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DIPLOMA THESIS

The marriage of farce and the play of ideas in Tom Stoppard´s *Jumpers* and *Travesties*

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this diploma thesis, titled "The marriage of farce and the play of ideas in Tom Stoppard's Jumpers and Travesties" is the result of my own work and that I used only the cited sources.

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Abstract

The diploma thesis focuses on Stoppard´s combination of high and low genres, which Stoppard describes as the perfect marriage of the play of ideas and farce. On the grounds of several of Stoppard´s plays, a general consideration of his dramatic work and definitions of the genres farce and the play of ideas, this detailed analysis of two of Stoppard´s major plays *Jumpers* and *Travesties* shows a combination of the characteristic elements of these genres. The aim is to identify elements of farce and the play of ideas separately, evaluate their balance individually in Jumpers and Travesties and at the same time find similarities and differences between the original genres and Stoppard´s interpretation, thus the combination of them. In the conclusion the author discusses the pros and cons of such a combination of genres and the possible motivation that led Stoppard to put together seriousness and frivolity.

Abstrakt

Práce je zaměřena na Stoppardovo spojení vysokého a nízkého dramatického žánru, které Stoppard nazývá dokonalým sňatkem mezi hrou idejí a fraškou. Na pozadí několika Stoppardových her, obecnějšího rozboru jeho dramatického díla jako celku a definice původních žánrů hra idejí a fraška, tato práce detailně analyzuje Stoppardovy hry *Skokani* a *Travestie*, do kterých se kombinace těchto žánrů výrazně promítá. Smyslem práce je oddělit vážné a humorné prvky ve *Skokanech* a *Travestiích* , zhodnotit jejich vyváženost v těchto hrách jednotlivě a zároveň najít podobnost a rozdíly mezi původní hrou idejí, fraškou a Stoppardovou interpretací kombinace těchto dvou žánrů. V závěru se práce věnuje podnětům, které Stopparda vedly k propojení vysokého a nízkého žánru, tedy vážnosti a frivolity, jež na první pohled působí neslučitelně.

Content:

The marriage of farce and the play of ideas in Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers* and *Travesties*

Introduction

Tom Stoppard is a proof of equivocation. In his work, seriousness and wit stand aside each other as identical twins, not able to survive one without another. His plays show that comedy or farce does not exclude tragedy and vice versa. On the one hand, Stoppard does not write pure comedies, on the other hand he does not write tragedies; far from it. What he tries to create in his work is what he calls *"a perfect marriage between a play of ideas and farce"*. In almost all of his major plays he manages to join seriousness and humour. While his characters deal with and discuss essential human values, Stoppard puts into their mouths incredibly witty and humorous language, creating highly entertaining shows that ensure that audiences do not lose concentration and interest.

I perceive Stoppard's intention to marry serious and frivolous dramatic categories into one complex work as one part of his, in my opinion, most significant feature and that is a duality, or more specifically diversity of opinion. In his plays, not a single character, not a single subject or situation is treated from only one angle. If he presents an idea, it is disputed in a proceeding dialogue and that is in turn refuted in the following one. Stoppard's plays, due to their ambiguity, invite various interpretations, yet not an entire relativity of attitudes and life as such. It is the complexity of Stoppard's work that reveals his attitudes. One must look at an apple from all sides, before eating it, for it might be rotten or wormy from the reverse side and even if we examine the surface thoroughly, there can always be some surprise waiting for us inside.

Even the most serious issues might have the potential to be presented in a humorous way and still not lose their seriousness; can carry a message or an idea- that is the one of the most admirable aspects of Stoppard's plays. In my thesis I would like to try to analyse the way in which Stoppard combines the above mentioned categories, thus farce, and the play of ideas, or in other words the seriousness and frivolity. I would like to search for similarities and differences we can find in Stoppard's work with the original play of ideas and farce and whether we can speak about the play of ideas in connection with Stoppard's plays at all. *Jumpers* and *Travesties* are similar attempts to combine serious ideas and humour, yet obviously they are not the same. Their impact lies neither in the ideas, nor the humour alone. It is the combination and balance of both in Stoppard's work that led to their being many

successors to his work in contemporary drama. Stoppard was one of those authors who made serious ideas more accessible to a wider audience.

Some of Stoppard's later work does not show such a combination of seriousness and frivolity as can be seen in his earlier plays. On that account, I have chosen for my analysis his plays *Jumpers* (first staged in London in 1972) and *Travesties* (first staged in London in 1974),as according to John Fleming, they are considered to be Stoppard's best attempts to marry the category of farce and the play of ideas.

Chapter 1

Stoppard as a complex dramatist and "dualist" - showing both or more sides to an argument

In this chapter I try to analyse Stoppard's dramatic work more in general, demonstrating some of the most significant features of his artistic craft. As complexity plays a very important role in his work, I find such an analysis essential. As many of his plays are interlaced, either thematically or formally, they can also contribute to my thesis on the combination of categories, for this aspect is not only present in Stoppard's *Jumpers* or *Travesties*. The duality, or multiplicity of points of views, including a serious and humorous approach to certain ideas or situations, simply permeates all of Stoppard's work. Many of his major plays seem to follow a similar combination of dramatic forms, working with serious, sometimes even philosophical ideas, yet treating them humorously. Not all of them though show such a balance of these aspects.

1.1 Introduction to Tom Stoppard – dramatist: features of his work in general, his influences

Stoppard is unique in the world of theatre because of the language he uses, which is sophisticated, full of puns and unexpected expressions, the way he juggles with the structure of his plays, playing with the themes and forms of other plays, and his ability to mingle historical time frames or heterogeneous environments. His themes, such as moral responsibility, the duality of the person, the sense of existence or the inaccessibility of history, that he unfolds in his plays, are displayed, combined and paraphrased by using metaphors of other themes, for instance philosophy, mathematics, physics or philology, and all are

performed in a highly entertaining way and through dialogues which are duels, exposing whole philosophical systems. It seems he can't be pigeon-holed. And this is not a disadvantage, it is quite the opposite. There is a bit of everything in Stoppard and the only "pigeon-holing" attribute I would dare to connect with his name is eclectic. Eclectic in the sense that he finds innovative forms and mingles them, combines things which at first sight seem incompatible, for instance science and humour, the way he treats time in his works or places various historical figures into one time frame and enables them to carry out arguments presenting ideas that would have never been possible in a conventional time scheme - that makes them unique, offering a different viewpoint.

"It's a kind of game. You write about a parallel world. You write truthfully about a parallel possibility. That's the game: This is how it might be if it would be. " (Buck in Delaney, p 170)

Stoppard's style is almost exactly described by Jim Hunter: "*Stoppard's plays make me think of a bunch of street-dancers or skaters, raiding some great historic buildings – a cathedral, say, a palace, and a place of government. They perform clattering jumps up and down the wide stairways, and swerve brilliantly round massive pillars; their noise and cries echo in vast spaces. Watching and enjoying this disrespectful yet skilful display, we still don't lose sight of the huge buildings themselves, or of what they stand for. Stoppard' s plays present a unique interplay between fun and the most basic and serious challenges to human understanding. He writes jokes and comic routines; but at the same time he is also writing about moral responsibility, about goodness, and about our scientific, mathematical or philosophical understanding or reality."* (Hunter, p 6)

Theatre is a medium where different, other worlds are created, where the impossible becomes real for a while and Stoppard truly contributes to this role of theatre. In his plays he engenders characters that originate from the ideas, questions and arguments he asks and answers himself inside his head, as everyone does, more or less; yet he is able to transform these inner dialogues into something creative. Stoppard himself admits he is not interested in characters primarily, they are the product of ideas, and he creates them to utter thoughts, not the other way round.

"My plays, generally speaking, derive from a desire to discuss and dispute a certain subject. My plays are not about the interaction of character. "And *„ I want to write a play about journalism or art or morality – but who the devil are the people?"*(Berkvist in Delaney, p 139)

His work, often described as sophisticated, sometimes produces an impression of being complicated, therefore incomprehensible. It is true that Stoppard's style is unusual and when

we hear him describing how his plays are created, we may as well imagine a huge building construction. Yet, the result he achieves is an admirable, complex product, very often full of jokes and highly entertaining, no matter what theme he is writing about. In addition to all this, behind the philosophy, science, humour and brilliant dialogues, I can still feel that he does not forget to deal with human emotions in his plays, though he often gets criticised for the very fact that in this area he is cold and detached. I strongly disagree with this view; in my opinion, emotions, love and humanity are almost ever present, although not explicitly, and contribute to the complexity of his work. An appropriate quotation is Michael Billington's : *"His plays from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to Hapgood, have been analysed as if they were intellectual conceits: I suspect they work only because of their emotional ground-base. That first play is anchored in what John Wood once called the 'bravery' of those two attendant lords whistling in the Elsinore dark. In Jumpers you felt the pain of a marriage audibly splintering. In The Real Thing you were aware of the torturing self-abasement that stems from the knowledge of infidelity. "* (Billington in Delaney, p 195) Stoppard's characters are not heroes, perfect individuals without souls. Often they are embodiment of antiheroes. Whether we think of his plays *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Jumpers, Travesties, Every Good Boy Deserves Favour or The Invention of Love*, the main characters of all these plays are not just ordinary people, they are outsiders walking against the crowd, they stand on the other side, often alone, confused and misunderstood. On the other hand, they are not tragic characters. Stoppard shows both their strong and weak points, sometimes he highlights their character features, and sometimes he puts them down.

For those who perceive Stoppard's plays as intellectual constructs demanding special education or knowledge, because he plays metaphorically with themes such as moral philosophy, thermodynamics, quantum mechanics or chaos theory, I recommend viewing them as entertainment. As Stoppard himself admits, theatre's primary purpose and function is to entertain, and in considering himself a playwright of comedy, he only proves that. If Stoppard demands something from his audiences, it is concentration and participation. In Stoppard, as you watch, you learn and laugh– is it not pleasant, to be entertained and a little "educated" at the same time? The "education" I have in mind is the ability to look at things from different angles and to realise that they often are something else than they seem to be at the first sight. One thing we should not forget, and it was repeated by critics as well (e.g. Jenkins or Hunter), that is the simple fact that Stoppard is a dramatist, in the first place. However philosophical or scientific metaphors or even his themes can be, he does not write

essays, scientific studies or not even philosophical lectures. What he presents in his work are questions about basic human values, one thinks about more or less every day.

Stoppard started his literary career in the late 1950´s. According to various sources, he seems to have found the impulse for writing plays in the Theatre of Absurd. Apart from Samuel Beckett, Stoppard admits he has been influenced, among others, by Harold Pinter. Fleming explains that: *"Pinter's plays are known for their economy of language and domestic power games whose implicit threats of violence percolate under the subtext and the famous "Pinter pauses".* (Fleming, 251) Even though Pinter's style is very different from Stoppard's, Pinter's work meant something like the break point in the world of theatre. *"Stoppard himself, while noting that Samuel Beckett "redefined the minima of theatre", points to part of Pinter's lasting influence and impact:*

> I think Pinter did something equally important and significant. He changed the ground rules. One thing plays had in common: you were supposed to believe what people said up there.... With a Pinter play, you can no longer make that assumption.... There are many different possible interpretations for a scene. All of them had been discounted until Pinter exploited the off centre possibilities. (Gussow, *Conversations*, 6-7) (Fleming, 251)

Having mentioned Samuel Beckett, Stoppard's work and Beckett plays, apart from certain similarities between Beckett´s *Waiting for Godot* and Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, do not have much in common. *"Stoppard himself has argued that Beckett´s influence comes more from his novels and from Beckett 's technique of having a character make a firm statement only to refute and unravel his own argument."* (Fleming, 253)

We could definitely find other names of big writers and dramatists that influenced Stoppard's work. I mentioned namely Beckett and Pinter because it seems their influence shows in *Jumpers* and *Travesties* the most. From Becket there is the multiplicity of voices, refuting and rebutting of them, and from Pinter there is the unrealistic approach of the worlds Stoppard created in *Jumpers* and *Travesties*.

The discussion later in my work will clearly demonstrate that Stoppard managed to overcome his influences. He found his own style and his plays are unique. Stoppard's attempt to marry serious and frivolous dramatic category only proves such assertion. However, certain aspects of his work do reveal his influences playing an important role in his work.

1.2 Stoppard modernist or postmodernist – aspects speaking for features of modernism and aspects speaking for postmodern features in his work

Mixing genres is a postmodern feature. Stoppard blends not only high and low genres – play of ideas and farce. He also combines drama with music, drama with lecture, drama and quotation form authentic historical texts, thus documentary genre. Many significant features of Stoppard's work demonstrate good examples of postmodern elements. However, there are many good examples of modernist elements as well. Critics often label Stoppard as his work being modernist. Others ascribe him as showing significant elements of postmodernism. The terms modernism and postmodernism mean different things to different people. That is why I believe that a short analysis of modernism and postmodernism helps to understand Stoppard's plays (namely *Jumpers* and *Travesties*) better. A brief description of both styles is followed by concrete instances of those that can be identified in Stoppard's plays.

My source comes out of Fleming, as he based his explanation on Todd Gitlin's "*Postmodernism: Roots and politics*": "*The modernist work aspires to unity, a unity that is constructed, assembled from fragments, or shocks, or juxtapositions or difference. It shifts abruptly among a multiplicity of voices, perspectives, materials. Continuity is disrupted, and with enthusiasm... The orders of conventional reality – inside versus outside, subject versus object, self versus other – are called into question... The work composes beauty out of discord*"(p 349). The definition of postmodernism, however difficult it seems to be to define the term, Gitlin puts in the following words: "*In postmodernism the search for unity has apparently been abandoned altogether. Instead we have textuality, a cultivation of surfaces endlessly referring to, ricocheting from, and reverberating onto other surface. The work calls attention to its arbitrariness, constructedness; it interrupts itself. Instead of a single centre, there is pastiche, cultural recombination .... Not only has the master voice dissolved... The implied subject is fragmented, unstable, even decomposed; it is finally nothing more than a crosshatch of discourses*"(p 350).

According to John Fleming Stoppard *"is more accurately seen as continuing and extending high modernism's experimentation with aesthetic expression."* (p 2) John Fleming's attempt to decode whether Stoppard should be labelled postmodernist or rather modernist seems to me the most logical of those I have come across. He agrees that both styles show their features in Stoppard's work, yet we have to take into consideration Stoppard's own comment. As he frequently puts emphasis on the fact that he is very much preoccupied with form and style,

with exquisite language, more than with a play's content, that shifts him more towards the modernism. While he has treated a diversity of subjects, aesthetics, the formal properties of play construction and style are a constant in his work. There is nothing arbitrary in Stoppard's plays, they are highly ordered, logical and despite many critical voices denying it, they do show a point of view. From Stoppard's multiple voices, from that kind of discord, arises the beauty of his work. On the other hand, his uncertainty about ideas and the world comes out of willingness to accept and value different, alternative or opposing prospective, which is more a postmodernist view. Gitlin asserts that: *"modernists exhibit anxiety and a sense of loss whereas postmodernists are characterized by a willingness to live with uncertainty, to tolerate and, in some cases, to welcome a world seen as random and multiple, even, at times, absurd" (p 44).* That basically means that Stoppard displays many voices and various viewpoints, but is able to take them as a part of contemporary life, simply realises they exist, works with them, discusses them, agrees and disagrees with them, but accepts them all as valid arguments.

Fleming also points out that the modernist approach shows itself once again in Stoppard's downplaying the social role of art. His plays very rarely address a social-historical moment directly. Stoppard focuses and is much more preoccupied with aesthetic effect and formal innovation, which I have already touched on earlier in this subchapter. Fleming writes: *"For Stoppard, a writer's only obligation is to write well and plays are good or important if the writing is of a very high order and not because of its social content."* (Fleming, p 2) Yet Stoppard points out that the style and form is always in service of some more substantial idea.

On the modernist/ postmodernist issue Fleming summarizes: "*Many of Stoppard's plays do show an acceptance of uncertainty and instability as being central components of human life; however, his plays also embrace order, logic, and those things that provide stability in an uncertain world. The both/and quality of Stoppard's work allows him to cut across categories and to attract admirers from different critical, theoretical, and ideological backgrounds."* (Fleming p 256)

Travesties is a perfect example of the fact that both a modernist and postmodernist approach appear aside in Stoppard's plays. If we analyse its structure – one play incorporated into another, multiple time levels, song, correspondence read on stage, all these aspects display postmodernist features. Various sources call *Travesties* a pastiche – of dramatic styles and language styles, which again points to postmodernism. However, the multiplicity of voices in *Travesties* is often seen as a modernist aspect, for Stoppard criticises Dadaists for the lack of

structure of their work. Moreover, the overall aesthetics is, according to Fleming modernist, as mentioned later in my thesis in the detailed debate on *Travesties*.

The play *Jumpers* is formally more conservative, yet even there Stoppard operates with more than one plot line, which is a postmodern feature. What can be perceived as a modernist approach is the loss of traditional values discussed in the play. It is the character of Dotty that expresses anxiety from such loss, which even causes her a nervous breakdown.

1.2.1 Two or more voices speaking for Stoppard, a rather postmodern feature

Stoppard characteristically writes for two or more voices. He lends his characters his own ideas and arguments, tries to find reasons for both/more sides and that sometimes forces him, I believe, to create a character that is to an extent unrealistic. Let me mention Max, one of the main characters of Stoppard's latest play Rock ´n´ roll, a diehard communist professor at Cambridge with no experience of socialist reality whatsoever, who saw the Russian invasion of the Czech Republic as positive. That is for Stoppard quite an extraordinary position to take, considering he's always been against regimes violating human rights. Nevertheless, he managed to create a character that utters ideas that might belong to such a person, though he probably never existed in reality. Stoppard is able to look at problems from different angles and then confront those viewpoints through his characters. One could object that such ability is essential for every writer or dramatist, yet Stoppard puts valid, reasonable and logical arguments into the mouths of all his characters. They seem to be more like one character turning into many, uttering the pros and cons with almost even arguments on each side. Such an example may be the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They seem as one person if we put them together, as individuals their characters are not quite complete. Stoppard said about them that they are: *"carrying out a dialogue which I carry out with myself. One of them is fairly intellectual, fairly incisive; the other one is thicker, nicer in a curious way, more sympathetic"* (In Conversation: Giles Gordon) Stoppard does not create characters that one can sympathise with at first sight; it is not always clear who is the good character or the villain - even his villains express cogent arguments. Just as sometimes we have good and other time mean intentions. It happens to everyone.

However, every Stoppard play, as a complex, does reveal a single idea line, to a bigger or lesser extent. The fact that he gives more opinions the same space in his plays does not necessarily mean one opinion does not prevail. Thus let us listen to all of Stoppard's voices and not separate them, let them appeal to us as complex. The fact they coexist in Stoppard's

plays together as they do, is not arbitrary, they were chosen to interact and produce a final product. Stoppard always expresses *"A and minus A"* (Hunter, p. 17) side by side. Stoppard comments: *"There is very often no single, clear statement in my plays. What there is, is a series of conflicting statements made by conflicting characters, and they tend to play out a sort of infinite leapfrog"*. (Theatre Quarterly) To support what I have mentioned above in this very paragraph, let me quote Jim Hunter: *"This not knowing (saying A as well as minus A) clearly laid itself open to charges of fence-sitting; but seems rather to have represented a scrupulous integrity. It is important to tell the truth; essential not to pretend to certainties you don't actually have."* (Hunter, p 17)

Stoppard's expressing multiple opinions on issues seems to be more of a postmodern approach, as uncertainty does not often lead to anxiety from such diversity in his work /as mentioned above, Dotty 's character in Jumpers suffers from loss of traditional values, yet the play as a complex does not lead to such feelings/. Stoppard, as an intellectual, perceives a multiplicity of voices as part and parcel of contemporary world, moreover, he is the proof himself that even an individual can speak for and against his or her own arguments.

1.2.2 Emphasis on style and form, one more aspect of modernist approach

Stoppard is very much preoccupied with style and form. He is fascinated by ideas, yet he puts great emphasis on stylistic shape and formal realization. *"What he does with an idea is often a bigger thing – or at least a more spectacularly theatrical thing – than the idea itself"*(Schiff in Delaney, p 216), which is a great proof of Stoppard's admiration of theatricality.
As an example, let us look at the structure of *Artist Descending a Staircase* (one of Stoppard's radio plays, thus not a major play, that later became thematic base for his *Travesties*) – the play is set temporally in six parts, the play begins in the here-and-now. The next five scenes are each a flashback from the previous scene; the last five scenes are continuations of the fifth, fourth, third, second and first, respectively. It sounds more complicated than it plays. "*What it allows me to do is reveal certain plot points in ways and in a time frame that forces the sense of reverberation*", Stoppard says. *„I also know that despite a career's worth of criticism to the contrary, I do try to deal with emotions. The sequential hijacks allow me to get at these better. Because I am not just trying to make them fit a scheme."* (Maychic in Delaney, p 232-233). Stoppard's comment once again proves that the emphasis on style and

form has some ideological, or emotional ground, thus is not just a complicated formal construct.

His style distinguishes itself by its very elegant language, its use of various figures of speech, e.g. metaphors, often unexpected, artful or unusual, juxtapositions and, as I mentioned above, paradoxes and tautologies. Stoppard is fascinated by the English language and takes real pride in using it in a truly artistic way and playing with it:

> In England the rich own the poor and the men own their women. Five percent of the people own eighty percent of the property. 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 quasi-marxist populism - liberal quasi-communist opportunism, economist quasi-internationalist imperialism, social Chauvinist quasi-Zimmervaldist Menshevism, self-determinist quasi-socialist annexationism, Kautskyism, Bundism, Kantism –
>
> (the 1974 versions of *Travesties*, p 66/52)

Stoppard is very much aware of its power and the possibility to misuse it, twist it and distort it for the speaker's benefit. One of Stoppard´s theories, explaining why his love for English is so strong, is that he came to the language quite late, yet he himself denies such an hypothesis: *"I used to compare myself to Nabokov and say it was like suddenly finding oneself on top of a mountain and looking down, instead of laboriously climbing up as most people do when they learn a language from childhood. But then I discovered that Nabokov had spoken English from childhood and anyway I myself had never been literate in any other language. English was the working language at my schools in India. I think I'd probably have been interested in language just the same, if I'd been a Czechoslovak writer instead of a British one."* Stoppard is also perfectly aware of the fact that language, however rich its expressions and systematic functioning, is often not able to express the innermost ideas and feelings or basic "truths". We use words to utter what we think or feel, yet sometimes our feelings do not perfectly fit the words and we are not able to find any other words that would fit any better. This is not because our language skills are limited. The perfectly right words simply do not exist. In *Jumpers*, Stoppard elucidates the difficulty of using language to articulate basic "truths" about life. George, in Jumpers, laments: *"Though my convictions are intact and my ideas coherent, I can't seem to find the words..... Or rather, the words betray the thoughts they are supposed*

to express. Even the most generalized truth begins to look like special pleading as soon as you trap it in language" (46)

Travesties open the debate on the intricacy and easy misuse of language as well. The character of Lenin (not only the play character, but mainly Lenin in real life) is a perfect and forbidding example that language, in terms of its variability, is easily manipulated to become manipulating.

1.2.3 Incorporation of other plays and intertextuality - more postmodern aspects of Stoppard's work

That Stoppard is often criticized for the "over-intellectuality" of his plays, I see as resulting from not seeing his plays as complex creations. *Travesties* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* count on the fact that the audiences are aware of other plays and we would not be able to understand certain details did we not have a knowledge of them; Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (*for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*) and Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (for *Travesties*) – these classic plays create the structural setting of these Stoppard parodies. However, this does not mean that all of Stoppard's works are only based on other writers' plays; I think he just found it both inspiring and entertaining to work with classic plays and transform them as he did. Moreover, Stoppard himself admits he finds it extremely difficult to think out characters and plots based on a certain idea. Such a fact might also partially explain why he used the plots of other plays to stabilise the structure of his own plays. *Travesties* are one of Stoppard's plays that directly work with blending another play into his play, which is to be discussed later in my work.

Travesties and *Jumpers* also contain many allusions to other literary works, various philosophers and real history events. At the end of *Jumpers*, for example, Archie reacts to Clagetrople's (new archbishop of Canterbury) line: *"Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?"* – alluding to Henry II' s line requesting the death of another archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas a Becket. (Hunter, p 103) Allusions to Shakespeare can be found in *Travesties* as well, e. g. when Gwendolyn recites his eighteenth sonnet.

However it is not safe to label Stoppard either pure modernist or postmodernist, both the approaches serve as quite safe frames for analysing his dramatic work. The overall objective of this chapter was to emphasise and clarify – using acknowledged definitions of modernism and postmodernism - the distinctive features of Stoppard's dramatic work. To a bigger or

lesser extent he elaborates on them in all his major plays. A careful reading of his text reveals that he invariably blends just the above mentioned elements together with seriousness that is constantly being compromised by frivolity or vice versa, which is also the topic of the following subchapter.

1.3 Themes and the approach to them– featuring major plays following Stoppard´s combination of seriousness and frivolity

As mentioned above, seriousness and frivolity cohabit alongside in most of Stoppard´s dramatic work. Let me briefly outline some of his other major plays that show a good balance of serious and frivolous approaches to certain themes and how heterogenous are some of Stoppard´s combinations of these, yet still maintaining quite a good balance of high and low genres.

Stoppard has dealt with and treated numerous subjects in his plays – the meaning of life and human behaviour, the presence of an underlying order in the world, or simply chaos, moral philosophy, the importance and function of art, the moral responsibility of an individual, the violation of human rights in Eastern European countries, the duality of the individual, the meaning of language, adultery, British colonialism, homosexuality, the inaccessibility of the past, the utopian notion of creating an ideal state and or, the communist reality of the year 1968, the years of so called "normalization" and the grandiose downfall of socialist regimes as practiced in Eastern European countries. Stoppard unveils a truly wide range of topics in his plays, through being inspired or fascinated by some idea, which he elaborates using some characters and inventing situations, usually unreal, though these are more real in his later plays, in which the idea can grow into a complex work. The variety and choice of themes might seem too sophisticated and complicated, yet all of these are in service of other themes, I dare to call them normal or ordinary, thus of the concerns of ordinary human beings. Through frequent dramatisations of romantic misunderstandings Stoppard again and again returns to the difficulties involved in married life or in living together with another person; he asks questions about how to create a relationship that could be real and lasting, he opens up topics about the ability to combine one's family commitments with a professional career and he repeatedly comes back to the theme of cognition: how we perceive what truth is and to what extent scientific cognition is a reliable description of the world. However serious the themes seem to be, Stoppard, in most cases, treats them with great humour and wit.

A lot of the ideas Stoppard deals with in his plays have origins in his own life, though this is not at all to say that his plays are autobiographical. He does not even use his own experience directly. The ideas either originate from his inner dialogues, when he refutes and disputes his own arguments over and over again and then basically from what he came across or dealt with in his own life. In this way, he gives the floor to different points of view and different interpretations. In *Night and Day*, for instance, he deals with the theme of the responsibility of an individual working as a journalist. Stoppard himself never had to solve the dilemmas unveiled in *Night and Day*. On the other hand, having worked as a journalist for several years, he hypothetically tried to find a solution to the question of responsibility and it also allows him to joke about it, as he knows certain pressures and influences that exist in journalist circles very well. Similarly, he works with the theme of British colonialism. Stoppard´s play *Indian Ink* could have been based on his own experience, yet he endeavours to look at the problem from a completely different angle. For *Indian Ink* he created characters that demonstrate duality and human inconsistency. The main character, Flora, is a British writer who is against British colonialism, yet comes to live in colonised India. Das is an Indian painter who admires British culture, Mrs. Swan, Flora's sister, originally a Marxist radical, came after having lived in India for a long time to the conclusion that British colonialism actually saved India, and finally Das ´s son, Anish, supports Indian independence, yet decides to live in Britain. The humorous line in *Indian Ink* is represented by the character of the American biographer Eldon Pike, whose ridiculous quest for Flora's life, as he is trying to complete her biography, becomes an exemplary case of the inaccessibility of history. (ref. J. Hančil, Arcadia playbill, ND) In *Travesties* Stoppard tries to answer his own questions about the artist and his or her function in a society and approaches them with innovation, humour and seriousness at the same time. The protagonists of *Travesties* – Henry Carr, Tristan Tzara, James Joyce and V. I. Lenin become advocates of different artistic viewpoints and create a platform, where Stoppard fights for and against his own arguments on the topic of art, working with farcical elements of Wilde´s play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Though most of the other themes do not relate directly to Stoppard´s life experience, they all are thoughts he is personally concerned with. As with George in *Jumpers*, Stoppard himself is preoccupied with the absoluteness of human values and whether God exists or not. He used George Moore, a professor of moral philosophy, to try to prove that there are certain human values that should be absolute. On the other hand, Stoppard used the same character to ridicule philosophical essays and their writers to prove that in particular moments and for particular features they are hilarious, thus funny, for "ordinary" people. The discrepancy

between George's world and the reality works here as a serious as well as a humorous element.

At one point in his career, Stoppard changed his opinion on political art and wrote a play *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*. In this play, Stoppard clearly shows on which side of barricade he is fighting. *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* tries to point out that Eastern European countries (until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989) practiced undemocratic regimes that with impunity violated human rights. However serious a political issue that was and in some countries still is, the other plot line in *Every Good Boy* is again very funny. In the same room of a soviet asylum hospital two Alexander Ivanovs happen to meet. One of them is a victim of political repression in the former Soviet Union. The second is an insane patient, who creates an image in his head that he is an orchestra conductor. His insane "reality" is presented on stage by the presence of a real orchestra that he conducts. As has been mentioned earlier, Stoppard's personal opinion is at this time very clear. Apart from Stoppard's unusual approach, the play is also unique because of the use of a live orchestra, thus blending theatre dramatization together with a concert of classical music.

Arcadia is Stoppard's second attempt to reveal science as metaphor in his play (the first play using science as metaphor was *Hapgood*, a spy thriller from the cold war era). The story of young Thomasina, a thirteen-year-old genius in mathematics and her teacher Septimus, became one of Stoppard's most admired and valued plays. The two time levels in *Arcadia* enable the spectators to become aware of the future of Stoppard's characters, thus giving them an advantage. Among the unveiling of various other interesting themes, *Arcadia* namely ridicules and criticises the approach of some historians, who transform history to fit their imagination or some scheme they created in their heads. *Arcadia* also shows elements of playful romantic comedy full of funny misunderstandings, love affairs and innocent true love. Aside from *Jumpers* and *Travesties*, *Arcadia* is another great attempt to marry farce and the play of ideas, thus creating well a balanced clash of seriousness and frivolity.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead, Stoppard's first major play and a great success remained his best known theatrical innovation – he situated the play into the plot of *Hamlet* and made two insignificant, episodic characters the two main characters of his own play. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are two courtiers who, for some reason that they do not remember or they are not able to agree on, are called to Elsinore. On the way they meet the theatrical group from *Hamlet* and then they become a part of the plot of *Hamlet*. *"Throughout the whole play they wait, talk, philosophise, play games and spend most of the time trying to make head or tail of the events happening around them. They are both seeking some kind of*

plan or purpose, an order that would give their lives some sense. For us, Shakespeare's Hamlet is such an order, as audiences we are ahead of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern" (e.g. as in *Arcadia* or *Indian Ink)*, as we are perfectly aware what is going on and we know in advance what is going to happen. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, death is present from the very first act. Stoppard put the truth about that already in the play's title; we know that the main characters are going to die at the end of the play. (ref. J. Hančil, Arcadia playbill, ND) *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a unique play in comparison with other works of Stoppard. It seems to be the only play, where the characters initialised the interest in a certain theme. It was pointed out earlier that Stoppard is usually interested primarily in some kind of idea, whereas in the case of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern he became fascinated by the insignificance of those two characters, it is probably the only Stoppard play that originated in such an order – first characters, then the idea. Jim Hunter (Tom Stoppard, p 63-155) argues on that issue that later in his literary career Stoppard proved he is able, if he wishes so, to create deep, emotional characters, such as for example in the earlier mentioned *Arcadia*. In Rosencrantz and Guildenstern it is different simply because those characters do not have any lives; therefore we cannot get to know their characters. They tend to be more comic and cartoon-like, which is typical for characters in Stoppard´s early plays. (ref. J. Hunter, p 35-38) Some critics take Rosencrantz and Guildenstern very seriously and do not want to see the humorous side of it, yet Stoppard himself repeated many times that it was not his intention to write a serious play. That is probably one of Stoppard´s misfortunes. Critics often search in his plays for some hidden code that is not really there, and on the other hand they miss what Stoppard might consider as evident. I deliberately wrote critics. Judging from the fact that many of Stoppard´s plays became box-office successes, it seems to be the case when ordinary theatre spectators probably understand him better than critics.

Chapter 2

The play of ideas and farce as dramatic categories – brief definitions and historical placement (ref. Wikipedia and The Oxford companion to English literature)

Before analysing *Jumpers* and *Travesties* from the point of view of "a perfect marriage of the play of ideas and farce", it is necessary to clarify the original dramatic forms – in terms of their definitions and time when they first emerged. That way it will become easier to compare those original forms with Stoppard's combination of them.

The original play of ideas, often termed as the problem play, is a dramatic category that falls into social realism of the late 19th century. Its first definition was based on analysis of plays written by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. The term was to describe a drama discussing certain social issues that were considered taboos at that time, such as prostitution, alcoholism, crime committing out of necessity, etc. The main character or characters of such plays were victims of conservative hypocritical society then. The play's main function was to shock the audience with the facts of reality and awaken general awareness of existing social problems that tend to be not spoken about. The play of ideas usually ends tragically, often letting the main character die.

One of the most important successors of Ibsen's plays of ideas was George Bernard Shaw. His plays also discuss social issues, yet he made them more palatable to the audience by approaching them with a certain amount of humour. Shaw's themes were education, marriage, government or even health care. Stoppard's plays are most often compared to G.B. Shaw. The analysis in the following chapters should uncover to what extent Stoppard's plays reveal similarity or difference to Shaw's plays of ideas.

At the time when Ibsen's plays emerged on stage, F.S. Boas, a literary critic, started to use the same term for some of Shakespeare's plays that could not be easily fit either the category of comedy, or the category of tragedy (e.g. All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure or Troilus and Cressida).

Farce is a comedy that uses unusual, unexpected, improbable or extravagant situations to entertain its audience. Apart from that, it often works with disguise and mistaken identity, verbal humour or word play. The speed of its plot increases throughout the action and typically ends in a chase (that applies for films). The main characters frequently get away with actions that sometimes verge on crime and the poetic justice is not always observed.

The play of ideas and farce are thus almost opposing categories, yet they do not necessarily have to exclude one another, as proved in Stoppard's *Jumpers* and *Travesties*.

Chapter 3

Stoppard's combination of categories – "a perfect marriage between a play of ideas and farce"- a well balanced clash of seriousness and frivolity

The following chapter and its subparts elaborate on analysing *Jumpers* and *Travesties* in terms of these showing elements of the categories of farce and the play of idea. The serious ideas are deliberately separated from the frivolous elements in order to enable, in the succeeding

chapter, a comparison showing to what extent, and in what way, Stoppard draws on the original features of the play of ideas and farce.

3.1 Jumpers

Kenneth Tynan depicted *Jumpers* as *"a farce whose main purpose is to affirm the existence of God. It is a farcical defence of transcendent moral values and an attack on pragmatic materialism."* (Tynan, p. 93). *Jumpers* uses a comical tone to treat a serious issue and in addition includes song and dance, acrobatics, striptease, philosophy lectures, a murder-mystery detective story and a dream sequence, all interacting to debate philosophical questions about the nature of moral values or the existence of God. As we can see, Stoppard does not just combine the categories of a play of ideas and farce; he also puts together in this play a whole spectrum of theatrical and other devices, as previously mentioned in chapter 1.2. *Jumpers is a play that works on stage as a complex: "Everything knits together in Jumpers: stage-picture, dialogue, lighting, sound-effects, action combine into an ultratheatrical game that matters deeply."*(A. Jenkins, p. 76).

Jumpers draws on another Stoppard play, a television piece *Another Moon Called Earth* where similar themes are opened and discussed.

3.1.1 Stage set – expressing visually serious ideas as well as farcical situations

It is simply impossible not to explore the stage craft when discussing *Jumpers* in detail. Stoppard's plays are very much tied to the theatricality. He writes detailed director's notes explaining how the stage set should be organized, which means it matters to him a lot. Some of the ideas as well as the farcical situations are expressed not verbally, but visually. *Jumpers* is definitely one of Stoppard's plays, where the stage set plays a truly important role – it emphasises the characters as well as for the whole idea of the play. Neither Fleming, nor Jenkins or Hunter omit stage craft in their analysis and based on their knowledge as well as on my own careful reading of *Jumpers,* is quite evident that the stage set (stage craft) are part and parcel of complexity of this Stoppard's play and contribute both to expressing serious ideas as well as farcical situations.

The play starts with a stage set typical for Stoppard's early work. The audience is almost "attacked" by a mix of images that do not make any sense to them. Soon after, however, they discover there are completely normal explanations for all of them. A move that surprises the audience as well as ambushes their subconscious expectations, which primarily imply that those images will never be enlightened, or at least that there will not be such "normal " explanations to them. There is a woman stripper swinging on and off the stage, a waiter who never sees the stripper and a troupe of acrobats. Jenkins describes a part of the beginning as follows: *"A loud drum-roll introduces a female stripper seated on a swing attached to a chandelier which arcs in and out of the spotlight's beam. We now feel as disoriented as Dotty (a singer who walked onto the stage as very first but did not succeed in singing anything, her voice betrayed her) and as confused as the waiter who then stumbles with his tray of drinks into the light. The stage audience protests vociferously at his blocking the view. Every time he looks in their direction, the stripper flies in, having shed more and more of her clothes; every time he looks behind him to see what the fuss is about, the stage is empty. Eventually he "backs into the path of the swing and is knocked arse over tip by a naked lady".* (Jenkins, p 77)

Throughout the rest of the play, the stage is organized in two rooms, divided by a hallway. One room belongs to Dotty and is organised and furnished as a bedroom in style that correspondence to her character as well as to her past occupation - that is a musical singer, in a very luxurious feminine style. There is a door leading to the bathroom and a door to the hallway, which has hooks on from the inside of the bedroom. Those hooks become a temporary hiding place for the corpse of McFee, which creates several comic situations when it gets open and closed – the audiences see what the entering person cannot – a dead body hung on a door hanger moving in "show-hide" way. There is also a TV screen, where the audience can watch the British landing on the moon and subsequent actions, the Radical Liberals' winning parade, etc. The TV screen serves as a 'window' into the outside reality of *Jumpers*. It is the way we learn what goes on outside, George and Dotty's flat is the place where we experience individual responses to the outside world. Dotty spends most of the play's time in her bedroom.

The other room, obviously, belongs to George and serves as his study. He comes out of his study into the hallway and he also several times enters Dotty's bedroom. Such organization of stage set evokes the relationship of Dotty and George – detached, separate, divided by a hallway, rarely entering each other's room, not hearing each other, literally as well as metaphorically.

The stage set indicates the zones of influence of the characters. Dotty feels safely and more certain in her bedroom and that is the space where she says the most lines in the play. George's shelter is his study. That is where he utters the most of his monologues. On the other hand, whenever he enters Dotty ´s room, he becomes insecure and does not know what to do. It is Dotty, who dominates the dialogues in her room.

The hallway is the domain of inspector Bones. That is where he spends most of the time throughout the play. Obviously, as a stranger in the apartment of Moore's family, he is not permitted to enter the intimate rooms and stays on the neutral space. Archie has not any distinguished space of his. He is the one who enters all rooms of Moore's apartment without any permitting. He is Dotty ´s psychiatrist, so it is not that strange that he stays in her room, moreover, he is her possible lover. What is very strange is the fact that he freely enters even George's study. The way he makes himself at home in their apartment corresponds with Archie ´s character. He does not respect any boundaries, he is the master of his actions, and he carelessly walks into people's lives and organizes them.

3.1.2 Serious ideas discussed in *Jumpers*

Themes, plot lines and characters

The main theme of *Jumpers* is undoubtedly the discussion about whether moral values are absolutes, thus God given, or are governed by social conventions, thus relative. On the one side, there is George Moore (thematically linked to the historical philosopher of the same name, ref. J. Hančil, Arcadia playbill, ND), trying to prove the existence of God and moral absolutes, on the other side there is Sir Archibald Jumper, the leader of the acrobatic jumpers, a radical liberal who philosophically and personally (Dotty ´s possible lover) stands against George, behaving according to his doctrine, not respecting anything apart from his own benefits. In addition, there is Dotty, who is something in between Archie and George. Jenkins asserts that George, Archie and Dotty create the three perspectives on morality offered in *Jumpers*. George is the only professor of the philosophical faculty who is not a member of Jumpers, teaching moral philosophy, believes in moral absolutes and tries to prove the existence of God. Archie and the Liberal Radical Party declare moral relativity and utilitarianism, they believe only in what is scientifically demonstrable. Dotty stands somewhere in between. In action, she seems to be accepting Archie's relativism, but her emotions reveal that she belongs to the world of George and his moral absolutes. Through

Archie, she rebels against George's disregard for her. *"Archie, Dotty and George present their world views that involve logical-intellectual component as well as an emotional-experiential dimension, which complicates the presentation of their characters and views."* (Fleming, p 87)

Stoppard explains his intent in *Jumpers: "I wanted a device enabling me to set out arguments about whether social morality is simply a conditioned response to history and environment or whether moral sanctions obey an absolute intuitive God-given law. I've always felt that whether or not God-given means anything, there has to be an ultimate external reference for our actions. Our view of good behaviour must not be relativist.....I think it's a dangerous idea that what constitutes 'good behaviour' depends on social conventions – dangerous and unacceptable. That led me to the conclusion, not reached all that willingly, that if our behaviour is open to absolute judgement, there must be an absolute judge. I felt that nobody was saying this and it tended to be assumed that nobody held such a view. So I wanted to write a theist play, to combat the arrogant view that anyone who believes in God is some kind of cripple, using God as a crutch. I wanted to suggest that atheists may be the cripples, lacking the strength to live with the idea of God"* (Kerensky 86-87). In various interviews, Stoppard takes the side of George, believing in moral absolutes. Simultaneously, he is aware of the fact that, intellectually, proving the existence of God is quite impossible. Fleming explains that the tension of the play is thus produced by the conflict of one's intellectual and emotional response to questions of morality. Stoppard writes about this tension: *"I wanted to write a play about this particular conflict between emotional and intellectual responses to the idea of God, because I've always thought the idea of God is absolutely preposterous but slightly more plausible than the alternative proposition that given enough time, some green slime could write Shakespeare's sonnets."* (Mel Gussow, Conversations 5, 15-16)

There are two main plot lines in *Jumpers*. They fade into one another throughout the play. The first one is George trying to write his paper for a philosophical symposium on the subject of the goodness or badness of a man. It includes long monologues of George trying to prove the existence of God and that moral values are God given. The second plot line is the mysterious murder of Duncan McFee and its investigation. Being a member of Radical Liberals, McFee watches live on TV the landing of British on the moon: *"Projected are images of the moon, astronauts, a moon vehicle, and a rocket. An announcer reports that due to a damaged space capsule only one of the astronauts could return: "Millions of viewers saw the two astronauts struggling at the foot of the ladder until Oates was knocked to the ground*

by his commanding officer...Capitan Scott closed the hatch with the remark, 'I am going up now. I may be gone for some time'. (22-23) *The use of the names Oates and Scott reverberate much more for a British audience as their historical counterparts were part of the first English expedition to the South Pole. On their return the group experienced great difficulties, and Capitan Oates, who was severely ill and weakened, decided to sacrifice himself so that his companions might have a chance to live"* (Fleming 87). This episode resembles the situation that came to being hand in hand with the Radical Liberals and seems to stand here as an alarming impact of their influence and conscienceless behaviour. In *Jumpers*, where the Radical Liberal Party won the elections and where logical positivism infected the brains of the majority, the sacrifice of Oates has been replaced by self-interest, a pragmatic fight where the stronger wins and it is clear who will live and who will die. Due to the events that happen on the moon, McFee revises his political and philosophical views and decides to desert the Radical Liberal Party and take up George's quarrel. George is, as mentioned earlier, Archie's opposite and the only professor a philosophical field that is no longer considered important in the world of *Jumpers*. The Radical Liberals, standing here for the logical positivists, moral relativists and behaviourists, in other words, contemporary philosophy, completely ignore moral philosophy as a considerable field of philosophy; they do not believe in moral absolutes, they behave in the way that suits their actual needs and ambitions, they profess the relativity of values. George is making an effort to write his lecture to prove the opposite, thus that there are moral absolutes and that these are in such a case most probably God given. The moon landing events cause McFee to start crediting moral absolutes and he wants to support George. He suddenly sees the danger of the Radical Liberals taking power and control of the army, media etc. McFee's decision endangers the hard core of jumpers, therefore is murdered. Even though some evidence leads to Dotty, throughout the play, we slowly begin to realise that the murder suspect is most probably Archie, the leader of the jumpers and the Radical Liberals. He acts unscrupulously, in cold blood and all that with dandyism too. He uses manipulative, persuasive language, twists facts in his favour, murders people and lies, indeed, in the name of logical positivism, claiming pragmatism and moral relativity. Sir Archibald Jumper was marked by Stoppard as the main villain of the play *Jumpers*, yet his characteristics are not as explicit, as the play offers an ending that might seem ambiguous. Archie uses his last speech to present a pragmatically optimistic view of the world: *"Do not despair – many are happy much of the time; more eat than starve, more are healthy than sick, more curable than dying. Not so many dying as dead; and one of the thieves was saved.....Millions of children grow up without suffering deprivation, and millions, while*

deprived, grow up without suffering cruelties, and millions, while deprived and cruelly treated, none the less grow up. No laughter is sad and many tears are joyful. At the graveside the undertaker doffs his top hat and impregnates the prettiest mourner. Wham bam, thank you Sam. (87) However optimistic the speech sounds, at the same time it directly exemplifies the slickness of Archie. Through Archie's last speech, and as a matter of fact throughout all Archie's replications, Stoppard shows *"how words, which he has always seen as ambiguous, sliding and confusing, can, because of those inadequacies, be deliberately used to deceive, persuade or undermine. In Jumpers, Stoppard moves towards the political implications of words that trap and Archie represents such locution."*(Jenkins, p 76)

However it might seem that George could be considered a hero of *Jumpers*, even he cannot be read directly. He is a prototype of an intellectual, completely submerged in his thinking, abstract philosophising. On the one hand, he is the advocate of absolute moral values and the existence of God. He is preoccupied with explaining what good and bad means, produces various, often funny, examples that prove "good" is not dependent on any conditions. Good is simply good, because we feel it. On the other hand, he does not realize the state of his own marriage, which is suffering severe crises. George and Dotty do not live together in the way that would be expected for a married couple, they literally live next to each other. It is true that there are scenes in the play where we can feel a bond between them, but that is slowly diminishing and George's contribution to this is extensive. Conserved in his own world of philosophy, he constantly ignores his wife and her needs. Several times throughout the play, Dotty calls for George's help, however she is always rejected, either simply by not being heard or by George making excuses such as: *"I've only got until this evening to sort out goodness and badness"* (1967,24). His sorting out works only in theory, not practice. Such behaviour puts George in the position of a person who does not live up to his beliefs. He searches for moral absolutes, yet does not produce moral actions. Therefore he cannot be considered a hero, because just thinking good is not enough, your good ideas must be succeeded by similar actions. George fails not only to support his wife in her depression, he also forsakes his own ideas in his dream at the end of the play, where he does not help Clegthorpe and lets him be Archie's next victim. The reason why Stoppard decided to discredit George at the end of the play works, according to Hunter, as his "minus A" (Hunter, p 80). George also manages to accidentally kill both his beloved pets, a hare Thumper, whom he shoots when he carries out an experiment, and his tortoise Pat, on whom he steps, crushing his shell, when reaching for the dead hare. George is a person who completely ignores what goes on around him. He does not notice a murder being committed in his own flat; he does not

pay any attention to the moon landing and its consequences. Yet, despite his failures, George's ideas are more human than those of Archie's and we sympathise with him, to a certain extent. His words: *"if rationality were the be-all and end-all, the world would be one gigantic field of soya beans"* (40), imply that the irrational marks us as human and beats the logical positivism with its efforts to explain everything scientifically.

The relationship between George and Dotty works as another theme in *Jumpers*. I have already touched on that topic when describing the stage set, where a hallway divides George's and Dotty ´s rooms. *"The set evokes exactly this interdependent independence."* (Jenkins, p 78) They live together, yet there is a wall between them, they both stay in their rooms most of the time, yet they need each other. As Jenkins explains, behind the coldness and detachment of their relationship, there is a fair knowledge of each other's habits and weaknesses, memories, and shared history. (Jenkins, p 93) In the first act, Dotty calls for George's help, when McFee is murdered, but George decides not to enter her room and goes back to his papers. Dotty therefore turns for help to Archie. However, by calling George first, Dotty expresses intuitively that she would like George to protect her. Throughout the play, there are other scenes that prove things between them could improve, yet it is usually George, who misses the opportunity to act in the way Dotty would expect him to. He throws away chances to get closer to Dotty, one after another. Even though they know each other well and respect each other, they are not able to *"coordinate each other's inner bewilderment"*. (Jenkins, p 93) They have moments of *"desolate or furious contact and those episodes establish an ironic picture of two people who seem unable to put their well-meaning intuitions about universals into personal practice"*. (Jenkins, p 93) Their relationship is even more complicated by Archie's daily visits to Dotty, apparently for medical reasons. George is not able to decode the truth: Is Archie just a doctor or is he Dotty ´s lover? He is able to make only indirect inquiries about it:

> GEORGE (reckless, committed): I can't put two and two together, you know. Putting two and two together is my subject. I do not leap to hasty conclusions. I do not deal in suspicion and wild surmise. I examine the data; I look for logical inferences.....
>
> (He has lapsed into a calm suavity.)
>
> Now let us see. What can we made of it all? Wife in bed, daily visits by gentleman caller. Does anything suggest itself?
>
> DOTTY (calmly): Sounds to me he's the doctor. (32)

If Dotty is deceiving George, it is a very elaborate *"conspiracy"*. Archie delivers into her bedroom *"a machine of ambiguous purpose"* and a number of stands and lights, all to *"examine"* (Jenkins, p 95) Dotty for her neurosis. George, together with the audience, is even more puzzled and actually never finds out the truth. The ambiguity of the Archie-Dotty relationship parallels with George's confusion over the discussion paper, in which he seeks to prove that God exists. The Archie-Dotty case dramatises what would otherwise remain just an abstract philosophical question, expressed by George: "*How the hell does one know what to believe?"* (71).

Stoppard has often been criticized for not being able to create a complex, believable female character and the character of Dotty has been labelled as the major weakness of the play. Yet, Anthony Jenkins wrote: *"her behaviour here (in Jumpers), though eccentric and stamped with her creator's own personality, has corners to it (believable character), facets and angles which make her a complicated, interesting and given the play's established idiom-credible individual. All Stoppard's women characters have a sort of inner mysteriousness, an untouchable knowingness which makes them puzzling to their partners. Perhaps this impenetrability is the mark of what Stoppard cannot understand, but in Jumpers those hidden areas of personality make a dramatic impact. Dotty 's external vibrance and neurotically destructive tendencies allow us to feel there is more to her than meets the eye, and Stoppard has given her moments with George in which we glimpse that inner self. In addition, he makes Dotty aware of her own mystery as a woman and a star – a mystery which she deliberately uses on George and later, quite lethally, on the Inspector* (Bones, pozn. Mn.)"(Jenkins 92).

Dotty, George's wife and Archie's patient, or possible lover, is a former successful singer with all the attributes that usually associate with a woman star – emotional, hysterical, romantic, and sentimental. She breaks down because of the moon landing, expressing her fear that the moon has lost its metaphorical power; the world has changed, and is endangered by loss of traditional values. At that point, she makes the impression of an emotional, dependent individual. The next tag that describes her character, however, is intelligent. As we discover throughout the play, she once had been a student of George. *"Stoppard made Dotty George's intellectual match, which causes their dialogues to work*." Jenkins remarks upon their relationship that they move on from philosophical quarrels to marital quarrels, they are piercing and attacking. Even though Dotty is connected to Archie and often voices his logical positivist ideas, her mind seems to be independent, and in replications with George she makes her own verbal thrusts. In certain moments Dotty 's behaviour indicates that she is doing everything she can to annoy George, to disturb him from his inner world of abstract ideas and

force him to communicate with her, to produce more human contact with her. As if the nervous breakdown she suffers and the possible affair she is having with Archie, along with his everyday visits were to awaken George from his dream world. As an actress, she definitely would be able to act such charades, for she still loves George deep inside:

> DOTTY: I won't see him /Archie/ any more, if you like. (Turns to him /George/) I'll see you. If you like

The moon plays a significant role in *Jumpers*. Firstly, it becomes the place of events that picture clearly the impact of relative moral values. Without hesitation, one of the astronauts knocks down the other to save his life. Not considering his colleague's fate, he presented what can be called the law of jungle – the faster and stronger wins. Such behaviour caused two vital changes in the play. Duncan McFee re-evaluated his ideas and realised that after all, moral values must be absolute and thus he caused his own death. Secondly, because of the same events, the moon lost its metaphorical aura. For Dotty, the moon embodied a romantic metaphor, she could not overcome the idea that by the moon landing, the moon was abused and fouled. Her nervous breakdown sprang from her fearing the instability of values, total chaos.

The murder of McFee remains an unsolved case. Even though it is being investigated by Inspector Bones, the real murderer is never disclosed. It looks as if Dotty fired the gun, yet there is no real motive that could prove her guilty. Archie has a strong motive, but there is no evidence against him. George could be the suspect as well. We could find at least a bigger motive here, as philosophically he is the only one against all jumpers. At the end of the play, George's secretary, who does not utter a word, turns out to be McFee´s lover. McFee, a married man, was terrified to tell her the truth about his marital status and thus she becomes another suspect of the crime, yet Bones sticks to Dotty being guilty. She was the only one present in the room when the murder happened and she had blood on her white dress. Even George reveals the opinion that it was "poor Dotty" (Jumpers, p...) who shot McFee. Although we do not really believe Dotty being guilty, the whole situation raises a question why she wanted to cover for Archie - that is if he is the assassin. Could it be the proof of Dotty-Archie love relationship, or is it only Archie's manipulative behaviour that forces her to cover crime that she has not committed? Anyhow, Archie uses all his power to convince Bones that McFee committed suicide inside a plastic bag, another proof of how twisting, manipulative and persuasive he can be.

3.1.3 *Jumpers* using farcical features to discuss serious issues

So far, I have analysed the serious features of Jumpers. I have described the serious ideas and themes Stoppard deals with in his play. In the following chapter, I would like to approach the farcical and ironical features used in *Jumpers*. Such an analysis is much more difficult, as the humour in the play is built, first of all, on dialogues and theatrical devices that work much better on stage than as a text on paper.

The first and most obvious joke is the troupe of acrobatic jumpers. Contemporary philosophy -logical positivists, moral relativists, behaviourists, etc. - epitomises for Stoppard, with its elasticity, gymnastics. Every traditional value is bent in the way that ´comes in handy´. That is the reason why the members of the philosophical faculty are presented as a troupe of acrobatic jumpers, wearing yellow uniforms. They create human pyramids and do other balancing exercises, demonstrating how flexible contemporary philosophy can be. In addition to all that, they wear uniforms, a fact which emphasises the lack of individuality. The yellow colour of their uniforms is throughout the play used as a symbol of evil, as McFee says: *"I have seen the future, and it's yellow."* (Jenkins), commenting on the victory of the Radical Liberals in the elections. The connection of something as abstract and idea-based as philosophy and something as visceral and demonstrably physical as gymnastics creates a unique and fantastic reality where anything is possible. Such inconsistency crosscuts the whole play and spawns numerous comic misunderstandings, dialogues and situations. George, for example, preaches on morality, yet lives in a luxurious house that was purchased with money earned by Dotty being a musical singer, thus a star of a *"light Muse"*. (Jenkins, p 117) He does not notice a murder has been committed in his house and is oblivious to repression on the streets, yet he freaks out when he finds out his goldfish was dead, a result of Dotty ´s earlier charade. Shaking with rage, he calls Dotty a "murderous bitch", lamenting that the fish should have been murdered for the sake of a game:

> DOTTY (angrily): Murdered? Don't you dare splash me with your sentimental rhetoric! It's a bloody goldfish! Do you think every *sole meuniére* comes to you untouched by suffering?
>
> GEORGE: The monk who won't walk in the garden for fear of treading on an ant does not have to be a vegetarian…

DOTTY: Brilliant! You must publish your findings in some suitable place like the *Good Food Guide.*

GEORGE: No doubt your rebuttal would look well in the *Meccano Magazine.*

DOTTY: You bloody humbug! – the last of the metaphysical egocentrics! You're probably still shaking from the four-hundred-year-old news that the sun doesn't go round *you*!

Within the context of George's murders of his pets, his character comes out as that of an ignorant fool.

Dotty is equally as inconsistent as George. On the one hand, she is an over-emotional, fragile woman suffering nervous instability caused by the tragic events on the moon, suffering from George neglecting her, expressing fears of moral decline and chaos. She directly calls for pity. On the other hand, she can almost instantly switch from such a character into a coquettish lady, perfectly aware of her charms and using them on men. Such a kind of ambiguity, likewise offers grounds for comic situations. When Inspector Bones comes to investigate in Moore's house, he confesses that *"show business is my main interest, closely followed by crime detection"* (46) and is so established as an ardent fan of Dotty ´s. He prepares to question her about the previous evening's party *: "after which, I will take my leave, perhaps with her autograph on the cover of this much played much loved gramophone record"* (45). We see him standing outside her bedroom, holding a vase with flowers in his hands, sprucing himself up and fishing for Dotty ´s gramophone record. When he enters, the bedroom glows romantically:

...pink curtains have been drawn across the french window, and there is a rosy hue to the lighting. DOTTY, *gowned, coiffed, stunning, rises to face the Inspector. Music is heard... romantic Mozartian trumpets, triumphant.* DOTTY *and* BONES *face each other, frozen like lovers in a dream.* BONES *raises his head slightly, and the trumpets are succeeded by a loud animal bray, a mating call.* DOTTY, *her arms out towards him, breathes, "Inspector..." like a verbal caress. From* BONES *´s lifeless fingers, the vase drops. There is a noise such as would have been made had he dropped it down a long flight of stone stairs. BONES is dumbstruck.* DOTTY *lest go a long slow smile: "Inspector..."*

From behind the closed curtains, the stiff dead JUMPER *falls into the room like a too-hastily-leaned plank.* (52)

Stoppard put a lot of humour into George's and Dotty's mouths even when they try to explain their views on serious matters. Although Dotty seems at first like a character simply echoing Archie and his doctrines, she is able to prove her own opinion when, for instance, she ponders

why God refuses to disappear despite the positivists and their political arm, the Radical Liberals:

> DOTTY: (still merry) And yet, Professor, one can't help wondering at the persistence of the reflex, the universal constant unthinking appeal to the non-existent God who is presumed dead. Perhaps he's only missing in action, shot down behind the thin yellow lines of advancing Rad-Libs and getting himself together to go BOO! (35)

Similarly, as in above quoted dialogue, when George meditates about his paper, trying to pick up on the vagaries of language, *"a finite instrument crudely applied to an infinity of ideas"* (63), George addresses himself to the distinctions between *a "good bacon sandwich"* and *"the Good Samaritan."* In the first expression, Fleming explains that *"good"* can be described in other terms, *"such as crisp, lean and unadulterated by tomato sauce"*. The goodness of such a sandwich would not be apparent to someone who liked his bacon *"underdone, fatty and smothering in ketchup"*. In the second expression, however, there is no doubt about the Samaritan's goodness. It is an absolute value, impossible to express in any other way and certainly not simply a statement about *"feeling, taste or vested interest"*:

... when we say that the Good Samaritan acted well, we are surely expressing more than a circular prejudice about behaviour. We mean he acted kindly – selflessly – well. And what is our approval of kindness based on if not on the intuition that kindness is simply good in itself and cruelty is not? (66-7)

Farcical situations are also based on George's inability to perceive reality and connect things, which leads to funny crosstalks. When Inspector Bones comes to investigate, George is still not aware of the murder and while Bones is already speaking about the events in connection with McFee, he still thinks Bones has come to question them about his previous night's phone complaint. Bones presses George to spare no expense in Dotty 's defence, presuming she is the murderer of McFee. George however, having in mind the short phone-call, answers: *"It was just a bit of fun! Where is your sense of humour, man?"*

Stoppard's characters are generally significant by being ambiguous. He seems to sympathise with some characters, yet he does not show them in a good light only. He is not afraid to put his heroes down at the very moment they begin to gain the absolute support of the audience. In Jumpers, all the characters are slightly exaggerated, George is too professor like, Dotty is too theatrical, Bones is too stupid and Archie is too slick and cunning, and that, undoubtedly contributes to the farcical side of the play.

An interesting fact about *Jumpers* is that Stoppard used authentic material for George's monologues and extracts from his paper. In one interview in Delaney's edition of *"Tom Stoppard in conversation"* he asserted that most people think he must have tried really hard to make George's philosophical monologues so funny. Nobody would probably expect that the monologues are based on real material. Stoppard admitted that for him, and *Jumper*s proved that for many other people as well, some of the philosophical lectures sound hilarious already in their original version.

3.2 *Travesties*

Critical evaluation of Stoppard's *Travesties* is very diverse. There are voices praising it for its stylistic elegance, charm and playfulness. Kenneth Tynan, representing the opposite view, offered a competent critique: *"What lacks is the sine qua non of theatre; namely a narrative thrust that impels the characters, whether farcically or tragically or in any intermediate mode, toward a credible state of crisis, anxiety, or desperation"*. It is true that *"Travesties lack narrative momentum and any sense of pain or pathos, attributes that are present in Jumpers.*" (Tynan, Hančil, Arcadia playbill, ND) For me, this became clear when I wanted to summarise the plot, which proved quite difficult. On the other hand, *Travesties* demonstrates style for style's sake, Stoppard's constant view that the artist is not obliged to justify him or herself in political terms. The weakness of storytelling in *Travesties* is most probably caused by the fact that Stoppard is always inspired by an idea. This time, an impulse for the idea was a simple piece of factual information that Tzara, Lenin and Joyce lived in Zurich at the same time during World War I. This inspired Stoppard to put these three together in conversations about the function of art – should it be art for art's sake, political art or something else? The plot idea came much later, when Stoppard, doing his usual research, found out Joyce directed a production of Wilde´s *The Importance of Being Earnest* when staying in Zurich during World War I. Stoppard decided to graft his plot onto Wilde's. The main character of Stoppard's *Travesties,* Henry Carr, happens to be a real historical figure that played one of the characters in Joyce´s production of *Earnest* in Zurich in 1917.
To defend Stoppard's *Travesties*, it is important to say that it was probably his very intention to create a play of such character, thus pieces juxtaposed one next to another. It was the formal structure he chose for *Travesties*. The play does not offer any comfort of getting to know at least a vague clue of what is going to happen next. Each scene is a surprise that destroys audiences´ feeling that they start to understand what is going on. Stoppard is known

for his ambushes, but *Travesties* is supposedly the most betraying of his plays, as far as the audiences' expectations for what will proceed are concerned.

Travesties, as a major play, has its predecessor, a radio play *Artist Descending a Staircase* (the title inspired by Marcel Duchamp's famous painting *Nude Descending A Staircase*), which deals with a similar theme – the function of art and the artist.

The following analysis is based on an after 1993 (when some significant changes were made to the original text of 1974) text, yet the original 1974 script is discussed as well.

3.2.1 Travesties as discussing serious ideas

Themes, plot lines, characters, structure

The simple fact, that Joyce, Tzara and Lenin lived in Zurich at the very same time, inspired Stoppard to imagine that they might have come across each other. The idea of the meeting of such different personalities becomes the basis for Travesties. Stoppard wanted to write a play about whether an artist could be at the same time a revolutionary and whether an artist has to justify himself in political terms. Tzara, Joyce and Lenin created for Stoppard a platform of three strong opinions on art. Tristan Tzara, one of the founders and main figures of Dadaism and revolutionary avant-garde artist, represents anti-art and the destruction of traditional art; Lenin, the political revolutionary, advocates political art as an instrument for social change and at the same time represses dissident voices; and James Joyce, the modernist artist advocating art for art's sake. Stoppard says: *"I added Joyce mainly because I didn't want Tzara and the Dadaists to carry the artistic banner in the play, and Joyce was an artist with whom I sympathize a great deal"* (Weiner). Such an assertion indicates clearly Stoppard's view on art. As mentioned earlier, stylistically Stoppard has a lot in common with the modernists, Joyce being one of their main representatives. However, Joyce is not the only voice speaking for Stoppard in Travesties. The main protagonist, Henry Carr, as a British official and member of the middle class bourgeoisie, thus the same class to which Stoppard claims to belong, echoes some of Stoppard's artistic values as well. For example, Carr's opinion that *"it is the duty of art to beautify existence"* (20) is much closer to Stoppard's view than Tzara 's vision of the same duty being *"to jeer and howl and belch"* (20). In another debate, Carr asserts: *"Artists are members of a privileged class. Art is absurdly overrated by artists, which is understandable, but what is strange is that it is absurdly overrated by everyone else"* (28). Such an assertion echoes Stoppard, as he has claimed similar opinions in various interviews (Delaney's edition of Tom Stoppard in Conversation). Yet Carr is at the

same time the very much unreliable reporter of the whole history displayed in Travesties. In the very beginning of his opening monologue, he says: *"Carr of the Consulate! – first name Henry, that much is beyond dispute, I'm mentioned in the books. For the rest I'd be willing to enter into discussion but not if you don't mind correction on all points"* (9). The monologue, unlike George's in Jumpers, is directly addressed to the audience and establishes Carr as a fallible narrator, full of biases and delusions.

In Travesties, Carr ´s opinions stand directly against Tzara ´s. Speaking for Stoppard, Carr defines an artist as "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 thus not gifted" (21). The speech is antecedent to a defence of the objective meaning of language:

"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. I might be able to claim to be able to fly… Lo, I say I am flying. But you are not propelling yourself about while suspended in the air, someone may point out. Ah no, I reply, that is no longer considered the proper concern of people who can fly…. Don't you see my dear Tristan you are simply asking me to accept that the word Art means whatever you wish it to men; but I do not accept it." (21)

Carr's speech serves as a convincing contradiction of Tzara ´s extreme linguistic relativity, however, the notion of language having an absolute, objective meaning is also called into question. Already in Jumpers, and later in The Real Thing, Stoppard opened the question of the ability to manipulate the *"innocent, neutral and precise"* (Fleming, p 109) words in favour of the speaker. Tzara offers a sufficient argument that the use of words is neither innocent, nor neutral. Language lives in a web of associations and the gap between the denotation and connotation of words can be relatively large. Tzara argues that "words like patriotism, duty, love, freedom…. are the traditional sophistries for waging wars of expansion and self-interest" (21). In this section of the play, Tzara and Carr also argue over the politics of war:

> CARR: Wars are fought to make the world safe for artists. It is never quite put in those terms but it is a useful way of grasping what civilized ideals are all about. The easiest way of knowing whether good has triumphed over evil is to examine the freedom of the artist ….

TZARA: Wars are fought for oil wells and coaling stations; for control of the Dardanelles or the Suez Canal; for colonial pickings to buy cheap in and conquered markets to sell dear in. War is capitalism with the gloves off....

CARR: I'll tell you what's really going on: I went to war because it was my duty, because my country needed me, and that's patriotism. I went to war because I believed that those boring little Belgians and incompetent Frogs had the right to be defended from German militarism, and that's love of freedom....

TZARA: You ended up in the trenches, because on the 28th of June 1900 the heir to the throne of Austro-Hungary married beneath him and found that the wife he loved was never allowed to sit nest to him on royal occasions, except! When he was acting in his military capacity as Inspector General of the Austro-Hungarian army – in which capacity he therefore decided to inspect the army in Bosnia, so that at least on their wedding anniversary, the 28th of June 1914, they might ride side by side in an open carriage through the streets of Sarajevo! (22-23)

Carr, defending the middle classes and the ideals of traditional art, and Tzara, offering a critique of capitalism and conscious of social classes (in real history he became a dedicated communist), are both given valid arguments. That these opposing ideologies can be both right implies the necessity to realise that historical events are the result of many causes and that even contradictory explanations may be needed to reach a complex understanding of history. Dadaism is one of such examples. As an artistic revolutionary movement, its real meaning does not dwell in the pure artistic values. Dadaism sprang out of the horrors of World War. Artists were searching for the way out of anything that was connected to the war, and that embodied for them the pre war art as well. Hans Richter quotes the prominent Dadaist Hans Arp: *"We were seeking an art based on fundamentals, to cure the madness of the age, and a new order of things that would restore the balance between heaven and hell"* (25). Dadaists used irrationality and chance to achieve a freedom from constraints and what they felt as a more authentic reality. Stoppard's main critique of Dadaism is aimed at their artistic approach, mainly the lack of structure and claim that anyone can be an artist and anything can be called art. In its historical moment, it offered an insistent response to the appalling events of World War I, yet its art (e.g. "chance" poems) has probably not such enduring artistic value as for example Joyce's work. Stoppard demonstrated the battle between Dadaist anti-art and traditional art on Shakespeare. At one point, Tzara cuts up Shakespeare's eighteenth sonnet and intends to transform it into a chance poem, but first Gwendolyn recites the entire sonnet.

Not only is the audience able to hear the beauty of the original sonnet, but also Tzara and Gwendolyn continue their conversation composed entirely of excerpts of Shakespeare. *"Here Stoppard's anthology of styles strives to show the superiority of conscious craftsmanship and linguistic mastery over the random and unstructured avant-garde"* (Fleming, 112). Under the careful control of Stoppard's guiding hand, Tzara randomly pulls out of his hat words of Shakespeare's sonnet. His final product, meant as his marriage proposal to Gwendolyn, has a rather sensual and erotic sub-text and climaxes with Gwendolyn's cry of *"heaven!"* (36). The colloquy between Joyce and Tzara works on three levels. Stoppard explains: *"On one it's Lady Bracknell quizzing Jack (from Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest). Secondly, the whole thing is actually structured on the eighth chapter of Ulysses, and thirdly, it's telling the audience what Dada is, and where it comes from"* (Tynan 109). The scene begins with interrogation and while Tzara is explaining the meaning of Dadaism, *"the visual image of Joyce conjuring, producing a carnation, a string of flags, and ultimately a rabbit "*(Fleming 113) creates a contrast. The image works better than any arguments. Joyce takes Tzara's pieces of paper, his trash, and creates from it something beautiful. Meanwhile Tzara is made to say that the only contribution to the world by Dadaists *is "the word Dada"* (40). *"The image ties Joyce and his type of art to the subsequent definition of the artist as the magician among humanity"* (Fleming 113). At the end of the scene both protagonists express their clear view on art:

> TZARA: Your art has failed. You've turned literature into a religion and it's as dead as all the rest, it's an overripe corpse and you're cutting fancy figures at the wake. It's too late for geniuses! Now we need vandals and desecrators, simple-minded demolition men to smash centuries of baroque subtlety, to bring down the temple, and thus finally, to reconcile the shame and the necessity of being an artist! Dada! *Dada! Dada!! (He starts to smash whatever crockery is to hand; which done, he strikes a satisfied pose.)* (41)

Some critiques argue that Tzara's speech makes him the most dynamic character. Yet Fleming, on the other hand, argues that theatricality here again speaks louder than words and shows that *"the only end product of his (Tzara's) artistic views is broken crockery"* (113). Joyce produces a defence:

> 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 in any of it, it is in 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 touch? Dust…But it is we who stand enriched, by a tale of heroes, ….of Ulysses, the wanderer, the most human, the most complete of all heroes – husband, father, son, lover, farmer, soldier, pacifist, politician, inventor and adventurer…. It is a theme so overwhelming that I am almost afraid to treat it. And yet I with my Dublin Odyssey will double that immortality, yes, by God there's a corpse that will dance for some time yet and leave the world precisely as it finds it. (41-42)

Stoppard often repeated in various interviews that he "loaded" the play for Joyce; that his speech speaks more or less for him, personally, and his approach to art. Yet the same monologue became a target of many critics who suggest that Stoppard did not do justice to Joyce's work. Especially the part where Stoppard's Joyce asserts that *"art leaves the world precisely as it finds it"* caused K. Tynan to remark*: "So much for any pretensions that art might have to change, challenge, or criticise the world, or to modify, however marginally, our view of it"* (122). Michael Billington adds: *"How can Ulysses be said to have left the world as it found it? Is changing people's consciousness and extending the change of the novel not as much a way of affecting the world as passing a piece of legislation?...Joyce enlarged our vision; and that seems to me a legitimate change of the world"* (Stoppard 102). These valid critiques do not take into consideration what Stoppard had repeated many times, thus his opinion that art has not immediate but long-term effect on the world. What he most probably meant was that the real, enduring value of art shows within a longer period of time, not having the ability to present an immediate effect. Fleming remarks that in that sense, Stoppard loaded the play for Joyce, not for the stage Joyce, but for the real Joyce and his approach to art, for *"the whole of Travesties, from its linguistic vitality to its switching of styles in midnarrative, is an embodiment of the Joyean aesthetics"* (Fleming 115).

The second act focuses on Lenin and his views on art and politics. Stoppard decided he would base most of Lenin's and Nadia's dialogues on their real historical writing. By means of Nadia, reading from their original correspondence, Stoppard aimed to present the Lenin character as being quite a serious and solemn figure. What is more, the audiences find out in this way that Lenin's speeches and replications are authentically based, which makes them

more effective and most probably very alarming. Stoppard deliberately shows how Lenin's views were clearly contradictory, which from today's point of view might sound even comic, however, when the play was released, what Lenin said was still reality:

> 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! Everyone is free to write and say whatever he likes without 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. (59)

According to Fleming, Stoppard's portrait of Lenin elaborates on the contradiction of his personal and political responses to art. Lenin did not admire avant-garde art; he was more in favour of traditional art, which again he rejected on political grounds. As an admirer of Beethoven he once more contradicts himself:

> I don't know of anything greater than Beethoven's Appassionata. Amazing, superhuman music. It always makes me feel, perhaps naively, it makes me feel proud of the miracles that human beings can perform. But I can't listen to music often. It affects my nerves, makes me want to say nice, stupid things and pat the heads of those people who while living in this vile hell can create such beauty. Nowadays we can't pat heads or we'll get our hands bitten off. We've got to hit heads, hit them without mercy, though ideally we're against doing violence to people… One's duty is infernally hard. (62)

Throughout the whole speech (in production), Beethoven's Appassionata is heard (Stoppard's director's notes), so as Fleming points out, the audience has the opportunity to judge for themselves - hear the beauty of traditional art, speaking for itself without any intellectual arguments.

A very important role in *Travesties* plays language. Once again, Stoppard (as in *Jumpers*) demonstrates how language can be used and misused by various ideologies. The character of Lenin, through his speeches, exemplifies the way language and its meaning can be twisted and distorted by a particular speaker. Lenin uses expressions such ach "free press" or "without restrictions", yet his connotations of those expressions are very different to their denotations.

The way he uses language is very similar to Tzara ´s interpretation of art and artist. Lenin and Tzara dare to interpret words in any sense they need it in a particular moment or to reach a certain goal. In the moment when such interpretation gets too far from the word's denotation, we can, in my opinion, speak about misusing of language in favour the speaker's profit.
Stoppard managed to link the ideologies discussed in *Travesties* to each other. Especially in the case of communism and Dadaism, it is more than significant. According to I. A. Orlich, it is not only that both the ideologies build on class equality and the inevitability of destroying the bourgeoisie, they both also adopt the same approach to art, they both want to cure humanity of bourgeois dementia. In the Eastern European Quarterly, Orlich writes:*" As radical projects, both Dadaism and communism create their own genre: the manifesto, which in the case of Dadaism is meant to change radically the life/art relation and to transform the figure of the artist into a brutal activist attached to (not detached from) life. And although political art was subsequently repressed by "Party" (communist party) art and liquidated by Stalin, and even though Dadaism quickly vanished from the stage, a powerful political art flourished, if only for a fleeting moment, both in Zurich and Russia. It was an art that deliberately scrapped the border between artistic and political action, an art whose professed goal was to crash the monsters of imperialism, Victorian models and prejudices, and classical art, and while dismantling the system, to prepare for the new reality that would bring the radical cohesion and merging of aesthetics and politics, ideology and reality, patriarchal and political structures."* (376)
Tzara's exalted speech, quoted earlier (line 9, page 38) anticipates and supports the whole of Lenin's militant ideology.
Even though *Travesties* has been widely criticized by specialists from theatre field for the fact that Tzara, Lenin and Joyce are given equal weight, the play as a complex has a different resulting effect. As P. Delaney argues, Stoppard has given space to many voices in his play, yet it does not mean there is not a prevailing idea. It is not only Stoppard's comment on his work that we can take into consideration, it is also history itself and what Dadaism and communism mean nowadays and what attributes would be given Joyce. Time will always show good that survives and bad that ends up at the ´history dump´.

3.2.2 *Travesties* using farcical elements to discuss serious ideas

The Structure of *Travesties* – as needed for a complex understanding, especially useful to understand how farce is incorporated into *Travesties*

The play has a unique structure that very much contributes not only to the expressing of serious ideas, but mainly to the comical elements of it.
The story of *Travesties* is interlaced with the plot of another theatre play. The whole structure is a mixture of Carr's memories and of the plot of Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Henry Carr, an old man, reminisces one particular period in his life. During World War I, Carr worked in Zurich, Switzerland, as a British consular official and happened to meet three important historical figures there: James Joyce - a modernist writer from Ireland, Tristan Tzara – the founder of Dadaism and V.I. Lenin – a Russian revolutionary. The plot takes place in two time levels. One time level pictures old Carr and his servant Bennet. The other time level leads us to Zurich during World War I., when Carr was a young man and met with Tzara, Joyce and Lenin. Both time levels are mutually connected, as the first one is the base for the second one. What comes back to Henry Carr is organized in "time slips" (Fleming). The whole trick lies in the repetition of the same situations with different dialogues. That strengthens the effect of Carr being an unreliable narrator and ridicules him a lot. As the scenes repeat, the audiences are given choices of interpretations of history, which can be marked as one more theme in *Travesties*. Stoppard strives to imply how intricate it is to interpret history relying just on our memory. The outcome is frequently not history itself, but what we wish or dream it to have been. An objective approach to history is according to Stoppard an impossible phenomenon, as its interpretation is almost always memory based and there are often no other proofs. (e. g. the Milan Kundera case from October 2008- of course, there was one proof, yet not evident and significant enough to designate Kundera an informer, done on the front- page of probably the most intellectual newspaper in the Czech Republic) There is also a non Wildean plot in *Travesties* - a spy plot. (Hunter, p) In the first act, young Henry Carr receives a letter from the ministry that he is entrusted by the British government to spy on Lenin and his political intentions and plans. This way Carr meets with Cecily, who becomes the reason why Carr had to deal with the moral dilemma of choosing his duty or his love-Cecily, thus putting himself into a position of a person who really could save the world from Lenin and the 1917 revolution in Russia. That is, obviously exaggerating his true importance – he would like to believe he was the one who could have pulled the strings, yet the reality, as we find out later, was completely different.

The proof of Stoppard's intention to combine a play of idea with a farce is undoubtedly, as mentioned earlier in this subchapter, the fact that he joined his own text with extracts from Wilde 's comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest* (apart from his artistic reasons, there was

a historical fact proving that the historical figure Carr took part in Joyce's production of Wilde´s *The Importance of Being Earnest* in Zurich during World War I and later sued Joyce for financial discrepancies). Fragments of *The Importance* are humorously incorporated onto the characters of *Travesties.*

Henry Carr and Tristan Tzara are remote resemblances of Algernon Moncrieff and Jack Worthing, respectively; Joyce represents Lady Bracknell, Bennett is supposed to be Algernon's servant Lane, Gwendolyn and Cecily are like characters from Wilde's play. *Travesties* does not reference the whole of Wilde's play, it only uses certain scenes – for example Algernon and Lane's conversations, the Algernon and Jack muffin eating scene, Lady Bracknell interrogating Jack, Gwendolyn visiting Jack's house and meeting with Cecily, or the final scene of Jack pairing up with Gwendolyn and Algernon pairing with Cecily. Stoppard does not use identical passages including dialogues; he works only with scene frames and wittily fills them with his own words, indeed, in Wildean style. For example, the original scene from *The Importance*, when Jack comes to visit Lady Bracknell and she questions him about his property and income as well as his origins, because he wants to merry her daughter Gwendolyn, is used in *Travesties* several times. Firstly, it appears when Joyce is inquiring Tzara, in *Travesties´* first act:

> JOYCE: What is the meaning of this?
>
> TZARA: It has no meaning. It is without meaning as Nature is. It is Dada.
>
> JOYCE: Give further examples of Dada.
>
> ZARA: The Zoological gardens after closing time. The logical gardenia. The bankrupt gambler. The successful gambler. The Eggboard, a sport or pastime for the top ten thousands in which the players, covered from head to foot in eggyolk, leave the field of play.
>
> JOYCE: Are you the inventor of this sport or pastime?
>
> TZARA: I am not.
>
> JOYCE: What is the name of the inventor?
>
> TZARA: Arp.

Secondly, it appears in the second act; and this time it is Lenin who paraphrases Lady Bracknell when speaking about lower class: *"Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example what on earth is the use of them? They seem as a class to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility! To lose one revolution is unfortunate. To lose two would look like carelessness! (58).*

In *Travesties* also appear other farcical elements, many of them again transferred from *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It is, for instance, a deliberate exchange of identities due to achieving a certain intent or goal, borrowed from Wilde as well. As in *The Importance*, the goal is to earn the love of a woman. Both Cecily and Gwendolyn (counterparts to Carr and Tzara) seem to love their men not for their natural characters but for their artistic or political convictions (in *The Importance* it was the name Ernest). Tzara pretends to be his brother, because he is afraid to reveal his Dadaist conviction in front of his beloved Gwendolyn, who works for Joyce and happens to admire his writing a lot. Carr then pretends to be Tzara, the artist, due to Cecily's political conviction and admiration of Lenin's ideas, as well as from practical reasons (that way he could find out more about Lenin's secret plans). An exchange of important document occurs as well, when Cecily and Gwendolyn inadvertently switch Lenin's essays and Joyce's chapter of *Ulysses* (resembling the unfortunate exchange of a baby and a novel manuscript that happened to Miss Prism in *The Importance*). Stoppard lets Joyce comment on Lenin's work, while Carr comments on Joyce's, when the switch is enlightened:

JOYCE: Who gave you this manuscript to read?

GWEN: I did!

JOYCE: Miss Carr, did I or did I not give you to type a chapter in which Mr. Bloom´s adventures correspond to the Homeric episode of the Oxen of the Sun?

GWEN: Yes, you did! And it was wonderful!

JOYCE: Then why do you return to me an ill-tempered thesis purporting to prove, amongst other things, that Ramsay MacDonald is a bourgeois lickspittle gentleman's gentleman?

GWEN: Aaaah.

TZARA: Ohhhh.

CECILY: Oops!

CARR: Aaah!

JOYCE *(thunders)*: Miss Carr, where is the missing chapter???

CARR: Excuse me – did you say Bloom?

JOYCE: I did.

CARR: And is it a chapter, inordinate in length and erratic in style, remotely connected with midwifery?

JOYCE: It is a chapter which by a miracle of compression uses the gamut of English literature from Chaucer to Carlyle to describe events taking place in a lying-in hospital in Dublin.

CARR *(holding out the folder)*: It is obviously the same work.

The structure of *Travesties* is often criticised for being too complicated and incomprehensible to an ordinary spectator, as well for the lack of a real narrative plot, functioning as a dramatic driving force and motivation of characters. Yet the real uniqueness of *Travesties* lies just in this combination of styles. Fleming writes: *"Plot summaries and descriptions of textual changes cannot do justice to the joie de vivre with which the play is written. Stoppard has said that he did not want "to write an inconsequential Dadaist play" (Kerensky 86), but rather he intended the play to include a "minor anthology of styles-of play, styles- of language" (Marowitz, "Tom Stoppard", 5). These styles include Wildean pastiche, political history lecture, documentary personal letters, Shavian dialectics, limericks, puns, parody, song, epigrams, and other wordplay. All the linguistic fireworks feed into the play's debate on the nature and function of art"* (Fleming 105)

Time is an important farcical element in *Travesties*. Carr's senile memory is a fertile source of comical situations and enables Stoppard to treat history with enormous flexibility. According to Fleming's analysis, the "time slips" allow Carr to interpret history the way he does, only when he starts to exaggerate too much or fantasise too much, the "time slip" device takes us back to the beginning of a scene and makes a fresh start. It allows the author to get himself out of any situations – the conversations do not have to lead to a logical conclusion but rather can be stopped whenever he wants. The first scene after Carr's opening monologue is an analogy of Earnest, when Carr (Algernon) is speaking to his butler Bennett (Lane). The scene is played five times. The first two scenes focus on war, as Carr and Bennett report on two different newspapers, the third, fourth and fifth focus on the Russian revolution and use the *comedy of inversion* (Fleming), as Carr, the consular official, knows relatively nothing about politics while Bennett, his servant, speaks as an expert on politics and political theory. In the second act, the old Carr becomes a part of Lenin-Nadia dialogue and comments on Lenin's monologues and Nadia's reading from their correspondence, which sounds comically:

> CARR and LENIN: Expressionism, futurism, cubism..... I don't understand and have no pleasure from them.
>
> CARR: My words. There was nothing wrong with Lenin except his politics.
>
> (60)

Most of the characters in Travesties are farce stereotypes, Hunter comments: *"/they/ are expected to perform at different times in quite different modes – limerick backchat, impassioned speech, son-and-dance: they are basically the leads in a musical revue. Their claims on our more serious attention rest in the unfarcical beliefs some of them defend"*. (Hunter p. 133) This does not include Gwendolyn, who does not represent any intellectual opinion in Travesties. The only character with some realistic psychology is Henry Carr, yet despite his experience with the horrors of the World War I trenches, he is described more like the sort of a person who dwells on tailoring details so much that it shifts him into the farce characters as well.

By means of using limericks (they appear very often in *Travesties*), poems with humorous intent, Stoppard parodies for example the impression that Tzara and his chance poems (one in the opening scene, second when working with Shakespeare's eighteenth sonnet) made on Joyce. Joyce not only ridicules Tzara, he also evaluates their (Tzara ´s and his own) artistic accomplishments side-by-side:

A Rumanian rhymer I met
Used a system he based on roulette
His reliance on chance
Was a definite advance
And yet … and yet… and yet

An impromptu poet of Hibernia
Rhymed himself into a hernia
He became quite adept
At the practice except
For occasional anti-climaxes.

When I want to leave things in the air
I say, Excuse me, I´ve got to repair
To my book about Bloom – (35)

Stoppard often counts on music when writing plays, frequently making it an integral part of them (*Jumpers, Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, etc.). *Travesties* uses music as well. This time, Stoppard decided to use a famous vaudeville song called *"Mr. Gallagher and Mr.*

Shean" with witty lyrics. He parodies the whole song using it as a frame for the dialogue that goes on between Gwendolyn and Cecily, when the letter mentioned visits Carr's home and meets Gwendolyn there. At the same time, this scene is, indeed, taken from *The Importance* and proceeds the same as in the original, when Gwendolyn and Cecily meet for the first time, they reveal their sympathies toward each other, yet when they arrive, due to a misunderstanding, to the fact that the object of their admiration is the very same man, Gwendolyn orders Cecily out of her lounge.

The play's title, *Travesties*, can be explained as a parody or as a disguise. In this sense Stoppard managed to combine both together. From the very beginning until the very end, the play is about changing identities. Parts of the first as well as of the second acts are a travesty of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It is also a great parody - of the characters, the treatment of time and history, the structure, the language, etc.

3.2.3 The discrepancy between the 1974 and 1993 version on *Travesties* (based on Hunter and Fleming)

The original version of *Travesties* produced a significant difference between Act 1 and Act 2. (Stoppard is well known for the mutability of his plays, he is never quite ready to say that the text is definite.) While the first was all in a humorous and light tone, the second worked as a huge contrast, sounding more like a political lecture. Stoppard did not want to incorporate the Lenin section into the Wildean plot and thought such discrepancy could work well, emphasising the tragedy of Lenin's ideology. However, later he changed Act 2, cut radically Lenin's monologues as well as Cecily's and Carr's initial debate on Marxist socialism that took place in the library and added another scene from *The Importance*, namely the Algernon-Jack muffin-eating scene. In the end, Stoppard decided to use Carr as an observer commenting throughout the whole second act and expose it entirely to his unreliable memory. *"The 1993 text makes clear Stoppard's "private sub-text ....that Old Carr, researching his memoirs in the Zurich Library, is thinking through bits of Lenin" (6 Nov.1975). Thus, at points during act 2, the audience sees Carr paging through a book as they hear the Lenins speak, and this device is introduced by having the mise-en-scéne mimic one of Lenin's public orations, but the words he speaks are a paraphrase of Lady Bracknell".* (Fleming 104-105). These words were quoted earlier in this chapter and sound even funnier as Lenin's approach to lower classes is diametrically opposed to the words he seems to say. At this very point Carr

reappears on the stage with the book he is examining, and he acknowledges that his memory has gone of the rails again.

Stoppard also changed his mind about not incorporating Lenin and Nadia into the Wildean plot. Not that they would voice characters from *The Importance* as Carr (though Lenin once does – Lady Bracknell), Tzara and the women characters, yet when they appear for their first escape plan, the cognizant spectator immediately recognizes Miss Prism and Chasuble – Nadia wears *"a bonnet, severely dressed and carrying a book"* while Lenin wears *"a clerical collar, but otherwise dressed in black from parson's hat to parson's leggings. He and Nadia look at each other and despair – Chasuble and Prism"* (53)

As a result of all these changes, the tone of second act is lighter and more playful. Moreover, the structure of it creates more integrated frame, as more is used from *The Importance of Being Earnest* and corresponds better to the first act. Despite such radical change, neither the second act lost its core essence of maintaining the different voices in the debate. *"Though a producer may wish to reinsert some of the cuts, as a whole, the 1993 version is a more focused, more comedic, and more effective text for performance"*. (Fleming 105)

3.3 Comparison of Jumpers and Travesties, similarities, differences – which play balances seriousness and frivolity better?

3.3.1 Structure of *Jumpers* and *Travesties* – similarity

Both *Jumpers* and *Travesties* start with a scene typical for Stoppard's early work. The audience is almost "attacked" with a mix of images that do not make any sense to them. Soon after, however, they discover there are completely normal explanations for all of them. A move that surprises the audience as well as ambushes their subconscious expectations, which primarily imply that those images will never be enlightened, or at least that there will not be such "normal " explanations to them. The puzzling beginning itself has the impact of the establishment of equivocality that Stoppard demonstrates in his plays. In *Jumpers*, the opening scene presents a naked stripper on a swing, later recognized in George's secretary who had an affair with married McFee, and a shot right after the stripper and swing had disappeared. In the initial scene of *Travesties,* we are surprised by a number of people speaking by different languages, thus creating extraordinary tangle of monologues. Later we learn why some of them spoke in different languages and that they do not understand each other, not linguistically but more ideologically, each also having their own interpretation of

events. The structural pattern follows with a long monologue of the main characters, in *Jumpers* it is George Moore, in *Travesties* Henry Carr, only after that dialogues take over and the plots start to develop. Fleming points out that Carr addresses the audience directly, which clarifies more or less that he will be the one in charge of the interpretation of the story. George addresses himself in the mirror, as he is preparing a paper for a public lecture, thus not the audience directly, which makes the play more objective.

3.3.2 Differences between *Jumpers* and *Travesties*

Jumpers and *Travesties* are similar plays in terms of treating serious ideas with humour and the effort to put them in balance. However, there are many significant differences between them. Apart from the structural parallel of the order of sequences in the beginning of the plays, the complex structure of each of the play is very different. *Jumpers* is Stoppard's original play, it does not use any other text to create the whole. It includes various types of dramatic and theatrical means, song, physical acrobatics, "whodunit", ménage a trois or a live TV report from the Moon. Apart from the very last sequence, thus when George is having a dream about the symposium and the TV report, there is unity of place and time. The whole story takes place in Moore´s apartment, within 24 hours. The action is more heterogeneous than the time and place, yet on the basis of the murder mystery it manages to hold firmly together and create the dramatic arch. As far as the frivolous aspect of *Jumpers*, it could be ascribed as satiric. The humour is coded mostly in the sarcastic reactions of the characters (e.g. dialogues of George and Dotty) and in cross talks (e.g. Bones and George dialogue on the purpose of George´s phone call – Bones came to investigate murder, George thinks he came because of his phone complaint about the party noise in his own flat). The metaphor with jumpers, visually representing the doctrine of radical liberals, might seem crazy enough. On the other hand it describes precisely how ´elastic´ were the radical liberal's thinking and their approach to human values.

Travesties takes its effect from pieces being juxtaposed. The plot is based on a play that already exists and the second act uses extracts of historical writing. Hunter remarks that Stoppard's original intention was to shock the audience. After seeing the first act, full of Earnest travestied scenes, time slips caused by Carr's ill memory, playing with language, puns and limericks, they were to experience the original second act. That was Cecily's lecture on Marxism and then Lenin's authentic correspondence and speeches. It was a huge jump from the light humorous Earnest-like first part into the deep dark waters of the reality of communist

ideology of the second part. It must have proved an immense disproportion even to Stoppard, because he decided to change the structure of his play, namely the second act, himself. The original "shocking" version was rewritten, or more precisely radically cut. Not only that Cecily's lecture was made much shorter, also Carr's comment on Marxism was cut and so was much of the dialogue of Nadia and Lenin (originally it occupied five whole pages of text when they were alone on the stage). Moreover, Stoppard decided to filter the reality of history through Carr's memory even in the second act (as discussed above) and despite his own initial unwillingness, he included Lenin and Nadia into the Wildean plot (in detail above). The reason why Stoppard made such changes is not really clear. We may only speculate that it was due to the critics, complaining about the discrepancy between the two acts, or the audience that was bored and puzzled by it. Stoppard probably took in consideration both, plus the fact that the communist reality had changed after the fall of the iron curtain, the circumstances were suddenly different. The topic of the second act then offered to be treated with a lighter tone. The rewrite managed to strengthen and weaken the play at the same time. The original text from 1974 was transformed in 1993 and showed efforts to unite the first and the second acts, which caused a bigger consistency of the play, yet having done that, Stoppard denied himself and his initial intention to mix together two acts with completely different content, energy and style. Such a shift in opinion ("*to Hyman in 1974 he insisted: 'it would have been disastrous to Prismize and Chasublize the Lenins'.'*", Hunter p.128) displays that Stoppard is able, and he often does it, to rebut himself not only in his inner dialogues, but also publicly, in interviews. People change their minds over time periods, it is an inevitable process. To claim the opposite would be very dangerous.

The characters of *Jumpers* and *Travesties* are also very different. In fact, the *Travesties'* characters are quite unique for Stoppard's work. Having taken in consideration most of his other characters, they show a common feature – that is uncertainty. They are not determined of their ideas or of what they intend to do. They always balance between the feeling of being wrong or right. Tzara, Joyce, Lenin, Cecily and Carr do not behave like that. Maybe it is because the characters are "borrowed" from *The Importance of Being Earnest* and Lenin is left as he was in reality. Old Henry Carr is the only one that shows elements of Stoppard's typical characters and that is done only by means of his memories (though not very credible), when he revises his past actions in Zurich in 1917. Every other character in *Travesties* (apart from Gwendolyn and Nadia, who stay a little bit aside) seems to be pretty much certain about his or her ideas and actions, thus self-confident. In *Jumpers*, on the other hand, we meet typical Stoppard's characters. Of course, there is one exception, Archie. He is very self-

confident, knows everything and is a doctor of everything. Apart from him, as Hunter points out, all the rest are uncertain individuals, questioning their ideas and actions all the time.

Overall, *Travesties* has a lighter and more humorous tone than *Jumpers*. This "cocktail" of styles of plays and styles of language has more than enough crazy effect. It is a very entertaining performance that manages to keep carrying some valuable views on art and its function. Yet it is probably *Jumpers* that succeeded better in balancing the seriousness and frivolity from the beginning to the end. *Travesties* mix too many styles and themes to keep a spectator's attention to all of them. *Jumpers* is closer to Stoppard's intention to marry the play of idea and farce, in terms of treating serious issues humorously and producing a good balance between the seriousness and frivolity. *Travesties* could be called, using Stoppard's style of comparison, ´a wild cohabitation of something slightly resembling the play of idea and an ultra farce´. At the same, I feel I have no right to judge the plays for being better or worse. They both wanted to bring together fun, entertainment and some serious ideas to think about. However similar, *Jumpers* and *Travesties* are unique pieces of art. Stoppard wanted "a perfect marriage of categories", but nothing can ever be perfect.

Chapter 4

Differences and similarities between Stoppard's plays and the dramatic category ´play of ideas´

One of the greatest differences between Stoppard's approach to the play of ideas is in the topics covered. As discussed earlier in my work, the original play of ideas usually discusses a concrete social issue, highly controversial for society then, meaning the time when the play of idea was, in its pure meaning, a live dramatic category. Those controversial issues, such as prostitution, alcoholism or crime committed out of necessity, were treated by authors usually from the victim's point of view. The plays, frequently moralistic, wanted to "attack" the audience, awaken them, and show them the reality and truth. They dealt with taboo issues of that time, revealing the dirt beneath conservative hypocrisy of Victorian era. Authors usually identified themselves with the moral outcome of their plays; they stood by one of their characters. Plays of ideas typically produce a single idea carrying a moral.
The themes that Stoppard chooses for his plays are not concrete social issues. He is interested in more abstract themes - basic human values, such as moral responsibility of an individual (*Night and Day*), absoluteness of moral and existence of God (*Jumpers*), or the function of art

and the artist (*Travesties, Artist Descending a Staircase*), or inaccessibility of history (Arcadia, *Travesties, Indian Ink*) or sense of human existence (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*). Stoppard's presentation of individual ideas is also very different from the original play of ideas. While the play of ideas presents a single prevailing point of view, Stoppard offers a multiplicity of voices - disputes them and refutes them, not really making clear on which side he stands as the author. Throughout his plays, Stoppard shows an inclination towards some of his characters, yet at the same time, he often puts them down, shows their weaknesses and ridicules them. Stoppard creates more comic characters than dramatic ones. That is why they might sometimes seem not subtle enough. When you create a comic character, you do not dwell on so many details as if you create a dramatic character. Comic characters are obviously flatter than those dramatic ones presented in the original plays of ideas. When writing a comic character, rising usually from discrepancies or duality, it is very important for the author to stay at a distance from such character. Into a dramatic character, on the other hand, an author can put certain depth and proportion. The tragedy category, which the play of ideas definitely belongs to, generally works with more details than the comic category. Stoppard is often being criticised for his emotionally flat and not elaborated characters, however, he creates his characters according to the genre he chose to be his domain and that is above all comedy.

As a "dualist", Stoppard does not moralise in his plays. It is always very dangerous to believe in a one and only truth. Stoppard shows the limits of the relativity of truth, yet he grants space for different interpretations of it.

Stoppard's attitude toward so called "socially committed art" is sceptical. While the play of ideas is a perfect example of such art, Stoppard does not believe in its effect. He has been criticised many times for not presenting a clear idea or opinion in his plays, yet he believes an artist is not obliged to defend himself for his work. As he said in an interview with Mel Gussow : *"If you looked out of your window and saw something that you really felt must be changed, something you felt was a cancer on society and you wanted to change it now, you could hardly do worse than write a play about it."* (Tom Stoppard in conversation, edited by P. Delaney, 75) Stoppard does not want to cure society from its cancer; he raises questions and offers possible answers or solutions. *"More traditional critics"* (Fleming 3) argue that behind Stoppard's multiplicity of voices, there is order based on moral absolutes, while *"postmodern and poststructuralist critics"* view his plays as accepting the relativity of almost all aspects of life. Fleming's interpretation of Stoppard's plays is based on both scholars: *"Plays do not possess one clear meaning, but rather are open to a multitude of responses,*

albeit some interpretations may be considered more valid than others. Thus at times both the traditional and the postmodern critics are accurate, but on particular points I argue that there are reasons for favouring one or the other and sometimes these seemingly polar readings can be mutually valid in a both/and paradigm. Kenneth Tynan suggests the paradoxical nature of Stoppard and his work when he speculates that Stoppard believes in a 'universe in which everything is relative, yet in which moral absolutes exist' (Tynan 56)" (Fleming 3). However, some of Stoppard's later plays show commitment, for example *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* or *Professional Foul*. Yet even the latter mentioned plays are not treated the same as the original plays of idea. They do express clear attitude of the author toward the topic covered, however, they do not exclude humour.

Another great distinction Stoppard shows in his versions of the play of idea and the original dramatic category is the degree of seriousness he uses to treat his ideas. If writers of plays of ideas wanted to shock the audience by the taboo topics they discuss in their plays, Stoppard wants to shock by the cohabitation of fun and serious ideas. Unlike Ibsen, but closer to Chekhov or Shaw, Stoppard manages to blends in his combination of categories seriousness and frivolity constantly compromising one another. Those two aspects are not always well balanced; the scale sometimes leans towards one or the other side, to a greater or lesser extent. Stoppard himself admits that the extent to which seriousness or frivolity should prevail depends on an individual spectator: *"What happens in my plays is a kind of marriage of categories. It's not my objective in the sense that I calculate it – it just seems to be what I'm doing, the way things come out. But I want to marry the play of idea to farce. Now that may be like eating stake tartar with chocolate sauce, but that's the way it comes out. Everyone will have to decide whether the seriousness is doomed or redeemed by the frivolity."* (Delaney, R. Wetzsteon 83). G.B. Shaw's plays are, as mentioned earlier, considered to be closest to Stoppard's plays marrying the play of idea and farce. What they share is the fact that Shaw, like Stoppard, manages to combine serious ideas with humour. Yet Shaw, unlike Stoppard, presents in his plays the real world, with real characters and realistic dialogues. If we take in consideration only Stoppard's plays *Jumpers* and *Travesties*, they hardly have anything in common with reality. Stoppard asserts: *"His (Shaw's) people have their feet on the ground. They walk into habitable rooms. His characters say sensible things to each other. They exist in a real world."* (Delaney, R. Wetzsteon 83)

The similarity of Stoppard's plays and the play of ideas in general consists in raising awareness of problems. Even though Stoppard does not get involved in concrete social issues, he employs himself with human values that have a direct impact on human behaviour, thus on

social behaviour. He does not want to cure society, yet he shows directions, where the pain, causing a certain illness, might come from. In that sense I disagree with critics blaming Stoppard for the lack of commitment. Stoppard may not be agitating and moralising in his plays, yet he opens debates on important questions, concerning what is probably the most serious illness of contemporary society, the loss, distortion or misinterpreting of human values.

Stoppard stated he wanted to "create a perfect marriage of the play of ideas and farce". He intended to clarify and categorise the style of plays he writes. Usually, categorising is very unfortunate, especially nowadays, when the rules and forms of traditional drama are often transformed or combined. Stoppard combined seriousness and frivolity in his *Jumpers* and *Travesties*, two aspects that did not exist side by side traditionally. On the other hand, Stoppard asserts that his plays are very conservative. In what way? one might ask. It is probably the conservative approach to the creation of comic characters and comic involutions. When writing *Jumpers* and *Travesties*, he built on features of conservative, or traditional, comedy. Be it the characters or the plots. By using the terms farce and the play of ideas to characterise his plays, Stoppard wanted to make clear that there is something more than farce or comedy in his plays.

Stoppard's greatest craft is to clash seriousness and frivolity. The ideas are important but he makes them interesting through the way he combines them with farce. As he says, if he wanted to elaborate ideas seriously, he would probably write essays, not theatre plays.

Chapter 5
Conclusion

Every piece of art is a matter of the point of view of its creator, regardless of the type of art. Two different artists, looking at the same thing or thinking about the same theme may come out with products that are very different. One may approach a certain theme with seriousness, another one with pathos, a third one with sarcasm. Stoppard chose a way that enables more than one point of view at the same time when trying to marry seriousness and frivolity. Such a method is at the same time very safe yet also extremely challenging. The safety rests in the possibility of avoiding personal responsibility for your own opinion, thus it may serve as an alibi to protect the creator when facing criticism, because the interpretation of such a piece of art is not just one prevailing one, but many different interpretations, sometimes even very opposing. The challenge in combining the incompatible consists in the fact that you might be

very well misunderstood; such a piece of art can seem confusing. A. P. Chekhov, for instance, one of the followers of Ibsen's plays of ideas, also aimed at, to a certain extent, the combination of seriousness and frivolity. His plays he considered most of all comedies but to his great surprise, when his texts came to life on stage, under the leadership of theatre directors, they were interpreted as tragedies. To look at things differently than it is usual and with certain innovation may be the way to success as well as to failure, as it was in the beginning of Chekhov's dramatic career. Stoppard might on the one hand raise a presumption that he only wanted to shock by combining the play of ideas and farce, on the other hand he strives to be honest in his plays. He does not pretend that he knows what is right and what is wrong, he admits that what one thinks to be seriously serious does not have to be perceived by somebody else with the same approach and the same applies for humour and laughable things. It all depends on circumstances, various points of views and many other factors. The type of characters Stoppard creates in his plays are also quite a risky choice. As mentioned earlier in this work, his characters are not heroes but ordinary people that have their strong and week points. Stoppard dares to disappoint the audiences by introducing a main character who is not very easy to identify with. He gives some space to his character to gain the audience's sympathy just a tiny little bit and straight after that he puts his character down by either ridiculing him or her, or revealing the darker, weaker side of his or her character. Sometimes to such extent that we wonder why we have or even wanted to identify ourselves with such a character. It can also make us feel uneasy about the fact that we might behave with the same unpredictability. We liked the character because he or she was reminding us of us or we shared mutual opinions. Suddenly we are laughing at him or her, or even feel a certain hatred towards the character, because he or she does something we would hardly ever confess publicly. Yet we know that there are these dark sides of ourselves but we simply dislike talking or, even worse, being reminded of it.

Stoppard most probably wanted to take this challenge more than to hide himself behind the curtain of relativity. The simple fact that he admits he deliberately mixes seriousness with frivolity, one constantly being compressed by the other, proves such a conclusion. Stoppard makes an effort to express in his plays that even serious themes, when taken too seriously, might become farce, as with George Moore and his philosophical monologues. On the other hand, some elementary things that often seem obvious and even might in some people invite feelings of cliché or ridicule can become essentially serious issues. Such an example is displayed well once more in *Jumpers*. When human society starts to ignore or twist basic human values, such as politeness, humanity or considerateness or the freedom of individuals,

which some take as obstacles or unnecessary and funny anachronisms, such an approach soon drives human society into a similar situation as we may experience in *Jumpers*. Often we are preoccupied with such sophisticated ideas that we forget about the basic human values, so obvious and taken for granted, that their importance vanishes into thin air.

Stoppard's plays, combining seriousness and frivolity, offer various individual interpretations. Someone can tend to be more addressed by the seriousness; another might enjoy the frivolity above all. The trick consists in the balance you create between them. Too much seriousness would deny Stoppard, marking himself as a writer of comedy, and his primary purpose to entertain people with his plays. Too much frivolity could cause audiences to forget the play as soon as they have seen it. If Stoppard wanted to entertain and at the same time pass over some message, containing more serious ideas, he inevitably had to choose just the way of combining seriousness and frivolity. However incompatible the play of ideas and farce might seem at the first sight, the combination of seriousness and frivolity is the most natural expression of what goes on in real life.

Appendix 1

1.1 Biography (ref. Hančil, Arcadia playbill, ND)

Tom Stoppard, his birth name being Tomáš Straussler, was born in 1937 in Zlín, Czechoslovakia, as the younger son in the family of a doctor in Bata's hospital. The family left Czechoslovakia out of fear of the Nazis - according to historical sources sometime in March or April 1939. Bata wisely prepared his employees for years of emigration, which meant that Stoppard's father, MUDr. Evžen Straussler, had spent a week as a trainee in every stage of Bata's production and sale departments before his departure. However, in Singapore, to which the family emigrated, he worked as a doctor again and his wife, Marta, worked as a nurse. After the Japanese invasion, Stoppard's mother went with the children to India. His father was supposed to arrive one ship later, but that one was sunk by the Japanese on its way to Australia. The family acknowledged the manner of his father's death much later and only thanks to RNDr. Emil Máčel, who gathered numerous valuable facts about the so-called „Bata Jews" and long corresponded with Stoppard's mother Marta.

Marta Straussler lived with her two sons in Darjeeling, where she met Kenneth Stoppard, a major in the British army. In 1946 she married him; he adopted her children and took them to Britain. Stoppard's mother went for complete assimilation, not teaching her children their native language. Stoppard went to an English-speaking school from the very first grade

already in Darjeeling and continued to study at a boarding school in Britain. He quit his studies at the age of 17, never attending any university and went straight into journalism. When he left school, he felt tired and disgusted by everything concerning studying. However, in his career, he opted for a style which compelled him to a lifelong self study of subjects he decided to deal with in his plays

1.2 **Work of Tom Stoppard – chronologically**

1960-62	writes *The Gamblers* (a one-act play), *A Walk on the Water* (later revised as *Enter a Free Man*)
1963	*A Walk on the Water* televised
1964	*The Dissolution of Dominic Boot* and *'M' is for Moon Among Other Things* (one act plays) on radio. Three short stories published by Faber and Faber. Writes *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, a one act burlesque, during five month in Berlin on a Ford Foundation grant.
1965	*The Gamblers* performed at Bristol University; *A Walk on the Water* televised.
1966	*If You're Glad I'll Be Frank* on radio; *A Separate Pace* televised. Translation of *Tango* staged by the RSC. ***Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*** staged on the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. *Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon*, a novel, published.
1967	***Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*** staged at the National Theatre (April) and on Broadway (October). *Teeth* and *Another Moon Called Earth* televised; *Albert's Bridge* on radio
1968	*Enter a Free Man* and *The Real Inspector Hound* staged; *Neutral Ground* televised
1970	*After Magritte* staged; *Where Are They Now?* on radio
1971	*Dogg 's Our Pet* staged by Inter-Action
1972	***Jumpers*** staged at the National Theatre. First New York production of *The Real Inspector Hound* and *After Magritte; Artist Descending a Staircase* on radio
1973	translates *The House of Bernarda Alba*; directs *Born Yesterday*
1974	first NY production of ***Jumpers***, ***Travesties*** staged by the RSC

1975 *The Boundary* (co-written with Clive Exton) televised; adapts *Three Man in a Boat* for TV; co-authors screenplay of *The Romantic Englishman*; first NY production of ***Travesties***

1976 *Dirty Linen* staged; **Jumpers** returned to the National Theatre repertoire; *The (15 Minute) Dogg 's Troupe Ham*let performed outside the National Theatre by Inter-Action; *Dalliance* (an adaptation of a Schnitzler play) staged

1977 ***Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*** receives one performance with the London Symphony Orchestra; *Professional Foul* televised

1978 ***Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*** revived at the Mermaid Theatre with a chamber orchestra and given first American production in Washington, D.C.; ***Night and Day*** staged; writes screenplay of *Despair*

1979 *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* staged. *Undiscovered Country* (an adaptation of a Schnitzler play) staged at the National Theatre; first NY productions of ***Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*** and ***Night and Day***

1980 writes screenplay of *The Human Factor*

1981 *On the Razzle* (an adaptation of a Nestroy play) performed at the National Theatre

1982 ***The Real Thing*** staged. *The Dog It Was That Died* on radio

1983 *The Love for Three Oranges* (translation of libretto for Prokofiev's opera) performed by the Glyndebourne Touring Opera

1984 first NY production of ***The Real Thing***; Squaring the Circle televised; *Rough Crossing* (an adaptation of Molnár play) staged at the National Theatre

1985 co-writes screenplay for *Brazil*; revises ***Jumpers*** for West End revival; directs *The Real Inspector Hound*

1987 translates *Largo Desolato* by Václav Havel; writes screenplay for *Empire of the Sun*

1988 ***Hapgood*** staged

1989 revises ***Hapgood*** for first American production in Los Angeles; first NY production of *Artist Descending a Staircase*

1990 ***Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead***, in a film version written and directed by Stoppard, wins the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival; writes screenplay for *The Russia House*

1991 film version of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* released; *In the Native State* on radio; writes screenplay for *Billy Bathgate*

1992 *The Real Inspector Hound* revived on Broadway; writes screenplay for *Shakespeare in Love* (film production cancelled in October)

1993 ***Arcadia*** staged at the National Theatre (April); ***Travesties*** revived by the RSC (September); *A Separate Pace* broadcast on BBC (March); ***Arcadia*** on radio (December); writes new narration for Lehár´s *The Merry Widow* performed by the Glyndebourne Opera in Festival Hall (July); writes screenplay for *Hopeful Monsters*, a novel by Nicholas Moseley

1994 first NY production of ***Hapgood***; revives *In the Native State* for the stage; ***Arcadia*** and ***Travesties*** both transfer West End theatres

1995 ***Indian Ink***, stage version of In the Native State, Aldwych Theatre

1997 *The Seagull*, adaptation of Chekhov´s Seagull, Old Vic Theatre, London

1998 ***The Invention of Love***, staged in Royal National Theatre, Theatre Royal Haymarket, London; The Lyceum Theatre, Brodway

2002 ***The Coast of Utopia*** (*Voyage – Shipwreck – Salvage*), Royal National Theatre, London

2006 Rock´n´Roll, Royal Court Theatre, London

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