Sir Tom Stoppard continues to write. In August 2003, his unproduced script from the early 1970s, Galileo, based on Brecht’s The Life of Galileo, was finally staged on the Edinburgh Fringe. His adaptation of Luigi Pirandello’s Henry IV opened in May 2004 at the Donmar Warehouse in London. In October 2005, Stoppard’s adapted version of Gerald Sibleyras’ Le Vent de Peupliers, titled Heroes, opened at Wyndham’s Theatre, London. The same year he created a half-hour stage version of Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice for young actors. Henry IV also had an American premiere in February 2006. However, Stoppard’s latest full length work has been Rock ‘n’ Roll, which premiered at the Royal Court Theatre, London in June 2006. This latest offering, too, alternates between two places, Prague and Cambridge, between the years 1968 to 1990. The rock ‘n’ roll band becomes a symbol of resistance to the Communist regime of Prague, as Stoppard gives us 25 years of Czech history in a condensed form. A film script, The Bourne Ultimatum is in pre-production for 2007. As is evident, Stoppard’s prolificacy, if anything, has increased. Looking back on such a varied body of writing, a pattern does seem to emerge but it hardly provides any clue as to what one might expect from Stoppard in the future.

The thrust of chapter II has been to show how Stoppard uses pastiche to convey the self-referentiality and meta-theatrical elements in two plays Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead and Shakespeare in Love. He does this, but by operating outside the confines of absurdist theatre. Unlike both Eliot and Beckett, Stoppard and his dramatis personae enjoy life, as do his most discussed protagonists, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Vladimir and Estragon have no joy in life, Eliot’s Prufrock considers himself dead for all intents and purposes at the end of The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, a work whose genre may be different but shares dramatic concerns with Stoppard’s style. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s innate camaraderie counters any sense of absurdity of their situation. Glancing at the texts selected for study in this chapter, it is
evident that Stoppard appropriates the past, but he does not mourn like Eliot, nor does he lament the loss of meaning like Beckett. Especially in the film version, their mutuality comes to the fore. Rosencrantz is always on the look-out for something new as he wanders through Elsinore, he delights in showing off his discoveries or inventions to Guildenstern, who seems accustomed to Rosencrantz’s childlike curiosity. What emerges is a level of comfort missing in absurdist theatre and certainly missing in Prufrock where all are acquaintances, but not friends. This chapter has also explicated the meta-theatrical devices used by Stoppard to bring together Waiting for Godot and Hamlet. It is evident from this analysis that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead is a sort of inter-text between both these texts, using pastiche to yolk them together. Similarly, the other text analysed in this chapter, Shakespeare in Love, also illustrates Stoppard’s usage of the play-within-the-play and role-playing-within-the-role as meta-theatrical devices during the writing, production and staging of Romeo and Juliet. The mock histrionics of the players in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, and the real histrionics of the troupe of actors in Shakespeare in Love provide the element of theatricality to these plays. In both cases, they are the players-within-the-play.

Moon and Birdboot in The Real Inspector Hound, the followers of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern too are modern anti-heroes, or as Stoppard calls them ‘bewildered innocents.’ The study has discussed how Stoppard chooses parody as his frame of reference in this case and deliberately subverts the whodunit genre. In this play also the familiar device is the play-within-the-play in which the lookers-on get swept away as they are caught in a world-within-a-world. But, this lack of control does not inspire any “sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition” in Stoppard’s theatre. Most of his characters face a choice; they do not lament or mourn the lack of opportunities. It is by choice that Birdboot wanders on to the stage, a step which leads him to his doom.

Both pastiche and parody are forms of intertextuality. One level of intertextuality that emerges from the study of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Shakespeare in Love and Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth is the way in which Stoppard uses extracts
from preceding texts and creates a dense network of quotation in his plays. At another level, *The Real Inspector Hound* and *Indian Ink* employ echoes of past literary traditions and forms to create highly referential intertextual works confirming how the writer always invokes the cultural past by re-working the existing texts. Thus, both pastiche and parody emerge as forms of intertextual allusion which refer to precursor texts. It is evident that Stoppard works on the assumption that there is a body of knowledge that is shared by him and his readers and the latter will automatically understand his referent. As a consequence, Stoppard’s writing is densely allusive and intertextual in nature. Whether pastiche and parody are ‘low’ art forms is open to interpretation as is the question whether they ‘contaminate’ literature. Debate on this issue would be indecisive.

To convey his ideas effectively, Stoppard almost always uses familiar plays-within-the-plays as in *Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth*. Doing so, the playwright can convey his point effectively and economically as the audience recognizes the play-within. In *The Real Inspector Hound*, Stoppard does insert a fictional play, but it is worth noticing that this fictional play has its origins in the typical murder mystery with which play going audiences are largely familiar. It is another matter that this play-within was based on *The Mousetrap*, the longest running play of those times. *Shakespeare in Love* also uses a familiar and hugely recognizable story, *Romeo and Juliet* as the play-within. The last play to be examined in this project, *Indian Ink*, revealed hitherto unknown facets of Stoppard, the artist. He has delved into the issues of colonization and culture within a network of literary allusions, both from India as well as England. What Das, Flora’s painter, says as he describes the nude painting of Flora is equally applicable to the play as well, “I’m so pleased you like it! A quite witty pastiche” (469). Like the painting, *Indian Ink* too, becomes a pastiche of cultures.

Another aspect highlighted in the analysis of these plays has been the de-centring of perspective. While, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* shifts *Hamlet* to make space for two ‘attendant lords’, *Shakespeare in Love* presents the playwright’s point of view, both were confined to the peripheries earlier. In both plays, Stoppard subverts the existing notions of power, shifting attention from the centre to the margin, leading to an
invasion of hierarchy, a subversion of power structures and hegemony. These plays have involved a shifting of the spotlight to the wings of the theatre, to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to the writer himself and to those oppressed by the rulers. “Of all modern playwrights, Stoppard is most partial to a device that enables him to champion the confused minor characters of fiction and history against the monolithic major personalities” (Cohn 117). Further, the analysis of three plays, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Shakespeare in Love and Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth, shows the diverse ways in which Stoppard handles Shakespeare and his canon.

In challenging Shakespeare and his place at the helm as a national icon, Stoppard attracted growing attention from the emerging school of cultural materialism. The issue of Stoppard’s ‘irreverent’ use of Shakespeare’s texts was discussed animatedly. While some critics opine that Stoppard displaces Shakespeare and subverts the canon, others are of the view that his plays do not challenge but only re-cast Shakespeare. However, Stoppard’s handling of Shakespeare is more inclined to the latter as it is visible that he never distorts the language. He merely cuts and pastes, but this is done to serve weighty issues. Stoppard has never violated Shakespeare’s language, that is why he lifts entire pieces. He could fiddle only with the structure, not with the words. This has been Stoppard’s homage to Shakespeare. In both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead and Shakespeare in Love, Stoppard shifts the focus to the peripheries which were side-lined and did not receive any attention earlier. In Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth also, Stoppard satirises the authoritarian rulers of Czechoslovakia and their censorship. His use of a Wittgenstein premise played with his audiences and toyed with their expectations of a sustained text and narrative. There is inter-play between the context of Stoppard’s play and Shakespeare’s inner play, Macbeth, to depict the plight of Czech artists. “Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth goes the furthest towards dethroning the Bard both in the speeches selected and in the method of quotation, juxtaposing chunks of Shakespeare’s texts with Stoppard’s permitting the spectators to “hear” their own resulting textual conversations” (Kelly, Companion 18). Stoppard merely alters and shrinks Shakespeare, literally, to make space for himself, but within Shakespeare’s domain of text and ideology. “Thus toying sporadically with Shakespeare, Stoppard does not shake the
foundations of a quasi-sacred tradition, which is nourished rather than undermined by burlesque” (Cohn 52). It has, thus, become evident that Stoppard has deftly re-contextualised the classics to suit a newer context through his re-writing and revising of an original source. Stoppard’s drama, therefore, conveys a moral purport without any travesty of the original sources.

One common strand running through all these five plays has been the way in which man copes with the artistic world. In Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, the protagonists struggle to come to terms with the text of Hamlet which eventually sweeps them away to their doom. In Shakespeare in Love, the playwright comes out of a state of writerly infertility to fall in love with his leading lady who actually portrays a man in the playwright’s play. In The Real Inspector Hound, two critics watching a play in a theatre get entrapped in the performance and pay with their lives. In Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth the school boys cope with the imposition of Hamlet on them and the actors in Czechoslovakia use Macbeth as a tool to subvert the authoritarian rule. And lastly, in Indian Ink, Flora and Das, write poetry and paint portraits, respectively, as these arts become Stoppardian metaphors for theatre. Art, therefore, controls all the dramatis personae of Stoppard’s plays, this control may assert itself during writing (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead), rehearsal (Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth), performance (Shakespeare in Love), reviewing (The Real Inspector Hound) and musing (Indian Ink). Since drama and its enactment figures so prominently in Stoppard’s scheme of things it may be concluded that the playwright has a pronounced taste for self-examination in his theatrical stance.

Stoppard does not follow the anti-literary trend of modern and post-modern literature. His work resounds with allusions and covers a broad range of ‘types.’ In fact, the twentieth century, on the whole, has seen varied ‘types’ of theatre emerging; realist, socialist, Marxist, absurdist, feminist etc. The abolition of censorship in 1968 in Britain and the opening of the National Theatre in 1963 were two events which heralded the revival of drama. The general trends in post 1950s British drama have been re-workings or adaptations of Shakespeare, meta-theatre, updating of history and history plays and
group specific productions and curiously, all of these involve a retreat from realism. Playwrights like John Arden, John Osborne, Harold Pinter, Noel Coward and Arnold Wesker were already established on the theatre scene when Stoppard began writing. Those who wrote on contemporary terms with Stoppard include Alan Ayckbourn, Edward Bond, Peter Shaffer, David Storey and Caryl Churchill. They were soon followed by the group of Howard Brenton, David Edgar and David Hare who were younger. Stoppard along with his contemporaries, Hare, Ayckbourn, Shaffer and Bond now forms the old guard of theatre. But, the number of new playwrights is rapidly decreasing as fiction and prose, especially the essay, have gained more currency in the current literary scene.

It is imperative to situate Stoppard amidst his predecessors, contemporaries as well as his successors to effectively gauge his contribution to the genre. Among those already writing before Stoppard came on the scene, Wesker and Osborne have similar patterns of development in their writings, they advocated ‘naturalism’ staying away from revisionistic experimentation. David Hare’s plays are known for their ‘bleak description of modern society...conditioned by a utopianism’ (Innes 205). Two dramatists, Alan Ayckbourn and Michael Frayn deserve mention because they advocate a return to traditional comic values while consciously staying away from the political drama of the early 1970s. At the same time, there were practitioners of poetic drama as well, Shaffer, Christopher Fry and of course Eliot. Stoppard as a link in this chain of British dramatists serves an important purpose; he plays with the form of drama comically, but he also raises significant philosophical issues.

Other playwrights in the twentieth century have also re-written Shakespeare’s works or adapted them. Though Wesker is known more for his naturalistic brand of drama, yet he has re-told The Merchant of Venice to write The Merchant, while Osborne adapted Coriolanus and produced A Place Calling Itself Rome (1973). This return to Shakespeare is evident in the works of many other playwrights. Edward Bond has written Lear in 1971, an adaptation of Shakespeare, retaining the basic elements of a King, but with two witch-like daughters who defeat their father in a civil war. However, Bond’s
vision is darker with death in the end for Lear. Bond also wrote *The Sea*, based on Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and *Bingo* (1973). The latter is a fictional dramatization of Shakespeare’s last days in Stratford. Bond depicts this last period of Shakespeare’s life as essentially full of discord with his greedy family awaiting his death gleefully and Shakespeare committing suicide at the end. In 1981, Brenton wrote *Thirteenth Night*, a cross re-working of *Twelfth Night* and *Macbeth*. London based American Charles Marowitz has perhaps written the most revised versions of Shakespeare; *An Othello, Hamlet* (1965), *Macbeth* (1969), *Measure for Measure* (1975) and *Variations on The Merchant of Venice* (1977). As it is in the case of Stoppard, familiarity with Shakespeare is a must to appreciate these adaptations written during the same period that Stoppard was writing his own revisions.

Significantly, there was hardly any female playwright on the scene till the late 1950s. However, the situation is markedly different now and feminist theatre has been on the upsurge since the mid-1970s. In the 1970s and 80s, when Stoppard was a well-established playwright, groups with diverse backgrounds sought to articulate and define their identities. Together with Black theatre and Gay fronts, Feminist theatre now forms the focal point of ‘alternative theatre’ providing the necessary counter foil to mainstream theatre. Groups like The Women’s Theatre Group, Women Theatre Company, Gay Sweatshop, Black Theater Cooperative are now catering to the needs of their respective communities. At the same time, Asian, African and other ethnic groups have also followed suit to device their own theatre. Interestingly, all these groups perform for specifically identified audiences, “These aspects of self-selection, limited focus, and an unusual degree of unity between dramatic subject, performer and public – together with the militant radicalism of the average socialist counter-theatre – formed the basis of the new feminist drama” (Innes 449-50). Radical feminist groups do not allow any male participation at all during all stages of theatre production. But, such practices of exclusiveness only serve to marginalize their drama. The result is that such drama with such confined contexts gets limited to fringes of theatre festivals and is only rarely seen in main theatre events. Two female playwrights, almost exact contemporaries of Stoppard, Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems, occupy a very important place in the context
of modern drama. They have now moved away from the extremist and radical form of feminism they started their careers with. Both of them use the genre of history play extensively to rectify sexual stereotyping in the banks of past drama. Like Stoppard, they go back to the past, but the purposes are different in both cases. While the feminists’ purpose was the urge to correct the misrepresentation of women, Stoppard uses the genre of drama to define an artist’s stand on past literature and thus, ‘to connect.’

A very pertinent scope of enquiry in this study has been the possibility of labeling Stoppard as post-modernist. Placing Stoppard within the ambit of post-modernism is debatable as well as problematic. Standard post-modern practices include self-consciousness, self-referentiality, a high degree of allusiveness and a significant use of parody and pastiche. Stoppard’s work is full of all these devices and his fragmented and partial narratives in his early works may assign him to this category. But the roots of his canon lie in aesthetic modernism and this fact subverts the possibility of appending the label ‘postmodern’ to Stoppard. However, a definite pattern has evolved in his work over the years, and it is becoming increasingly visible that Stoppard has moved away from some of these hallmarks of postmodernism. His textual openness in works like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, The Real Inspector Hound, Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth and even Shakespeare in Love to some extent, is a movement towards post-modern literature but Indian Ink would never fit this criteria, nor would other later plays like The Invention of Love or Arcadia. As a result, Stoppard’s relation to post-modernism is very complex. This perspective is shared by critics like Katherine E. Kelly, who is of the view that:

Stoppard expresses keen interest in certain intellectual, aesthetic and ideological positions associated with postmodern art and drama, while he is at the same time antipathetic to, and even staunchly critical of, some of the more radical notions and claims of postmodern social theory and its image of the human subject. (Companion 213)

In fact, Stoppard has established himself as a playwright by both practicing and defying post-modernism. Over the years, he has moved away from conscious displays of wit and
theatricality as well as parody towards a greater concern with the human being and towards enhanced involvement in political issues and surprisingly, poetry. Stoppard has also acknowledged that he is more interested in character and characterization now than he was at the start of his career. In an interview with Mel Gussow, Stoppard accepts how his early characters sounded like himself:

I used to say it because I used to think it was true and maybe it was true in those days. I think everybody in Night and Day sounds like me, for example. It’s less true now. It’s certainly not true in Indian Ink...I wouldn’t say it nowadays. (qtd. in Hodgson 200)

Like his characters who have moved from their comically fragmented status to a more rounded individuality, Stoppard too has displayed a distinct and recognizable movement of growth and development from fringe to mainstream, experimenting within a broad spectrum of technique and ideas. Moreover, his works provide a classic example of struggle between the sub-genres of drama. All the plays analysed in this study with the exception of Indian Ink defy any categorization as tragedy or comedy.

Stoppard has exerted and continues to exert a formidable influence on the current literary scene and any attempt to assess his achievement or his contribution to the genre must take into account his minor side-writings as well as his major plays. Interestingly, Stoppard’s career has more or less moved parallel to the history of twentieth century drama. The entire body of Stoppard’s writing has covered a variety of areas:

Memories of war and cold war amalgamate with reading about it. Reading about the Russian Revolution, about spying, about life behind the Iron Curtain, about African states, about India, mingles with buried memories, with chance remarks and random experience and with theories about the origins of the natural world, the nature of language and of art. (Hodgson 11)

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1 Stoppard has admitted that he got so caught up in writing Flora’s poetry in Indian Ink that he forgot the play itself.
Such an extensive range of themes invariably demands a lot from its audiences – head, heart and libido, while convincing the audience about the writer’s point of view. This makes Stoppard something of an autodidact, who uses the stage very effectively. He knows how to handle this genre and his passion for theatrical conundrums has created a new dramatic style. This style is almost devoid of naturalism and there is a lot of design at work. One instance is his use of dramatic license; in inventing a love affair of Shakespeare, in placing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Beckett-land, in turning the Christie mechanism upside down and in placing a fictional poet, Flora in the midst of the London of 1920s and in India in 1930.

Most of Stoppard’s plays have been directed only by Peter Wood, who responds well and is familiar with Stoppard’s ideas. However, the premieres of Stoppard’s latest works, The Coast of Utopia and Rock ’n’ Roll, have both been directed by Trevor Nunn. Stoppard is aware of the fact that a playwright cannot afford to just write a script in isolation and send it for rehearsals and performance. Instead, it has become imperative that he attends rehearsals, revises his texts and even re-writes, if required. Stoppard makes it a point to attend the initial rehearsals of a new work to see his vision of the written word evolve and take shape. So the emphasis now is on theatre as a collaborative effort rather than an activity with individual functioning. This is visible in Stoppard’s pruning of The Coast of Utopia in 2006 to produce a significantly revised version based on the feedback of his actors, directors, critics and reviewers, who complained that there was too much material too handle and that the trilogy sounded more like a research project than a play.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead had already received a lot of attention from critics and academicians alike. The significance of this study lies in the fact that apart from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, the other four plays have received the attention that they deserve. The study of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead is perhaps indispensable to any project undertaken to examine Stoppard’s work. But The Real Inspector Hound and Dogg’s Hamlet, Cahoot’s Macbeth have received relatively
little attention. Very little has been written about either Indian Ink or Shakespeare in Love.

I have tried to give them the attention they warrant and did not get so far. The studies available on these plays deal with only the general influences working on Stoppard and do not discuss any textual impact on them. This study has been conducted from a textual and intertextual perspective, relying primarily on the texts which form the background for individual plays under scrutiny. My project has examined those influences, both general and specific, that have gone into the creation of each play. The impact of writers as diverse as Shakespeare, Beckett, Agatha Christie, E.M. Forster, etc., has also been taken into account. The primary sources used by Stoppard behind each text, which make it the cross-product or the derivative of other works, has served to explicate his creative process at work. Adopting a pluralistic and broad-based approach, the study is both comparative as well as contrastive. The project has laid more stress on the form, especially on Stoppard’s meta-theatre, rather than on the theme or content which have been over-analyzed in his case. It has emerged from this study that Stoppard’s intertextuality is playful and it involves the amalgamation of genres, styles, devices to create a canon which is necessarily meta-narrative and self-conscious. I have thus, tried to trace the genesis of each play, relying on the original texts behind them, considering plays representative of his pastiches, parodies and political plays as reference points. The project would thus, I hope, make a modest contribution to existing criticism on Stoppard from a fresh perspective. But, the critical distance that separates the critic from the artist is not adequate yet.

This project has endeavoured to focus on the theatricality of Stoppard’s work, including Stoppard’s own observations and a number of academic perspectives. In the midst of all these diverse insights, the question arises; is Stoppard against the grain? He was derivative, when others were original. He was aesthetic, when others were committed. He was nonchalant, when others were political. He was emphasizing the individual talent when others were collaborating. He was celebrating performance, when others were pouring over the word. Whatever the case may be, Stoppard has so far
successfully walked the tight-rope of theatre despite numerous lurings to plunge into the pitfalls of conventionality. Even if he falls, we can be sure that he will break new dramatic ground and come up with yet another play that will give evidence of his use of pastiche, parody and politics.