Travesties Study Guide

Travesties by Tom Stoppard

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Introduction

When *Travesties* appeared on the London stage in 1974, it soon reinforced Tom Stoppard's reputation as one of the twentieth century's most innovative and clever playwrights. 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. Henry Carr, who in real life knew Joyce, relates the trio's interactions through his unreliable memory. The play takes the form of a witty farce as it showcases, through comic wordplay, the political and philosophical point of view of these three men, who all had a profound influence on their times. Humorous complications spring from misunderstandings, mistaken identity, and plot twists that Stoppard horrows from Oscar Wilde's farcical masterpiece, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. As Stoppard cleverly juxtaposes his three central figures' theories on Marxism, dadaism, and modernism, he addresses complex questions on the nature and function of politics and art and the role of the artist Anne Wright, in her article on Stoppard for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, suggests that *Travesties*, along with his other plays, proves Stoppard to be "a skilled craftsman, handling with great dexterity and precision plots of extreme ingenuity and intricacy."

Author Biography

Tom Stoppard was born Tomas Straussler on July 3, 1937, in Zlin. in the former Czechoslovakia, to Eugene Straussler (a physician) and Martha (Stoppard). The family moved to Singapore in 1939, but soon after, before the Japanese invasion, Stoppard, his brother, and his mother fled to India, The Japanese in Singapore killed his father in 1941. Alter his mother married Kenneth Stoppard. a British officer, the family relocated to England. At seventeen, Stoppard left school to become a journalist and, soon after, a playwright. He wrote for various British newspapers until 1963. when he devoted himself to play writing. In 1976 he earned a master's in literature at the University of Bristol and completed graduate work at Brunei University and the University of Sussex.

The 1966 production of his *Rosencrant and Guiluenstern Are Dead*, by the Oxford Theatre Group as part of the fringe of the Edinburgh Festival, propelled him into the theatrical spotlight and earned him the reputation of a promising new playwright. In her article on Stoppard for *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Anne Wright comments, "His first major success established him as a master of philosophical farce, combining dazzling theatricality and wit with a profound exploration of metaphysical concerns." *Travesties* reinforced his reputation as a major dramatist. During the past three decades. Stoppard has written plays for theatre, radio, and television, screenplays for television and film, adaptations and translations of works by European dramatists, several short stories, and a novel. His work has earned him several awards, including the *Evening Slumlord* Drama Awards in 1967 for most promising playwright; in 1972 for *Jumpers*; in 1974 for *Travesties*: in 1983 for *The Real Thing*: the New York Drama Critics Circle Award in 1968 for *Rosencrant- and Guildenstern Are Dead*: in 1976 for *Travesties*; and in 1984 for best foreign play for *The Real Thing*; and an Academy Award in 1999 for his screenplay for *Shakespeare in Love*.

Plot Summary

Act 1

Most of the action in *Travesties* takes place in Zurich in 1917, during World War I, and focuses on three revolutionaries: the communist leader Lenin, the dadaist poet Tristan Tzara, and the modernist writer James Joyce. Henry Can', a minor British official, relates the trio's actions and dialogue through his memories of that time period. Carr claims that he met Lenin at the Zurich library and Tzara and Joyce during a production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The play is set in two locations: the Zurich Public Library, where the principle characters interact, and Carr's apartment in Zurich, where the now-elderly man recalls the past.

The dialogue focuses on the revolutionaries' politics and philosophies at a turning point in each man's life: Joyce's writing of his novel *Ulysses*, published in 1922; Tzara's creation of the principles of dada, a nihilistic movement in art and literature; and Lenin's decision to journey back to Russia to take part in the Russian Revolution.

The play opens at the library as Gwen. Carr's younger sister, sits with Joyce, transcribing an early draft of what will become *Ulysses*. Lenin and Tzara are also present and writing. When Tzara finishes, he cuts up his paper "word by word," places the pieces into his hat, dumps them on the table, and begins randomly arranging them into nonsensical sentences, which he then reads, Joyce reads, from his manuscript, sentences that also appear to be nonsensical.

Cecily, a young, attractive librarian, who has been helping Lenin work on his book on imperialism, enters. She inadvertently picks up a folder containing Joyce's manuscript while Gwen does the same with Lenin's draft. Neither notices the mistake and both leave. Nadya, Lenin's wife, then arrives and talks to her husband "in an agitated state," telling him that a revolution in Russia has begun.

The play jumps ahead several years to an elderly Carr, reminiscing about the different characters. He refers to Joyce as an "Irish lout" due to litigation with the writer over financial matters concerning the production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the play both had been involved in. Carr then turns his attention to Lenin and his desire to participate in the revolution. Carr explains that in 1917, he received orders from the British Foreign Minister to spy on Lenin to discover his plans.

The scene shifts back to the past as Tzara arrives at Carr's apartment, followed soon after by Joyce and Gwen. Joyce asks for Carr's official support and money for a production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* The scene degenerates into a seemingly nonsensical conversation among the characters that is set in limerick form, which nonetheless provides a sense of the tenets of dadaism. Tzara and Carr then appear to become characters, from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, who discuss two literary schools: aestheticism (devotion to and pursuit of the beautiful), practiced by

Wilde, and dadaism, as their dialogue devolves into "clever nonsense." Tzara insists that artists should "jeer and howl.. .at the delusion that infinite generations of real effects can be inferred from the gross expression of apparent cause " Carr counters, "it is the duty of the artist to beautify existence."

Later, Tzara explains that to avoid a conflict with Lenin, who holds dadaists in contempt, he identified himself as Jack Tzara, Tristan's older brother. When Gwen and Joyce arrive, Joyce asks Carr for financial support for the production of *Earnest* and asks him to play the leading role, "not Ernest, the other one." Tzara then cuts up one of Shakespeare's sonnets, puts the words randomly into poetic lines, and gives the results to Gwen, saying, "I offer you a Shakespeare sonnet, but it is no longer his. It comes from the wellspring where my atoms are uniquely organized, and my signature is written in the hand of chance." When he tells her he loves her, she says she was destined to love a poet, and so she will love him.

As Joyce begins to do magic tricks with his hat, he and Tzara discuss dada. Soon the two argue about art and artists Jumping into the future, Carr remembers the suits he and Joyce brought against each other for alleged nonpayment of monies involved in the play. He notes that Joyce left Zurich after the war, went to Paris for twenty years, and then returned to Zurich in 1940. He died the following January.

Act 2

Back in the library, Nadya writes in her journal. Carr explains that at the outbreak of the war, Lenin and his wife were briefly interned in Austro-Hun-gary After arriving in Switzerland, they came to Zurich so Lenin could use the library as he worked on his book on imperialism. Carr explains, "Zurich during the war was a magnet for refugees, exiles, spies, anarchists, artists and radicals of all kinds." Nadya's journal, which is an early draft of her *Memories of Lenin*, records, "from the moment the news of the February revolution came, JJyich burned with eagerness to go to Russia ,. but this was easier said than done." She notes that Russia was currently at war with Germany, "and Lenin was no friend of the Allied countries. His war policy made him a positive danger to them."

When Carr arrives in his role as spy, Cecily misidentifies him as Tristan Tzara, and he plays along with the ruse. He insists to her that he is not "a decadent nihilist" but asks her to reform him nonetheless because he is ready to renounce his beliefs in dada. The two then argue about the role of art. Tzara appears and joins in the argument, insisting that "artists and intellectuals will be the conscience of the revolution." Lenin and his wife leave.

The elderly Carr explains that he got a good idea of Lenin's intentions through his association with Cecily. However, he claims that he did not act on the information, noting, "I might have stopped the whole Bolshevik thing in its tracks, but... I was torn. On the one hand, the future of the civilized world. On the other hand, my feelings for

Cecily." After noting Lenin's dismissal of modern art, Carr argues "there was nothing wrong with Lenin except his politics" and decides that they are of the same mind.

After Gwen arrives, she and Cecily sing a conversation with each other to the tune of a popular song. Eventually they clear up the mistaken identities of Jack and Tristan Tzara. When Joyce arrives, asking Carr for money, the two men argue. Later, the switched folders are exchanged, and the scene dissolves into a dance.

In the final scene, Old Carr and his wife, Cecily, discuss the court case with Joyce. Cecily tries to correct her husband's faulty memory, insisting that Carr "never got close to" Lenin and that she does not remember Tzara. She admits Carr had contact with Joyce, but that she never helped Lenin write his book on imperialism. The scene ends with Carr refusing to acknowledge his unreliable memory as he insists, "great days .. Zurich during the war Refugees, spies, exiles, painters, poets, writers, radicals of all kinds I knew them all." He notes that he learned three things during the war: first, "you're either a revolutionary or you're not, and if you're not you might as well be an artist as anything else"; secondly, "if you can't be an artist, you might as well be a revolutionary." He forgets, though, the final thing he learned.

Act 1, Part 1

Act 1, Part 1 Summary

Travesties represents fantasy, history, and tribute to a great play - *The Importance of Being Earnest*, by Oscar Wilde. Set within the memories of a diplomat stationed in Switzerland during World War I, the play utilizes historically documented relationships between the Russian political theorist, Vladimir Illych Lenin, the Irish novelist, James Joyce, and the Dadaist philosopher, Tristan Tzara. They are the basis for a highly theatrical and comically complex tale of miscommunication, romance, and intellectual confrontation.

As the play begins, Gwen and Joyce are sitting at a table in the library, busy with research. At another table, Lenin is also busy with research. At a third table, Tzara cuts up a piece of paper on which are written the words of a poem. He drops each word into a hat, shakes it up, pulls out words at random, arranges them into sentences, and reads those sentences aloud as though they were themselves a poem. Cecily passes through, telling Tzara to be quiet. Joyce dictates to Gwen, Tzara creates another poem, and Cecily comes back in, telling them all to be quiet. As she gives books to Lenin, Tzara goes out. Joyce gives Gwen a file folder, and Lenin gives Cecily a file folder. The folders are accidentally exchanged, so that Gwen gets the folder intended for Cecily and vice versa.

Gwen and Cecily both leave, each with the wrong folder, as Nadya comes in. She speaks in Russian with Lenin, their conversation revealing that a revolution has begun in Russia. As they speak, Joyce takes scraps of paper out of his pocket and reads the words written on them aloud. As Nadya goes out, Joyce picks up a slip of paper accidentally dropped by Lenin and reads the words on it aloud. Lenin recognizes the words and approaches Joyce. Joyce gives him the paper, and Lenin leaves. Joyce speaks poetically about a librarian asking people working in the library to be quiet. Cecily comes in, tells him to be quiet and goes out. Joyce also leaves, singing an Irish song.

Carr appears, an old man at this point, and begins a long, rambling, disjointed speech that begins with reminiscences about James Joyce, how they met while working on an amateur production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and how they became friends while Joyce was working on his novel *Ulysses*. He also recalls what life was like in Switzerland, where he and Joyce both lived, as did Lenin. He then describes Lenin's appearance in great detail, and how Lenin is regarded by history, as opposed to how he's remembered personally. He describes Lenin's greatness, in the same words as he described Joyce's, as never being in doubt. His memories of Lenin lead him to comment that two revolutions were happening in Switzerland at the same time, the political and social revolution led by Lenin and a philosophical revolution led by the Dadaists, followers of a philosophy essentially founded on the belief that life is chaos. Making puns on the word "Dada," Carr refers to the Dadaist philosopher Tzara, which leads him

to recall how peaceful, geographically beautiful and politically neutral Switzerland was. As Carr becomes his younger self, he mentions that all his recollections are open to correction, since they are, after all, the recollections of an old man.

Act 1, Part 1 Analysis

The first part of this section functions on several levels. The most important is the definition of character and relationship, as we see the working relationship between Joyce and Gwen. We also see an example of the somewhat surreal wordplay inherent in all the works of James Joyce, but most particularly in *Ulysses,* the novel he's writing at the time the play is set. We also see the political awareness and activism of Lenin and Nadya. Through Tzara's business with the poems, we experience an illustration of the core beliefs of Dadaism in general, and Tzara in particular.

The random way in which Tzara literally pulls a poem out of his hat is a dramatization of the Dadaist belief that chaos and randomness are at the heart of human existence, but that beauty and art can still emerge from that chaos. Pulling things out of a hat becomes a motif, or repeated image, throughout the play, as does the way words and ideas are left behind by one person and picked up by another. This piece of business, or utilization of props or set pieces to define a plot point, is first utilized in the way Joyce picks up a scrap of paper left behind by Lenin and speaks a series of thoughts inspired by what he's read. This idea of the movement of ideas also relates to the business of the mishandled file folders, the repercussions of which are revealed in the second act.

The second part of this section introduces us to Carr, whose memories define the action of the play in terms of both content and style. Stylistically, the fragmented way in which he speaks is repeated in the fragmented way in which his memories play out before us. At the same time, the content of those memories, his recollections of incidents, confrontations and relationships, form a kind of collage. This collage ultimately gives an impression of who he is, what the other characters were like, and what their intertwined relationships meant to them all, and to history. This sense of apparently random juxtapositions of ideas and memories combine with the previously discussed motifs of pulling things out of hats, and the way abandoned thoughts trigger new thoughts in others to make one of the play's central thematic points - that life is essentially a series of random events and encounters from which can spring surprising, new truths.

At this juncture, it's important to discuss the two works of art that play an essential role in defining the action, characters and relationships of this play. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a comedy written by Oscar Wilde, early in the 20th Century. It focuses on the relationships between two young men, Jack and Algernon, and the women whom they love, Gwendolen and Cecily. The fact that two of the women in this play have the same names is no coincidence. Plot points from *Earnest* are deliberately echoed in plot points in *Travesties*, and will be discussed as they appear. The narrative style of *Earnest* is also deliberately echoed, in that both plays contain extremely witty dialogue, language that makes simple points in clever, complex ways.

The utilization of this style is a representation of how Carr remembers this period in his past. His appearance in the amateur performance of *Earnest* produced by Joyce was a defining time in his life, since he was developing his intellectually productive relationships with Lenin, Joyce and Tzara at the same time as he was in the play. The development of these relationships is therefore recalled in the same terms and context as *Earnest*.

The second work of art that plays a role in the action is James Joyce's novel *Ulysses,* published in the early 1900's and viewed by some as completely incomprehensible. Others viewed it as a masterpiece. Both interpretations arise from its idiosyncratic use of language, similar to that used by Joyce in the first part of this section of the play - a blend of blank verse and stream of consciousness narrative. The story transplants the tale of the mythical hero Ulysses' epic voyage home from the Trojan War from Ancient Greece, to turn of the century Ireland. The adventures encountered by Ulysses are paralleled in the life of a character named Bloom. However, while Ulysses' journey took several years, Bloom's take place in a day. References to the novel in this play are symbolic of how Carr is on a journey of his own into the past through the medium of memory, with his rambling speeches similar in tone and quality to the stream of consciousness in the book.

In the same way as the play's central characters are versions or portraits of actual historical personages, many events mentioned in this play also actually took place. These include the Russian Revolution, which brought Socialism to what had once been a monarchy. This revolution has clear resonance with the revolution in thought and philosophy represented by Tzara and the references to Dadaism; with the revolution in literature brought about by Joyce and the appearance of *Ulysses*; and most relevantly to this play, the revolution in feeling brought about by the love that develops between Carr and Cecily.

Act 1, Part 2

Act 1, Part 2 Summary

Conversation between Carr and his butler, Bennett, which has obvious stylistic echoes of

conversations between Jack and his butler in *Earnest*, refer to the political neutrality of Switzerland, and the war (World War I) going on outside its borders. At one point, Carr, who now appears to be much younger, slips back into the rambling conversational style of his older self. His memories of the misery of life in the trenches becoming confused with his current thoughts about which tie to wear. Bennett repeats something he said earlier, and the conversation resumes more coherently. This restarting of conversations (referred to as a "time slip" in stage directions) occurs throughout the play, reminding us that we're watching the memories of an elderly person rather than a linear, clearly defined narrative.

Carr and Bennett return to conversation about the war, with Carr referring to how he heard about its outbreak while he was at his tailor's. Bennett tells him Tzara came to call but left, because Carr was not immediately available. Carr and Bennett make witty comments about the possibility that Tzara is a spy. There's another time slip, and Bennett restarts the conversation. This time, he and Carr refer to the revolution in Russia. Bennett says that there has been violence involved. Carr responds with comments that violence could only be expected in a country like Russia, and then quotes a line from *Earnest* about too much champagne being drunk at dinner.

There's another time slip, and Bennett starts the conversation, yet again, with references to the downfall of the Russian government. He speaks at length and in detail about the Marxist (Socialist) philosophy behind the revolution, and then says again that Tzara called. Carr complains about Bennett's tendency towards free association and stream of consciousness in his conversation. Bennett replies that he only spoke that way, because Tzara is an artist. There's another time slip, and Bennett starts the conversation again. He returns to his lecture on Marxist philosophy and refers to Lenin's role in the revolution, which he says is becoming less and less important. Bennett then tells Carr that he's had instructions from his superiors in the diplomatic office to find out exactly what Lenin's intentions are.

Act 1, Part 2 Analysis

The most important element of this section is its stylistic attack, the way it flows in and out of different realities - Young Carr's place as a diplomat assigned to keep an eye on Lenin, Old Carr's recollections, Bennett's somewhat academic lectures on political theory and historical fact, and scenes and relationships from *Earnest*. The slipping is practically constant, with movement back and forth occurring at a rapid pace and

occurring at unpredictable moments. There is a sense of great playfulness about the writing here. It continues throughout the play, as the playwright continually explores new and different ways to expand the use of language, memory and style.

About the only element of plot in this section is contained in the exchange in which Carr receives instructions that he's to keep an eye on Lenin. This foreshadows complications in the development of Carr's relationship with Cecily.

Act 1, Part 3

Act 1, Part 3 Summary

Tzara comes in, speaking in a thick Romanian accent and expressing his intention to ask Gwendolen to marry him. Shortly afterwards, Joyce and Gwen come in from separate entrances. As soon as they see each other, they feel an attraction. Joyce begins a conversation with Carr, Tzara and Gwen, conducted entirely in limericks. All four characters speak in full limericks, in lines or half lines, or in words that complete someone else's line.

Gwendolen introduces Tzara, Joyce and Carr, revealing that Joyce is looking for money to support a production of a British play. Tzara speaks scornfully of plays, in particular, and of culture and tradition, in general. Carr suggests a production of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta. Tzara leaves in a huff, followed by Gwen. They leave Joyce to recite a few more limericks, which suggest that he's got to get back to work on Ulysses. As he goes, Carr speaks the last line of the limerick, returns to normal language, and restarts the action with another time slip.

Tzara comes in again. In a conversation that clearly echoes conversations between Jack and Algernon in *Earnest,* he and Carr discuss the war and the philosophy of Dadaism. Tzara claims that the true job of the artist is to reveal that all of society's delusions about order and the theory of cause and effect are nonsense. Carr tells him his theory is itself nonsense. Tzara agrees that it's possible, but he adds that it's not clever nonsense. He says that cleverness, along with many other things, has been destroyed by the war. Carr reminds him that he has seen the horrors of the war first hand, which he describes in terms of the horrors of losing beautiful clothes.

Tzara and Carr debate the role of art in war and the nature of art, in general. Carr describes it as taking complete self-absorption, and Tzara describes it as someone merely giving objects or words some kind of meaning. Carr doesn't accept that argument, but Tzara tells him that human beings do the same kind of thing with words like "patriotism" and "duty," all the time. Their argument becomes more intense, as Carr argues that artists embody the kind of freedom that wars are fought to protect, and Tzara argues that wars are fought over land and money. Carr calls Tzara a string of names, accusing him of avoiding the realities of war by merely focusing on being clever about it. He then passionately recounts his reasons for fighting in the war - true patriotism and true duty. Tzara, just as angrily, tells him that the current war started just because a prince married the wrong woman. There's a time slip, and Carr speaks poetically about his experience on the front lines, his wounds, and the way he was taken away from the front lines and given a diplomatic job.

There's another time slip, and Tzara and Carr return to the language and style of *Earnest*, with Tzara reminding Carr that Cecily, the librarian, doesn't approve of conversation in the library. As Carr talks about how attractive Cecily's name is, Tzara

asks whether he knows Joyce, describing his mismatched clothes and literary style, at length. He then asks whether Carr knows Lenin, but Carr gets him to talk more about Cecily. After talking about the kind of poetry that Cecily likes and saying that she probably wouldn't approve of poetry written out of a hat, the conversation turns to Gwendolen.

Tzara says he's admired Gwendolen from a distance for some time, but has been unable to talk to her, because she's always with Joyce. Carr tells him that she's become devoted to Joyce, working with him as a research assistant, as he develops a book we understand to be *Ulysses*. Conversation reveals that Carr is Gwen's brother, and that he's refusing to let Gwen marry Tzara. In a misunderstanding straight out of *Earnest*, Carr reveals that his refusal springs from an awareness that Tzara goes by two different names - one in the library and another everywhere else. Tzara explains that when Cecily was first introduced to him by Lenin in the library, only his last name was mentioned. She assumed that he was Tzara, the Dadaist, and expressed her hatred of Dadaism. Tzara says he told her "Tzara the Dadaist" was his younger brother and came up with another name for himself.

Carr is interested in how Cecily knows Lenin. Tzara says that she's become as devoted to him as Gwendolen has become to Joyce. They argue about Lenin's socialist philosophy, with Carr arguing for the socialist principle of power for the people and against artists, who live off the work of others. Tzara argues that it's artists who tell "the people" their stories and define their identities. Carr says the argument that an artist is a special kind of human being is a complete fake. This leads Tzara to call Carr a string of names in a similar way to how Carr called him a string of names earlier, saying that it's artists who give meaning to the day-to-day drudgery of life. He becomes hysterical, shouting the word "Dada" over and over again. There's a time slip, and Bennett ushers in Gwendolen and Joyce.

Act 1, Part 3 Analysis

The previously discussed sense of playfulness in the movement between styles in *Travesties* appears throughout this scene, first in the conversation conducted entirely in limericks, and later in the verbal variations on stylistic themes in *Importance of Being Earnest.* Also, early in this section, both Tzara and Joyce are described in stage directions as being "nonsense," suggesting that their characteristics and attitudes are being exaggerated for comic effect. At this point, it's important to remember that the play is taking place in Carr's memory. This means that the exaggeration of Tzara's Romanian-

ness and Joyce's Irish-ness, combined with the playing with language, makes the thematic point that memory is completely subjective. What a person remembers about a situation is less important than the interpretation they place on that memory.

This idea is developed further in the conversation between Tzara and Carr, or more specifically in the two different versions of the conversation. Careful examination reveals

that in each version, each character argues from the opposite position. In the first, Carr speaks in support of artists; in the second, he speaks against them. With Tzara, the shift is in the opposite direction, from opposing art to supporting art. The point here has less to do with the arguments about the nature of art, which are undeniably interesting. They have more to do with the play's thematic point about the unreliability of memory.

As mentioned in the Summary for this section, Tzara's having two names is a direct parallel to *Earnest*, in which Jack is also revealed to have two names. Misunderstandings and misdirected affections resulting from this situation occur in both *Earnest* and *Travesties*. They create comic confusion, romantic quarrels, and ultimately, an opportunity for all the characters in both plays to face the future secure in a trustworthy truth. This sense of romantic misunderstanding parallels the intellectual misunderstandings arising in the debates between Lenin, Joyce, Tzara, Carr, and even Cecily. As they sort their misunderstandings, all the characters develop clearer understandings of who they are, what they believe, and what they have to do to bring those aspects of themselves and their lives to more effective fruition.

Act 1, Part 4

Act 1, Part 4 Summary

In fairly straightforward language, Joyce introduces himself. Gwen and Tzara greet each other, Gwen introduces Henry to Joyce, and then introduces Joyce to Tzara, saying they're in a similar line of work, writing poetry. Tzara compliments Joyce on his work, using words incorrectly and excusing himself by saying that he's a foreigner. In an exchange of dialogue that clearly echoes *Earnest*, Tzara and Gwen talk flirtatiously about the beauty of Joyce's poetry.

As Tzara goes off into a corner and begins to write, Carr makes a joke about Joyce's name and asks why he's there. Joyce says he's the business manager for The English Players, a company that wants to mount a season of British plays. Gwen explains that Joyce thought Carr's official diplomatic support might help the project succeed, and Joyce adds that the British community in Switzerland doesn't seem to think that highly of him. He quotes, at length, a satirical poem about the British way of life. He says that, as an artist, he attaches no importance to politics or history. He also says that he wants to pursue the project to pay back a debt that he owes to the British government, adding that his season will show the Swiss "who leads the world in dramatic art."

Carr's thoughts turn to the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, but Joyce tells him he has plans to produce *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a play that Carr says he hates. He seems about to suggest that the Embassy wouldn't be able to support the play, but then Joyce offers him the lead role. Gwen and Joyce both try to persuade him to take the part. As they do, conversation reveals that Carr's major concern is about what he's going to wear as a costume. Joyce describes the play in terms of what Carr would wear in each scene, and he and Carr go out to discuss the idea further.

When they're gone, Tzara comes up to Gwen and offers her Joyce's hat, into which he's cut the words of a Shakespearean sonnet. Gwen recites the full version of the sonnet, and then in language that has clear echoes of several Shakespearean plays, angrily accuses Tzara of being disrespectful and not a true poet. He offers her his hat. One by one, she pulls out words that, when strung together, make an erotic poem to her beauty. She reacts with shock and surprise, but pulls herself together and talks in *Earnest*-like language about how she's always been attracted to him. She says that when Carr told her Tzara worked at a literary magazine, she knew she was meant to love him. She hands him the file folder she's been carrying, which we understand to be a story by Joyce that she wants Tzara to read, but which we remember is actually Cecily's folder which she received from Lenin. As she asks him to look at the story and give her an opinion, she and Tzara, again in *Earnest*-like language, proclaim their love for each other and embrace. Tzara wonders whether she'd love him if he didn't share her regard for Joyce. She says it doesn't matter and kisses him.

Joyce comes in, quotes a line directly from *Earnest* essentially telling Tzara to behave himself, collects his hat, and goes right back out again. Gwen goes out to tell Henry about what's just happened. A moment later, Joyce comes back in, his hat on his head and covered with pieces of paper that have fallen from it. He asks for an explanation, but Tzara says there is no explanation. He claims that what happened was pure chance in the tradition of Dadaist philosophy. In the manner of the very stern Lady Bracknell from *Earnest*, and as he plucks words from his suit and places them into his hat, Joyce asks Tzara a series of questions about Dadaism, its founder, its history, its development, and the way that hats and coats can be used interchangeably to create poetry. Tzara refers to an incident in which he was sued for copyright infringement after creating a poem, which sounded very similar to a poem that had already been published. Joyce asks whether this is the incident that made both Dadaism and Tzara names to "conjure with" whenever art came under discussion. Tzara says "yes." Conversation continues about the aftermath of the incident, and Joyce "conjures" a carnation and silk handkerchiefs from the hat. As Tzara talks about the countries Dadaism spread to, Joyce waves a series of flags.

Tzara explains how the term "Dada" came to be used to describe the philosophy, and how arguments emerged between Tzara and other leaders of the movement about how the philosophy was to be used. Joyce makes a joke about the philosophy, and Tzara loses his temper, calling him a string of names in the same way that he and Carr called each other names, earlier. He accuses Joyce of turning literature into a religion as dead as all the other religions. He calls out for the spirit of chaos in Dadaism to destroy Joyce's religion in the same way as it's destroyed the others and also to remove the shame from being an artist. Joyce responds by calling him over-excited, and describes an artist as the "magician" able to gratify humanity's urge for immortality, referring to art as the only thing that survives war. He specifically refers to the story of *Ulysses*, which survived the Trojan War and all the wars since, saying he's terrified of bringing that story into his book. However, he believes that once the book is done, the story will be more immortal than ever. He then says that if Tzara wants to shame art out of existence with his "fashionable magic," he needs to acquire some subtlety. He pulls a rabbit out of his hat and leaves.

Carr comes in, as his elderly persona, and reads from a copy of *Earnest*. As he does, Tzara goes out, reading the document in the folder Gwen gave him. Carr tells how Joyce's production was a success, how he (Carr) got very little compensation for his expenses. He was even asked to pay for the tickets he gave to his friends. He then tells how he and Joyce sued each other over the ticket money, and what Carr believed was his rightful share of the profits. His mind and words ramble so much that he swears at himself. He tells us if anyone has difficulty following his thoughts that they should leave now, because the second act will be even more rambling. He then goes back to his story about the lawsuit, reveals that it was resolved to the satisfaction of neither him nor Joyce, and calls it a "travesty" of justice. He recalls the circumstances of Joyce's death. Then, he recalls a dream in which Joyce was on trial, and he (Carr) was cross-examining him. He says that, in the dream, when he asked Joyce what he did during the war, Joyce says he wrote *Ulysses* and asked what Carr did. Carr says he had a "bloody nerve."

Act 1, Part 4 Analysis

Once again, the sense of play in the use of language and style in *Travesties* is apparent. The words of Shakespeare are brought into play for the first time; the name calling motif and pulling things out of a hat motif reappear; the meaning of the play's title is hinted at; and the resemblances to *Earnest* become more pronounced. In terms of this latter point, the appearance of Joyce in a manner that resembles that of Lady Bracknell, a key character in *Earnest*, is particularly interesting. This is partly because this is the first time that Lady Bracknell's way of speaking and style of relationships has appeared, but more importantly, because the parallel defines Joyce as autocratic, narrow minded, cheap and snobbish. These are all traits personified in Lady Bracknell, and all reappear in Joyce, as described by Carr.

Also worthy of note is the poem "created" by Gwen, which we are meant to believe is a completely spontaneous example of how Tzara's philosophy of Dadaism manifests itself, but which must have been just as carefully written by Tom Stoppard as the original sonnet was by William Shakespeare. This clearly careful piecing together of sonnet fragments is echoed in the brief but fierce confrontation between Gwen and Tzara about the merits of Tzara's poetry. It is, itself, a careful piecing together of fragments from several Shakespearean plays; including, *Hamlet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello, As You Like It,* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor.* Once again, style illuminates substance, as the play's central theme about both memory and the totality of life being a piecing together of fragments is illustrated by the way fragments of existing works are pieced together to create something new and different.

Due to these multiple and paradoxical layers of reality (a playwright creating the impression of spontaneity through careful manipulation of the words of another playwright), the play suggests that Dadaism and the many other philosophical arguments in the play about perceptions of philosophy's bearing on life are just that - perceptions, or interpretations, as opposed to universal truths. This idea is reinforced by the way that Joyce performs magic tricks throughout his discussion with Tzara about the background of Dadaism. Aside from repeating the "pulling things out of a hat" motif, Joyce's illusions suggest that Dadaism, the play, and everything it says are all illusions. They are impressive and enchanting, but no more real than the idea that a rabbit can be magically pulled from a hat. Dadaism, art, intellectual philosophy - they're all, to coin a phrase, slight of mind.

The return of Carr, in his elderly persona, reminds us of both the play's context and its theme, that everything is his memory of what happened. It is, as has been discussed, interpretation rather than fact. Here, the word "travesty," meaning mockery or sham, appears for the first and only time, reinforcing the point by suggesting that what we're seeing - the memories, relationships, style in which they're all recalled and presented - is itself a travesty, or a caricature. Inherent in this is the suggestion that what really transpired between the characters is both serious and important. From this idea, it becomes possible to infer that recalling what happened in this particular fashion is the only way Carr can recall it at all. Any other way is too painful.

Act 2, Part 1

Act 2, Part 1 Summary

This act begins with Cecily delivering a long lecture on the development of Marxism/Socialism in Russia, the political and philosophical development of Lenin, and how he was forced to leave the country after a shift in the intellectual perspective behind the Socialist Revolution. She also tells how he came to be in Switzerland at the same time as Joyce, Tzara and Carr. She translates as Lenin and Nadya repeat their conversation in Russian from the first scene of the play in which they talk about the revolution. As Carr appears in one of his costumes from *Earnest*, Cecily concludes her lecture, by saying it was only natural that the British Government would assign someone to spy on Lenin.

We understand Carr to be that spy. He hands Cecily the calling card left behind by Tzara when he visited Carr in Act 1, and Cecily greets him as Tristan Tzara. This is Tzara's real identity, but Cecily believes that Carr/Tristan is the Dadaist older brother that "Jack"/ Tzara invented in order to court her (see Act 1, Part 3). In conversation that again echoes *Earnest*, Cecily criticizes Carr/Tristan's behavior and attitudes. Carr, in turn, criticizes Jack/Tzara, saying he only finds Cecily pretty, but he (Carr/Tristan) finds her the most beautiful woman in the world. We understand him to be belittling Tzara, so he can court Cecily for himself. Further conversation reveals that Cecily and Carr/Tristan share a love of books, and a desire to discuss philosophy, but also that Cecily is too busy to spend time with Carr/Tristan, because she's so devoted to Lenin. Carr/Tristan says that because of the revolution, Lenin will surely be returning to Russia. However, Cecily says he's barred from traveling. If he wants to go back, he will have to go in disguise.

Cecily refers to telegrams that the Embassy has received that seem to be in code. When she mentions what the telegrams say, Carr/Tristan tells her that they're actually expressing congratulations on the opening of Joyce's production of *Earnest*. Cecily talks about how much she dislikes the play. She says that it's frivolous, and that the purpose of art is social criticism. She and Carr/Tzara argue politely, and then with increasing anger, about the nature and purpose of art.

Suddenly, there's a time slip, and Cecily re-starts the conversation with another reference to Lenin. She hands Carr/Tristan the folder that she accidentally exchanged with Gwen earlier, which she says contains an article written by Lenin. As she summarizes it, their argument begins again, as Carr/Tristan argues that Marxist philosophy is wrong and explains in detail why. Cecily, in the manner of Carr and Tzara before her, calls Carr/Tristan a string of names and passionately defends both Socialism and Lenin.

Lights change, sexy music plays, and as Cecily continues, timing her words with the movements of a stripper, we see her for a moment as Carr sees her - intensely

desirable. He shouts a rude comment, the lights change, and the music stops. There is a time slip, and Cecily re-starts the conversation again. Carr/Tristan brushes off what she says and tells her how much he desires her. She confesses that she's waited for him for months, adding that ever since Jack/Tzara told her about his brother, she's had a desire to love and reform him. They embrace, and lower themselves behind Cecily's desk to make love.

Act 2, Part 1 Analysis

Cecily's lecture is easily the most blatantly factual and historical piece of writing in the entire play. In almost every other case, background information, or exposition, about who the characters are is revealed in a less obvious way. The purpose of the stylistic choice here is to define the character of Cecily as intellectual rather than emotional, bookish rather than passionate. This defines her at the beginning of a short journey of transformation, triggered by her encounter with Carr/Tristan. It moves her from the nearly stereotypical bookish librarian, to a sexy, fervent, freedom fighter.

This transformation is yet another clear and deliberate echo of *Importance of Being Earnest*, as are the identity games played by Carr/Tristan and the reasons he plays those games. In *Earnest*, Algernon poses as Jack's invented younger brother, in order to court his Cecily in the same way and for the same reasons as Carr poses as Tzara's older brother. Also, Cecily behaves in exactly the same way as the Cecily in *Earnest*, moving from a purely intellectual perspective on the relationship to a more passionate and intimate one. The main difference is that in *Travesties*, Cecily becomes far more sexual than the Cecily in *Earnest* would ever be, or be allowed to be.

The mishandled folders appear again at this point, following through on the motif established in Act 1 about Lenin's words being interpreted as Joyce's and vice versa. In other words, while Cecily thinks she's passing Carr/Tristan Lenin's words, she's actually handing him Joyce's. The repercussions of this situation play out in the following scenes.

Act 2, Part 2

Act 2, Part 2 Summary

Nadya appears and speaks in English about Lenin's desperation to return to Russia to join the revolution. She narrates a letter Lenin wrote in which plans were made for him and Nadya to travel, disguised as Swedish, deaf mutes. Tzara appears, reacting in disbelief to this idea. As Nadya explains that this plan never happened, Lenin appears and narrates a letter detailing a revised plan. As he speaks, Carr looks up from behind Cecily's desk - we understand this to be a dramatization of his "spying" on Lenin. Lenin narrates his plans further, and Cecily looks up from behind the desk. Tzara spots her, and Cecily tells him that his brother has turned up. Tzara tells her that he doesn't have a brother, and then sees Carr.

Lenin and Nadya watch curiously as, in yet another reinterpretation of *Earnest*, Carr/Tristan apologizes to Jack/Tzara for his past behavior. Cecily urges them to reconcile. Jack/Tzara refuses, which we understand is the result of his anger at the way Carr/Tristan has manipulated the situation. Cecily runs off, Carr follows, and Lenin turns away in disgust at all the foolishness.

Nadya narrates how Lenin's second plan for escape wasn't realized, either. Carr appears in his older state and finishes her story, speaking in his disjointed way about how he could have reported Lenin's plans to the British Government and stopped him going to Russia. He didn't, because he cared for Cecily and couldn't decide whether she, in her enthusiasm for Socialism, was right in believing that Lenin should be allowed to return home. He returns to Nadya's story, telling how members of the Russian community in Switzerland met to discuss Lenin's options for travel.

As Carr leaves, Nadya resumes her story, and Lenin narrates another letter. Carr returns in his younger state and joins Tzara. As Carr and Tzara discuss what's to be done about Lenin and Cecily, Nadya and Lenin narrate a series of telegrams discussing escape plans. Carr talks himself into passing on those plans, telling Tzara he doesn't believe he (Tzara) cares about the future of Socialism, at all. Tzara talks about how artists and intellectuals, like Lenin, will be the conscience and guides of society, adding, "History comes out of a hat too." Lenin and Nadya continue narrating their plans. Carr decides that Lenin must be stopped and goes out to send a telegram to the government in England.

There is the sound of a departing train, lights change, and Lenin appears. In a long, passionate speech, described in stage directions as the climax of the act, he talks about how all literature and writing must be controlled. It must be free from individualism and independent thought. He also says that all art from now on will support the ideals and goals of common people, not the cultural, social and economic elite.

Nadya appears, and she and Lenin comment on the contrast between Lenin's public beliefs and private enjoyment of traditional artistic expression. They also add that he didn't understand modern art. In language that comes across as significantly plainer than language used in the rest of the play, Nadya and Lenin define how Lenin's views on art were shaped by what the public enjoyed and were moved by. They also discuss how Lenin advocated the incarceration of rebellious artists and intellectuals and didn't care for impassioned acting or sentimentality, but could still be deeply moved by music. At the conclusion of their dialogue, Nadya tells how, when Lenin was in prison, he asked her to stand in a certain spot at a certain time, so he could see her out a window while he was having his brief exercise period. She says that she did what he asked for several days, but later learned that he never saw her. She says something went wrong, and that she never found out what.

Act 2, Part 2 Analysis

In the first part of this section, Cecily's attempts to reconcile Carr and Tzara are again straight out of *Importance of Being Earnest*, in which that play's Cecily tries to affect reconciliation between Jack and Algernon, but her attempts are rebuffed. In both plays, Jack and Tzara are angry, because Algernon and Carr have used a lie told for one purpose to achieve a completely unrelated goal. The comic repercussions of this scene become the narrative focus of the remainder of both plays.

The main thrust of this section, however, is the exploration of the character and situation of Lenin. There are several important components here. First, as indicated in the Summary, the language used by Nadya and Lenin is fairly textbook in style, generally unemotional and intellectual in tone. The way they speak is similar to the way Cecily spoke at the beginning of the act, reinforcing the idea of a Socialist based, intellectual and philosophical kinship between her and the Lenins. The fact that Cecily has just opened herself to passion for Carr/Tristan illustrates how far she has moved from this kinship, and also how emotionally empty Socialist philosophy is.

The second point to note about this section is perhaps paradoxical, in that it also contains moments of intense passion, interesting as much for their contrast to the rest of this section as for their intellectual content. This is particularly true of Lenin's speech about the purpose of art. Its passion, plus the fact that it's described in stage directions as the climax of the act, suggests that its argument is somehow essential to the play's theme. It seems unlikely that a playwright would write a play that is by turns playful, clever and passionate, to make Lenin's point that art should be exactly the opposite. This suggests that the speech is important, because the play as a whole is making exactly the opposite point. In other words, the speech defines the theme by contrast, making the point about what art must be by clearly defining what it can't be - passionate, individual and free spirited, as opposed to purely intellectual, used as propaganda or controlled.

The final part of this section, in which Nadya and Lenin discuss the ways that Lenin's perspectives occasionally altered, takes the point even further, showing how Lenin's

public pronouncements differed from his private experience. The play is, in effect, illustrating how impossible it is for art to be what Lenin, in his speech, thinks it should be. The point is made poignantly in Nadya's final speech which, in spite of its straightforward language, makes an emotionally powerful statement. On one level, she's talking about loneliness, which itself is something potentially very moving. On a symbolic level, however, the speech represents how Lenin, in his opinions about art, missed what was right in front of him. Art is by far a more powerful motivator of human emotion and change than any intellectual or philosophical revolution. This is a statement of another of the play's central themes.

Act 2, Part 3

Act 2, Part 3 Summary

Cecily and Gwen meet for tea. Their conversation is sung to the tune of an Irish folk song and is a replay of a similarly exaggeratedly polite confrontation between Cecily and Gwendolen in *Earnest.* They talk about how Joyce's research materials are overdue, and how Cecily is going to be very lonely now that Lenin has left. They also argue over the respective merits of the so-called Tzara brothers, Tristan and Jack. Gwen argues that Tristan loves art for its own sake, and Cecily protests that Tristan now believes art should be created in the service of the people. We understand from this that Gwen is referring to the real Tristan Tzara, while Cecily is referring to Carr/Tristan.

At the height of the argument, Carr comes in holding the folder Cecily gave him. We remember that this is the folder originally picked up by Gwen, which has writing by Joyce in it. Cecily calls Carr "Tristan," but Gwen tells her who he really is - her brother who works in the embassy. Before Cecily can react, Tzara appears, carrying the folder Gwen gave him. This is the folder that Cecily dropped, which contains writings by Lenin. Gwen refers to him as "her Tristan," but Cecily refers to him as "Comrade." Both girls realize they've been deceived, comfort each other, and then each ask what the men thought of the contents of the folders. Each man tries to be polite. However, after being prompted by the ladies, Carr refers to Lenin's writing as rubbish. Tristan refers to Joyce's writing as unreadable bilge. The ladies call them hypocrites, and Carr protests that he and Tzara love them. Gwen and Cecily agree that love is important, but then in a paraphrase of a key line in *Earnest*, they simultaneously tell the men that their "intellectual differences are an insuperable barrier." They leave in a huff.

As Carr and Tzara comfort each other, Bennett brings champagne. As he passes it around, he begins a conversation in the same way as he began the conversations in the first scene, talking about the reviews for Joyce's production of *Earnest*. He says that a telegram has arrived from the government, ordering Carr to keep Lenin in Switzerland. Bennett goes out, Carr and Tzara speak disparagingly of Joyce, and then Bennett returns, showing Joyce in. Joyce asks for the money for the tickets sold by Carr. We understand that this is the beginning of the lawsuit referred to by Carr in his speech at the end of the first act. Carr demands compensation for his expenses at the same time as Tzara hands Joyce what he thinks is his folder. This folder contains Lenin's writing, talking about how awful it is. Gwen and Cecily come in, just as Joyce sees the writing is not his own. He demands to know what happened to the chapter he gave Gwen to copy. As he describes it in lofty and arrogant terms, Carr recognizes the contents of his folder. The folders are given to their rightful owners, Cecily and Gwen. There is a scene of much embracing and dancing, as Carr and Cecily become Old Carr and Old Cecily.

Old Cecily, speaking in a similarly disjointed fashion to Old Carr, recalls Carr's lawsuit, Joyce's departure from Switzerland, and Carr's performance in *Earnest*. We understand from this that Cecily and Carr have been married for several years. As they bicker over

who did what and when, Carr points out that the exact time and place and participants in events don't matter - they happened, and life went on. He turns to us, talking about how wonderful life was in those days, with the intellectual arguments late into the night and other good times. He talks about the three things he learned from his experiences: You're either a revolutionary or you're not; and you might as well be an artist as anything else. He then admits that he forgets the third thing.

Act 2, Part 3 Analysis

After the relatively serious tone of what we might call "the Lenin Interlude," the intellectual and linguistic playfulness of the play's earlier scenes returns in the confrontation between Cecily and Gwen. The parallels in style and actual content to a similar scene in *Earnest* are clear and specific, as are the further parallels relating to the various misunderstandings about identity that emerge when the men come in. There is also a parallel in the switching of the folders, although the similarities here are less specific. In the original, it's the manuscript of a novel that gets misplaced, but the consequences of the final unwinding of the truth are the same. Everybody finally understands who everybody is, everybody falls in love with the right person, and there is much rejoicing. This is the emotional climax of the play, the point at which "happily ever after" seems both earned and inevitable. This is opposed to the climax found in the Lenin Interlude, which is essentially thematic and intellectual.

The scene between Old Carr and Old Cecily might be described as an epilogue, a moment or scene in which we learn what happened to the characters after the official story ended. Aside from seeing that Carr and Cecily have aged into an almost stereotypical bickering pair of senior citizens, the more noteworthy point is made during Carr's final speech. In saying, essentially, that events happened and life goes on, he's making the play's final thematic statement. He says that remembering things and defining what memories mean or represent, is less important than simply recognizing that the memories exist. This idea is born out by the fact that he can't remember the third thing he says he learned. He doesn't remember, because it's not important. Only the fact that things happened matters, not the things themselves or how they're interpreted.

In short, we see at the end of the play how *Travesties* is, among other things, a good humored travesty of itself, how it gently mocks its own particular identity as a piece of art and also art in general through its perspective on both art and memory. The play makes the thematic point that it doesn't matter how passionately you argue about what either is or what either means. The ultimate point, and value, of both is that they were created, and that they exist. The third thing is open to interpretation.

Bibliography

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Characters

Bennett

Bennett, Carr's manservant, has "quite a weighty presence." When he relates the current news to his employer, he often expresses definite opinions about world affairs. Tzara claims Bennett "has radical sympathies," while Carr notes that he "seems to be showing alarming signs of irony." In her article on Tom Stoppard for *Twayne's English Authors Series Online*, Susan Rusinko suggests that Stoppard included Bennett in the play "to emphasize, by means of [his] keen knowledge and intelligence, the indifference of Carr to the events swirling about them." Rusinko notes that Bennett's comments are "wide-ranging, from the political events exploding in Russia to the revolutions occurring in the art world."

Henry Carr

The play's main character, Carr, is a minor British government official assigned to Zurich during the First World War. The action of the play is presented through Carr's sometimes-unreliable memory. At the end of the play, Cecily, his wife, expresses her doubts over whether Carr actually ever met Tzara or Lenin Carr did, however, meet Joyce when he played Algernon Moncrieff in a production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* In his memory, Carr engages in discussions that sometimes degenerate into arguments with Lenin, Joyce, and Tzara about the war, politics, and art. Carr's memory confuses the story of his life with that of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Some of the dialogue he recalls are quotes from the play, and two of his characters have the same names

In "Stoppard's Theatre of Unknowing," Mary A. Doll notes that Carr "is the improbable fringe catalyst of chaos who remembers his time in war chiefly through recollecting what he wore (war/ wore) twill jodhpurs, silk cravats [presenting] war [as] a metaphor for fashion." C. W. E. Bigsby in his article on Tom Stoppard for *British Writers* comments on Carr's role as narrator, insisting "this clash of ideas loses much of its urgency seen from the perspective of a deluded, prejudiced, and erratic minor functionary." Bigsby notes that Carr "wants to believe in a world in which he can play a central role." As a result, Carr "resists reality with as much dedication as either Joyce or Tzara. He is, of course, in a real sense a playwnght. He 'creates' the drama in which he casts himself as the central character."

Cecily

A librarian in the Zurich library, Cecily eventually marries Carr. She epitomizes the shallow pedant, as she studies poets based on alphabetical precedence and translates emphatically every word Lenin speaks in Russian. At the beginning of the play, she

works with Lenin on his book on imperialism. She firmly believes that art should have a political purpose.

Gwen

Gwen, Carr's sister, works for Joyce, researching and transcribing the manuscript of *Ulysses*. She reveals her superficiality when she decides that she loves Tzara because she is destined to love a poet.

James Joyce

Carr's decidedly subjective opinion of Joyce is sometimes contradictory but usually shows the effects of Carr's anger over the litigation with the writer over money matters concerning the production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the play in which both of them had been involved Carr describes Joyce as paradoxical, having both positive and negative qualities. He is "a complex personality, an enigma, a contradictory spokesman for the truth, an obsessive litigant and yet an essentially private man who wished his total indifference to public notice to be universally recognized,"

At one point, Carr determines that Joyce is "a prudish, prudent man ... in no way profligate or vulgar, and yet convivial, without being spendthrift. " On the one hand, Joyce shows "a monkish unconcern for worldly and bodily comforts" and "shut[s] himself off from the richness of human society, whose temptations, on the other hand, he met with an ascetic disregard tempered only by sudden and catastrophic aberrations." Later, however, Carr insists that Joyce is an "Irish lout" and "a liar and a hypocrite, a tight-fisted, sponging, fornicating drunk not worth the paper."

Carr explains that he met Joyce when "his genius [was] in full flood in the making of *Ulysses*, before publication and fame turned him into a public monument for pilgrim cameras." At that time, "to be in his presence was to be aware of an amazing intellect bent on shaping itself into the permanent form of its own monument the book the world now knows as *Ulysses*." Joyce detaches himself from thepolitical tensions of the age, admitting, "as an artist.... I attach no importance to the swings and roundabout of political history."

Lenin

Lenin has little interaction with the other characters. Most of what the reader discovers from him is taken from his writings. Bigsby notes that Lenin is the only character "who is not controlled by Carr's distorting imagination." Lenin has been in exile since the abortive 1905 revolution in Zurich. During the outbreak of the war, he and his wife were briefly interned in Austro-Hungary. After arriving in Switzerland, they came to Zurich so he could use the library as he worked on his book on imperialism. Carr notes Lenin's "complex personality, enigmatic, magnetic." He calls him "an essentially simple man,

and yet an intellectual theoretician, bent ... on the seemingly impossible task of reshaping the civilized world into a federation of standing committees of workers' deputies " Even though Carr agrees to spy on him, he declares, "to those of us who knew him, Lenin's greatness was never in doubt." Lenin's beliefs on the function of art are illustrated in his essay "Literature and Art," which Carr reads. In that essay Lenin insists "today literature must become party literature. .. Literature must become a part of the common cause of the proletariat, a cog in the Social democratic mechanism."

Nadya

Nadya is Lenin's solemn wife. She becomes extremely agitated when she learns that the revolution in Russia has begun.

Tristan Tzara

A poet who created Dada a nihilistic movement in art and literature in the early part of the twentieth century. Tzara claims he is "the natural enemy of bourgeois art and the natural ally of the political left " Often, during his arguments about art and politics, he gets highly emotional and lashes out at the other characters Joyce calls him "an overexcited little man, with a need for self-expression far beyond the scope of [his] natural gifts"

Doll argues that Tzara "becomes perhaps the first Stoppard mouthpiece to articulate a clear position on the seriousness of play." She continues that through his discussions with the other characters, Tzara's opinions on the nature of art and the artist become clear: "Not only does he insist on the right of the artist to delude audience expectation but he insists on the ethical function of such denunciation." Tzara explains that wars are fought for economic realities rather than ideologies, fought for words like *oil* and *coal* rather than *freedom* and *patriotism*.

Bigsby comments on Tzara's sometimes contradictory stance. The critic insists Tzara is "drawn simultaneously in both directions" between the philosophies of Joyce and of Lenin Tzara, he concludes, sometimes spins "neologisms and cascades of words tike Joyce, convinced that the artist constitutes the difference between brute existence and any sense of transcendence," and at other times sees the writer "as the conscience of the revolution and justifying the brutality of its servants."

Themes

Art and Politics

One of the mam questions Stoppard raises in Travesties is whether there should be any relationship between art and politics His characters have divergent opinions on this topic. Stoppard's inclusion of contradictory points of view results m none being privileged over the other. Lenin insists that art be didactic, not beautiful. In his "Literature and Art," which Carr reads, Lenin argues that contemporary literature should address the concerns of the Communist Party by becoming "part of the common cause of the proletariat, a cog in the Social democratic mechanism."

Cecily adamantly supports Lenin's point of view. In a conversation with Carr, she claims that literature must serve as a social antique or it is worthless Justifying her position by citing an historical perspective, Cecily presents a strong argument that since corrupt economic forces shape current society, the people must take the responsibility of enforcing change and that change can best be accomplished through great literature.

Carr and Joyce contradict the arguments presented by Lemn and Cecily often in very logical discourse. In a counter to Cecily's statements, Can-defends art that is not didactic, that has no discernable function, claiming that it is valuable because "in some way it gratifies a hunger that is common to princes and peasants." When she insists art should change society, he disagrees, claiming the reverse is true, that society changes art.

Joyce's position supports Carr's but insists that great art does serve a purpose. In his opinion, art should not change society by promoting political dogma. However, it does justify and record history by reconstructing from its ruins "a corpse that will dance for some time yet and leave the world precisely as it finds it"

Art and the Artist

As the characters respond to the question of the relationship between art and politics, they explore the nature and function of art and the artist. Again, Stoppard's inclusion of various points of view on a topic result in none being clearly privileged. Thus, the reader never comes to a clear understanding of the author's stance on these issues Tzara offers the most radical point of view on the relationship between art and the artist through his explanation of dadaism. He insists that artists should "jeer and howl... at the delusion that infinite generations of real effects can be inferred from the gross expression of apparent cause." He constructs his poems through a random selection of words; thus the final work is designed by chance. In a discussion of the role of the artist, he comments "Nowadays, an artist is someone who makes art mean the things he does " He clarifies this statement with an example: "A man , may be a poet by drawing words out of a hat," which is basically what he has done when constructing a poem.

Joyce and Carr disagree with Tzara's concepts. In Carr's assessment, an artist is "someone who is gifted in some way that enables him to do something more or less well which can only be done badly or not at all by someone who is not thus gifted." He tells Tzara he does not accept "that the word Art means whatever you wish it to mean" and that "it is the duty of the artist to beautify existence."

Tzara criticizes Joyce's highly structured and obscure prose, claiming that "making poetry should be as natural as making water." He then condemns Joyce, insisting that through his work, he has "turned literature into a religion" that is "as dead as all the rest" He calls for "vandals and desecrators" to smash the notion of the superiority of the artist. Joyce, echoing his discussion of art and politics with Cecily, counters with his claim that artists are magicians who should be praised for their ability to immortalize men and history through their art He notes, "if there is any meaning in any of it, it is in what survives as art."

Style

Style

Stoppard constructs *Travesties* as a farce that focuses on a travesty of the main characters' style with the exception of Lenin's monologues. He parodies the modernist, fragmented, and obscure style of Joyce's *Ulysses*, the randomness of dadaist verse in Tzara's poetry, and the aesthetic wit and comedy of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Nonsense dialogue, limerick form, and musical numbers also add to the comic effect.

Structure

Stoppard borrows the structure and plot devices from *The Importance of Being* Earnest while he raises complex questions on the relationship between art and politics. Characters in the two plays share the same names, the same conflicts, including mistaken identities and misunderstandings, and pieces of the same dialogue. As a result of this comic interplay, no one point of view becomes dominant

Point of View

The play's action is related through the sometimes faulty memory of Henry Carr. Often "time slips" occur as Carr recalls incidents from his past, and as a result, he "drops a scene and then picks it up again." These time slips take place during Carr's conversations with his manservant Bennett and reveal his "prejudices and delusions." Stoppard notes that in these instances the story "jumps the rails and has to be restarted at the point where it goes wild."

Historical Context

Structuralism

In the 1970s, structuralism, a type of literary criticism concerned with the structures of language, became popular in academic scholarship. Structuralism began in the science of linguistics, especially in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. This theory depends on a theory of language as a sign system whose individual components can be understood only in relation to each other and to the system as a whole. Meaning is determined by how language fits within literary conventions. Structuralism challenges the view that a literary work reflects a given reality or that it reflects the emotions of its author. Stoppard's continuous and witty word play in *Travesties* reflects the structuralists' attention to the constructs and the effects of language.

Marxist Criticism

Marxist criticism is another literary school that was popular at the time *Travesties* was published. This theory is based on the economic and political doctrines of Karl Marx and Fnednch Engels, Marxist literary scholars examine the economic and social pressures on authors and how those pressures are reflected hi their works The literature most highly regarded by this school mirrors and critiques social realities. Extreme Marxist critics call on authors to construct their works to express and promote party doctrine. Less strident followers of this school, however, focus their attention on how authors show their characters suffering under rigid social and economic ideologies, especially those produced under a capitalistic system. The Hungarian Georg Lukacs was the most widely influential Marxist critic in the twentieth century, especially after his *Writer and Critic and Other Essays* was translated into English in 1970.

The Lenin in the play represents the extremist Marxist view in his essay, "Literature and Art," written during the first Russian revolution in 1905. In this essay, Lenin insists that contemporary literature "must become party literature" by becoming "a part of the common cause of the proletariat, a cog in the Social democratic mechanism."

Cecily supports and extends Lenin's point of view in her conversation with Carr. She tells him "the sole duty and justification for art is social criticism." When Carr disagrees, Cecily counters by insisting that since society is governed by economics, the people must take responsibility for change, and that change can be promoted through party literature. She ends the arguments with Carr by stating, "Art is a critique of society or it is nothing."

Dada

Dada was a nihilistic movement in art and literature started in Zurich in 1916 by the Romanian poet Tristan Tzara along with Hans Arp, Hugo Ball, and Richard Huelsenbeck

in response to the widespread disillusionment engendered by World War I. The founders meant dadaism to signify total freedom from ideals and traditions concerning aesthetics and behavior. The most important concept of dada is the word *nothing*. In art, dadaism produced collage effects as artists arranged unrelated objects in a random fashion. Dadaism in literature produced mostly nonsense poems consisting of meaningless, random combinations of words, which were read in public cafes and bars. These constructions in art and literature stressed absurdity and the role of the unpredictable in the creative process This group came into vogue in Paris immediately after the First World War Tzara carried the school to England and America where its influence became apparent in the poetry of Ezra Pound and T S. Eliot and in the art of Ernst and Magntte By 1921, dadaism, as a movement, was modified into surrealism. However, its influence continued for many years in literature and art.

During his conversations with Carr in the play, Tzara explains the tenets of dadaism. He insists that artists should "jeer and howl... at the delusion that infinite generations of real effects can be inferred from the gross expression of apparent cause." After Carr criticizes him for speaking "nonsense," Tzara argues, "it may be nonsense, but at least it's not clever nonsense. Cleverness has been exploded, along with so much else, by the war." During a discussion of the role of the artist, Tzara insists that art was corrupted as "it began to celebrate the ambitions and acquisitions of the pay-master." He claims that now with or without art, man is a "coffee-mill," following a daily pattern of monotony, which is the message of dada. Carr describes dada as a "historical halfway house between Futurism and Surrealism ... 'tween the before-the-war-to-end-all-wars years and the between-the-wars years." He suggests that dadaists cry "down with reason, logic, causality, coherence, tradition, proportion, sense and consequence."

Aestheticism

Another literary school of thought that was popular during the later part of the nineteenth century, aestheticism focuses on the analysis of the beautiful or tasteful. An aesthete appreciates the beautiful in art, music, and literature. Its tenets included the point of view that art is self-sufficient and should serve no other purpose than its own ends. One of the catchphrases of the movement was "art for art's sake." Thus art should not endorse any political or moral position. Followers devoted themselves to a search for beauty and a promotion of the idea that beauty has independent value.

The movement originated in the work of several German writers of the Romantic period, including Kant, Schelhng, Goethe, and Schiller. They all advanced the philosophy that art and the artist must be autonomous and therefore should be considered superior. The movement became a reaction against the materialism and capitalism of the late Victorian period. Oscar Wilde became the aesthetes' "cult hero."

Carr voices the aesthetes' position in *Travesties*. In a conversation with Tzara, he claims, "revolution in art is in no way connected with class revolution. Artists are members of a privileged class," and "an artist is someone who is gifted in some way that enables him to do something more or less well which can only be done badly or not

at all by someone who is not thus gifted." Later he insists "it is the duty of the artist to beautify existence."

Critical Overview

When it opened in 1974 at the Aldwych Theatre in London, *Travesties* earned overwhelmingly positive reviews Critics applauded the play's wit as well as its depth. Wilborn Hampton in his review in the *New York Times* writes that the play "races forward on Mr. Stoppard's verbal roller coaster, leaving one dizzy yet exhilarated by its sudden semantic twists, turns, dips, and loops." Clive Barnes's review in the *New York Times* suggests Stoppard "has constructed a whole ballet of words, wit and oddly disturbing literary echoes." T. E. Kalem in *Time* insists the play "blaz[es] with wit, paradox, parody, and, yes, ideas It is exhilaratingly, diabolically clever."

Susan Rusinko in her article on Stoppard for *Twayne's English Authors Series Online* claims Stoppard's "dazzling language" is "sheer magic" and that the entire play contains "the most intoxicating reinvention of language on the modern English stage."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Perkins, an associate professor of English at Prince George's Community College in Maryland, has published articles on several twentieth-century authors. In this essay, she examines how the form andstyle of Stoppard'splay reinforces its statement on the problematic process of gaining knowledge.

Prior to the twentieth century, playwrights structured their works to reflect their belief in the stability of character and the intelligibility of experience. Traditionally, plays ended with a clear sense of closure as conflicts were resolved and characters gained knowledge about themselves and their world. Many writers during the twentieth century challenged these assumptions as they expanded the genre's traditional form to accommodate their characters' questions about the indeterminate nature of knowing in the modern age, a major thematic concern for these writers. Critic Allan Rodway explains this focus as a question: "how do we know we really know what we think we know?" Tom Stoppard continues this inquiry in *Travesties* as he examines different points of view on the nature and role of art and the artist Through his meticulous shaping of the play, he refuses to privilege one point of view over another. As a result, the play becomes a statement on the difficulties inherent in the process of gaining absolute knowledge.

The nature and role of art and the artist is debated throughout the play by the principal characters: modernist James Joyce, dadaist Tristan Tzara, and political revolutionary Vladimir Lenin Joyce contends that art justifies history by reconstructing from its ruins "a corpse that will dance for some time yet and leave the world precisely as it finds it"

Tzara criticizes Joyce for turning "literature into a religion" and insists, "we need vandals and desecrators" to smash the notion of the superiority of the artist. He also presents radical views on art, claiming that artists should "jeer and howl .. at the delusion that infinite generations of real effects can be inferred from the gross expression of apparent cause " Thus, literature should be constructed through a random selection of words, the structure designed by chance. In a discussion of the role of the artist, he declares that an artist is "someone who makes art mean the things he does." Tzara tries to prove this point when he randomly arranges words into what he considers to be a poem

Lenin argues that the function of art must be to promote social and political change. He ignores the beauty of art and instead promotes the didactic, explaining that literature must "become a part of the common cause of the proletariat, a cog in the Social democratic mechanism." Cecily becomes Lenin's mouthpiece in the play, adamantly supporting his point of view when she insists "the sole duty and justification for art is social criticism," Like Lenin, she also places her theory into an historical context when she insists that society is governed by destructive economic forces and that artists must take the responsibility to alter that dynamic.

Some critics have insisted that Stoppard privileges one point of view over the other in the play, but they disagree about which character speaks for him. Roger Scruton in his

article on Stoppard in *Encounter* has no doubt whose side Stoppard is on. He insists, "Joyce's novel, like Tzara's badinage, is supremely conscious of its artistry; but it also justifies every word by a vision of reality, whereas dada is nothing more than self-advertisement." Scruton contends that Stoppard presents Lenin standing apart from the other characters "sifting his benighted pedantries," because "Lenin's words are dead, unfeeling, a patter of urgencies which occasionally rattles across the stage." He concludes that through his presentation of Lenin, Stoppard reveals his belief that political dogma cannot be turned into art.

Mary Doll in her article "Stoppard's Theatre of Unknowing" determines that Tristan Tzara becomes Stoppard's "mouthpiece." Dol! notes that Tzara insists on the "ethical function" of art as artists frustrate the audience's expectations. Citing Stoppard's word play throughout *Travesties*, Carr argues that Stoppard supports the theory that dada art is "committed to the serious enterprise of exposing the sophistry within every rational argument."

Other critics, like Enoch Brater in his article in *Essays on Contemporary British Drama*, have argued that Stoppard leans more to the Marxist point of view espoused by Lenin in the play, noting that Lenin never engages in any of the verbal banter of the other characters, and therefore is treated more seriously. However if the play is viewed as a whole, it becomes clear that Stoppard never resolves the debate on the nature of art and the artist.

Stoppard creates a witty collage of the trio's opinions on art in this farcical production, interplaying them with elements from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, from chapters of Joyce's *Ulysses*, and from Lenin's writings. He masterfully weaves together a series of separate plots, some farcical, some containing serious discussions on the nature of art and the artist.

The intricate form of the play becomes a "travesty" of the styles of the work of each of the principle characters, including Joyce's modernist narrative, Tzara's dadaist verse, and Lenin's political polemics, through its use of limericks, puns, jokes, and musical numbers. It also parodies the earnestness of each as it borrows characters and dialogue from Wilde's masterful comedy. The names "Gwendolen" and "Cecily" are used for the female leads in each play while Carr and Tzara act out their parts in the play-within-the-play. Carr "becomes" Algernon Moncrieff and Tzara becomes John Worthing.

This clever pastiche results in no one position gaining superiority over the other. The indeterminacy is heightened by the narrative structure of the play as all of the dialogue is related from Carr's faulty memory Often "tune slips" occur as Carr recalls incidents from his past and as a result, he "drops a scene and then picks it up again." These time slips take place during Carr's conversations with his manservant Bennett and reveal his "prejudices and delusions" and indicate the subjective status of past events. C. W E. Bigsby in his article on the play notes that form and style merge in this context as the characters "become mere performers m a Wildean comedy, which jolts along with all the manic energy and manifest dishonesty of a bogus memoir." As a result of these

structural and stylistic devices, the question of the responsibility of the artist to society is never answered absolutely.

One illustration of Stoppard's intricate form in the play occurs during a conversation Joyce has with Tzara at the end of act 1 after Gwen leaves to tell her brother that Tzara has just proposed to her. The dialogue between the two artists echoes that of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom in the Ithaca chapter in *Ulysses*, with its focus on question and response. As Joyce questions Tzara on the tenets of dadaist art, Stoppard undercuts Tzara's responses by including a pun on urinating, which also echoes a similar scene in *Ulysses*. Stoppard pushes Tzara's theories to an absurd level when he has the artist insist that "making poetry should be as natural as making water." Stoppard also plays with Joyce's insistence on the elevation of the artist when, throughout the scene, he turns Joyce into a magician, pulling silk scarves and a rabbit out of his hat. As a result of Stoppard's parodies of both artists, none of their theories emerge as the most logical.

In his article on the play for *London Magazine*, Allan Rodway identifies the form of the play as "metaphoric, parodic, and semifactual," which, as a result, continually raises the questions, "What is literal truth? What is authentic1? What is fact?" Rodway suggests that Stoppard's point of view in the play is that "the problem of knowledge has ao solution; we must just learn to live with it and laugh about the absurdities it generates."

Stoppard reinforces his conclusion about the difficulties inherent in the search for truth at the end of the play when Carr sits with Cecily, reminiscing about his days in Vienna. As Cecily corrects his faulty memory, she suggests he never met Lenin or Tzara and notes the other details of the period that he was mistaken about. Initially insistent on his accurate recall of the past, Carr declares that he remembers three important lessons he learned from these revolutionary thinkers. However the import of both the first and the second is that one cannot determine the difference between the artist and the revolutionary, and unfortunately, he forgets "the third thing."

Source: Wendy Perkins, Critical Essay on *Travesties*, in *Drama for Students*, The Gale Group, 2001

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Meyer explores how Stoppard uses mtertextuality in Travesties to comment on writers, their art, and politics.

In Tom Stoppard's 1964 story, "Life, Tunes: Fragments," the writer-protagonist seeks originality by consciously denying the influence of previous writers: imagining himself a general on the field of battle, he surveys the corpses of the powerful precursors he has just vanquished. His first person accounts, however, are inevitably derivative, rilled with the haunting echoes of the very writers primarily Beckett and Hemingway he has supposedly killed off by the force of his own self-originary powers. "Artistic recyclying" dramatic allusion, mtertextuality, parody, travesty- -is not only inevitable, Stoppard is telling us, but necessary, it is only in the interweaving of texts the "convergences of different threads" as Stoppard called it that the new text emerges.

From the early *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967) through *Travesties* (1975), *Dogg 's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979), and *The Real Thing* (1982), Stoppard's plays have dramatized such an interpretation of text and text, re-contextu-ahzing and transforming the words of others (Shakespeare, Ford, Stnndberg, Beckett, T. S. Eliot, Wilde, Albee, Genet, to name just a few) into some of the most original drama on the modern stage. In a well-known *Encounter* article, Chve James was inspired to use metaphors from the world of physics to describe the interpenetrative dynamics of Stoppardian intertextuality: the relationship between old context (Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*) and new text in *Travesties*, for example, is compared to the movement of "one stream of particles through another"; for James, "here and now in Stoppard is a time and place defined by an infinite number of converging vectors each heading towards it at the speed of light and steadily slowing down to nothing before passing through it and speeding up again." Less high-tech but no less laudatory, Harold Bloom applies the ancient Roman stage trope of *contammatio* to Stoppard's plays, which he defines as a "kind of interlacing between an old play and a new one." Stoppard, notes Bloom, is "an almost obsessive contaminator" whose plays "compel wonder and respect."

In this essay, I intend to examine the effects of textual interlacing in Stoppard's drama in both theatrical and thematic terms. Although some critics have claimed that Stoppard's textual game playing occasionally leads to a drama of "disengagement," my purpose will be to examine how *contaminatio* may perform as a contextualizing and histoncizing force, exemplifying engagement, not disengagement, making a play not only a comment on another play but also what Stoppard has called a "commentary on something else in life." As a beginning, we might say that Stoppard's plays demonstrate a use of *contaminatio* which is not merely "the licensed interplay of pastiche as dialogue," but also a philosophical and political as well as theatrical act In performance, *contaminatio* is one force activating the reciprocity between playwright, director, performer, and audience. Drawing upon a context which all share the wntten word Stoppard's plays highlight the audience's participation in a public event with connections to past events. The dynamic dialogue between texts depends upon the audience performing as

"witnesses" to the possibilities of "entering into ... collaborative worlds of play." More than a scintillating demonstration of "Pirandellian games," as Stoppard's intertextual drama has been called, the interlacing of texts reaffirms for the audience the validity of literature within human experience. Thus, while Stoppard's use of *contaminatio* enables him to present, or re-present, prior texts and at the same time play with those texts in the structured world of performance, it also reaffirms a clearly logocentric and humanistic core in modern drama. For Stoppard, the drama of the intertext is not an end in itself but a technique which enables the dramatist to "frame deeply personal considerations of human action, its motives and limitations and values." These ideas will be examined below in the two plays which best exemplify the drama of the intertext as a means of engagement: *Travesties* (1975) and *The Real Thing* (1982).

In *Travesties* (1975), Stoppard employs the drama of the intertext to affirm the mutual permeability of art and history. The play turns on the following premise: three well-known historical figures James Joyce, Dadaist Tristan Tzara, and Lenin were all in Zurich during World War I; moreover, each was engaged in some kind of revolutionary activity Tzara in art, Joyce in literature, and Lenin in political philosophy What unites these figures is that for all of them writing is central, it is significant, for example, that the play opens on a scene in the Zurich library, where the three are seen busy *writing* ("they are occupied with books, papers, pencils," notes one of the opening stage directions). As may be expected, Stoppard adds a structural and literary twist to this challenging premise: most of the action takes place within the memory of one Henry Carr, who (historically) played Algernon in a 1918 Zurich production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, staged by James Joyce. Unlike other well-known memory plays (Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, or Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*, for example), the dramatization of a mind in play with its images of the past is complicated and intensified in *Travesties* by the subsequent intertextual dynamics; just as Joyce rewrites *The Odyssey* and Tzara "rewrites" Shakespeare (and perhaps just as Lenin rewrites Marx), Stoppard rewrites Wilde through Henry Carr. The activities of the characters mirror the activity of the playwright. In setting up this mutual mirroring, Stoppard combines two functions first, as in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstem Are Dead*, he reaffirms the value of the wntten word within the theatrical experience by using repetition, interpretation, and re-presentation in the structured world of performance; and second, he points out the constant crossing of boundaries between the language of history and the history of language by showing how neither can be sacrificed at the expense of the other.

Like the playwright whom they mirror, each of the three characters in *Travesties* is occupied with defining the function of art in an age of uncertainty Through these characters, Stoppard seeks the connection between the words we use and the social, political, and moral matrix in which words are embedded. Not surprisingly, it is Joyce who glorifies the artist as "the magician put among men to gratify capriciously then: urge for immortality." History our measurement of human time would be nothing ("a minor redistribution of broken pots," as Joyce calls the Trojan War) without art. "if there is any meaning in any of it, it is in what survives as art," he says. Joyce sees writing as a doubling activity; in spite of the overwhelming nature of the immortal *Ulysses* theme, he declares, "yet I with my Dublin Odyssey will double that immortality." Later he boasts

that the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter of Ulysses uses "the gamut of English literature from Chaucer to Carlyle to describe the events taking place in a lying-in hospital in Dublin". From the mythic magnitude of the Trojan war to the more mundane proportions of events in a Dublin maternity ward, history is significant, even immortalized, according to Stoppard's Joyce, only because of the power of the artist to present it in words, some of which will no doubt also be a doubling or a representation of the words of others.

Both Lenin and Tzara provide counter-arguments to Joyce's *credo* of the centrality of the artist and the primacy of the word While Lenin stresses that art is significant only if it is in the service of those material forces which move history inexorably towards revolution, Tzara denies the significance of both art and the artist and calls for an anti-art of pure Chance.

Speaking from a high rostrum in the library, Lenin presents a tour-de-force of Marxist political rhetoric:

Today, literature must become party literature Down with non-partisan literature1 Down with literary supermen' Literature must become a part of the common cause of the proletariat, a cog in the Social Democratic mechanism.

Calm yourselves, ladies and gentlemen' Everyone is free to write and say whatever he likes, without any restrictions *But* every voluntary association, including the party, is also free to expel members who use the name of the party to advocate anti-party views

Ironically, there is a crack in the virulently anti-bourgeois facade, and thus Lenin is placed in subtle affinity with Joyce as well as, one assumes, with Stoppard The vehemence of Lenin's oratory is in direct proportion to the power that he knows art to have and that he therefore believes must be suppressed. Lenin's wife Nadya reminisces about how her husband would react emotionally, almost viscerally, to the theater; Gorky, Chekhov, and Dickens all affected him intensely. Lenin himself reveals his critical perspicuity by demonstrating his ability to distinguish great from mediocre art: "I don't know of anything greater than the Appassionata," he says. "Amazing, superhuman music. It always makes me feel," he continues.

Perhaps naively, proud of the miracles that human beings can perform. But I can't listen to music often It affects my nerves, makes me want to say nice stupid things and pat the heads of those people who while living in this vile hell can create such beauty Nowadays we can't pat heads or we'll get our hands bitten off. We've got to *hit* heads, hit them without mercy, though ideally we're against doing violence to people ,

Hm, one's duty is infernally hard

Lenin's response to the powers of art, based on clear philosophical and political premises, is travestied and taken *ad absurdum* by Cecily the librarian, who is staking in her talent for carrying the "ism" to new heights of gibberish:

The only way is the way of Marx, and of Lenin, the enemy of all revisionism of economism opportunism liberalism of bourgeois anarchist individualism of quasi-

socialist ad hoc-ism, of syndicalist opportunism, economist quasi-internation-alist imperialism, social chauvinist quasi-Zimmervaldist Menshevism, self-determmist quasi-socialist annexatiomsm, Kautskyism, Bundism, Kantism

For Stoppard, clearly, Cecily's insistence that "Art is a critique of society or it is nothing" bears with it the concomitant danger of imprisoning both the word and the artist. In *Travesties*, Stoppard counters the charge that art must further the revolution or else be considered worthless, and he does this by once again using the drama of the mtertext; by re-presenting and travestying the Cecily of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, he "doubles the immortality" of the prior text and affirms the consciousness of the individual artist.

In this context, perhaps the most problematic figure in the play is the Dadaist Tristan Tzara, who denies such authorial autonomy in the name of pure Chance. For Tzara, since the autonomy of the artist is an illusion, then "anti-art is the art of our time". It follows that art is totally relative, beyond irrelevant and reactionary standards of beauty or excellence. "Nowadays, an artist is someone who makes art mean the thing he does," says Tzara. "A man may be an artist by exhibiting his hindquarters", he continues (most likely a Stoppard aside on the bottom-baring theatrical hits popular in London during the last two decades) Again, just as Lenin's awareness of the power of art reveals an ironic affinity with the aesthetic views of James Joyce, so too does Tzara's extreme statement of avant-garde relativism reveal an affinity with the stringent control of artistic expression imposed by dialectical materialism In the idea that Chance rules all, "that the causes we know everything about depend on causes we know very little about, which depend on causes we know absolutely nothing about", Tzara, like Lenin, denies the independence of the individual artist; as he insists, "The artist has negated himself: paint eat sculpt grind write sh t."

If Lenin is the Marxist critic, then Tzara is the extreme post-structuralist who demonstrates the "death of the author as an organizing consciousness" (to borrow a quote from Roland Barthes) by showing how words in context may contain within themselves their own potential for de-contextuali-zation.' "The artist has negated himself': like Barthes, Tzara sees writing not as the expression of individual voice, but as the destruction of voice. In Barthes' words, writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing,

For Tzara, the negation of the artist is logically connected to the play of semiosis and the play of intertextuality: "All poetry is a reshuffling of a pack of picture cards, and all poets are cheats". Even Stoppard himself mirrors Tzara through the intertextual techniques he employs; his conclusions regarding the implications of such artistic reshuffling, however, are significantly different Stoppard, like Joyce, "doubles" the text as a way of affirming the logocentric core of both history and theatrical play, while Tzara sees this logocentrism as an "overripe corpse," the remnant of a religion of literature that must be destroyed: "Now we need vandals and desecrators, simple-minded demolition men to smash centuries of baroque subtlety, to bring down the temple, and

thus finally, to reconcile the shame and the necessity of being an artist! Dada! *DadalDadall*".

Interestingly, just as Lenin's fervent call for a literature "free from bourgeois anarchist individualism" was an indirect acknowledgement of the written text's emotional and intellectual power, Tzara's call to leave literature to the "hand of chance" is an indirect acknowledgment of the presence, and not the negation, of the artist. Tzara woos Carr's sister Gwendolyn (another character from Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*) by cutting up the text of Shakespeare's eighteenth sonnet and mixing the scraps in a hat. When Gwendolyn pulls the scraps out of the hat, she ends up with a gloriously bawdy love poem, thus apparently demonstrating Barthes' dictum that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author." The act of cutting up and recomposing Shakespeare's sonnet seems to provide an ironic counter-text to its famous closing quatrain and couplet:

But thy eternal summer shall not fade

Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest

; Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,

When in eternal lines to time thou growest

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see

, So long lives this and this gives life to thee

However, have Shakespeare's eternal Lines to time in fact been mutilated by Tzara's Dadaist act? Do we (and Gwendolyn) witness in this act the "death of the Author"? Stoppard provides the answer in the dialogue *following* the cutting of the sonnet:

GWEN: These are but wild and whirling words, my lord

TZARA. Ay, Madam.

GWEN: Truly I wish the gods had made thee poetical.

TZARA: I do not know what poetical is. Is it honest in word and deed' Is it a true thing'

GWEN' Sure he that made us with such large discourse, looking before and after, gave us not *that* capability, *and* god-like reason to fust in us unused and on and on in Shakespearean pastiche. Through the interlacing of texts from Shakespeare, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *Travesties*, Stoppard suggests that the cutting up and recomposing of texts is not a canceling but a doubling; the intertextual technique "eternalizes" the lines of the sonnet not because it freezes them in some superhistoncal time-frame but because it rewrites them within the realm of human action and perception:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,

So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

With Carr, Stoppard moves in and out of Wilde's play while simultaneously plundering texts of Joyce and Lenin, highlighting the primacy of writing within human experience, preserving the canon through the act of deviation. Employing a wide range of kinds of writing the memoir, oratory, limericks, puns, Gilbert and Sullivan wit all of which perform like "an infinite number of converging vectors," he insists on the logocentric core of theatrical play. John Wood, the British actor who played Carr in the 1974 London production, put it this way:

In Tom's play the word is all. The word is beating back against the silence, beating back the darkness Thought is all we've got, says Tom, otherwise the dark, the jungle will close in on us.

For Sammells, *Travesties* exemplifies Stoppard's drama at its best, a drama which "earns its liberty ... by means of a critical engagement with the demands of conformity." It is in reference to this standard of an "aesthetics of engagement" that Sammells judges Stoppard's next play, *The Real Thing* (1982), as a contradiction or betrayal of such an aesthetics. *The Real Thing*, in Sammells' opinion, reveals a playright whose work has hardened into "a militant conservatism that is both aesthetic and political and which denies his distinctive achievements as a dramatist." Sammells claims that *The Real Thing* elevates form to the level of content by demonstrating "not just the necessity of saying things correctly, but of saying the correct things."

Sammells' provocative study is a important contribution in that it requires us to evaluate the moral and political content of Stoppard's plays in relation to their formal ingenuity It is this very interconnection between morality and play, however, that makes Stoppard less easily classifiable than Sammells suggests. Within the almost classical structure of the romantic comedy, *The Real Thin*g, like *Travesties*, continues to pose the dangers threatening the autonomy of the author and the centrality of the word in human history. A humamzation of the themes of *Travesties, The Real Thing* demonstrates what happens when the anchor of logocentricity is unmoored in two spheres of discourse: revolutionary rhetoric and theatrical dialogue. In this play, as in *Travesties*, drama as a commentary on something else in life affirms that the real thing in life, love, and art and its various verbal and written realizations are inseparable.

Henry, a playwright, is in love with Annie, an actress *The Real Thing* opens on a scene from one of Henry's plays, *House of Cards*, in which Henry's wife Charlotte appears together with Annie's husband Max. During the scene, the theater audience is convinced that they are watching the "real" play Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*. Only in Scene Two do they begin to discover that they have been drawn into a series of plays within plays: not only Henry's play, but Strindberg's *Miss Julia*, Ford's "*Tis Pity She's a Whore*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, and a leftist play by one Bill Brodie, a Scottish soldier who has used the wreath of the Unknown Soldier to set fire to the Cenotaph in a burst of radical bravado. In their search for the real thing in love, Henry and Annie divorce

their spouses and marry Most of the play is taken up with Annie's subsequent efforts to convince Henry to "cut and shape" the rough language of Brodie* s television play, which he wrote in order to generate support for his release from prison The complications of the plot (echoes of Moliere, Congreve, Feydeau, and the Marx Brothers are purely intentional) provide Stoppard with ample opportunity to play with notions of the role of language in human action both in love and in politics. Which is the real thing? The language of romantic idealism9 Witty badinage9 Revolutionary rhetoric? Amateur plays with words that go clunk? The language of Shakespeare, Ford, Stnndberg, and Henry James? Reverberating in every scene of the play, this question points up the many difficulties facing the writer including the writer of *The Real Thing* who attempts to connect the word with human interaction.

Sammells' criticism of the aesthetic and political conservatism of *The Real Thing* bases itself on the identification of Henry, a playwright, with Stoppard himself, surely an understandable and easily supportable view Henry, like his creator Tom Stoppard, praises "good writing" and affirms the worth of the word "beating back against the silence." Moreover, Henry draws audience attention and approval like a magnet; equipped with a ready intelligence and even readier wit, he is easily the most attractive character in the play. What is less readily acknowledged, however, is the self-parody inherent in the *flawed* Henry who, as the Last Romantic (in the words of his first wife, Charlotte), sees words as sacred and innocent and who "cannot write love" because it is so "unhterary." If Henry is Stoppard's mirror, he is also the reflection of the playwright's own foibles.

While Stoppard employs the drama of the mtertext in *Travesties* to reaffirm the validity of art in a time of political upheaval, in *The Real Thing* he explores the same theme further by using intertext to highlight the flawed attempts of human beings both Brodie and Henry to tie words to human action. The interlacing of *Miss Juha,Othello* and *'Tis Pity She's* a Whore with Stoppard's play is not meant only, as Sammells charges, to "measure and confirm the distance between 'good stuff and rubbish'." The choice of these plays was surely not arbitrary *Miss Julia,* almost the paradigmatic play of social upheaval in modern drama, examines the various levels of discourse in the language of sexual attraction between a well-born young woman and a servant; *Othello* investigates the role of language in the attractions and the blindnesses of power, *'Tis Pity* the connections between the erotic and the political in the convoluted language of palace intrigue. If Stoppard does use these plays as "touchstones of literary excellence," as Sammells disparagingly charges, he does so not in order to have some of their famous aura rub off on him but rather in order to establish contrasts to the bumbling efforts of Brodie to use words to evoke revolutionary sincerity as well as to the shcker, but not necessarily more successful, efforts of Henry to "write love."

While Brodie's attempt at propagandist drama is meant to be the real thing history, power politics, oppression ("ANNIE: Brodie really has something to write about, something real " -it succeeds m being more ahistorical, more self-enclosed in short, more unreal than art has ever been. Mary and Bill meet on a train:

"I'm glad to make your acquaintance, Mary "

"I'm glad to make yours, Bill "

"Do you know what time this train is due to amve in London?" ..

"At about half-past one, I believe, if it is on time."

"You put me in mind of Mussolini, Mary People used to say about Mussolini, he may be a Fascist, but at least the trains run on time. Makes you wonder why British Rail isn't totally on time, eh?"

"What do you mean"'

"I mean it's a funny thing. The Fascists are in charge but the trains are late as often as not."

"Butthis isn't aFascist country "

"Are you quite sure of that, Mary""

Can this be the real thing? Stoppard asks. Can one separate individual action from the rhetoric which tries to obfuscate moral accountability? Critic Roger Scruton has astutely focused on the empty center of such linguistic camouflage:

Nothing speaks from it, nothing comes out of it, besides itself. By posturing as the real thing, the thing outside art, it loses the aid which art can bring It too becomes self-referential But unlike art, which strives always to make room in its centre for the individual experience, the jargon-ridden language of revolution makes room only for itself. Its self-reference is of a more deadly kind, it is like a blind drawn down on our only window on the world, where we stand hopelessly looking for that elusive thing, the self

Like the Leninist rhetoric in *Travesties*, Brodie's language exhibits an avoidance of human feeling Moreover, like Tzara' s brusquely eloquent negation of the artist, Brodie's revolutionary monosyllables deny the creative presence behind autonomous discourse. Finally and this is the ultimate hole in the facade of Brodie's anarchist pretensions we discover that the original motive for his actions was simply to impress Annie, an attractive woman he met on a train.

"That one I would have known how to write," says Henry, when he finds out what is (or rather what is not) behind Brodie's braggadocio. Stoppard, however, does not allow us to accept Henry's assessment of his own ability to discern the real thing The question which the play poses is whether Henry, the play wnght, can provide an option to counter the Brodies of the world. More cogently presented than the polemics of Brodie, Henry's ideas are nevertheless a problematic alternative, leaving us still with an unsatisfactory equivalent for the real thing. The speech most often presented as demonstrating the Stoppard/ Henry identity, and the much touted answer to Brodie's ranting, is the cricket bat speech of Scene Five. Annie has just charged Henry with jealousy: "You'rejealous of the idea of the writer," she says. "You say he can't write like a head waiter saying you can't come inhere without a tie. Because he can't put words together. What's so good

about putting words together'? .. Why should that be *it*?" Henry's response is designed to show why putting well-chosen words together should be it the real thing:

This thing here, which looks like a wooden club, is actually several pieces of particular wood cunningly put together in a certain way so that the whole thing is sprung, like a dance floor. It's for hitting cricket balls with. If you get it right, the cricket ball will travel two hundred yards in four seconds, and all you've done is give it a knock like knocking the top off a bottle of stout, and it makes a noise like a trout taking a fly. (*He clucks his tongue to make the noise*) What we're trying to do is to write cricket bats, so that when we throw up an idea and give it a little knock, it might ...travel ,

Writing as arbitrary masculine fiat (cricket, bottles of stout, fly-fishing: ladies need not apply): the linear, ejaculatory movement from word (a click of the tongue to indicate a clear line of projection) to thing. Henry naively thinks that such control can be achieved without dishonoring the pristine innocence of the word. Referring to the hot air which passes for language in Brodie's lexicon, Henry says:

Words don't deserve that land of malarkey. They're innocent, neutral, precise, standing for this, describing that, meaning the other, so if you look after them you can build bndges across incomprehension and chaos.

Brodie may be a lout with language, but Henry has become an even odder creature a male chauvinist aesthete. Despite his insistence on building bridges across incomprehension, Henry, like Brodie, has isolated language from human action; this is why he has so much trouble writing love, "it's so unliterary." Words, as most of the other characters in the play realize, can never be innocent and sacred, nor can they be neutral and precise. Annie's first huband, Max insignificant, pathetic Max may lack Henry's command of words, but he shows a deeper understanding of life and love. "You've got something missing," he tells Henry "You may have all the answers, but having all the answers is not what life's about" For Max, life's about "messy bits of good and bad luck, and people caring and not necessarily having all the answers," His words echo Charlotte's perceptive comment in the previous scene, when she tells Henry: "Having all the words to come back with just as you need them. That's the difference between plays and real life."

Shakespeare, Ford, Strindberg, and James succeeded in forging a language which included not only the answers but also the eloquent silence of those moments of human interaction when clearly defined, precise answers are not forthcoming; none of these great writers divorced language from its roots in passion, suffering, and history. Stoppard's use of the mtertext in *The Real Thing* is not intended to secure his place m the literary cannon but to demonstrate, through Henry, the *dangers* of seeing language as "innocent, neutral, precise." The steamy dialogue between incestuous lovers in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (sections of which are presented verbatim in the very next scene, ironically revealing a real-life affair between Annie and Billy, her co-actor) intertwines the language and the ambiguities of passion as the witty badinage of *Henry's House of Cards* does not.

BILLY I think you love me, sister

ANNIE Yes, you know I do

BILLY-1 know't indeed. You're very fair

ANNE Nay, then, I see you have a merry sickness.

BILLY That's as it proves The poets feign, I read,

That Juno for her forehead did exceed All other goddesses, but I durst swear Your forehead exceeds hers, as hers did theirs

ANNIE: 'Troth, this is pretty'

BILLY: Such a pair of stars As are thine eyes would, like Promethean fire, If gently glanced, give life to senseless stones

ANNIE'Fie upon ye1

BILLY The My and the rose, most sweetly strange,

Upon your dimpled cheeks do strive for change Such hps would tempt a saint, such hands as those Would make an anchorite lascivious.

Similarly, the theater references in Stnndberg's *Miss Julia* obscure the distinction between theater and life and thus show that "having all the words to come back with just as you need them" can camouflage a subtext of lust and seduction

HENRY [helping Annie rehearse by reading the part of Jean]. 'You flatter me, Miss Julie
'

ANNIE, 'Flatter" I flatter9'

HENRY 'I'd like to accept the compliment, but modesty forbids

And, of course, my modesty entails your insincerity

Hence, you flatter me'

ANNE 'Where did you learn to talk like thaf Do you spend a lot of time at the theatre'7'

HENRY: 'Oh yes I get about, you know.'

ANNIE1 Oh, Hen Are you all right*?

HENRY Not really, I can't do mine, I don't know how to write love

The drama of the mtertext in *The Real Thing* thus has a double-edged function; it demonstrates, by contrast, the empty core of Brodie's language which implies a similar emptiness in his ideas, and it demonstrates the different but not more successful attempts of Henry to connect word and thing in both *House of Cards* and in life. Through Max's discovery of a stained handkerchief in Annie's car, Stoppard brings in the *Othello* mtertext with striking force The hand kerchief is both theater prop (a real thing) and word. As such it points accusingly at Henry within the text of *The Real Thing* and at the same time out towards *Othello*, a play in which word and deed, discourse and love, are inextricably intertwined In the words of Othello's touching account of Desdemona's initial attraction to him, she returned again and again and "with a greedy ear / Devoured] up my discourse." Surely one of the great themes of *Othello* is that words are neither neutral nor precise, the tale of passion, deception, and blindness m both politics and love is rather a story, in Max's far more banal idiom, of "messy bits of good and bad luck, and people caring and not necessarily having all the answers "

Finally, the title of Stoppard's play deserves some comment, because it, like the title of *Travesties*, is both the real thing and its opposite. la an 1892 work called "The Real Thing," Henry James tells the story of a professional book illustrator who discovers that Major and Mrs. Monarch, the "real" gentleman and lady he has hired as models for his ("unreal") paintings of aristocrats, are far less convincing (that is, "real") than the rather scruffy (by society's standards, "unreal") Miss Churm and the "scrap of a lazzarone," Oronte. Early in the story, the first person narrator admits "an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one" and supports his bias with the tautological, and therefore incontrovertible, logic that "the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation " By the end of the story, however, the "defect of the real one"- that quality which made Major and Mrs. Monarch so unsuitable as models is countered by the quiet strength and dignity of their behavior as they submit to "the perverse and cruel law in virtue of which the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal." As in Henry James' tale, the drama of the intertext in Stoppard's plays glorifies re-presentation without ignoring its potentially divisive ability to cut off language from human action. Moreover, if a play is not to be an end in itself but a consideration of such action, the act of writing must be central. "Who decides*?*" asks Guildenstern regarding the alternative of "just desserts" or "tragic irony" when it comes to a specific character's death. "*Decides*?" asks the Player unsmilmgly. "It is *written*": the debt to other texts is not a constraining factor, but a force liberating dramatist and audience from the limbo of pure play which is the flip side of logocentric drama Stoppard, in fact, reaffirms not only a logocentric but also a graphocentric impetus behind Western drama. "It is *written*." This perhaps is his greatest debt to the paradigmatic contaminator, Shakespeare, whose exuberant plundering of prior written sources sparked the creative power of worlds of play that provided, in Stoppard's words, a powerful and convincing commentary on something else in life.

Source: Kinereth Meyer, * "It is Written' • Tom Stoppard and the Drama of the Intertext," in *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 23, No 3, Summer, 1989, pp. 105-19.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Gianakaris explores Travesties within a word-game context, citing its "verbal acrobatics rather than kinetic action."

The strong affiliations between games and the theatre are obvious Even observers outside strictly artistic fields, like Johan Huizinga, have explored the instinct of mankind for "play." Today's pragmatic playwright views drama as an ideal vehicle for exposing games we play, while plays also can express the terror-filled, ridiculous lives we lead in our current existential setting. In an existential mode, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* cleared new paths; in turn they have been followed by the convoluted games of Genet, the absurd charades of lonesco, and the opaque conundrums of Pinter.

Quite possibly the most ingenious game-playing dramatist of our time, however, is Tom Stoppard His *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (1967)* first revealed not only how effectively a drama could be constructed around a game core, but also how much playful fun could result More specifically, Stoppard has perfected the intriguing "Spin Off' technique. In this innovative process, he selects a well known literary work or a host historical incident and then fabricates a plot around one segment of the source to provide a "Spin Off' play of his own. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* entertainingly impresses with a plot built around the lives and dilemmas of two marginal figures in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Subsequently, Stoppard was to work with other inventive game techniques plays-withm-plays, circus-like settings, and so on in *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968), *Jumpers* (1972), and Dirty *Linen/New-Found-Land* (1976). It is with *Travesties* (1974) that Stoppard may have earned verbal game playing nearly to its artistic limits. For there he has concocted a mixture of verifiable *fact* and *fabrication*, by melding historical figures together in an echo-plot patterned identifiably upon Oscar Wilde's comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest.*

By casting the real-life revolutionaries from the realm of art and politics into a framework derived from Wilde's classic, Stoppard formulates a tantalizing "Spin Off' game. And that game furnished a vehicle for provocative polemics regarding the values of art and geopolitics.

The first thing to note about *Travesties* is that, like Stoppard's other pieces, it is dominated by verbal acrobatics rather than kinetic action. Divided into two acts, *Travesties* is an elaboration of a footnote in history whose substance is thickened with large doses of coincidence and speculation In the prologue discussion and in additional notes to the text, Stoppard states that, comcidentally, James Joyce, Lenin, and Tristan Tzara all happened to be living in Zurich at the same time in 1918. Futhermore, it was possible all three studied in and perhaps wrote some of their respective works in the Zurich Public Library. Add to this situation the historical fact that a lower echelon British diplomat named Henry Carr, then also residing in Zurich, was approached by James Joyce to act the part of Algernon in a local production of Oscar Wilde's comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest*. From there, Stoppard's teeming imagination provided the needed catalyst.

Verifiable records reveal that Joyce and Carr ultimately had a falling out and that each ended up riling legal actions against the other. That Lenin, Tzara, and Joyce ever had met or knew each other cannot be confirmed, but Stoppard shapes *Travesties* as though they had. Additionally, the playwright arranges matters so that Carr's sister whom he names Gwendolen, like Wilde's heroine is pursued by Tzara (made to resemble Jack Worthing), while Carr (Algernon) eventually will marry Cecily, the librarian at the Zurich Library. Beneath this sketchy romantic subplot in *Travesties* is seen the scaffolding of Wilde's famed comedy which brought Joyce and Carr together in the first place.

Stoppard proves himself a master at implanting one play's character "refugees" in another play's circuitry. In *Travesties*. Tristan Tzara wants to court Carr's sister Gwendolen. But he takes on the name of' "Jack" Tzara and pretends to be Tristan's younger brother, when it is clear that Carr does not approve of Tristan and his radical beliefs. In Act Two, Can-contributes to the device of mistaken identities by passing himself off as "Tristan" Tzara to the librarian Cecily. He begins his charades in order to spy for information regarding Lenin, the Russian revolutionary whom Cecily is assisting at the Zurich library; but eventually Carr seriously woos Cecily who later wil! become his wife. Thus the multiple confused identities con-elate with the prototypes from Wilde's play.

Ultimately, the true identities emerge, and the aged Carr and Cecily long married to each other close out *Travesties* with her calling him to task for exaggerating his centra! ity to important historical events from the 1918 period:

Old Cecily: You never even saw Leniru

Carr: Yes I did. Saw him in the cates. I knew them all. Part of the job,

Old Cecily (*wnall panne*)'. And you were never the Consul.

To make his correlative game even more evident, several times Stoppard introduces dialogue taken directly from *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Carr. first greets Tzara in this fashion:

Carr: How are you, my dear Tristan. What brings you here? . . .

Tzara (*ebulliently*): Plaizure. plaizure! What else? Eating ez usual, I see 'Enri?

But this interchange promptly is interruped by the entrance of James Joyce and Gwendolen. Sloppard here employs his time "Slip" device, permitting a new greeting between Tzara and Carr:

Carr, How are you, my dear Tristan9 What brings you here?

Tzara' Oh pleasure, pleasure' What else should bring anyone anywhere'.. Eating and drinking as usual, I see, Henry'

Such "Spin Offs" will be recognized as closely following the initial encounter between Algernon and Jack Worthing near the opening of *The Importance of Being Earnest*:

Algernon: How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town9

Jack. Oh, pleasure, pleasure1 What else should bring one anywhere' Eating as usual, I see, Algy!

Stoppard conveys his story mostly as the enacted reminiscences of his narrator, Henry Carr. But it is an aged Carr with a slipping memory who sits in his apartment, one of the two main settings for the play, recollecting his younger years in Zurich and his unhappy encounter with the Irish novelist James Joyce. Act One, by far the longer of the two acts, mostly takes place in Carr's quarters where he is attended by a servant named Bennett and by his sister Gwendolen. As he is visited there by Tzara and James Joyce in reenacted flashbacks, Carr utters brilliant observations concerning the writings of Joyce and Tzara.

Act Two, both shorter and more problematic than the first, generally takes place in the Zurich Library where all three writers have been working. But in Act Two, most of the attention is directed to Lenin and Cecily, his assistant. Extended sections of that act are given over to long-winded narration and explication of Lenin's Marxist positions on social, political, and artistic issues.

Stoppard's total design allows for a series of games of illusion to proceed. Especially prominent by virtue of the play's overall structuring, e g, witnessing the action as seen through Carr's recaptured memories, is the game of Time Slippages. Within a stage direction, Stoppard specifies his intentions with respect to this device: "A note on the above: the scene (and most of the play) is under the erratic control of Old Carr's memory, which is not notably reliable, and also of his various prejudices and delusions. One result is that the story (like a toy tram perhaps) occasionally jumps the rails and has to be restarted at the point where it goes wild."

The particular episode Stoppard alludes to is begun six separate times and develops differently each time. In each case, the interchange begins with Bennett the butler announcing to Carr, "I have put the newspaper and telegrams on the sideboard, sir," to which Carr responds uniformly, "Is there anything of interest1?" But before Bennett can fully answer, a "Time Slippage" occurs in Carr's recollecting narrative to force the "Derailment" Stoppard indicates. When taken in sequence from several pages of the dialogue, Bennett's several answers underscore the remarkable fluidity of exposition attained through the "Time Slippage" method. What Stoppard's cited textual note does not indicate is that each time, Bennett answers with details of events moving incrementally in history and time In this ingenious manner, Stoppard can move along his plot exposition without committing himself to any one version of the encounters.

Audiences and readers of Stoppard's earlier plays are acquainted with his masterful employment of the interrogation routine In *Travesties* a remarkable tour de force results in an interchange between Joyce and Tristan Tzara, one of the founders of Dadaism. In

addition to the verbal sparkle of the moment, Stoppard permits an incisive look at each man's views of letters and art:

Joyce Describe sensibly without self-contradiction, and especially without reference to people stuffing bread rolls up their noses, how the word Dada was discovered

Tzara Tristan Tzara discovered the word Dada by accident in a Larousse Dictionary. It has been said, and he does not deny, that a paper-knife was inserted at random into the book. In French dada is a child's word for a hobbyhorse In German it denotes a sim-plemmded preoccupation with babies

This specific confrontation concludes with Tzara and Joyce insulting one another, each accusing the other of misconstruing the true function and aim of art:

Tzara: By God, you supercilious streak of Irish puke' You four-eyed, bog-ignorant, potato-eating ponce1 Your art has failed You've turned literature into a religion and it's dead as all the rest, it's an overripe corpse and you're cutting fancy figures at the wake It's too late for geniuses' Now we need vandals and desecrators, simplemmded demolition men to smash centuries of baroque subtlety, to bring down the temple, and thus finally, to reconcile the shame and the necessity of being an artist1 *Dada' Dada' Dada'*

Joyce responds with:

You are an over-excited little man, with a need for self-expression far beyond the scope of your natural gifts This is not discreditable. Neither does it make you an artist An artist is the magician put among men to gratify capriciously their urge for immortality. The temples are built and brought down around him, continuously and contiguously, from Troy to the fields of Flanders. If there is any meaning m any of it, it is in what survives as art

Even as he plays his games in an episode such as the one above, Stoppard also raises for our consideration the rather important issue of art in society as advanced in two major artistic currents of this century.

Much of the second act of *Travesties* -the very title of the piece connotes a form of game deals with Lenin's writing and life in Zurich before he took the fateful train ride back to Russia. So that audiences better comprehend Lenin's hard-line position concerning the classes of society and especially the role of art in his ideally conceived society, Stoppard turns extended portions of Act Two into an illustrated slide lecture. At times, Lenin is allowed to lecture, at other times, persons such as Cecily or his wife articulate Lenin's viewpoints But in each instance, Stoppard employs Lenin's own documented words, which are adamantmely anti-intellectual:

Today, literature must become party literature Down with nonpartisan literature1 Down with literary supermen1 Literature must become a part of the common cause of the proletariat, a cog in the Social Democratic mechanism , I dare say there will be

hysterical intellectuals to raise a howl at this Such outcries would be nothing more than an expression of bourgeois-mtellecual individuals

Publishing and distributing centres, bookshops and reading rooms, libraries and similar establishments must all be under party control. We want to establish and we shall establish a free press, free not simply from the police, but also from capital, from careerism, and what is more, *free from bourgeois anarchist individualism**

At least one sustained, serious question flows through Stoppard's otherwise merry game sequences in *Travesties*. What function and value does Art have in society? Stoppard provides no simplistic response. He allows his key characters to voice positions accurately mirronng the actual figures from history. In the interchange earlier cited between Tzara and James Joyce, we heard Tzara's iconoclastic rantings representing the consciously *avant-garde* of the time, countering those were Joyce's views of a mystical Art leading to spiritual fulfillment for all mankind. Further, the quoted passage from Lenm explicitly subordinates the role of Art in society to that of being handmaiden to political objectives.

Interestingly, it is Henry Carr in *Travesties*, the fourth and only non-famous figure among the play's lead characters, who is cotter pin in Stoppard's intricate mechanism. Carr views Art more "normally" than any of the protagonists. For him, Art indeed is important in life, but he cannot support the other extreme tenets posited by the historical figures he encounters. It is Carr who, during one of their frequent, flamboyant debates, debunks Tzara's exquisite defense of total artistic liberty:

Tzara Doing the things by which is meant Art is no longer considered the proper concern of the artist In fact it is frowned upon Nowadays, an artist is someone who makes art mean the things he does, A man may be an artist by exhibiting his hindquarters. He may be a poet by drawing words out of a hat

Carr Don't you see my dear Tristan you are simply asking me to accept that the word Art means whatever you wish it to mean, but I do not accept it The easiest way of knowing whether good has triumphed over evil is to examine the freedom of the artist

In Act Two, Carr elicits a heated argument with Cecily over the topic of art and society. Cecily, whom Stoppard creates in part as a mouthpiece for Lenin's notions sounds a strictly Marxist chord. "The sole duty and justification for art is social criticism ... we have been given an entirely new kind of responsibility, the responsibility of changing society."

Because Carr's stance is located somewhere between the radical dogmas of Lenin, Joyce, and Tzara, Stoppard is able to rehearse the multifaceted purposes of art for audiences of *Travesties*. No ultimate conclusion is advanced, however, and he closes the play with the same enigmatic teasing which characterized an early work like *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*. *Travesties* ends with the spotlight fading on Carr (as it does on Guildenstern at the conclusion of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*), who grumbles about the significance of his chance meeting with the greats during his younger years in Zurich. All is left open-ended:

Cart. Great days .. Zurich during the war Refugees, spies, exiles, painters, poets, writers, radicals of all kinds I knew them all ... I learned three things in Zurich during the war I wrote them down Firstly, you're either a revolutionary or you're not, and if you're not you might as well be an artist as anything else Secondly, if you can't be an artist, you might as well be a revolutionary I forget the third thing.

In his immediately subsequent works, *Dirty Linen/New-Found-Land* (1976), Stoppard draws initial inspiration from contemporary news accounts of misdemeanors by Parliament members and deftly "Spins Off' the rollicking charades involving the fabulous Maddie Gotabed. Then, rising to the challenge suggested by Andre Previn in 1974, Stoppard concocted *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (whose title reflects the mnemonic E.G.B.D.F., well known in musical circles), a drama with a full orchestra as a central agent in the story.

Here, as well as in *Travesties*, Tom Stoppard opens up new but hardly imitable channels for later playwrights. One legitimately can question where his merry pranks ultimately will lead. A partial answer is emerging in Stoppard's continued play output. Furthermore, the very latest zags in his writing career are not wholly unanticipated. In an interview from 1976 he declared: "Most of *Travesties* not as a structure and a play but speech by speech still seems to me as good as I can ever get. It's slightly worrying actually. A lot of things in *Travesties* and *Jumpers* seem to me to be the terminus of the particular kind of writing which I can do." Then he adds, "I don't see much point in trying to do it again, though I probably will, for want of being able to do anything else "

Although Stoppard's most recent plays continue to engage comically, they do suggest a changed tonality reflecting the more sober thematic interests preoccupying him more and more. Admittedly, his work never has been devoid of a more serious understructure. At the outset of Stoppard's international career, however, most observers were more dazzled with his imaginative comic arsenal. But more recently, the strands of thoughtful issues in his comedies have become increasingly apparent. Thus by 1972 and his wild play *Jumpers,* Stoppard already was giving ample indications of serious motives being imbedded in his games. Not all his signals were interpreted as expressions of a single argument or thesis on his part; yet the seriousness itself was recognized.

Critical grasp of Stoppard's later intentions is informed both by past patterns and more precisely by his announcesd recent objectives. An incubating television play he spoke of in 1976 became *Professional Foul* A compelling television drama, broadcast in 1978, *Professional Foul* dealt with Czechoslovakia Stoppard's birthplace and with the abuse of human rights there today. Viewers struck by the force of that television piece were also aware of Stoppard's entirely realistic format. And that style in large measure is repeated in *Night and Day*, his most recent drama which opened in London late in 1978. Benedict Nightingale, in an article captioned "Have Pinter and Stoppard Turned to Naturalism? " comments that this latest work marks "a new departure" for Stoppard, because *Night and Day* is "more true-to-life, more 'naturalistic' than the work that preceded."

What also is evolving with Stoppard now in his 40's and highly successful as a playwright is the gnawing personal issue called by Ronald Hayman his "private anxieties

about the uselessness of art." Effects of those anxieties surface in *Travesties*, the conclusion of Act One offering an effective case in point. There, a rambling monologue by the aged, forgetful Henry Carr is voiced about his spat with James Joyce. Carr, the epitome of a strait-laced, "follow orders" Britisher of the 1920's, closes the act with reminiscences of his grudge with Joyce "Art with Responsibility," Joyce's personal motto, galls the chauvinistic Carr: "I dreamed about him, dreamed I had him in the witness box, a masterly cross-examination, case practically won, admitted it all, the whole thing, the trousers, everything, and I *flung* at him 'And what did you do in the Great War? "I wrote *Ulysses*,' he said. 'What did you do?' Bloody nerve." Here is the unresolved question concerning what an artist's dues should be to society This longstanding tension in Stoppard is shifting in balance with a concomitant change in his dramaturgy.

Though the road is not perfectly straight, Tom Stoppard's career as a master game player proceeds according to a more discernible design. The unsympathetic attitude of totalitarian authority toward the oppressed implied in *Rosencrantz and Gildenstern* splices together with the conundrums concerning rational thought found in *Jumpers*, the follies of authority in *Dirtu Linen*, the duty of Art in *Travesties*, the brutality of tyranny in Professional Foul and E.G.B.D.F., and the dangers of a too-powerful press in *Night and Day*. Still, with a fertile intellect and innovative imagination like Stoppard's there can be no guaranteed path mapped for the future. More plausible for us to expect is continued use of the "Spin Off" design as we have seen it used in *Travesties*. For Stoppard seems to have employed some versions of that method consistently in his works, regardless of the didactic quotient of their contents.

Source: C J Gianakans, "Tom Stoppard as Master Game Player *Travesties* and After," *in Perspectives on Contemporary Literature*, Vol 6,1980, pp 11-18.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Billman asserts that Travesties "extends the discussion of art and the artist's social responsibilities to include history "

In his profile of Tom Stoppard for the *New Yorker*, Kenneth Tynan, pursuing a biblical distraction, divides contemporary British dramatists into two camps:

On one side were the hairy men heated, embattled, socially committed playwrights, like John Osborne, John Arden, and Arnold Wesker, who had come out fighting in the late fifties On the other side were the smooth men cool, apolitical stylists, like Harold Pinter, the late Joe Orton, Christopher Hampton , Alan Ayckbourn . ., Simon Gray , and Stoppard

Stoppard himself said in 1974, "I think that in future I must stop compromising my plays with this whiff of social application (found in *Jumpers*). They must be entirely untouched by any suspicion of usefulness. I should have the courage of my lack of convictions." This is not to say that Stoppard's stylistically dazzling plays are devoid of substance or lack themes. Indeed, one of his favorite issues in *Travesties* as well as a number of his preceding works is the definition of art and of an artist's social obligations. But *Travesties* is also a history play, a fact that may seem surprising given the playwright's avowedly asocial, therefore ahistoncal, perspective. As historical drama the play is not unlike such other contemporary works as Weiss's *Marat/Sade*, Camus' *Caligula*, or Kopit's *Indians* each represents history as a random and mysterious course of events rather than as a logical, easily understood narrative Noris *Travesties* out of line with Stoppard's earlier plays, for it extends the discussion of art and the artist's social responsibilities to include history, first defining the subject and ultimately determining the historian's function.

The absence of absolutes has been another longstanding concern for Stoppard. In the plays before *Travesties* the relativity of everything from word meaning to political stances and philosophical arguments is illustrated dramatically. The way one looks at things is always a question of point of view, an idea expressed first by Stoppard in the 1967 radio play *Albert's Bridge*, in which the character Eraser suddenly finds life tolerable when he joins the painter Albert atop the Clufton Bridge

So I climb up again and prepare to cast myself off, without faith in angels to catch me or desire that they should and lo 'Hook down at it all and find that the proportions have been re-established My confidence is restored, by perspective

Stoppard relates this theme to the subject of art and its legitimacy For him the products of his profession, literary works, are not inviolable, as he shows when he rewrites *Hamlet* from the perspective of two minor characters in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and when he parodies the convolutions of British detective stories in *The Real Inspector Hound*. In *Travesties*, too, Stoppard works in the tradition of literary imitation. Beyond echoing great modern dramatists from lonesco and Beckett to Brecht,

the obvious source for imitation is Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest Travesties* contains a play within a play in that four of Stoppard's characters act out (without knowing it) the roles of the confused quartet in Wilde's comedy Henry Carr is Algernon; Tristan Tzara, Jack Worthing; Cecily and Gwendolen, their namesakes.

The dialogue in the play includes, moreover, travestied limericks and Shakespearean sonnets. And Stoppard parodies less poetic but nonetheless well-known wordgroups: Carr repeatedly turns cliches on end e.g., "my art belongs to dada" and "post hock, propter hock." As this last snippet of rewntten Latin illustrates, the playwright does not stop with parodies of English. By choosing more than one way of saying something "Pardon! . .. Entschuldigung' . . Scusi! . . Excuse me!" Stoppard makes lonesco's point about the arbitrary relationship of word form and meaning. What is more, Stoppard dramatizes the fact that word meaning is relative; even when speaker and listener use the same language, the meanings they assign a word vary, a point demonstrated by Carr and Tzara's argument over the meaning of the word *artist*. Responding to Tzara's loose construction of the term, Carr counters:

If there is any point in using language at all it is that a word is taken to stand for a particular fact or idea and not for other facts or ideas Don't you see my dear Tristan you are simply asking me to accept that the word Art means whatever you wish it to mean, but I do not accept it.

Carr's diehard absolutism notwithstanding, he cannot convince others to abide by his (belief in) precise denotation; they have their own points of view.

It should come as no surprise that works of literature and their medium, language, are presented as malleable in a play that has Dadaism as one of its central concerns, since the absence of absolute or rational explanation is what Dada is all about: "*Dadal* down with reason, logic, causality, coherence, tradition, proportion, sense and consequence." What is more extraordinary is the application of the tenets of this artistic and literary movement to historical events. Tzara acts out the Dadaist credo when he creates a poem by arbitrarily pulling lines out of a hat. Significantly, he extends the theory of random choice "To a Dadaist history comes out of a hat too."

A sign of Stoppard's own attention in *Travesties* to larger historical patterns is the long monologue delivered by Cecily at the beginning of Act H. "Cecily's Lecture," as it is termed in the text, is a Brechtian newsreel of the historical events providing the backdrop against which the action of the play takes place. This indication of conventional historical narrative aside, events are reviewed in a piecemeal fashion that disorients audiences used to thinking of history along such orderly lines as chronology or progression. The play provides no linear design allowing for easy assimilation of historical fact. It moves forward by fits and starts and often circles back to one event time and again e.g., the repeated allusions to Carr and Joyce's dispute over the cost of the trousers the former wore in Joyce's Zurich production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Travesties does provide, however, if not a readily understandable presentation of historical fact, a lesson about the recapitulation of history. Stoppard's point, of course, is that the unorthodox, convoluted structure of his play is more mimetic than the tidily

sequential and causally related chain of events in which historical records are frequently served up.

But the playwright's point of departure a questionable occurrence, the meeting of Joyce, Lenin, and Tzara while they were in Zurich concurrently makes it clear that he, too, is *shaping* an historical account. Again, it is a subjective question of point of view. Speaking of his own dramatic piecing together of Shakespeare's personal history, Stoppard's contemporary, British playwright Edward Bond, writes:

Of course, I can't insist that my description of Shakespeare's death is true I'm like a man who looks down from a bridge at the place where an accident has happened. The road is wet, there's a skid mark, the car's wrecked, and a dead man lies by the road in a pool of blood I can only put the various things together and say what probably happened Likewise, Stoppard's history play dramatizes a view from the bridge, as his earlier *Alberts Bridge* did literally. Somebody stands back and plays the role of investigator or detective, whose job it is to reconstruct the events History, then, does have a pattern, not one rising naturally from events under scrutiny but one imposed inevitably by the person recounting what happened.

A minor character in most accounts, including Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which he is found in a footnote, Henry Carr becomes in *Travesties* the reconstructer through whom the stories of three great men are channeled Drama does not require an onstage narrator of events, but Stoppard has provided one and in so doing has found a visual means of underscoring the creativity of the history-teller. Beyond being a conspicuous raconteur, Carr is a conspicuously eccentric source of information His recollections of the way things were in Zurich include not only remembrances of public events and great men but also those of a distinctly personal nature, and he makes no attempt to integrate the two. For example,

You forget that I was there, in the mud and blood of a foreign field, unmatched by anything in the whole history of human carnage Ruined several pairs of trousers. Nobody who has not been m the trenches can have the faintest conception of the horror of it. I had hardly set foot in France before I sank m up to the knees in a pair of twill jodhpurs with pigskin straps handstitched by Rarmdge and Hawkes. And so it went on the sixteen ounce serge, the heavy worsteds, the silk flannel mixture until I was invalided out with a bullet through the calf of an irreplaceable lambs-wool dyed khaki m the yarn to my own specification I tell you, there is nothing in Switzerland to compare with it

The reader of *Travesties* is told directly that Carr's account is idiosyncratic: Stoppard explains in a stage direction at the outset of the play that "the story (like a toy train perhaps) occasionally jumps the rails and has to be restarted at the point where it goes wild." He then gives these derailments a name, "time slips," and makes suggestions for their staging. The viewer of the play also knows that Carr's perception of the past is not always lucid or concise. By the character's own admission in the dialogue: "... I digress. No apologies required, constant digression being the saving grace of senile reminiscence."

Moreover, Stoppard structures his work so that it is obviously a memory play, even though he resorts to no such apparent device as the tape recorder used by Beckett in *Krapp's Last Tape* Aside from the parody of Wilde's play, *Travesties* contains in a second sense a play within a play, the inner performance equaling the psychodrama of Carr's retrospection. Carr, in fact, splits into two onstage characters, Old and Young Carr. At the conclusion Stoppard moves forward to the present time of the play as Old Carr and Old Cecily argue about how things went.

Old Cecily And I never helped him wnte *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* That was the year before, too. 1916

Carr Oh, Cecily, I wish I'd known then that you'd turn out to be a pedant1 (*getting angry*} Wasn't this Didn't do that 1916 1917 *Whatofit*?! was here They were here They went on I went on We all went on.

This exchange nicely points up how stories are influenced not just by personal interests but by less conscious factors as well, such as forgetfulness and the inability to sort out what is important.

Carr's manner of speaking further emphasizes the fact that a person is in control of the history he tells. First, the pace of Carr's story is noticeably uneven. Sometimes he so deletes or compresses information that the audience is left behind; sometimes he is ckcumlocutory to the point that the narrative virtually comes to a halt. His language, too, draws attention to itself as in this passage

'Twas m the bustling metropolis of swiftly gliding trams and greystone banking houses, of cosmopolitan restaurants on the great stone banks of the swiftly-gliding snot-green (mucus mutandis) Lirnmat River, of jewelled escapements and refugees of all kinds, e g Lenin, there's a point Lenin As I Knew Him... To be in his presence was to be aware of a complex personality, enigmatic, magnetic, but not, I think, astigmatic, his piercing brown (if memory serves) eyes giving no hint of it

Here he relies on the stock formulas of the oral storyteller (" 'Twas in the...") as well as his own uniquely additive syntactic patterns and ability to turn a phrase ("mucus mutandis").

Despite his own acknowledgment that he digresses, Carr believes that his "memory serves." As his debate over semantics with Tzara illustrates, Carr believes, most fundamentally, in objectivity and absolutes. And he believes in order, throughout his reminiscences, for example, he resorts to labels as a device to give structure to his discourse: "Memories of James Joyce," "The Ups and Downs of Consular life in Zurich During the Great War: A Sketch," "Lenin As I Knew Him." Of course, all that he does and says belies his principles he is a living reminder of the erratic subjectivity of the history-teller and the relativity of his product.

Accordingly, audiences cannot take all that Carr recounts and preaches seriously. But Stoppard means for the man himself to be taken seriously, and he is. Carr's idiosyncrasies and ways of putting things are arresting, and even his sartorial obsession

is, after all, a humanizing vanity Finally, he not Tzara, Lenin, or Joyce is the focal character of the play. His arguments negating Tzara's nihilism are more persuasive than the pontifi cations of the Dadaist, and he can effectively counter the Marxist rhetoric and Joycean banter when in the situation to do so. In short, Stoppard leads audiences to support Carr and his story; Old Cecily's nitpicking attention to correcting details at the end of the play is silly Since history comes "out of a hat," Carr might as well be doing the pulling. His account is as good as any ... and better than many, for as we have seen, it implicitly but strongly points up the fact that creation is involved in marshaling historical facts into narrative.

Old Carr sums up his documented legal battle with Joyce over Carr's theatrical costume and concludes:

I dreamed about him, dreamed I had him in the witness box, a masterly cross-examination, case practically won, admitted it all, the whole thing, the trousers, everything, and I *flung* at him "And what did you do in the Great War?" "I wrote *Ulysses*," he said "What did you do"?"

In this passage Joyce, sounding like Stoppard demanding the courage of his lack of convictions, cooly asserts *art pour I'art*, a position Carr would condone despite personal squabbles with the writer. But elsewhere, in a speech whose importance Stoppard now dwells on, Joyce defends the artist against Tzara's attacks on the grounds that he is the recorder and shaper of history:

An artist is the magician put among men to gratify capriciously their urge for immortality. The temples are built and brought down around him, continuously and contiguously, from Troy to the fields of Flanders If there is any meaning m any of it, it is what survives as art, yes even in the celebration of tyrants, yes even in the celebration of nonentities What now of the Trojan War if it had been passed over by the artist's touch1? Dust A forgotten expedition prompted by Greek merchants looking for new markets. A minor redistribution of broken pots.

Even though Carr would not be quick to second this opinion, Joyce's comment in effect sums up what the bit player dramatizes in *Travesties*, for Carr performs the function Joyce assigns to the artist Through his characterization of Carr, Stoppard yokes the roles of artist and historian: he goes beyond the travesty of existing histories, affirming through Carr the importance of history and of the individual "making" it.

In much of his subsequent work Stoppard shows that he learned the lesson his history play teaches. The plays that immediately follow *Travesties Dirty Linen sad New-Found-Land* are social comedies in that they both depict the practices of bumbling British politicians, in the House of Commons and a local Home Office respectively. But Ms more recent works the television drama *Foul Play, Every Good Boy Deserves Favor, sad Night and Day* are plays that truly represent social engagements on Stoppard's part: these plays face squarely such issues as governmental restriction of individual freedom. In characteristic fashion Carr lists at the conclusion of *Travesties* the things he learned in Zurich:

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

I forget the third thing

What he has forgotten but Stoppard has learned is that the two categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and thus the playwright has gone on to show he has the courage to state his social convictions on stage.

Source: CarolBilhnan, "The ArtofHistoryinTomStoppard's *Travesties," in Kansas Quarterly*, Vol 12, No 4, Fall 1980, pp 47-52.

Topics for Further Study

Read two or three poems by Tristan Tzara. What elements in the poems do you think reflect dada-ism as espoused by the character of Tzara in Stoppard's play? What other poets can you find that follow dadaism in their works and who are they9

Investigate the status writers had in communist Russia. Were Lenin's opinions that were cited in the play on the relationship between art and politics upheld after the revolution? Were they altered7

Read Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* What specific thematic and structural parallels do you find between the two plays? What point do you think Stoppard is making by borrowing so much of Wilde's play?

Cut up one of Shakespeare's sonnets and then randomly arrange the words as Tzara does in the play. Do you think the result constitutes a work of art? Give reasons

Compare and Contrast

1917: On November 6, the Bolshevik revolution begins in Petrograd, Russia. Government offices are seized, and the revolutionaries take over the Romanovs' Winter Palace.

1991: On December 17, president Mikhail Gorbachev orders the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and a new Commonwealth of Independent States is formed by the countries that formerly made up the U.S.S.R.

1914: World War I begins and lasts until 1918, the largest war to date Approximately ten million are killed and twenty million are wounded.

1973: The United States signs a peace agreement with North and South Vietnam ending the Vietnam War. The United States faces worldwide protest over its involvement in the war

2001: The conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians heightens in the Middle East.

1922: James Joyce has a difficult time finding a publisher for his novel *Ulysses* due to its sexuality explicit passages and what many consider to be its vulgarity. The novel is eventually published by a small Parisian press.

1973: Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* provides an explicit exploration of a woman's sexual experiences, which shocks the reading public Nevertheless, the book becomes a bestseller.

Today: Sexually explicit novels are published on a regular basis.

What Do I Read Next?

Henry Carr and James Joyce met during a production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). Stoppard borrows the comic situations and tone of the play as well as some of the characters for *Travesties*.

Lenin's wife Nadya reads from her biography *Memories of Lenin* (1930) in *Travesties*. The biography focuses on Lenin's experiences during the Russian Revolution.

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstem are Dead* (1966), Stoppard constructs a play around the absurd situations in which the two characters borrowed from. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* find themselves

Ulysses (1922), the novel James Joyce is writing in the play, was banned in the United States until 1933. Although its obscurity has produced controversy among literary scholars, it is considered to be one of the finest works of the twentieth century.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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