Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to analyze how Tom Stoppard re-works original texts in such a way that his plays retain their textual origins and yet demonstrate the playwright's originality in his experimentation. It will be my endeavor to highlight the meta-theatrical concerns in the plays selected for study through a detailed analysis of Stoppard's use of the play-within-the-play and role-playing-within-the-role as devices of meta-dramatic discourse which run through almost all the texts. I begin with this introductory Chapter that charts the progress of Stoppard's career highlighting his main achievements with his biography in the backdrop. Thus, this Chapter paves the way for a detailed study of Stoppard's plays in the Chapters that follow.

As a playwright, Tom Stoppard defies labeling. He has been called absurdist, cerebral, parasitical, intellectual joker and political at different points of time. Yet, he has received acclaim in all the media that he has handled – stage, radio, TV and film. To understand his success, it is imperative to look at the context in which he started writing, “Born fifteen years earlier, Tom Stoppard might never have become a playwright at all. Nor for that matter might William Shakespeare, if born in 1549 rather than 1564. The man and the time need to coincide” (Hunter 7). Anthony Jenkins in The Theatre of Tom Stoppard says:

Had Lord Malquist and Mr Moon become a best seller in the autumn of 1966 and had Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead vanished – as Ros and Gui! do – after that year’s Fringe Festival at Edinburgh, the modern theater could have lost its most adroit manipulator of stage pictures. (ix)

So, apparently, it is sheer timing that has made Stoppard one of the most widely read and performed playwrights of today. At the same time, it is equally accepted that any work of art is the product of the complex inter-play of an artist’s memory and imagination.
Various conditioning factors like background, talent, temperament, conditions, etc., also go into the production of a creative work. Inherited literary tradition and art, and biography of the creator, together function as the backdrop for artistic endeavor. Tom Stoppard vehemently resists all attempts of critics to link his early life to his oeuvre, whereas, he himself invents and creates lives as well as biographies, filling them out with facts and events enabling him to make significant use of the theatre as a medium for biography. He has given biographies to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, James Joyce, Lenin, A.E. Housman, and he also bestowed a love affair on Shakespeare. It is possible that his distrust of biography has its origins in his family’s reticence to reveal the past and he has aggressively resisted easy identifications between his life and his art. (Nadel 161). But a glance at his origins is absolutely necessary for an understanding of his work and the kind of reaction it prompted from the world and men of letters.

Born Tomas Straussler, on July 3, 1937 in Zlin, Czechoslovakia, he was the second son of a doctor working for the Bata Shoe Company. In 1939, the Jewish family left for Singapore to escape from the Hitler regime. After the Japanese invasion, Stoppard’s mother and the children came to India. But, his father was killed when the Japanese sank the ship on which he was sailing to Australia. In Darjeeling, his mother worked for the same company, which had employed his father and Tom boarded at an American multi-racial school. In 1945, his mother married Kenneth Stoppard, a Major in the British Army and moved to England. Consequently, Stoppard took his step-father’s name. After his schooling in Yorkshire, in 1954 Stoppard left for Bristol to work for the next six years as a news reporter, theatre critic and feature writer. These initial years of writing reviews are reflected in his 1967 play The Real Inspector Hound. He worked first for the Western Daily Press and subsequently for the Bristol Evening World. He later resigned in 1960 to write plays and fiction, as his job as a theatre reviewer had aroused his interest in writing for the stage. A year after he visited Germany on a Ford Foundation Grant, in 1965 he married Jose Ingle. Then came the triumph of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead and the birth of his sons in 1966 and 1969. Though Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead and Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon were written around the same time, i.e., 1965-66, it was the former which eclipsed the latter. It was around this
time that Jose had a nervous breakdown and Stoppard decided to divorce her. He took custody of his sons and moved in with Dr. Miriam Moore-Robinson in 1970. After his divorce in 1972, he married Miriam on February 11, 1972. They have two sons, born in 1972 and 1974. In 1990, Stoppard entered into a relationship with Felicity Kendal, a leading lady in many of his plays and he and his wife agreed to a legal separation, to be divorced in 1992. In 1998, his relationship with Felicity Kendal also came to an end. Since then he has written translations, adaptations, film scripts, apart from plays, which he writes very prolifically every three to four years, The Coast of Utopia (2002), a trilogy of three sequential but self-contained plays, Voyage, Shipwreck, Salvage, and Rock "n" Roll (2006) are his most recent successes.

This project will study how Stoppard was doing two things, "recognizing the nature of his talent and ability, and actively and deliberately resisting a political imperative that required a display of social conscience" (Kelly, Craft 3) when he started on his literary career.

The context of the twentieth century, in which Stoppard started writing, is one of the most vital and exciting periods in English drama, rivaling the Elizabethan theatre in thematic scope and stylistic ambition. (Innes1). John Osborne and the group of so-called kitchen-sink realists, who emerged in the 1950s, were hailed at the time as a revolutionary force on the English stage. They aimed at an accurate and meticulous depiction of middle class domestic trivia. Each of these dramatists moved towards increasingly idiosyncratic forms of drama and they increased their demands upon their interpreters. Experimenting whenever they saw the need, they realised that the theatre can be free from the constraints of what used to be called a well-made play, which practically does not exist any longer. The ingredients of a well-made play: plot, character development, psychological truth, dramatic language, as an impersonation of "real" speech, were dissolved in the theatrical flux of this period. Look Back in Anger by John Osborne, was one play which single-handedly exploded all the old theatrical conventions. It was taken to represent a new level of social realism, ushering in the era of "kitchen sink drama". The inability of Osborne’s characters to act heralded the listlessness of the
absurdist theatre that was to follow. Arnold Wesker’s plays were also marked by loss of
dramatic coherence and regression just as Harold Pinter’s early plays such as *The Room*
(1957) and *The Birthday Party* (1958) were rejected as obscure. (Innes 279). The entire
theatre of this era came across as “apolitical” and none of the dramatists wanted to
“change the world.”

A direct inheritor of Osborne’s, Pinter’s and Wesker’s brand of drama, Stoppard’s
first play *Enter a Free Man*, did not do well at the hands of the press, probably because it
does not have the originality of form that mark Stoppard’s subsequent plays. Despite
being disparaged by Stoppard himself, the play is not negligible. Originally written as *A
Walk on the Water* in 1960, in three months, this play was bought by a commercial
television company. It was produced on the London stage after several re-writes, under a
new title, *Enter a Free Man*, two years after the success of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
are Dead*. It heralds the playwright’s pre-occupation with a number of issues like
imagination, creativity, free will and freedom, control etc. He continues to examine the
question of freedom and control in his political plays, as this study will explicate later.

This influence was displaced by the production of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*
which marked a radical departure from the brand of social realism practiced earlier. Also,
the period of English drama (1950- onwards) was such that the influence of Brecht and
Beckett co-existed. Bertolt Brecht provided post 1950 British drama with various aspects
of stylistics and a radical stage form, which had immediacy and directness. He also gave
modern theatre a means of portraying dramatic characters not as unchanging and
circumscribed entities but as contradictory, alterable beings. His drama led to an
encouragement to write plays that are vigorously theatrical, using visual qualities,
employing songs, using the stage to represent exotic locations that are distant in
geographical and historical terms. Moreover, he led to a re-discovery of the fun of the
theatrical event. This influence and the theatre of the absurd form the backdrop of
Stoppard’s initial phase of writing. Absurdist theatre was a part of the aesthetic response
to the predicament of uncertainty that plagues our age. Man’s relationship to the universe
was tenuous and life seemed precarious. When Stoppard began writing, the theatre of the
absurd was at its pinnacle and he has himself explained the influence of the movement on
his plays in an article for Sunday Times in 1968:

   It seemed clear to us, that is to say the people who began writing about the same
time that I did, about 1960, that you could a lot more in the theater than had been
previously demonstrated. “Waiting for Godot”- there’s just no telling what sort of
effect it had on our society, who wrote because of it, or wrote in a different way
because of it. But it really redefined the minima of theatrical experience. Up to
then you had to have X: suddenly you had X minus one. (qtd. in Page 86)

   Waiting for Godot had rattled the composure of British theatre. It was recognised
that innovation was not only possible but absolutely necessary if British drama was to
have any life in the 1950s and beyond (Brown 2). Beckett has exerted a specific influence
on Stoppard, who has consciously adapted his theatrical approach. Beckett’s drama
embodies typically intellectual qualities, which also mark Stoppard’s theatre. A vast
academic industry has grown around Waiting for Godot and its principles have now
become an accepted part of theatre language. Just as Beckett’s plays are open to any
number of interpretations and have particular academic appeal, similarly critics differ on
the “seriousness” of Stoppard and his plays. In a speech delivered at the New York Public
Library in 1999, Stoppard says:

   Three plays which meant a lot to playwrights of my generation when we were
young were Look Back in Anger, Waiting for Godot, and The Birthday Party…
   Each play was simultaneously inspiring and baffling. It broke a contract which up
to that era had been thought to exist between a play and its audience.

   Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead was Stoppard’s first success, though it
was described as a mere derivative of Hamlet and Waiting for Godot. As a play, it is less
“grand” than the former and less “serious” than the latter, but it can be considered a re-
write of both these works. Revisions and adaptations have generally been considered
aesthetically inferior exercises while novelty in creative writing is thought of as an
essential virtue of a literary product. It is for this reason that this pioneering work was
disparaged as a theatrical parasite by Robert Brustein in his article “Waiting for Hamlet:
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.” New Republic, 4 November 1967. But, re-visioning and re-working of classics and other texts is not a new phenomenon in literary history. It is a well-established fact that Shakespeare re-made old plots, adapting existing tales and legends into plays which catered to the demands of his audience. Today writers like Edward Bond, Arnold Wesker, Eugene Ionesco, Charles Marowitz and Tom Stoppard have re-written Shakespeare’s plays and have brought into focus the textuality and inter-textuality of the Shakespearean canon through their revisions of Shakespeare’s plays. Referring to Stoppard, Harold Bloom in his book Modern Critical Views stretches his term “anxiety of influence” to describe him as an author who wills influence and thus, is an unusual case of “anxiety of influence.” This study will explicate how Stoppard has given a new facet to the art of re-working already existing texts by analyzing three major facets of Stoppard as a playwright, namely, his practice of the art of pastiche, his parodies and finally his political plays.

Pastiche, literally meaning “paste”, usually consists of a medley of extracts, which have been fitted into one work. It requires a re-interpretation of already existing works and an experimental approach. Most artists employ pastiche as a specialized, self-conscious and self-reflexive mode. It involves an imitation of aesthetic style, juxtaposition of motifs from different sources and sometimes “creates a deliberate incongruity between the borrowed material and its new, textual position” (Jaidev 30). After having derogatory connotations earlier, in modernism and post-modernism, pastiche has now acquired some prestige. It seems that in Stoppard’s case, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead as a pastiche, is his way of coping with the influence of both Beckett and Shakespeare which are influences otherwise too strong to be shed and the play itself is perhaps one of the most illustrative examples of a pastiche in modern drama.

The second chapter of this study has endeavored to examine how Stoppard shifts the spotlight to two marginalised characters of Hamlet, re-creating, rather creating biographies for them and at the same time re-producing the minimalistic aura of Waiting for Godot. Rosencrantz and Guilenstem are Dead has been dealt with not only as an absurdist play but also as a pastiche of two texts which are representative of the Renaissance and Modern ages of literature. This chapter has also dealt with Stoppard’s
recent screenplay, *Shakespeare in Love* (1999) which has been placed in the context of Stoppard’s career later in this chapter.

Victor L. Cahn in his book, *Beyond Absurdity: The Plays of Tom Stoppard*, has drawn attention to the thematic parallels between *Lord Malquist and Mr Moon*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *Enter a Free Man*. *Lord Malquist and Mr Moon* is Stoppard’s only attempt at fiction writing till date. According to Cahn, the basic characteristics of absurd theatre have been transferred to this work of fiction. In all three the protagonists are befuddled victims of the world around them. The novel has a disjointed structure, composed of a series of incidents and images tied together by a single group of characters and a few recurrent themes, “As in absurd drama, this dramatic structure reflects the vision of a fragmented, irrational world, an attitude embellished by the tone, one of blanked-out emotion” (Cahn 66). Extravagantly allusive, *Lord Malquist and Mr Moon* provides a window on Stoppard’s early influences. It also introduces several prototypes which figured in his later plays (such as the unnoticed corpse, later seen in *The Real Inspector Hound* and *Jumpers*).

A very significant initial phase of Stoppard’s career was the 1960s, when the radio was an attractive medium for the aspiring writer. The BBC attracted playwrights with its history of creating and promoting serious drama as a distinct genre. According to Katherine E. Kelly, radio offers aspiring playwrights highly defined limits, both aesthetic and practical, within which to perfect their craft. (“Tom Stoppard Radioactive: A Sounding of the Radio Plays”. *Modern Drama* 32:3, 1989:440). In 1964, Stoppard wrote two short 15 minute plays for BBC radio, *The Dissolution of Dominic Boot* and “M” is for *Moon Among Other Things*. He himself acknowledges that in the writing of these plays, he was more concerned with exploring the medium than character, “They do count. They don’t count in the same way. It’s not that the plays are short, it’s that they are fundamentally jokes. They’re musical boxes, mechanical contrivances. They’re not plays about characters” (Gussow 24).
If You’re Glad, I’ll be Frank, Albert’s Bridge and Where are They Now? were other plays for the radio written around the same time. Simultaneously, Stoppard was also writing for the TV. His first play to be broadcast by the BBC in August 1966 was A Separate Peace. Innovating and experimenting, Stoppard produced various successful TV plays like Teeth, Another Moon Called Earth, Neutral Ground, etc. What is common to all these plays is that they provided Stoppard with much of the impetus needed to produce his later stage plays. Their brevity encouraged him to write with maximum economy and with the potential of holding the auditor/spectator’s attention. Freshness, unconventional dialogue and surprising, sometimes unreal, situations rather than cliched plots and situations characterise these early radio and TV plays, “Most of these plays present a series of images of the individual trapped inside a mechanistic world, warped and destroyed by a logical system which fails to accommodate itself to human aspirations” (Bigsby 6). In his radio plays, Stoppard meets the requirements of inventiveness that make creating pictures and action in sound only, a challenging task. They have architectonic economy and density. His TV plays are also marked by originality in writing as the television screen is hospitable to dramatic images of immediacy and an intensity common in the cinema but technically impossible on the stage. Consequently, Stoppard’s plays provide all the ingredients which are the stuff of a good TV play.

Stoppard’s next stage play, written in 1967, was The Real Inspector Hound. It is the next play undertaken for study in Chapter III of this thesis. The idea for this play originated in Stoppard’s experience as a theatre critic in Bristol and he set out to parody the type of play that he reviewed. Agatha Christie’s The Mousetrap being the unmistakable hypo-text of The Real Inspector Hound, this chapter has explicated how Stoppard satirizes and parodies the standard formula of the whodunit genre. According to The New Oxford Dictionary of English, “A parody is the imitation of the style of some artist or work with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect.” In its intent, parody differs from pastiche, but both use imitation and mimicry. However, parody usually has a subversive intention; it ridicules or diminished the source. Subverting and thwarting conventional expectations, Stoppard almost creates a new genre in itself in the play. A
major portion of this chapter examines the “hall of mirrors effect” which provides the play its complexity. An attempt has been made to show how this play is a general comment by Stoppard on the writing of critical reviews.

A play often performed as a companion piece to The Real Inspector Hound is After Magritte, written in 1970. Stoppard seems to have been quite occupied with the “detective” type of stories at this point of time. He highlights the fact that the Agatha Christie mechanism can also depict a bizarre set of components in a way which is entirely different from Beckett’s. The play is an imitation of the works of an avant-garde artist, Rene Magritte, many of whose works were parodies and had recently been exhibited with deliberate mismatching of labels. The characters are shown in a bizarre situation when the play opens; the mother is lying on her back on an ironing board, the wife on her hands and knees wears a full-length ball gown, the husband is wearing thigh-length waders and evening dress and Holmes, a police constable, is watching through the window. The “After” in the title depicts Stoppard at his imitative best, the sense implied being that of Magrittean disarray and to further complicate the situation, the characters have returned from a Magritte exhibition. All the characters have perfectly logical explanations for their current states and there is no great detection required, not to ignore the play on the name of the constable. The serious mode in which the story is told gives sheer enjoyment despite the farcical tone of the play.

His comic genius notwithstanding, Stoppard is a meticulous craftsman. Jumpers (1971) is one play, which, adequately illustrates this fact. He devoted two years to this play, reading widely in philosophy and reworking material from previous plays. His voracious reading spans theories of literature, science, advanced mathematics and physics, art, philosophy, Latin and Greek scholarship:

A lot of my reading has resulted from the sheer necessity of having something to deliver – a piece of writing... the books on ethics and moral philosophy that went into Jumpers I found immensely enjoyable. I think I enjoyed the rules that philosophers play by. It’s an extremely formal discipline. (Hayman, Tom Stoppard 1)
Jumpers (1972) and Travesties (1975) are two plays, which have received most of the critical attention, after Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead. Both plays have vivid stage metaphors and function as vehicles for Stoppard’s ideas. Jumpers offers some wild and implausible theatrical events and a succession of ludicrous happenings, the chandelier-swinging secretary, the agnostic Archbishop of Canterbury, the acrobatic University dons, the policeman calling on his murder suspect with a bouquet and the story of McFee shooting himself inside a plastic bag.

Travesties draws upon Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest as the backdrop. The play is a dazzling display of intellectual prowess on the part of the playwright and it demands that the audience recognise the characters and their identity as existents in history. Stoppard draws upon the fact that James Joyce, Lenin and the Dadaist Tristan Tzara were all in Zurich at the time of the First World War. He brings together these artists and revolutionaries with one Henry Carr, a minor official at the British Consulate in Zurich at that time. Carr had acted the role of Algernon in a production of The Importance of Being Earnest staged by James Joyce. Stoppard, the manipulator that he is, seized upon this small event and wrote Travesties, a travesty of Wilde’s exquisite comedy. Wilde emphasized the pursuit of beauty and of style, particularly form. Stoppard’s views on art and its role are an extension of Wilde’s. Wilde foresaw in 1891 that there could be no correspondence between the arts and the state, a view in which the young Stoppard believed quite “earnestly.” However, this study will explicate later that over the years, Stoppard has cultivated a progressive attachment with the issue of politics and art. Perhaps, Stoppard’s most remarkable achievement in Travesties has been his politicizing of the context of Wilde’s apolitical and neutral play.

It is at this point, that is in the mid-seventies, that there is a change in the tone and emphasis of Stoppard’s work and attention is drawn to his increasing political concerns, which relate mainly to an aversion to any kind of gagging or censorship. Every Good Boy Deserves Favour and Professional Foul (1978) are plays that demonstrate this preoccupation. They play off the Cold War politics of Eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia and the former Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s. It has been remarked that in this period
of his career, Stoppard comes off the fence of scrupulous detachment on which he had been sitting to make some direct observations about issues as vital as politics and political control. These plays are capable of raising serious ethical debates and they discuss the erosion of individual liberty in the communist countries. (Hayman, Tom Stoppard 135). At this time Stoppard was in contact with Vaclav Havel, a fellow Czech playwright, who later became his friend. Vaclav Havel represents the politicized absurdist tradition of Eastern Europe. He was one of the first Czech dramatists to use the absurdist tradition to satirize and attack the bureaucratic machinery of state government. At one time the suppression of individual liberties under Communism was personified in the years of persecution that Havel had suffered. (Kelly, Companion 117). The playwright of opposition, he later became the President of Czechoslovakia in 1990. Stoppard dedicated Professional Foul to Havel as the inspiration and several key scenes in the play are based on Stoppard’s knowledge of real events of Havel’s arrest (the play’s Pavel Hollar). In this play, Stoppard clearly depicts that oppression, cruel and unsympathetic, is a blot on the existence of man.

On the lines of Chapter II, the fourth chapter also deals with two plays, Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth (1979) and Indian Ink (1995). The aim of this chapter has been to draw attention to the increasingly political content of Stoppard’s work. Though Stoppard believes that art cannot have a direct effect on society yet it can create a moral climate, which is conducive for eventual change. In the case of Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth, the fourth chapter shows the place of culture and literature within repressive political systems, examining Stoppard’s depiction of the use of Shakespeare as a cultural monument. Dogg’s Hamlet and Cahoot’s Macbeth were two separate plays originally, the former originated in 1979 while the latter was born out of Stoppard’s meeting with two playwrights Pavel Kohout and Pavel Landovsky, who performed a 75-minute Macbeth in a private room, as they were banned from the stage. A dominant influence on these plays, individually and as a single text, has been Ludwig Wittgenstein’s speculations in Philosophical Investigations (1953) about language comprehension.
A very significant piece of work to follow this phase was Night and Day (1978). “Professional Foul and Night and Day are companion pieces – the one examining the ethical problems generated by a closed society, the other, the moral dilemmas of sustaining a supposedly open society” (Bigsby 36). Night and Day illustrates how passionately Stoppard feels about the freedom of the press and it is in line with Every Good Boy Deserves Favour and Professional Foul, as it makes a direct political statement; only in this case Stoppard’s stance is clearly at odds with the attitudes fashionable among British playwrights. He shows no reverence towards trade unions and what is perhaps even more surprising is that he chooses an African setting and a Black President of what was once a British colony to spark off a debate about the British press. Very conveniently he also inserts a love story in the play showing how he can integrate heterogeneous material to form a coherent and cohesive piece of writing with no jerks and starts.

It has been said of Stoppard that he cannot write about either love or women, “And what of the heart beneath – or is there one? Not according to those who see him as a glittering wordsmith who puts style before feeling, theatrical trickery before genuine emotion, and who never could write about women” (Jenkins 159). But his next play The Real Thing (1982) is precisely about both. This play operates on different levels of reality and the playwright employs the complex device of the play-within-a-play to make this work a challenging piece for interpretation. The protagonist, a witty and intellectual playwright, mirrors Stoppard’s own self, and seems to tease the audience (Hodgson 115). The playwright in the play, Henry, writes a play House of Cards, which has structural similarities to Stoppard’s play and these inter-connecting pictures dictate the structure of the entire play. It seems as if Stoppard questions the existence of the “real” as opposed to the falsity of things. This work stands as a major personal achievement for Stoppard who finally wrote “the love play” that critics wanted.

Stoppard’s interest in natural science and human identity is the staple of Hapgood (1988), his next big play. Stoppard labeled the play “a melodrama” which actually is a spy thriller with numerous sets of twins: British and Russian, real and imaginary, overt
and covert, nominative and designative, psychological and biological. Consequently, randomness and unpredictability, which are at the heart of the universe, are also celebrated at the human heart of this play. One recent play, Arcadia (1993), has drawn lots of attention in the literary world. This play focuses on the nature of creativity. It has juxtaposition of past and present, characters and their researchers. But it has relative realism and Stoppard is no longer in the travesty mode. Arcadia is one play by Stoppard in which science takes on a truly central role, however, most of his works touch on some mathematical or scientific enigmas. James Gleick’s bestseller Chaos: Making a New Science, is Stoppard’s major source for his treatment of chaos theory in Arcadia. The skillful manner in which he includes these scientific ideas in the play is fascinating. Most of the explanations of the chaos theory can be found in scene four – not surprisingly, this scene also marks the centre in the construction of the play. This concern with chaos, personal and social, runs right through Stoppard’s work and he admires the working of an anarchic spirit. At the same time, this play is also about love, “the attraction that Newton left out.” Almost every character in the play is partly driven or perplexed by sexual feeling.

Before producing Arcadia, Stoppard had already written In the Native State, which was broadcast on BBC in April 1991. Arcadia and In the Native State are similar, in the sense that, in each play, modern researchers try to recover the past. Both also deal with creativity, the former with poetry, science etc., and the latter with poetry and painting. In the Native State charts the visit of Flora Crewe, a British poet, to India in 1930. She visits Jummapur, one of the “native states” still governed by Indian royalty in collaboration with British rule. The play has an Indian sensibility and it abounds in literary and political references. E.M. Forster’s A Passage to India has been a very strong formative influence on this work. One very important relationship in Stoppard’s life has been his involvement with his leading lady on stage, Felicity Kendal, to whom he dedicated In the Native State. She became Stoppard’s muse, just as Shakespeare’s Viola in Shakespeare in Love and their romantic relationship continued for eight years. In 1995, Stoppard re-worked the text of In the Native State and produced Indian Ink, which was first performed in February 1995.
A considerable part of Chapter IV of this project studies *Indian Ink* and the analysis examines how Stoppard re-writes his own earlier play to underline the nature of creativity, which is studied against a political backdrop, using the tension between Indian and English cultures. Thus, this chapter examines the role of the artist in an environment non-conducive to the production of literature and art. The influence of writers as diverse as Shakespeare, Beckett, Agatha Christie etc., in the plays selected for study earlier, and E.M. Forster has served to make this analysis contrastive as well. *In the Native State* and *Indian Ink* were not written for the same media, radio and stage respectively, and it has been worth noting the structural changes that Stoppard incorporates to accommodate this shift in media.

Two years after *Indian Ink*, *The Invention of Love* was performed in September 1997. This play is not about a fictional poet, as was *Indian Ink*, but about an authentic one, A.E. Housman. Devoid of any substantial plot, Stoppard uses techniques like an old man looking back at his younger self, to build up the story and sustain the narrative. But the play has some brilliant dialogue and remarkable word pictures. In the play, Stoppard portrays Housman as literally two men; the poet at the ages of seventy-seven and in the early 20s. The purpose of this division was to depict the “head” and the “heart” of the poet and to highlight the Romantic/Classicist contrast. It can be said that Stoppard has been quite successful in inventing a biography for Housman, who as a classical scholar, was all “head” and as a romantic poet, all “heart”. Finally, it was recognised that Stoppard could write about love:

Stoppard’s plays of the 1990s, while paradoxically still remaining as intellectually clever, complex, and challenging as ever dramatize precisely that kind of love; the most cerebral of contemporary playwrights has become, ironically, the foremost romantic dramatist of our time. (Kelly, *Companion* 198)

In the light of the above mentioned observations, the recent commercial success of *Shakespeare in Love* (1999) has deserved special treatment in the scope of this study. The production of the film was set to begin in October 1992, but it was cancelled when Julia Roberts withdrew from the cast, delaying the film by six years. Stoppard co-
authored the script for the movie with Marc Norman. But, it is not easy or even possible to separate Stoppard’s contribution from that of his co-writer. This study examines how the spotlight is shifted to the playwright, Shakespeare, who is portrayed in a personal and romantic relationship. The backdrop is the production of a play similar to the Romeo and Juliet that we know today, Romeo and Ethel, the Pirate’s Daughter. It is during the production of this play that the writer becomes the actor in Stoppard’s drama. Extracts from Romeo and Juliet are inserted, rather pasted, to form this work which is an interesting contrast to the stark and empty atmosphere of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead. The work begins as a spoof of Romeo and Juliet but presents an interesting comment on the evolution of a script from original sources. It presents immense aesthetic and intellectual possibilities for the playwright to mould and adapt according to his needs. The purpose of having two texts representative of different and widely separated phases of the playwright in one chapter is to show the development of the artist from “enfant terrible” to “grand old man” of contemporary theatre.

Stoppard has created an immense repertory of partly fictional and partly real characters in his body of writing. In an article for The New York Times, Mel Gussow pays a tribute to this skill of the dramatist:

More than any other contemporary British playwright, Tom Stoppard populates his plays – from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead to The Invention of Love...with characters from life and literature. But one cannot always tell the difference between those who are real and those who are imaginary.

It has also been observed that there has been a progression from comically fragmented to seriously complex characterization. (Hodgson 201). His characters are not whole, but “split”, the emphasis being on their duality. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are their own “splits”, Hapgood has twins in abundance, Housman and AEH in The Invention of Love are the same person, only removed in time. This argument could perhaps be extended to Stoppard’s own life and identities as Tomas Straussler and Tom Stoppard, “The playwright who throughout his career had written about unidentical twins, about double
acts, turns out to be his own unidentical twin in a way he had always imagined (Kelly, Companion 35).

Stoppard’s recent work, The Coast of Utopia (2002), is daring in its sweep and it describes the rise of revolutionary Russia in the 1830s and was first performed at the National Theatre in London in the summer of 2002. It encompasses the lives of a stormy group of mid-nineteenth century Russian radicals and it seems that Stoppard has done all the right research to depict the mood of the age, which was marked by the nightmare of police-state censorship. A trilogy comprising three plays, Voyage, Shipwreck and Salvage, the play abounds in politics and philosophy. Stoppard’s work can be termed Brechtian, in the sense that, he is extremely fond of using exotic locations which are separated from us not only historically but geographically as well in vast terms. The influence of Brecht is also evident in the fact that his plays are a celebration of the fun of the theatrical event. As this analysis highlights, all the plays selected for study are representative of different phases of Stoppard’s writing, hence the need for placing them in the context of his career, which has had diverse and varied phases. The works discussed in this analysis are crucial for an understanding of the man and his oeuvre, which is essential for the detailed study that this project has taken up.

During his career, Stoppard has also adapted many plays and novels for stage and film. They include Dalliance and Undiscovered Country, from Liebelei and Das Weite Land, both by Arthur Schnitzler, 1986; Large Desolato by Vaclav Havel, 1987; Rough Crossing by Ferenc Molnar and On the Razzle by Johann Nestroy, 1991; Tango by Slawomir Mrozek, 1968; The House of Bernardo Alba by Federico Garcia Lorca, 1973. Amongst the film scripts that Stoppard has written, prominent ones are Brazil (1985), Empire of the Sun (1987), Despair (1977; from Vladimir Nabokov’s novel), The Human Factor (1978; from Graham Greene’s novel), The Russia House (1990; from John le Carre’s novel), Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead; the Film, directed by Stoppard himself in 1991 and of course Shakespeare in Love, 1999. Undiscovered Country, On the Razzle, Rough Crossing and Dalliance are naturalistic comedies from central Europe which Stoppard adapted quite extensively and all of them are mainly about love and
marital relations. His penchant for adaptations is interesting. Stoppard says that he welcomes adaptations for “the reason” that he does not “have continual ideas for new plays and it’s nice to do a play in between where the idea is dropped in (his) lap.”

A multi-faceted artist, Stoppard has received recognition and acclaim throughout his career. In 1968, he won the Tony award for *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* as best play; which also got him the John Whiting Award, *Evening Standard* drama award, New York Critics Award for Best Play of the Year, the Prix Italia, Antoinette Perry Award for Best Play and Play and Players Award for Best New Play. Later, *Travesties* also won Stoppard two Tony awards including best play. The first New York production of *The Real Thing* won five Tony awards including best play. *Professional Foul* won the British Television Critics’ Award for Best Play of 1977. Besides these, he has been awarded the *Evening Standard* Award for *Jumpers* in 1972, *Travesties* in 1974, *Night and Day* in 1978, *The Real Thing* in 1982, *Arcadia* in 1993 and *The Invention of Love* in 1997. He also received an Oscar nomination for co-writing the screenplay of *Brazil*. In 1990, the film version of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* won the Golden Lion Award at the Venice Film festival with screenplay and direction by Stoppard. In 1999, *Shakespeare in Love* won three Golden Globes including best screenplay and seven Academy awards including best screenplay and best picture. Stoppard’s plays are frequently revived and he got the Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play for *The Real Thing* at Broadway in 2000.

Personal honours too have been numerous. Stoppard had already won the *Evening Standard* Award for Most Promising Playwright in 1967. He was honoured as a C.B.E., Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1978. Because of his immense contribution to theatre, Stoppard was appointed to the Board of the National Theatre in 1989. He has been made an Officier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Government. In 1997, he was knighted at Buckingham Palace and Sir Tom Stoppard became the first dramatist to have received this honour since Sir Thomas Rattigan in 1971.
The last three decades have seen various theoretical and evaluative perspectives on Stoppard. Numerous articles and books have been published comparing Stoppard with Beckett, Wilde, Shaw, Pinter, Ibsen and of course Shakespeare. According to Ruby Cohn, “Stoppard has spurred more academic criticism than any English playwright but Pinter” (14). Critical and academic interest in Stoppard has been varied and sustained and begins with his Absurdist initiation into the world of theatre:

The plays of Tom Stoppard clearly show the impact of the Theatre of the Absurd, in spite of the obvious difference in other aspects of their approach, and the tradition – that of English high comedy – which they represent. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966) uses standard elements of *Waiting for Godot* (1953) while *Jumpers* (1972) concludes ... with a direct paraphrase of lines from *Waiting for Godot*: “At the graveside the undertaker doffs his top hat and impregnates the prettiest mourner”. To which the character of Archie and surely the author of the play also, adds: “Wham, bam, Thank you Sam”. The play’s debt to Samuel Beckett could not have been more clearly emphasized. (Esslin 433-34)

Stoppard himself acknowledges the influence of Beckett but demurs at the “absurdist” tag. But an analysis of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* will explicate that this play is not absurd but about the absurd and how in a way it moves beyond absurdity. Most critics dismiss Stoppard as being “liberal” or having a “right of centre perspective” and are still divided over whether *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* has anything to say or is it simply a dazzling display of verbal and theatrical sophistication. However, it is interesting to note that Stoppard began his career by subverting Shakespeare. Challenging Shakespeare and his system is like re-casting a national icon and subverting society. Stoppard displaced Hamlet, the archetypal tragic hero, from the centre of his own play and made the peripheries prominent. He displaces the Shakespeare myth and creates space for his own writing. An attempt has been made in this study to see whether he up-dates the status and context of his characters in his revisions of Shakespeare and other writers as generally writers who re-work existing texts make a conscious effort to contemporize older versions.
Critical and academic opinion next focused on Stoppard’s theatricality. Plays like *Jumpers* and *Travesties* delineate Stoppard’s pre-occupation with wit and verbal finesse and the emphasis is on presentation. He fused the absurdist tradition with a technical polish and the result was a new tragic-comic tradition. That is why, many of the reactions to Stoppard are conditioned by the nature of the comic element in his plays. His revisions of the comic genre have been meticulous and painstaking. As stated earlier, his craft comes across at its best in his treatment of parody, which engages the literary and theatrical past. At the same time, he avoids didactic and explicit statements of his opinion of the past that he draws upon. His puns produce misunderstandings and errors and his characters use a multitude of willed and accidental puns, the interlocutors tending to pick the wrong meaning. Some critics opine that his puns and parodies serve no purpose except entertainment and that his drama is “light” and devoid of values. But there is another class of critics which is of the view that his work appeals more to the intellect than to the emotion and that his work is elitist, rather than popular. The study of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and the success of *Shakespeare in Love* has demonstrated how, most of his plays, blur the distinctions between high and low cultures, in spite of the language that he uses. Critics have also paid tribute to the felicity of his language:

Perhaps it is the words one notices first, in Stoppard later the sense of theatre, the craftsmanship, the thinking and the caring may seem more important; but at first one is dazzled...by the brilliance of the verbal polish. Stoppard comes across as fluent to the point of facility, gifted with the gab of the Irish: Wilde, Shaw, Joyce, Beckett...The brilliance also seems to have an academic element: he might well be taken for a University Wit. (Hunter, *Plays* 93)

It is worth observing here that the intellectual frame of reference that he uses in so many of his plays is the product of a man who quit school at seventeen. Stoppard has even been called a “university wit” by Brustein, while others have paid tribute to his showmanship, “Ideas and wit go together for Stoppard because only through that union can he achieve the objectivity needed to rein in his volatile, impressionable senses” (Jenkins 100-01). Stoppard, therefore, belongs to “an international literary tradition –
brain-teaser modernism", for him literature is a game of mental possibilities and an irresistible occasion for philosophical showmanship, making his plays a feast of language. In an article already cited (Sunday Times), Stoppard says:

(I have) an enormous love of language itself. For a lot of writers the language they use is merely a fairly efficient tool. For me the particular use of a particular word in the right place, or a group of words in the right order, to create a particular effect is important; it gives me more pleasure than to make a point which I might consider to be profound.

The critical world next appended the term "political" to Stoppard and his canon. This was partially the result of his latest writing with political contents and partially because of his speeches and letters published in various newspapers regarding oppression in East Europe. But, Stoppard's recent works like Indian Ink, Arcadia, The Invention of Love, The Coast of Utopia and most recently Rock "n" Roll, being well-rounded, individualistic works, defy classification. In fact, any attempt to label Stoppard proves to be baffling and frustrating, and there is no dearth of new and surprisingly different insights. More recently, Paul Delaney in his 1990 book on the "moral vision in Stoppard's plays" says, "Tom Stoppard has a vision of life which permeates all of his major plays" and that Stoppard "accepts a direct connection between art and morality, between art and life, however distinctly unfashionable such a view may be" (1). This connection between art and its location in life has been discussed in Chapter IV, where authoritarian control over the creative process has been discussed. However, Stoppard has never been as outspoken about his sympathies as some of his contemporaries have been and there lies his uniqueness, "What separates Stoppard from the masses of current British playwrights writing about the masses is not a right-wing political stance as opposed to a left-wing stance, but a metaphysical perspective as opposed to a political perspective, a moral view of individuals and regimes as opposed to a materialistic or ideological view" (Delaney 9).

Ian Mackenzie has highlighted an interesting aspect of Stoppard's work in his essay "Tom Stoppard: The Monological Imagination" (Modern Drama 32:4, 1989, p.
He has tried to apply Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories to Stoppard’s drama. He opines that Stoppard’s theatre is essentially a statement in monologism and that he has an immense talent for monologue and one-liners, rather than for dialogue. According to him, Stoppard makes his characters thoughts and actions fit his overall plan. His views may be selectively correct, but this just serves to show the diverse and varied opinions that his work has fetched in the critical world. For instance, Katherine E. Kelly applies the term “formalism” with a small "f" (Craft 3) to Stoppard’s works to explain his re-presentation of literary history, “Stoppard’s formalism is thus the product of an authentic engagement with his own past as a Czech émigré, with his experience as a journalist, and with his view of himself as a divided observer” (Craft 3-4). However, almost all criticism leveled against Stoppard seems less relevant when one takes into account his later works.

Another area of concern of this study has been the feasibility of locating Stoppard in the post-modern context as it is evident that fragmentation and disjunction are distinctive features of his creative output. He has borrowed from other texts and styles across genres. As a result, his works are self-referential and inter-textual. At the same time, Stoppard has relentlessly pursued themes relevant to post-modernism’s obsession with textual openness and free-(wheeling) play of signification or meaning (Kelly, Companion 218). The free-interplay of forms, styles and performances is a dominant post-modern stance and its recognition is an experience shared by the playwright, the director and the spectator alike.

But, Tom Stoppard is a reader-conscious dramatist as well and one of the various facets of his art is that of his practice of writing detailed stage directions for the readers of his plays. He can be compared to Shaw in this need for attention to detail. His directions display his prowess at creating visual and verbal pictures, and, at the same time, also depict the allusiveness and wordplay of what he gives his characters to say. For both Shaw and Stoppard, what we read and what the audience sees, is an integral part of the “whole” that they create. For a clear understanding of his plays, careful attention must be paid by the reader to the italicized passages that he inserts in plenty throughout the texts. Stoppard often revised his texts and even published versions differ dramatically from one
edition to the next. For example, the so-called Broadway edition of *Hapgood* is very different from the original text. Most of the changes and adaptations that he incorporates focus on the performance aspect of his plays and his texts are in a constant state of fluidity till he achieves the result and the perfection that he so desires. Writing, he revises “each page half a dozen times, four times or twenty times” and actors speak of his prolonged deliberation if a word is to be changed. This also highlights his obsession with re-writing and revising as important concerns of the dramatic art. This study has made an endeavor to take into account various re-writes of the texts under scrutiny, where necessary, and to the structural changes that went into the creation of the present texts.

The present study aims at an examination of the inter-and-multi-textuality of Stoppard’s plays with a special focus on the varied dramatic forms that he handles. The entire body of his writing is marked by rejection of traditional genres and hence the categories of realism, comedy, poetic drama etc., are given unconventional texture when it comes to the form of his work. This study lays more stress on form rather than on content which has been over-analyzed in Stoppard’s case. Another field of investigation has been Stoppard’s blurring of the dramatic genres of tragedy and comedy, drawing attention to the pastichean element of his plays. The over-riding tone of his works as a whole is comic-tragic but they retain their detachment. Further, my study focuses on Stoppard’s consistent use of the meta-theatrical devices of the play-within-the-play and role-playing-within-the-role. Four out of the five plays under scrutiny use these devices leading to a prominent self-reflexive tendency in his drama. Each play under study has been analyzed with respect to the peculiarities inherent in it and, in some cases, as products of the intersection of largely dissimilar texts. An important area of my research has been how Stoppard’s use of devices like flashbacks, narrators, juxtaposition of two sets and two pieces of action, etc., serve to bring together texts which are radically different. Apart from this, his linguistic juggling, craftsmanship and pyrotechnics (a term used by Cahn to explain Stoppard’s verbal agility and fire play) have also been highlighted. These techniques would be related to my three-pronged approach to Stoppard’s *oeuvre*; demonstrating how the tools he uses blend with the over-riding concerns of his plays.
This study has been conducted from a textual and inter-textual perspective, relying primarily on the texts that form the background for the individual plays under scrutiny. Play specific influences and general influences working on Stoppard have formed an important aspect of the methodology used for the research. I have adopted a pluralistic and broad-based approach, making the study both comparative and contrastive. In the concluding chapter, I have tried to contextualise Stoppard in the contemporary dramatic scene by examining the unique place that he holds amongst his contemporary playwrights. This study concludes by locating Stoppard in the context of the age in which he continues to write and by assessing his contribution to the dramatic genre.

It can be seen from this analysis that Stoppard’s theatre is the characteristic combination of philosophically significant issues with intellectually trivial theatrical ingredients (Innes 327) and over the years he has developed his own idiosyncratic style of writing. “Displays of overt theatricality” may be the hallmark of his plays but he enjoys a very ambiguous situation when it comes to placing him in any category or class. But the reading of his plays comes across as a very rewarding and enriching experience, especially now, when over the years he has let down his guard about his past after he began to re-connect with his Czech origins in the 70s and the 80s, “The older I get, the less I care about self-concealment.”

Over the years, Stoppard had been discovering more of his background than his mother had ever revealed. He learnt from a Czech relative that all four of his grandparents had been Jewish, rather than the one Jewish grandparent that he had supposed earlier. He also came to know that all of them had died at the hands of the Nazis. His state of mind was revealed in an article “On Turning Out to be Jewish”, which he wrote for Talk in September 1999. From Tomas Straussler to Sir Tom Stoppard, his career covers a vast territory in the revival of British Theater from the languor into which it had fallen after the World Wars. He has seized opportunities to write plays which are highly allusive; be it the wish to write a Beckett type of play (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead), or using the radio as a launching pad, or the urge to write a spoof of Christie (The Real Inspector Hound), or a probable visit to an art exhibition and the
desire to utilize the ideas therein (After Magritte), or the fact that certain people were in a
certain city at the same time (Travesties), or a piece of information about a Russian
dissident in a jail (Every Good Boy Deserves Favour), or a reading of Wittgenstein
(Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth), etc., the examples are endless and so are Stoppard’s
ideas which draw upon the wealth of the literary and historical past. His entire canon
provides a very productive area for multiple and varied interpretations. Most importantly,
Stoppard’s imitations and revisions of the literary past have forged a link between his
own work and cultural legacy that he inherited, even if, at times, his imitation has
mocked, subverted, or even parodied its model.