosophers play by’<sup>103</sup>.

*Jumpers* is a play which deals directly with philosophical ideas. Rather than being a superficial attempt at creating a drama of philosophy, *Jumpers* reflects the post modern obsession with ideas. It is not a play about politics or philosophy but about people. As Stoppard states:

*Jumpers* obviously isn’t a political act, nor is it a play about politics, nor is it a play about ideology. There is an element in it which satirizes a joke-fascist outfit but you can safely ignore that too. On the other hand the play reflects my belief that all political acts have a moral basis to them and are meaningless without it.<sup>104</sup>

His aim is not to create a philosophical play. Stoppard is primarily a dramatist not a philosopher, therefore he only uses philosophy as a background of the play.

The play is a reaction against modern man’s denial of all values and reconfirmation of the belief that something within us makes us human, something which makes us believe in goodness and beauty. But, at some points we find ourselves in a great emptiness and start questioning the meaning of everything. Maybe, that is why using philosophy as a background of the play is a brilliant idea. And George is not alone in asking the question: ‘How the hell does one know what to believe?’<sup>105</sup> It is the question that most of us ask ourselves from time to time. In a conversation, Stoppard’s own comment about the play is:

. . . it tried to be a moral play, because while George has the right ideas, he is also a culpable person; while he is defending his ideas and attacking the opposition, he is also neglecting everyone around him and shutting out his wife who is in need, not to mention shooting his hare and stepping on his tortoise.<sup>106</sup>

*Jumpers* is a very funny and fast play. The wit and much of the comedy of his language relies on puns.

During the play, we see the same facts from different points of views. It is possible to reach different conclusions through George, Dotty, Archie, Bones, Crouch and even the secretary. All these characters have very different points of view. Throughout the play, George has his own

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<sup>103</sup> *Sunday Times*, 1974, as quoted in Gussow, Mel, **Conversations with Stoppard**, Nick Hern Books, London, 1995.

<sup>104</sup> Bareham, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>105</sup> *Jumpers*, p. 62.

<sup>106</sup> Hunter, op. cit., p. 79.

dilemma: ‘Does, for the sake of argument, God, so to speak, exist?’<sup>107</sup> He points out that his despair comes from the fact that ‘When I push *my* convictions to absurdity, *I* arrive at God’.<sup>108</sup> As a philosopher, the way George deals with ideas is totally different from his wife. For Dotty all his ideas are ridiculous and she tells George that he is living in a dreamland.

The play is open to various possible explanations. Poor McFee could have been killed by Dotty – in a moment of emotional confusion, or by George who wanted to take his place, or by Archie who might be thought as a villain, or by Crouch who perhaps blackmailed McFee about his immoral relationship, or by the Secretary who might learn that McFee is married.

The title of the play, *Jumpers*, can be interpreted in different ways. First and most importantly, the play deals not only with acrobats who perform on stage but also with the human weakness of jumping to conclusions about moral values and social conventions. Dorothy’s relationship with the so-called doctor Archie, and her half naked play of charades with Inspector Bones, the Secretary’s and the married McFee’s immoral relationship, the inhuman fight in the space, the misuse of authority (Archie is appointing an unqualified person – the butler – as the Chairman of the Moral Philosophy symposium) are all examples for the falling moral values that Stoppard points out with his wittily chosen title. In the play, the character Archie is the *jumper*. As written on his business card, he is a doctor of medicine, philosophy, literature, and law, with diplomas in psychological medicine and PT (physical training) including gym. People keep changing their ideas on philosophy, politics and morality. People do not stay firm in our beliefs. The title can be interpreted as a criticism of people’s not staying loyal to one belief. One interpretation could concern Stoppard himself. He is like a magpie; in all his plays he uses many different subjects and sources, in other words he is like a *jumper*, jumping from one subject to another and finally he tries to find the way to mingle those different subjects – just like putting philosophy and a striptease secretary in the same play.

*Jumpers* seems to have all the characteristics of absurd drama. Stoppard has concretized his absurd world in the form of philosophical concepts. Although Stoppard never aims to be didactic, he certainly makes us think after reading or watching the play. There are many surprises and traps in the play and we – the audience – think that the play is continuing firmly, but this thought does not continue for a long time; as we are given shocks all the time by the author we cannot be quite sure where we are. The answer, however; is easy enough: in a Stoppard play.

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<sup>107</sup> *Jumpers*, p. 18.

<sup>108</sup> *Jumpers*, p. 58.

## TRAVESTIES

‘Horrahs’, ‘huzzahs’<sup>109</sup>

That is how Garry O’Conner began his review about *Travesties*, in *Plays and Players*. The hurrahs were repeated in New York where *Travesties* opened at the Barrymore Theatre and captured both the New York Drama Critics Circle Award<sup>110</sup> and the Antoinette Perry Award<sup>111</sup> for Best Play of the season. As Henry Carr, John Wood (1930)<sup>112</sup> earned the ‘Tony Award’ for Best Actor.

Stoppard’s next major play which is also considered to be his most complex work, *Travesties*, was staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company under the direction of Peter Wood<sup>113</sup> at the Aldwych Theatre<sup>114</sup> in London, on June 10, 1974.

The play focuses on the fictional meeting of three important revolutionary figures in Zurich in 1917: the communist leader Lenin, the Dadaist poet Tristan Tzara, and the modernist author James Joyce. And Henry Carr, who in real life knew Joyce, relates the trio’s interactions through his unreliable memory. As Stoppard says about Carr’s memory:

I’ve taken the precaution of setting the play within the memory of an old gentleman who cannot be totally relied upon for accuracy.<sup>115</sup>

As in most of Stoppard’s plays, the starting point in *Travesties* is also very interesting. *Travesties* arouse because Stoppard had heard that Tzara and Lenin had both been in Zurich during World War I, because he wanted to write a play for John Wood, and because he wanted to say something about the role of the artist in society. As Stoppard says:

I utterly believe in his speech at the end of Act I on what an artist is.<sup>116</sup>

And when he was asked about the origin of his most complex work, Stoppard remarked:

When I was working on a newspaper in Bristol, a colleague of mine told me, apropos of nothing very much, that Lenin

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<sup>109</sup> Gabbard, Luciana Paquet, **The Stoppard Plays**, The Whitson Publishing Company, New York, 1982, p. 107.

<sup>110</sup> Presented each May by critics from all New York City’s newspapers, magazines and wire services except the *New York Times*.

<sup>111</sup> (Mary) Antoinette Perry (1888-1946) was an actress, a director, and a founder of the American Theatre Wing. The Tony Award is named for her.

<sup>112</sup> British actor, who joined the Old Vic in 1954, then spent several seasons with the Royal Shakespeare Company. In 1967, he made his bow as the glib Guildenstern in Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. He has had many leading roles such as *Sherlock Holmes* (the title role), *Travesties*, *Tartuffe* and so on.

<sup>113</sup> British director who was nominated as Best Director in a play for the 1975-1976 ‘Tony’s for *Travesties*.

<sup>114</sup> Historic theatre in the West End, which has been the home of both farce and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

<sup>115</sup> Delaney, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>116</sup> Delaney, op. cit., p. 86

and Tristan Tzara were in Zurich at the same time, but never met. This seemed a rather interesting fact of history to keep in one's mind. I never quite forgot it and never quite did anything with it, and then I started working on *Travesties*. I became dimly aware of James Joyce's part in all this. He was also there around about the same time. In fact, "I'd better see if there's anything in this James Joyce angle." And so a few weeks in, it turned out to be a play about Joyce as well. . . . So, you see, I'd already got into Tzara and Lenin before what turned out to be the main form of the play introduced itself.<sup>117</sup>

Stoppard first thought the role of Joyce for Wood, but when the play began to take its own shape the role of Henry Carr, an insignificant member of Zurich's British Consulate, mentioned by Richard Ellman in his biography of Joyce, material from which Stoppard used, was given to Wood. Joyce, as business manager of the English Players in Zurich, enlisted Henry Carr to play Algernon Moncrieff in his group's first production, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. After the performance closed, Joyce and Carr became involved in a court action. Carr sued for the cost of the trousers, hat, and gloves he had worn as Algernon or a share of the play's profits. Joyce countersued for slander and the price of five tickets Carr had sold. Joyce won the money, but lost on the slander charge, and vented his hostilities by making Carr one of the blasphemous soldiers in the 'Circe' episode of *Ulysses*.

Considering the vast amount of historical, biographical, and literary material incorporated into the play, it is clear that Stoppard had done a lot of preparation before starting to write the play. In his interview with Joost Kuurman, Stoppard stated that:

. . . for *Travesties*, . . . I had to read a lot; but apart from that it's not really a matter of researching a subject and then feeling that one has something to write about. It's the other way round really. It starts off with an idea and I find out things if I need to.<sup>118</sup>

As Anthony Jenkins states; *Travesties* is such a grab-bag of styles and incidents – Stoppard called it 'a pig's breakfast'. In some points, *Travesties* recall *Jumpers*. Stoppard thinks: 'If it is worth using once, it is worth using twice.' Again in his interview with Ronald Hayman, Stoppard honestly remarked:

*Jumpers* and *Travesties* are very similar plays . . . they're so similar that were I to do it a third time it would be a bore. You start with a prologue which is slightly strange. Then you have an interminable monologue which is rather funny. Then you have scenes. Then you end up with another monologue. And you have unexpected bits of music and dance, and at the same time people are playing ping-pong

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<sup>117</sup> Hu, Stephen, **Tom Stoppard's Stagecraft**, Peter Lang, New York, 1989, p. 115-116.

<sup>118</sup> Jenkins, op. cit., p.17.

with various intellectual arguments ... there are senses in which *Travesties* is a great advance on *Jumpers*, but it's the same kind of pig's breakfast.<sup>119</sup>

*Travesties* assumes considerable advance knowledge from its audience; it juxtaposes Dadaist, aesthetic and political realities, and concerns major artists, artistic movements, and revolution. Hence in discussing the play we shall begin the play by introducing the leading figures and movements – the Dada movement and twentieth century Russian history – would be a good idea.

James Joyce (1882-1941), the modernist author wrote his masterpiece *Ulysses* (1922) during the war - a vast comical novel describing one day in Dublin - is one of the leading real life characters of the play.

The Dadaist Romanian-French poet, Tristan Tzara (1896-1963) who was just in his twenties when he invented the name 'Dada' for a new movement in art and literature. Dadaism, founded in Zurich in 1916, gloried in everything new: new ideas, new materials, new directions, and new people. Dada was a way to express the confusion that was felt by many people as their world was turned upside down. There is not an attempt to find meaning in disorder, but rather to accept disorder as the nature of the world. Zurich during the Great War was the birthplace of Dada. It then rapidly spread to Paris, Italy, and New York. The significance of the birthplace being in Zurich – the dead centre of the war- is very important. As Roger Sales<sup>120</sup> says, Zurich during the Great War was like an island of calm amid a sea of troubles. Tzara's poems revealed the anguish of his soul, caught between revolt and wonderment at the daily tragedy of the human condition.

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov– the communist leader - who adopted the name of Lenin (1870-1924), was sent to Siberia for five years for spreading Marxist propaganda. He took part in the Russian Revolution of 1917, after which he was forced to live in exile. At the start of *Travesties* the news of the Revolution reaches Lenin. Lenin ruled the Soviet Union from 1917 until his death in 1924, creating a totalitarian state which would have huge international influence for most of the twentieth century.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was a political movement in Russia with the overthrow of the provisional government that had replaced the Russian Tsarist system and led to the establishment of the Soviet Union, which lasted until its collapse in 1991. The Revolution can be viewed in two distinct phases. The first one was that of the February Revolution of 1917, which displaced the autocracy of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and sought to establish in its place a

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<sup>119</sup> Hayman, op. cit., p.12.

<sup>120</sup> Sales, op. cit., p. 103.



democratic regime. The February Revolution came about almost spontaneously when people protested against the Tsarist regime as they lacked enough food to eat. There was also great dissatisfaction with Russia's continued involvement in the First World War. The second phase was the October Revolution, in which the Soviets, inspired and increasingly controlled by Lenin's Bolshevik party, whose ideas were based upon the ideas of Karl Marx and marked the beginning of the spread of communism in the twentieth century, seized power from the Provisional Government.<sup>121</sup>

Tom Stoppard discovered one of the real life characters, Carr – Henry Wilfred Carr (1894-1962) – when he was researching Joyce.

*Travesties* uses *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) as an inter-textual basis for its structure and characters. *Travesties* depends heavily for its laughter and intellectual wit on prior knowledge of Oscar Wilde's comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest*, whereas *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* may work fairly well for someone who does not know *Hamlet*. Not knowing anything about Wilde's play is not an obstacle to the enjoyment of *Travesties*. The only disadvantage is that the audience might not grasp some of the nuances: like the cigarette case's being a library ticket in *Travesties*. We should be able to compare the wonderful speeches of Gwendolen in *Travesties* and in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Like the last sentence of the speech in *The Importance of Being Earnest* is:

GWENDOLEN: The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you.  
(p. 10)

The last sentence of her speech in *Travesties* is:

GWEN: When Henry told me that he had a friend who edited a magazine of all that is newest and best in literature, I knew I was destined to love you.  
(p. 55)

*The Importance of Being Earnest* is used in more or less the same way that *Hamlet* was in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. And as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* has a play – *The Murder of Gonzago* – within, *Travesties* also has Joyce and Carr's play within it. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a three act play which is set in London. Jack Worthing, who lives in the country but prefers to spend his time in London, pretends to have a younger brother, called Ernest, whom he says he must visit in the city. While in London he uses the name 'Ernest' himself. Meanwhile, Jack's friend Algernon Moncrieff is a city dweller who enjoys country life for

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<sup>121</sup> All the information about the Russian Revolution is taken from *Wikipedia Encyclopaedia*.  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>

adventure. He has created a fictitious friend named ‘Bunbury’ who lives in the country and whose failing health provides the perfect excuse for Algernon to get out of the city.

While in the city, Jack has fallen in love and proposed to the beautiful but flighty Gwendolen Fairfax. Gwendolen accepts Jack, confessing she has always felt that a man named ‘Ernest’ was her fate.

GWENDOLEN: . . . my ideal has always been to love  
some one of the name of Ernest. There is  
something in that name that inspires  
absolute confidence. The moment Algernon  
first mentioned to me that he had a friend  
called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love  
you.<sup>122</sup>

(p. 10)

But Gwendolen’s wealthy aunt Lady Bracknell has forbidden the match due to the fact that Jack cannot produce his family lineage. The only knowledge he has of his family connections is that Jack was left as an infant in a leather bag at the cloak room at Victorian Station. This is unacceptable to Lady Bracknell, and so she forbids the marriage.

Cecily, Jack’s ward, alone in the country with her governess, Miss Prism, is agreeably surprised at the appearance of Algernon in the guise of the much-discussed younger brother, ‘Ernest’. The young couple lose no time in becoming engaged, Cecily admits that the name ‘Ernest’ has always fascinated her. The name ‘Ernest’ was a fairly common Christian name in Victorian times. The word ‘Earnest’ was a very Victorian virtue implying honesty, dependability and seriousness. But funnily enough, our characters are not particularly honest.

CECILY: . . . it had always been a girlish dream of mine  
to love some one whose name was Ernest.

(p. 33)

While Jack and Algernon are separately arranging with the rector for a rechristening, Gwendolen follows Jack to his home in the country; the cast of characters all meet and chaos ensues when their true identities are revealed. Gwendolen and Cecily (the two characters from this play who are imported into Stoppard’s travesty of history, to become the assistants of Lenin and Joyce) discover that they both seem to be engaged to ‘Ernest Worthing’. The appearance of both young men clarifies the matter of engagements, but also reveals that neither is named ‘Ernest’. When the girls learn that their fiancés had been about to be rechristened for their sakes, they forgive the deception.

With the arrival of Lady Bracknell the question of consent again comes up. Lady Bracknell is quite willing that Algernon shall marry Cecily with her fortune. Jack, however, as Cecily’s

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<sup>122</sup> All quotations are from Wilde, Oscar, **The Importance of Being Earnest**, Dover Publications, New York, 1990.

guardian, refuses his consent unless Lady Bracknell permits his marriage to Gwendolen. The appearance of Miss Prism who is recognized by Lady Bracknell, results in the identification of Jack Worthing as Algernon's lost elder brother, Ernest, thus settling matters to everyone's satisfaction.

JACK: . . . I've now realised for the first time in my life  
the vital *Importance of Being Earnest*.  
(p. 54)

As Stoppard said later, 'I haven't done a large play since *Travesties*'.<sup>123</sup> The two-act play which is set in Zurich is the longest of Stoppard's plays. The content of *Travesties* examines the relationship between revolution and art.

As explained in the prologue, the play is set in Zurich, in two locations: the drawing room of Henry Carr's apartment – the Room -, and a section of the Zurich Public Library – the Library.

Switzerland's neutrality during the First World War attracted a number of intellectuals from elsewhere in Europe. These intellectuals were attracted by its peace and calm. Three historical men living in Zurich were each ground-breaking leaders in their different fields, who did not actually know each other. Stoppard decided to bring them together with three characters from Wilde.

As Stoppard reconstructed *Hamlet* from the points of view of two minor characters in *Hamlet*, he reconstructed the character of Henry Carr out of a deep note. As Roger Sales<sup>124</sup> says, Stoppard rescues, once again, a central character from obscurity and Carr becomes more than just a literary footnote. While much of the play features Old Carr as a first person narrator, whose accounts are unreliable because of memory failure and his subjective involvement in events, Stoppard presents many scenes from an objective point of view.

The play opens in the Zurich public library, where we see Tzara, James Joyce, Gwendolen Carr, Lenin and Cecily Carruthers at work. At first there is silence. Here we once again meet Stoppard's powerful usage of theatrical silence. An opening in silence makes the audience rather bewildered. And then we hear words, but hardly a word of English is spoken.

NADYA: Vylodya!  
LENIN : Shto takoya?  
...  
JOYCE : . . . "Morose delectation ...  
Aquinas tunbelly ... Frate porcospino ..."<sup>125</sup>  
(p. 19)

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<sup>123</sup> Hayman, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>124</sup> Sales, Roger, **Tom Stoppard: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead**, Penguin Books, London, 1988, p. 103.

<sup>125</sup> All quotations are from Stoppard, Tom, **Travesties**, Faber and Faber, London-Boston, 1975.

The multi-lingual setting of Zurich is established, as is the multi-national cast. So a bewildering jumble of languages is presented and these different languages and accents are crucial in the play. After an opening in silence, the foreign languages are further theatrical tricks of Stoppard's drama.

Tzara cuts up what he has written and shuffles the pieces, then reads the scraps out apparently at random; the result is gibberish. The foreign language part was already amazing for the audience, the gibberish words are rather surprising for the audience, and probably makes most of the audience wonder what kind of a play *Travesties* is. An interesting title, opening, words not in English and now these gibberish words.

TZARA: Eel ate enormous appletzara  
key dairy chef's hat he'lllearn oomparah!  
Ill raced alas whispers kill later nut east,  
noon avuncular ill day Clara!  
(p. 18)

Fragments of Joyce's work are also heard aloud, and also sound like gibberish.

JOYCE (*dictating to GWEN*): Deshill holles eamus ...  
...  
JOYCE: Send us bright one, light one, Horhorn, quickening  
and wombfuit.  
(p. 18)

The librarian, Cecily, shushes them. Gwendolen receives a folder from Joyce, and Cecily gets one from Lenin; and the folders are accidentally exchanged. This might be thought of as a travesty of the exchange of the baby in *The Importance of Being Earnest* and the manuscript in *Travesties*.

*It is now necessary that the audience should observe the following: GWEN has received from JOYCE a folder, CECILY receives an identical folder from LENIN. These folders, assumed to contain manuscripts, are eye-catching objects in some striking colour. Each girl has cause to place her folder down on a table or chair, and each girl then picks up the wrong folder.*  
(p. 19)

Tzara leaves. So do Gwendolen and Cecily, taking the wrong folders with them. Nadya bursts into the library and tells Lenin that a revolution has started in St. Petersburg; all this is in Russian, while Joyce declaims incomprehensible passages.

NADYA: Bronski prishol. On s'kazal shot v'Peterburge  
revolutsia! (*Bronski came to the house. He says  
there's a revolution in St. Petersburg.*)  
LENIN: Revolutsia!  
...  
JOYCE (*regarding his first find*): "Morose delectation ...  
Aquinas tunbelly ... Frate porcospino ..."  
(*He decides he doesn't need this one. He screws it  
up throws it away, and finds a second ...*)

“Und alle Schiffe bracken ...” [.]  
(p. 19)

Lenin drops a scrap of paper. Joyce returns the scrap to Lenin, who tries different languages on him; Joyce responds to each in turn. The Lenins leave. All these different languages are great metaphors to indicate the multi-linguaged Switzerland. And also Tom Stoppard is being obscure by using all these different languages together. He is in a sense mimicking Joyce’s modernist fashion in terms of language.

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

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

(p. 20)

We are teased by an opening silence, and then by an absurd action, then by a varied flow of language, all of them are incomprehensible. These are just some parts of Stoppard’s various theatrical uses in his drama. The use of silence is very well done and used by Stoppard in his plays. Though actually practising their art, Joyce and Tzara appear like weird people, with Gwendolen and Cecily as their foils. Lenin, however, appears absolutely serious.

The scene changes to the Room, scene of Old Carr’s reminiscences.

*(The stage now belongs to OLD CARR. The LIBRARY must now be replaced by the ROOM. . . . the use of music as a bridge is probably desirable.)*

(p. 22)

And an indispensable theatrical element of Stoppard’s drama: music is also used in *Travesties*. Because of many erratic shifts, we think of Carr as an unreliable witness.

CARR: . . . Alas and alack for it. But I digress. No apologies required, constant digression being the saving grace of senile reminiscence.

My memoirs, is it, then?

(p. 22)

He reveals that he was a consular official in Zurich, that he knew Joyce, Lenin and the Dadaists, and that he acted in a production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Old Carr becomes young Carr in his drawing room.

*(CARR is now a young man in his drawing room in 1917. . . . Carr’s age has been in his voice.)*

(p. 26)

We begin with Carr’s relief as being away from the hectic war atmosphere, and his curious ‘time slips’ enable a repeated update of the situation in Russia. Many times the same lines are repeated

and the use of these repetitions are important in the play in terms of showing the servant's – Bennet – being more clever than his master, Carr.

BENNETT: . . . I have put the newspapers and telegrams on the side board, sir.

CARR : Is there anything interesting?  
(p. 26)

BENNETT: There is a revolution in Russia, sir.

CARR : Really? What sort of revolution?

BENNETT: A social revolution, sir.  
(p. 29)

BENNETT: The Tsar has now abdicated, sir. There is a Provisional Government headed by Prince Lvov, with Guckhow as Minister of War, Milyukov Foreign Minister and the Socialist Kerensky as Minister of Justice.

(pp. 29-30)

BENNETT: In St. Petersburg, the Provisional Government has now declared its intention to carry on the war . . .

(p. 31)

The previous section skilfully bridges us into *The Importance of Being Earnest*. And now, the non-Wilde subplot begins: a telegram from 'the Minister' urges Carr to 'ascertain Lenin's plans'.

BENNETT: . . . it is suggested that you take all steps to ascertain his plans.

CARR : A consensus of the humorous and intellectual weeklies?

BENNETT: Telegram from the Minister.

(p. 32)

Then Tzara enters as Oscar Wilde's Jack. Tzara speaks loudly and un-English. He is followed almost instantly by Gwendolen and Joyce. Tzara's un-English speech again surprises the audience.

BENNETT (*entering*): Mr. Tzara.

(TZARA *enters*.)

...

TZARA (*ebulliently*): *Plaizure, plaizure!* What else? Eating ez usual I see 'Enri?!- 'allo- 'allo, *what* is all the teapots etcetera? Somebody *comink?* It is Gwendolen I *hopp!*-I *luff 'er, 'Enri-I have come by tram* expressly to propose a marriage-ah-ah!—

Tzara's speech is very funny and it is like Stoppard is also having fun to keep making the audience's have shocks successively.

BENNETT: (*entering*): Miss Gwendolen and Mr. Joyce.

(p. 32)

Gwendolen is Carr's sister. Joyce introduces himself to Carr and Tzara, and invites Carr to act in his play.

The lights are dimmed and Old Carr is alone again.

*(The light steps down between verses.)*  
(p. 35)

Lighting is another crucial theatrical device that Stoppard applies to his plays successfully. The lights keep going down and up according to the transitions between the Old Carr and the Young Carr. Then the lights go up: we see Bennett and young Carr again, and for the second time Tzara enters as Jack, but this time Tzara speaks perfect English.

*( . . . Low light on motionless CARR in his chair.)*

...  
*(Normal light.)*  
BENNETT: *(entering)*: Mr. Tzara.  
(TZARA enters.)

...  
TZARA : Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring anyone anywhere?  
(TZARA, *no less than CARR, is straight out of* The Importance of Being Earnest.)  
(p. 36)

They argue, Tzara explaining his Dadaist rejection of history, traditional art and patriotism.

TZARA: . . . 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 . . .  
CARR *(slight pause)* : Oh, what nonsense you talk!  
TZARA: It may be nonsense, but at least it's not clever nonsense. Cleverness has been exploded, along with so much else, by the war.  
(p. 37)

Carr angrily remembers his war experiences.

CARR: You forget that I was there, in the mud and blood of a foreign field, unmatched by anything in the whole history of human carnage. . . . Nobody who has not been in the trenches can have the faintest conception of the horror of it.  
(p. 37)

The memory overwhelms him, the lights grow dim to the sound of a song from the trenches: it is another glimpse of Old Carr.

CARR: ( . . . *The light starts to go. . . .* )  
. . . "Good morning, corporal! All quiet on the Western Front?" ... "Tickety-boo, sir!" – "Carry on!" - . . .

(p. 41)

Then the lights return and we see for a third time Tzara's entry as Jack.

*(Lights to normal.)*

And what brings *you* here, my dear Tristan?

(p. 41)

*The Importance of Being Earnest* scheme continues as Carr produces Tzara's library ticket, which is in the name of Jack.

CARR : I believe it is customary in good society to take a cucumber sandwich at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?

...  
CARR : Who is Cecily? And is she as pretty and well-bred as she sounds? *Cecily is a name well thought of at fashionable christenings.*

(p. 41)

TZARA: . . . I am in love with Gwendolen and have come expressly to propose to her.

...  
CARR : My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my sister and before I allow you to marry her you will have to clear up the whole question of Jack.

TZARA: Jack! What on earth do you mean? What do you mean, Henry, by Jack? I don't know anyone of the name of Jack.

CARR (*taking the library ticket from his pocket*): You left this here the last time you dined.

(pp. 43-44)

Jack's courtship of Gwendolen is now paralleled by Tzara's courtship of Gwendolen. Gwendolen reveals that she was attracted to Tzara because he admired Joyce as an artist; he actually does not, this corresponds to Gwendolen's enthusiasm for Jack's name of 'Ernest'.

GWEN: . . . *I knew I was destined to love you.*

*(She has the folder she acquired in the Prologue and gives it to TZARA.)*

Predestination has an important effect in *Travesties* as well as in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, and *Jumpers*. Predestination always comes to the fore because of the need of modern man's attempt to explain his decisions and wills.

TZARA (*breaking off*): But you don't mean that you couldn't love me if I didn't share your regard for Mr. Joyce as an artist?

GWEN: But you do.

(p. 55)

*The Importance of Being Earnest* scheme has now reached the end of Wilde's Act One. Stoppard's act ends in Old Carr's reminiscences about his feud with Joyce

CARR: ...

*(CARR enters, as Old Carr, holding a book.)*



...  
[N]ot one to bear a grudge, not after all these years, and  
him dead in the cemetery up the hill, unpleasant as it is to be  
dragged through the courts for a few francs . . . . (p. 63)

and his later dream that he asked Joyce ‘what did you do in the Great War?’, and was told: ‘I wrote *Ulysses*. What did you do?’. There is a very famous First World War recruitment poster that Stoppard alludes to here. The original is ‘What Did You Do in the Great War, Daddy?’. Stoppard addresses the question of our commitment to our values, such as nationalism. Did we really do something, or just pass by and go on with our lives?

Act Two is set in the Library again. As Hunter states<sup>126</sup>: ‘this is a smart play which demands some framework of knowledge.’ When the audience is back in their seats after the interval, they have a surprise. Cecily is already been on the stage, like a teacher waiting for her students – the audience - coming back from the break.

*Most of the light is on CECILY who stands patiently at the  
front of the stage, waiting for the last members of the  
audience to come in and sit down.*  
(p. 66)

‘I thought it would be nice’ Stoppard has admitted, ‘if they all went out thinking “oh this is fun isn’t it”, came back, and I just hit them with this boring thing, as though they’d come back into the wrong theatre.’<sup>127</sup> Stoppard greatly enjoys surprising his audience. Cecily gives information about the revolution and the way Lenin got to Switzerland, and mentions about Joyce and Tzara as well. So, while at the beginning of the play we had a summary about the characters and the political reasons that caused them to be in Switzerland, we are now told about the importance of Switzerland for the artists during the war time.

CECILY: . . . Zurich during the war was a magnet for  
refugees, exiles, spies, anarchists, artists and  
radicals of all kinds. Here could be seen James  
Joyce, reshaping the novel into the permanent form  
of his own monument, the book the world now  
knows as *Ulysses*! – and here, too, the Dadaists  
were performing nightly at the Cabaret Voltaire in  
the Meierei Bar [.]  
(pp. 69-70)

And Lenin was working on his book on Imperialism.

Then Carr enters. Carr’s ‘manner betrays’ that he is now a spy – presumably he does some caricature slinking-around.

*(CARR enters, very debonair in his boater and blazer, etc.  
CARR has come to the library as a “spy”, and his manner*

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<sup>126</sup> Hunter, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>127</sup> Hunter, op. cit., p.120.

*betrays this until CECILY addresses him.)*

(pp. 70-71)

Cecily sees him; they have a flirtatious kind of conversation, just as in Wilde.

*(CECILY sees CARR who hands her the visiting card he received from BENNETT in Act One.)*

...

CARR: . . . My brother Jack is a booby, and if you want to know why he is a booby, I will tell you why he is a booby. He told me that you were rather pretty, whereas you are at a glance the prettiest girl in the whole world.

(p. 71)

Carr attempts to discover Lenin's movements, and reveals that Bennett is a socialist who routinely passes consular letters to Tzara.

CARR : Of course – *Lenin*. But surely, now that the revolution has broken out in St. Petersburg, he will be anxious to return home.

CECILY: That is true. When the history of the Revolution – or indeed of anything else – is written, Switzerland is unlikely to loom large in the story. However, all avenues are closed to him. He will have to travel in disguise with false papers. Oh, but I fear I have said too much already. Vladimir is positive that there are agents watching him and trying to ingratiate themselves with those who are close to him. The British are among the most determined, though the least competent. Only yesterday the Ambassador received secret instructions to watch the ports.

(p. 72)

Without having any hesitation about the possibility of Carr's being the so called 'spy', Cecily is giving too much information about Lenin's sneaking off to Russia which she should not give.

CARR : . . . The Consul has been busy for several weeks in rehearsals which culminated last evening in a performance at the Theater zur Kaufleuten on Pelikanstrasse. I happened to be present.

CECILY: That would no doubt explain why he virtually left the Consulate's affairs in the hands of his *manservant* – who, fortunately, has radical sympathies.

(p. 73)

Carr is very surprised to hear that his servant, Bennett, is a socialist and playing off the two sides.

CARR : Good heavens!  
CECILY: You seem surprised.  
CARR : Not at all. I have a servant myself.

CARR : . . . . To whom did this manservant pass the  
Consul's correspondence?

CECILY: Your brother Jack.

(p. 73)

Carr asks Cecily to reform him – she gives him a folder to read, which she believes contains an article by Lenin but actually contains a chapter by Joyce.

CECILY: . . . . Here is an article which I have been  
translating for Vladimir Ilyich.

(p. 78)

Cecily reveals that she has always wanted to love Jack's decadent nihilist younger brother, and drags him down behind her desk.

CECILY: Ever since Jack told me he had a younger brother  
who was a decadent nihilist *it has been my girlish  
dream to reform you and to love you.*

CARR : . . . . But, my dear Cecily, you don't mean that  
you couldn't love me if –  
(*-and is dragged down again.*)

(p. 79)

The Lenins enter, with their serious history:

(*NADYA enters and comes down to address the audience,  
undramatically.*)

NADYA: From the moment news of the revolution came,  
Ilyich burned with eagerness to go to Russia . . .  
He did not sleep, and at night all sorts of  
incredible plans were made.

(p. 79)

Carr, as spy, is seen eavesdropping. Tzara enters as Jack, and we are again back in Wilde's play.

LENIN : . . . . I am considering carefully and from every  
point of view what will be the best way of  
travelling to Russia. The following is absolutely  
secret.

...  
(*CARR pops up attentively from behind the desk,  
and listens carefully.*)

CECILY: Jack!

TZARA : (*turning one way*): Cecily!

CECILY: I have such a surprise for you. Your brother is  
here.

TZARA : What nonsense! *I haven't got a brother.*

(p. 80)

Tzara and Carr find themselves somewhere out of the Library, like Jack and Algernon, arguing over the muffins; simultaneously, from another part of the stage, we hear the build-up to Lenin's departure by train for St. Petersburg.

( . . . *It can no longer be said that the scene is taking place “in the Library”. CARR and TZARA might be in a café, or anywhere.*)

(p. 82)

TZARA: The train left at 3.10, on time.

(p. 84)

There follows a speech by Carr in which he implies that he might have stopped Lenin travelling but was distracted from doing so by his feelings for Cecily.

The stage goes black except for a light on Lenin. He is seen as a fierce public orator, modelled upon a famous photograph.

*(The train noise becomes very loud.)*

*(Everything black except a light on LENIN. He is bearded again. There is a much reproduced photograph of Lenin addressing the crowd in a public square in May 1920 – “balding, bearded, in the three-piece suit” as Carr describes him; he stands as though leaning into a gale, his chin jutting, his hands gripping the edge of the rostrum which is waist-high, the right hand at the same time gripping a cloth cap ... a justly famous image.*

...  
(LENIN as the orator is now the only person on stage.)

(pp. 84-85)

Lenin is said to be deeply moved by Beethoven. Nadya recalls a past failure of communication with her husband which nevertheless resonates through all we have heard of her memories.

NADYA: . . . I remember him one evening at a friend’s house in Moscow, listening to a Beethoven Sonata

...  
LENIN : I don’t know of anything greater than the Appassionata. Amazing, superhuman music. It always makes me feel, perhaps naively, it makes me feel proud of the miracles that human beings can perform.

...  
NADYA: Once when Vladimir was in prison – in St. Petersburg – he wrote to me and asked that at certain times of day I should go and stand on a particular square of pavement on the Shpalernaya. When the prisoners were taken out for exercise it was possible through one of the windows in the corridor to catch a momentary glimpse of this spot. I went for several days and stood a long while on the pavement there. But he never saw me. Something went wrong. I forget what.

(p. 89)

The true identities of Tzara and Carr are then revealed, to the young women's mutual disappointment; they are asked for their true opinions of the characters they read. They have to admit having concealed these opinions because of their love – just as Wilde's characters preserved their false names because of love. But, privately, both Tzara and Carr thought that the chapters Cecily and Gwendolen gave them to read were drivel. The chapter Cecily gave Carr was Joyce's chapter, and the one Gwendolen gave Tzara was Lenin's chapter.

CECILY: . . . – *Tristan!*  
(CARR *has entered. Pause.*)  
GWEN : (*censoriously*) That's my brother.  
CECILY: Your brother?  
GWEN : Yes. My brother, Henry Carr.  
CECILY: Do you mean that he is not Tristan Tzara the  
artist?  
GWEN: Quite the contrary. He is the British Consul.  
(p. 93)

Cecily is shocked at the fact she learns. And then Gwendolen is similarly shocked.

GWEN : Tristan! My Tristan!  
CECILY: Comrade Jack!  
GWEN : Comrade Jack?  
...  
GWEN : A gross deception has been practised upon us. My  
poor wounded Cecily!  
CECILY: My sweet wronged Gwendolen!  
...  
CECILY: What in truth *was* your opinion of the essay I  
gave you to read?  
GWEN : What indeed *did* you think of the chapter I  
showed you?  
CARR (*timidly*): Very ... well written ... Interesting style...  
TZARA (*timidly*): Very ... well read ... Rich material.  
CECILY: But as a social critique -- ?  
GWEN : But as art for art's sake -- ?  
CARR (*giving up*): *Rubbish!* He's a madman!  
TZARA: Bilge! It's unreadable.  
GWEN & CECILY: Oh! Hypocrites!  
CARR: I'm sorry! 'Twas for love!  
(p. 94)

Love is like the key for everything. Carr and Tzara's unstable behaviour could be excused under love.

Carr tackles Tzara, amicably, about Bennett's leaking of Consular correspondence. It is Bennett's victory, just as Lenin may be winning in Russia. It is important because Bennett's victory is a kind of victory taken against Carr; that is the master. This incident beautifully fits in the play. The master is foolish and the servant is cleverer, just like lover classes are important and the masters are fool in the philosophy of Lenin and his followers.

Joyce returns to conduct his quarrel with Carr.

CARR: Lout. Quadri-oculate Irish git ... Came round to the dressing room and handed me ten francs like a *tip* – bloody nerve – Sponger –

JOYCE (*with dignity*): . . . could you let me have the twenty-five francs.

CARR: What twenty-five francs?

JOYCE: You were given eight tickets to sell at five francs per ticket. My books indicate that only fifteen francs has been received from you.

CARR : I have spent three hundred and fifty francs of my own money so that your off-the-peg production should boast one character who looked as if he was acquainted with a tailor. If you hope to get a further twenty-five francs out of me you will have to drag me through the courts. (*deliberately*)  
*You are a swindler and a cad!*

(p. 96)

Finally, Old Carr and Old Cecily are left dancing on the stage, and the falseness of Carr's recollections is admitted. We see that everything actually was a game of Carr's imagination.

OLD CECILY: You never saw Lenin.

OLD CECILY (*small pause*): And you were never the Consul.

CARR : Never said I was.

CARR : . . . I learned three things in Zurich during the war. I wrote them down. Firstly, you're either a revolutionary or you're not, and if you're not you might as well be an artist as anything else. Secondly, if you can't be an artist, you might as well as be a revolutionary

...  
I forget the third thing.

(pp. 98-99)

In his *Critical Essays on Tom Stoppard*, Jenkins says<sup>128</sup>:

I enjoy *Travesties* for its wit, its erudition, its interplay of argument, its highly theatrical combination of time-slips, potted history, striptease, song-and-dance. Tzara says an artist is someone who makes art mean the things he does: Stoppard is a dramatist who makes drama mean the things he does.

*Travesties* is a play in which Stoppard argues about different opinions about art. As Stoppard says:

It asks whether an artist has to justify himself in political terms at all.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Jenkins, Anthony, *Critical Essays on Tom Stoppard*, G.K Hall & Co, Boston, Massachusetts, 1990, p. 127.

There is a kind of debate in the play. The principal questions of the debate are: What is the meaning and purpose of art? How does it relate to society and politics? And what is the nature of the artist? Each character contributes an opinion.

In literature, James Joyce is writing one of the most important novels, *Ulysses*, of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In art, Tristan Tzara who represents the movement of Dadaism is suggesting that both in life and art, ‘luck’ is the element which shapes our life and art. In politics, Lenin is working on the Russian Revolution and defending the idea of using art as a powerful vehicle of social life. Unlike the other leading characters, Stoppard’s Lenin is not really funny. Stoppard uses Carr to tell what has happened and is happening in the play. In a sense Carr is like a bridge who unites the two plays – *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Travesties*. As stated before the transition is very successfully done by Stoppard throughout the play and using a character who has a function in the play like Carr allows Stoppard the freedom of playing with the historical facts and jumping from one time to another. (Carr has a lot of memory problems, so we have many time-slips in the play.)

The important thing which Stoppard emphasizes is that life has its meaning through art, and the only thing which is immortal is a work of art. To Joyce, the meaning and purpose of art can be explained in the brief phrase ‘art for art’s sake’. And Stoppard agrees with Joyce in an interview in which he says:

When [Joyce, Lenin and Tzara] have that argument about art at the end of the first act, notice that Joyce has the last word. I wanted him to murder Tzara and he does.<sup>130</sup>

The following images of Troy resound with the splendour of an artistic heritage that stands as one of mankind’s glories and which dramatizes Stoppard’s most overt statement about the artist’s function.

JOYCE: An artist is the magician put among men to gratify  
– capriciously – their urge for immortality.

...  
What now of the Trojan War if it had been passed  
over by the artist’s touch? Dust. A forgotten  
expedition prompted by Greek merchants looking  
for new markets.

(p. 62)

The title of the play is a charming example of Stoppard’s wit. The play was hailed as ‘a masterpiece of serious wit’ and ‘a miraculous display of verbal fireworks.’<sup>131</sup> Stoppard provides a variety of interpretations of his title. Since the play is based on Wilde’s *The Importance of Being*

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<sup>129</sup> Delaney, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>130</sup> Wetzsteon, Ross, **Tom Stoppard Eats Steak Tartare with Chocolate Sauce**, *Village Voice*, 10 November 1975, p. 121.

<sup>131</sup> Delaney, op. cit., p. 80.

*Earnest*, it would seem that he is playing with the meanings of Wilde's title and his own. While *Earnest* means: characterised by or showing deep sincerity or seriousness<sup>132</sup>. *Travesty* means: a copy or example of something that completely misrepresents the true or intended nature of the real thing<sup>133</sup>. Stoppard is also concerned with travesty of justice:

CARR: . . . The counter-claim of Henry Carr is denied.  
Herr Carr to indemnify Doctor Joyce sixty francs for  
trouble and expenses. In other words, *a travesty of*  
*justice* . . .  
(p. 64)

On another level Stoppard is also creating a travesty of these historical characters – Joyce, Lenin, and Tzara. Stoppard's choosing Joyce, Lenin and Tzara for his play, once more proves his ingenious creativity. The title entirely suits the characters. They are involved in the travesty of literature, politics and painting.

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>132</sup> **Webster's** New Riverside University Dictionary, The Riverside Company, Boston, 1984, p. 414.

<sup>133</sup> **Longman** Dictionary of English Language and Culture, Longman, England, 1998, p. 1434.



This thesis is concerned with Stoppard's use of diverse theatrical materials in his drama. These diverse materials have been examined in the following plays of Stoppard; *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Jumpers*, and *Travesties*.

Farce, high comedy, intertextuality, post-modernism, Theatre of the Absurd, play within a play technique, visual and linguistic gymnastics, the use of repetitions are the key words to describe Stoppard's plays. All these theatrical materials are noticeable in all Stoppard's plays. However, it is not possible to put the plays in any clear-cut categories. Differences in style separate one play from the other. For instance; *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *Jumpers* are the closest to the Theatre of the Absurd, while *Travesties* stands out as a pure high comedy.

Using puns and double meaning are among Stoppard's most characteristic and effective sources of humour. Using puns is a perfect way of conveying doubles entendres. An outstanding example occurs in *Jumpers*. George asks Crouch, 'Who killed him?', meaning his hare, Thumper. Crouch, thinking George is referring to dead Professor McFee, explains that things point to 'Miss' Moore. George, still thinking of Thumper, continues, 'Do you realize she's in there now, *eating* him?' Crouch cries, 'You mean – *raw*?' and George answers crossly 'No, of course not! – *cooked*-with gravy and mashed potatoes.'<sup>134</sup>

Stoppard is at his best in parody when he plays with other writer's ideas. He takes some of his plots from well known writers such as Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, James Joyce; and in addition he quotes a lot from Beckett, Bernard Shaw, T. S. Eliot, and Shelley and others. Stoppard also makes reference to the plots of many other writers. In this way, Stoppard's plays are like jig saw puzzles – a very entertaining and intellectual kind of puzzle. We derive a great deal of intellectual pleasure from parody – especially if we have pre-knowledge about the sources of the plots or the ideas. At first we only like the play because of the perfectly used language and wittily organised dialogues, but if we know the source of the underlying pun we enjoy it doubly. For instance, the cigarette case which gives Jack away in *The Importance of Being Earnest* becomes a library ticket in *Travesties*. In Carr's speech, 'my art belongs to Dada 'cos Dada 'e treats me so – well'<sup>135</sup> he alludes to a popular song, *My Heart Belongs to Daddy* and to a famous First World War recruitment poster, 'What Did You Do in the Great War, Daddy?' which is 'What did it do in the Great War, Dada'<sup>136</sup> in the text.

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<sup>134</sup> *Jumpers*, p. 67.

<sup>135</sup> *Travesties*, p. 25.

<sup>136</sup> *Travesties*, p. 25.

As stated above, most of Stoppard's plays require previous knowledge of the source. This is particularly true for *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, which assumes knowledge of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Stoppard does not just simply use Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in his play; he also conveys many new meanings. In *Travesties*, it is an asset if we know *The Importance of Being Earnest*. These are the essential master works which form the structural bases for Stoppard's plays. *Jumpers* does not lean on previous theatre in such a way, and to that extent can be taken more on its own terms, because it actually uses one of Stoppard's own plays as a subtext; *After Magritte*.

The plays of Tom Stoppard are above all the plays of a man who enjoys arguing with himself, and he makes this clear through his characters. For example; in *Travesties*, considering Joyce's speeches on art, Stoppard says; 'Joyce's defence of art is mine, too.'<sup>137</sup>

When we take a general look at his plays we cannot easily categorise his plays. The subjects of Tom Stoppard's theatre are varied. He writes about the anxiety and confusion of life, helplessness of the individual, the loss of identity and faith. As in *Guildenstern and the Player's* speeches; *Guildenstern* asks 'Who are *we*?', and the *Player* answers 'You are *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*.'<sup>138</sup> He discusses the scientific, mathematical or the philosophical understanding of reality, moral responsibilities, about goodness and history.

Since Stoppard used already existing plots, he has been accused of being a plagiarist by many critics. Dramatists have clearly benefited from the works of others; to find a playwright in this period who repeated nothing from the past is almost impossible. Almost all famous texts have a history of readings and no one today can read a famous novel or a poem, or look at a famous painting, drawing or sculpture, or listen to a famous piece of music, or watch a famous play or film without being conscious of the contexts in which the text had been reproduced, alluded to, parodied and so on. However, the most significant thing is to give or add or most importantly create something peculiar to the artist of the work: like Stoppard does so. It is quite possible to call all these criticisms against his work 'unfair', because inspiration in art is both natural and inevitable.

There is an element of coincidence in what's usually called influence. One's appetites and predilections are obviously not unique. They overlap with those of countless other people, one of whom – praise be God- is Samuel Beckett. And it's not surprising if there are fifty writers in England who share in some way a predilection for a certain kind of

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<sup>137</sup> 'Interview with Nancy Shields Hardin', taken from T. Bareham's **Tom Stoppard: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Jumpers & Travesties**, p. 161.

<sup>138</sup> *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, p. 90.

intellectual or verbal humour or conceit which perhaps in some different but recognisable way is one which Beckett likes and uses.<sup>139</sup>

If you read or watch *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* without knowing anything about *Hamlet* or *Waiting for Godot*, or reading *Travesties* without having any knowledge of *The Importance of Being Earnest* the plays still make a great delight. If you already know these background texts to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *Travesties*, you experience another sensation: you feel clever, intellectual excitement and curiosity. However; for *Jumpers* no sub-text knowledge is required.

Stoppard is a brilliant master of English language. The way he chooses his words in his plays attests his interest in language. He has always been aware of the significance of the words. As the character, George Moore, in *Jumpers* says:

‘I can’t seem to find words ... or rather, the words betray the thoughts they are supposed to express.’<sup>140</sup>

Although these three plays are different from each other in terms of plot and the employment of theatrical materials, they convey the characteristics of the Theatre of Absurd.

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<sup>139</sup> Hayman, op. cit., p. 7.

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