CHAPTER THREE

MASTER AT PLAY

COMEDY TO THE FORE

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead was a resounding success. After that Stoppard had not written any major work. The desire in him to write more full-length plays makes him read up and equip himself for this task. In this process he is able to bring together different disciplines like philosophy, politics and art. Because of this variety of subjects his comedy becomes more weighty and substantial. In his blend of the comic and serious, the comic elements gain an ascendancy over the serious. This chapter tries to highlight how Stoppard is a master comedian though the elements of the serious are always present. It is a question of which side of the balance is tilted. In Stoppard's middle phase (1971-1976), the comic comes to the fore because of his rich variety of themes. He has been able to laugh looking at a situation from different angles. This phase is a crucial test for Stoppard as claimed by Tim Brassell, "In establishing a playwright's reputation the successor to his first triumph is often regarded as a crucial test" (115).

Jumpers for its hero has a professor of philosophy, George Moore. The play revolves around three major characters: George, Archie and Dotty. Archie and George
belong to rival schools of philosophy namely Logical Positivism and moral philosophy. George and Duncan McFee are supposed to meet at a symposium and defend each one's position. As Duncan McFee gets killed Archie takes his place. There is also political change as the Radical Liberal Party has been swept to power. The historical event of Moon landing is also presented. In a mix of philosophy, politics and history Stoppard weaves this play into a renowned comedy.

A VARIETY

The play Jumpers has a variety of themes. There are a lot of references to various philosophers like Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell, Kant, Zeno and Moore. The play alludes not only to philosophers but also to literature, art, history and politics. The tortoise, hare and Dorothy's cry 'wolf' bring to the minds of the readers references to Aesop's fables. There is also reference to the historic landing of man on the moon. There is also allusion to the theory of Darwin's evolution which brought about a whole world of change in the perspectives of man with regard to God, world and man himself. All these varieties prove to be sources of fun in the very dextrous way Stoppard handles them. The enriching variety is highlighted by Lucina Gabbard as she says, "the content of Jumpers includes everything from
bedroom farce to comic tragedy and metaphysical enquiry. In fact, this play can be likened to a kaleidoscope, creating new configurations of ideas, forms and themes with each "twist of the dial" (85).

PHILOSOPHY AND THE COMIC

In the conflict between moral philosophy and logical positivism, George Moore takes the side of moral philosophy and Sir Archibald Jumpers, Archie for short, takes the side of logical positivism. While moral philosophy postulates God as the supreme being and tries to explain all phenomena with reference to God, logical positivism denies any reference to God and tries to create a system of philosophy based on things that can be seen and observed. Moral philosophy posits absolute standards of what is good and evil while logical positivism denies any absolute standards or norms. George being the spokesman of moral philosophy gives several reasons for belief in God such as God is the first cause. He tries to show that just as circle can be inferred from the idea of polygon with infinite number of sides, God can also be inferred from creation. He also argues that God is necessary for the moral absolutes to be meaningful. As all these arguments are unconvincing to himself and the audience he gives up his intellectual arguments and falls back on his belief in God. That George at one time abandons rationality
is illustrated as G.B. Crump points out, "In his argument that God can be inferred from life, at the furthest boundary to which reason can carry him, George abandons rationality and makes a jump of his own, an existential leap of faith" (364). The argument of first cause defeats itself. Starting with saying that everything should have a cause, the argument ends up by saying that God has no cause. This provides fun as George is labouring to prove the existence of God through the argument of first cause.

In contrast to moral philosophy logical positivism takes a totally different position as it holds that good and evil are just social and psychological conventions for the smooth running of the society. According to logical positivists, metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics are not relevant as they cannot be measured and verified. Stoppard makes fun of both the schools of philosophy. It is not only the philosophies of George and Archie which are contrasted, but the very persons are contrasted. They rival with each other in their relationship with Dotty. Stoppard not merely uses philosophical statements to convey his ideas but also uses the whole dramatic structure to convey what he wants. When Stoppard brings in philosophers along with the acrobats and makes them 'jumpers', it only confirms the usual charge against philosophy that it is a jugglery of words. Stoppard makes George juggle with words as he says, "How does one
know what it is one believes when it is so difficult to know what it is one knows" (J 71).

PARODY OF POLITICS

The Radical Liberal Party has been swept to power. Though it has been catapulted to power, its credentials are bogus as rigging the elections is strongly suspected. Dotty points this out when she says, "It's not the voting that is democracy, it's the counting" (J 35). With Radical Liberal Party coming to power, democracy becomes a travesty as people who came to power with so much of promise perform so little. There is something crazy about the rulers as they confiscate Church property, arrest newspaper owners and appoint an agnostic as the Archbishop of Canterbury. The university chapel is converted into a gymnasium. Stoppard makes the politicians a set of unthinking men. They just do whatever Archie tells them just to get his favours. They are 'jumpers' and are ready to dance to the tune of the ring master, Archie, by exhibiting uncritical obedience and unquestioning conformity. The uniforms they wear are signs of their cowardly uniformity and they represent a world of demagogues who "control a skeptical, disbelieving world in which faith, trust and personal heroism have no place" (Durham 172). In such a world no revolt is tolerated and so McFee is murdered because he has become a believer in God.
The same thing happens to Ciegthorpe. Once he begins to appreciate the faith of the people and wants to do something for them, Archie gets rid of him. The way politics is pictured makes the readers laugh at these insane characters.

**PARODY OF KNOWLEDGE**

Stoppard makes fun of George's knowledge. Knowing much is useless as it only makes him more ridiculous. The difficulty with George is that he knows much but that knowledge does not lead to action. He is more interested in the animal world of hare, tortoise, goldfish. Even though he is angry at Dotty for having allowed the goldfish to die, he himself kills both the hare and the tortoise. Paul Delaney in his article "The Flesh and The Word In Jumpers" gives a beautiful insight into the character of George:

George knows. He knows that some acts are, objectively, good, and that others are just as objectively bad. He knows that human actions must be judged in terms of moral absolutes, not merely condoned in terms of political expediency.... Yes, George knows much. But he is not transformed by his knowledge. (385)

Stoppard parodies knowledge in Archie too. Archie is invested with degrees like "M.D., D.Phil., D.Litt., L.D., D.P.M., D.P.T. (GYM). Archie is philosopher, doctor, man of
letters and what not. Stoppard makes a parody of knowledge, as these degrees are not genuinely acquired.

THE MACRO AND THE MICRO

Stoppard brings out the seriousness of the situation by the interplay of the macro and the micro. There is intrinsic relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm. In the macrocosm one sees Captain Scott as an incarnation of selfishness. In the microcosm, one sees people who are selfish as Dotty is abandoned by George. In spite of presenting a grim society, Stoppard never forgets to entertain the audience. There is laughter as James Morwood puts it, "the society the playwright envisages is dehumanized and grim but it is constantly being irradiated by shafts of benign laughter" (141).

THE MOON AND FUN

Fun arises in the way the moon is portrayed. Dorothy has a romantic view of the moon. Her romantic view is evident as she sings, "Shine on, shine on silvery moon" (J 19). The first landing of man on moon is a desecration for Dorothy. She thinks that the moon landing has sounded the death knell of all values cherished by humanity till then. About Dotty, James Morwood says, "She tearfully reflects that the moon landing has made the world seem
little and local and has thus undermined the absolutes man previously took on trust" (136). On moon landing Dotty says, "Not only are we no longer the still centre of God's universe, we're not even uniquely graced by his footprint" (J 75). The moon landing has destroyed all myth and romance about the moon. Stoppard juxtaposes Antarctic expedition and moon landing. In the Antarctic Scott expedition Captain Oates is ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of his companions whereas in the moonlanding, man is against man. Here Captain Scott knocks astronaut Oates as the space ship can carry only one person. The value systems of the past and present are contrasted. There is more irony as Stoppard chooses the same names, Scott and Oates as against Oates of Scott expedition. Modern Scott mercilessly leaves Oates (one who sacrificed his life in the past era) in the lurch, to die alone. As Stoppard presents a world where there is decadence and lack of values in all fronts with the sensational illustration of moon landing, there is certainly black humour. In the case of Dotty the whole episode makes her a psychological wreck as she has lost all romance and creativity by becoming a living corpse. What was once the heavenly, the accessible and the transcendent has just become the ordinary because of man's setting foot on the moon and it "has reduced that familiar pitted circle,
Milton's spotty globe to an expanse of featureless wastes" (Morwood 137).

CHARACTERISATION AND THE COMEDY

The way Stoppard portrays characters is a source of comedy. George lives in seclusion unaffected by what happens outside like Radical Liberals' victory, agnostic becoming archbishop and the struggle of moon men. These do not become the subject of his lecture. He is busy with proving the existence of God. In his task he is busy using the arrow, hare and tortoise. This makes him a funny character. George with all his philosophy is not sufficiently human and in fact has lost all his humanity. Paul Delaney in his article "The Flesh and the Word in Jumpers" aptly says, "While George in his study is proving that man is good or bad but not indifferent, he remains inhumanely indifferent to the pain of his wife in the next room" (385). George is interested in man the abstract and not the concrete man as he is busy with abstract problems and has nothing to do with regard to concrete problems at home. He withdraws into the comfort of the abstract. His involvement with good and evil is confined merely to lecture. His withdrawal is symbolically presented as he practises his lecture in front of a large mirror as one avoiding all external intrusion. When Dotty who is deranged cries for help George is
concerned in the least with her problem. George keeps aloof and refuses to join the party thrown by his wife. He does not see the extremely visible corpse. His obsession with philosophy is something like Albert's infatuation for the bridge. If neighbours were nonexistent for Albert, Dotty is nonexistent for George. George can only argue for the existence of moral absolutes and of God in the realm of philosophy. Weldon Durham perceptively points out, "George responds to the moral emptiness and ethical chaos all around him with righteous but impotent anger and with laboured but ineffective arguments for the existence of God and ethical intuition" (172). He is least cut out for the lofty questions like God of creation, God of goodness, human knowledge, human values and human behaviour. When Clegthorpe is shot dead, he does not even raise any voice of protest. He is unaware of what is happening under his own roof as he is ignorant of McFee's death, the whereabouts of Thumper, whether or not there is an affair between Dotty and Archie. According to Barbara Kreps, George is thus frequently funny despite the overriding seriousness of his own intentions... even though we all see and know how much George fails to see, and therefore does not know, of reality, most of us listen with sympathy and shared belief to what he says to us about knowing and reality. (88)
The direction of the play is about goodness and moral standards while the action of the play is a contradiction in terms leading to selfishness, rivalry and death.

Stoppard has fun at the inspector by showing him as one more interested in Dotty than the task at hand of investigating the murder of Duncan. He is more interested in music and in getting autograph. A man who was determined to let the law take its course, changes his mind once he has been attracted by the charms of Dotty. There is a lot of fun in the way Stoppard conceives the character of Archie. Archie is the Vice Chancellor of the University. He does not behave as one befitting his office as he starts visiting Dotty regularly that too at odd hours. Like a circus master he gives orders and directions to the jumpers. His academic records are impressive as he holds doctorates in medicine, literature, philosophy and law. Besides these he has diplomas in psychology and physical training. All this knowledge does not make him a noble person. He is totally amoral and pragmatic as he is ready to solve any problem by "lies, bribery and blackmail" (Gabbard 90). Stoppard makes fun of him as he invests him with so many degrees, by showing that it is not accumulation of knowledge but accumulation of power. This is proved by what John Bailey says: His mass of academic degrees has nothing to do with knowledge in the grand disinterested sense and everything to
do with the amassing of professional expertise useful in acquiring power" (340).

The character relationships portray moral relativity, skepticism and selfishness. The relationship between George and Dotty pictures the traditional married love. The relationship between Bones and Dotty brings to mind the idealistic romantic love whereas the relationship between Archie and Dotty is crass physical attraction.

COMEDY THROUGH THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES

The characters live in their own world since the happenings outside, sometimes momentous events, do not affect them. The reader sees that Dorothy and George have withdrawn from the active world and confined to a world of their own. George hardly moves out of his room and it is the same with Dotty. The two rooms form a scenic metaphor as one stands for the domain of the intellect and the other for the domain of emotions. Each one is buried in his or her own world resulting in withdrawal. This withdrawal results in the breakdown of relationships as George and Dorothy are not able to relate to each other. This breakdown is theatrically shown by confining George to his study and Dorothy to her bedroom. If at all there is any communication it is through the television screen. What is shown there also is a "sensational illustration of the extinction of moral
values" (Morwood 136), through the moon landing episode. Astronauts who have gone to the moon have withdrawn from the society in the literal sense also. Through this technique of withdrawal, Stoppard builds comedy into it, as George is busy with setting right the world while he is unable to set right his own home.

Stoppard uses the device of contrast to provide fun. Renowned singer Dorothy known as the "Moon Girl" is to sing on the stage. Even as the high hopes are raised they are dashed as the musical comedy actress is unable to be her old self by failing to sing her favourite song. Though Dorothy, a seasoned artist, "much-missed, much loved star of the musical age" (J 17), fails to come good, her opposite number, the secretary, keeps the audience engaged by cheap entertainment. She regales the audience with riotous laughter not because of any virtuosity but because she strips off her clothes while swinging in and out.

Stoppard makes fun of the way one arrives at certainty. That truth is relative and the perception of a particular person seems to be wrong are shown through theatrical devices. The meaning of the events in the bewildering opening scene is not clear. Even though the audience sees them with its own eyes it is not able to arrive at the truth. When Archie and Dotty are in compromising position,
the obvious and apparent explanation of the reader would be that they have an affair. This obvious impression is shown as wrong as Archie explains that as a doctor he is examining the skin of Dotty. This ambiguity of perception of truth is also seen in the way George reacts to the cry of Dotty, "help! Murder!" (J 24). George thinks that it is a device to draw his attention while Dotty is actually trapped in the bedroom with a dead body. Her direct literal words are misunderstood by George as he says, "Dorothy, I will not have my work interrupted by these gratuitous acts of lupine delinquency (J 26). Stoppard wants to show that there is relativism in the perception of reality. When Dorothy says, "play with me" (J 30), George understands that she is asking him to have sex whereas Dorothy means games.

COMEDY THROUGH DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

Stoppard expresses his faith in words and the potentials of language as he revels in constructing dialogues. Stoppard’s manifesto is interesting because unlike him his contemporaries deemphasize language. Stoppard believes in dialogue for keeping the audience in good humour. He has stated what to look for in his plays as he says, "there is very often no simple, clear statement in my plays. What there is, is a series of conflicting statements made by conflicting characters, and they tend to play a sort
of infinite leap-frog" (Hudson 13). His plays are replete with contradictory ideas that the playgoers feel that they were in for a debate and not so much a play. He does not intrude on the audience with his views. The debate helps him to leave it to the audience to take a stand.

Leslie Thomson in his article "The curve itself" (472-482) speaks about the recurrent imagery of curve and arch. Stoppard uses this imagery to bring out the downfall of man. Through the imagery he tries to show that man is not only of his own times but is related to the whole cosmos and linked to the total history of mankind. The imagery helps him to present man in a downward slope. The curve and arch show the emptiness and the hollowness of mankind. It runs like a leitmotif as Stoppard refers to arch in various places. When McFee is shot dead out of the human pyramid of philosophical acrobats, there is a hollow, through which Dotty walks. This hollow is similar to an arch. George refers to the curve or arch in his dialogue.

George There is in mathematics a concept known as a limiting curve, that is the curve defined as the limit of polygon with an infinite number of sides. (J 71)

George Experience has taught me that to attempt to sustain the attention of rival schools of academics by argument alone is tantamount to constructing a Gothic arch out of junket. (J 27)

When the secretary swings there is reference to the arc,
"making an arc from wing to wing" (J 17). One of the characters is called Archie. When the Archbishop of Canterbury is murdered second pyramidal collapse, creating once again a hollow, takes place. Etymologically "arc" is from the Latin word "arcus", meaning bow, arch or curve. "Arch" is the French version of "arcus". Arch as noun means anything that has the structure of a curve. As an adjective it means chief, main, prime, clever or cunning as can be seen in the use of words like archbishop, archangel and architect. From the religious and historical point of view rainbow is the symbol of God's covenant with mankind as can be seen from the Biblical text, "I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth" (Genesis 9:13). The Ark of Noah symbolizes the beginning of new creation. Moses places the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were engraved in the Ark of the Covenant. The play Jumpers also refers to the Ten Commandments when Bones says, "Well, if that is the case, I don't see any difference whether he thinks he's obeying the Ten Commandments or the rules of tennis" (J 49). Through all these layers of language, history and religion, a leitmotif of curve is created. Leslie Thomson points out what Stoppard does with this imagery:

Stoppard repeatedly shows us a world of curves with edges, curves that will never make circles
but instead convey the idea that humanity has already reached the height of its curve and is on the downward slope back to a more primitive state where animal instincts prevail over human ones. 

(476-477)

Through this imagery Stoppard shows the hollowness in man. This emptiness is related to the moon landing episode and the madness of the jumpers. By presenting this hollowness running through out the play, Stoppard mocks mankind for its emptiness.

The title of the play, "Jumpers" is itself a source of comedy. Stoppard equates logical positivists and linguistic philosophers with acrobats. If acrobats do feats by physical jumping, logical positivists and linguistic philosophers do the same feats by intellectual jumping. Archibald Jumpers also jumps roles. He is a psychiatrist, lover, doctor and legal adviser all turned into one. He jumps from one role to another. The same kind of jumping is associated with politicians "as Stoppard quickly identifies his jumper as a cross section of Radical Liberal academics who have been willing to leap to a bewildering fashionable positions" (Delaney 38-39). Through this Stoppard literalises a metaphor. If philosophy and logic call for mental jumping, Stoppard literalises the metaphor by presenting jumpers forming a human pyramid in actuality.
This literalising continues in the way George philosophises. Lofty moral philosophy is made literal by the use of bow and arrow, hare and tortoise. That is why Joan Dean says, "one of Stoppard's favourite ways of manipulating and simultaneously inciting dramatic action is to make the figurative literal" (62). The same literalising is done with regard to the moon. Moon is considered to be a symbol of love. Stoppard says that moon is a "whole heritage of associations, poetic and religious" (as quoted in Cahn 113). The grandeur, romance and awe associated with moon evaporate once men set their feet on the moon. Thus Stoppard literalises the romantic image of moon as "what was once a symbol of love, desire, the unattainable and the willing suspension of reason is just an identifiable landscape where the meanness of man is equally as apparent as on the earth's surface" (Dean 63).

The way Stoppard uses language proves to be a source of fun. First of all Stoppard makes George unable to find the proper words to express his ideas.

George ... but unfortunately, though my convictions are intact and my ideas coherent, I can't seem to find the words. (J 46)

Dotty while watching the jumpers do their act, says "That's not incredible ... well, is it? I can sing better than that" (J 18). One wonders what is the connection between jumping
and singing. What she wants to say is that she can sing better than they can jump. This kind of use of language not only keeps the audience on its toes but it also traps the characters constantly as they do not know what the other person means. George is in a dilemma whether he could say 'late Lord Russell' since it does not suitably describe Russell as he was a man of punctuality. When Dorothy says that "she's all right in bed" (J 70), it may mean that she is safe and secure or sexually adept. The way Stoppard uses names proves to be very comical. The name corresponds to the psychological disposition and this is called cognomen syndrome by G.B. Crump in his article "The Universe As Murder Mystery" (354-68). Archie Jumper is a gymnast as he jumps from one role to another role. Crouch, the servant, is cringing as his name suggests but is prepared to jump as he aspires to become a jumper-philosopher by making philosophical statements because of his association with George. Duncan McFee is son of faith as McFee would mean and he suffers the fate of the murdered king in Macbeth. Inspector Bones deals with the bare bones of reality. Dotty as the name suggests is shaky, crazy, foolish, silly and eccentric. George is like his namesake who was a philosopher of ethical principles.

Joseph Feeney says that there are "structured layers of metaphor" (233) in Stoppard's plays. There are clear links
among different aspects like themes, characters, plots, language and setting. Stoppard has the skill of weaving diverse elements into a synthetic whole. Even though these elements seem to be chaotic and unconnected he is able to bring out the interrelatedness of different things. He achieves this through the multiple layers of metaphors. This rich texture provides lot of fun. The play's major conflict, a dispute between the philosophy of George and Archie, is stretched to other fields like gymnastics, sex, morality and politics. Stoppard makes philosophy resemble gymnastics, sex, morality and politics. Archie does not have solid metaphysical foundation and so he is a jumper in the field of philosophy. In the field of gymnastics he is a jumper as he is the manager of a group of gymnasts hired for the party. In the field of sex also Archie is a jumper as he leaps from bed to bed and ends up in seducing George's wife. In morality too Archie is a jumper as he holds to no moral position as absolute and is willing even to resort to murder. In politics the Radical Liberals are jumpers as they have no qualms in appointing an agnostic as Archbishop and they do not hesitate to do away with him when he does not suit their ends. Thus Stoppard ingeniously links philosophy to gymnastics, sex, morality and politics. This is corroborated by what Joseph Feeney says, "He sees similarities, works out continuing points of comparison, and
builds these metaphors into his plays in such a way that
the parallels are fantastic yet consistently coherent" (234).

Language is a great source of fun. In the text where
Stoppard alludes to Wittgenstein there is comedy.

George Meeting a friend in a corridor, Wittgenstein
said: "Tell me, why do people say that it was
natural for men to assume that the sun went
round the earth rather than the earth
rotating?" His friend said, well, obviously,
because it just looks as if the sun is going
round the earth". To which the philosopher
replied, 'Well, what would it have looked
like if it looked as if the earth was
rotating?" (J 75)

Since there can be no answer for the above question, there
is lot of fun.

Similarly what George says about his socks is full of
fun because of the reasons given for the existence of socks.

George Consider my left sock. My left sock exists
but it need not have done so. It is, we say,
not necessary, but contingent. Why does my
sock exist? Because a sock-maker made it in
one sense; because, in another, at some point
previously, the conception of a sock arrived
in the human brain; to keep my foot warm is a
third, to make a profit is a fourth. (J 28)

There is comedy as Stoppard takes a familiar literary
form and travesties it. Here Stoppard takes the form of
'whodunit' or detective play. The acceptable canon of a
detective play is that justice should be established at the
end and the mysteries should be unravelled while truth comes out triumphant. Stoppard takes this familiar literary form and travesties it. Till the end the reader does not know as to who killed McFee. Stoppard does not present a world where justice prevails. At the end it is power rather than right that prevails.

The play is funny not only because it deals with philosophy in a comic way by making statements but also because it tries to give extended treatment to philosophy by showing. Every value that is taken up is brought out by a comparison with a circumstance where the value is absent. The value of selfless love is taken up and shown in the historical Scott and Oates of Antarctic expedition. This value is given extended treatment of showing by the doings of the two astronauts Scott and Oates. This absence of moral value in the murder of McFee is taken up and it is given extended treatment of showing. The contrast is the fate of Pat, the tortoise and Thumper, the hare. By unwittingly releasing the arrow George kills the hare and unknowingly crushes the tortoise by stepping on it. He cries saying "Dotty! Help! Murder!" (J 81) They echo the words of Dotty, "Help! Murder!" (J 24) after the shooting of McFee. Comedy arises because of these extended treatments of showing.

Though comedy is foremost in the play, the serious
theme is however present. Commenting on the play, Michael Billington says, “what Stoppard has done in Jumpers is to translate that combination of the supposedly irreconcilable—the serious and the comic—into extravagant theatrical terms” (83). The society Stoppard presents may be grim, but there is no dearth of laughter. The laughter is not without any purpose as Barbara Kreps remarks, "Jumpers stimulates a great deal of hilarity, but it also gives us a glimpse of what a world without ethical brakes would be like—and though we laugh at the witty phrasing, the vision itself is far from funny" (187). The play draws from a wide range of subjects like Philosophy and ethics, religion and science, literature and linguistics. Finally the play pictures "a society that is becoming increasingly materialistic and pragmatic, a society that advocates moral relativism in its politics and ethics and turns its back on transcendental values" (Andretta 127).

ALTERATION OF HISTORICAL FACTS

In his next major play Travesties, Stoppard turns his attention to history, art and politics. Stoppard chooses three revolutionary representatives James Joyce, Tristan Tzara and Lenin for the three fields of literature, art and politics respectively. These three people are brought to Zurich, in Switzerland, towards the end of the World War I.
Though this is not a historical fact, there are enough evidences to show that they have lived in Zurich at sometime or other. Stoppard, as an artist, takes liberty to alter historical facts and makes them contemporaries to suit his designs. There are some historical evidences to show that Joyce and Henry Carr lived together in Zurich. Joyce was the manager of the English players for the production of the play The Importance of Being Earnest in 1918. Henry Carr was one of the cast in the play acting as Algernon Montcrieff. Carr was an army officer who was seriously wounded in France after which he was taken a prisoner to Germany. Later he was sent to Zurich as a prisoner of exchange. Now in the play Travesties, he is an old man who reminisces his past. Because of the twists Stoppard gives to historical facts, he is able to provide lot of fun. The action is set in the Library of Zurich and in the drawing room of Carr. Most of the action takes place within Carr's memory which goes back to the period of the World War I.

PARODY OF HISTORY

Stoppard does not present a faithful account of history. He uses it only as a framework to create a make-belief situation. As in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Stoppard in this play presents worm's eye view since Carr is as insignificant as Ros or Guil. In Travesties it is
one step higher because it is not the direct presentation of what a marginal character sees, but what happens in the memory of a senile character, Henry Carr. He was only occupying a very humble position in the British consulate. Through the vagaries of his unsteady memory Carr thinks that he occupied a very superior position in the consulate and turns his actual higher officer, Bennet, into his servant. Consequently Carr assumes too much importance for himself. He thinks that he could have stopped the outbreak of Russian revolution. What Stoppard strives to achieve is to look at the historical events through unreliable memory of Carr which makes the play very funny. As Carr looks at the heroes--Joyce, Tzara and Lenin--through his abnormal mind, Stoppard is reminding us that "historical events always look slightly preposterous when seen from the margins" (Billington 98).

COMEDY THROUGH MYSTERY

If in Jumpers the reader is in for a visual feast, through the gymnasts jumping, the secretary swinging and the philosopher with a bow and an arrow, in Travesties the reader is in for a verbal feast. Tzara is reciting something in a foreign language. Lenin dictates something in Russian. Joyce dictates something incomprehensible. This can be illustrated from the following text.
What they speak is unintelligible to the audience. Everything except English is spoken. A sense of mystery is created on account of which there is comedy. What is even more funny is that all these apparent nonsense seem to have some meaning and design. What Tzara speaks seems to be rubbish as no meaning could be made out when hearing for the first time. He says,

Eel ate enormous appletzara
Key dairy chef's hat he'll learn oomparah!
Ill raced alas whispers kill later nut east
Noon avuncular ill day clara! (T 18)

This apparent nonsense renders meaning when the words are grouped differently. It is no more meaningless group of words but it becomes French and yields clear meaning as can be seen from the following rendering of the above text (cf Londre 71-72).

Il est énorme, S'appelle Tzara
Qui dérèchef se hâte. Hilare nonpareil!
Il reste à la Suisse parcequ'il est un artiste.
"Nous n'avons que l'art", il déclara!

This can be rendered into English. (cf Kelly 105).

He is astonishing, the one called Tzara
Who rushes headlong once again! Peerless jokester!
He stays with the Swiss, 'cause he's an artist. "We have only art," he declares to us.

By presenting some verbal rubbish which can yield meaning, Stoppard makes the play funny. This is corroborated by the words of Paul Delaney, "Like Jumpers, Travesties bursts on to the stage with a dizzying array of fragments which seems unreal, chaotic, devoid of coherence and impervious to sense" (58).

ENGAGING DEBATE

In 'leap-frog' style, Stoppard allows the exponents to air their views, while he himself remains neutral without taking sides. Since the views of the exponents are contradictory Stoppard leaves it to the audience to arrive at a conclusion. James Joyce is the spokesman of traditional approach to art and considers art as an activity of great importance. He is the exponent of the view 'art for art's sake'. He is quite indifferent to war or history as he thinks that they have no meaning independently. For him war and history have meaning only in and through art. For him artist is creative like a magician and art does not need any apology. Art is its own excuse for being.

Tzara holds the view that chance is the very design of art. He says that there is no such thing as logic and causality. His view is expressed in the following text.
Tzara I am sick of cleverness. The clever people try to impose a design on the world and when it goes calamitously wrong they call it fate. In point of fact, everything is chance, including design.

Carr That sounds artfully clever. What does it mean? Not that it has to mean anything, of course.

Tzara It means, my dear Henry, that the causes we know everything about depend on causes we know very little about, which depend on causes we know absolutely nothing about. (T 37)

He stands for anti-art. He is the disciple of Dadaism. Dadaism is a movement which stresses nihilism. It rebels against conventional art denying any sense of order. He says that "artist is someone who makes art mean the things he does" (T 38). Even though he rejects traditional art forms he thinks that art is a superior kind of activity as he says, "the difference between being a man and being a coffee-mill is art" (T 47). As regards war he holds the view that war is no more romantic and hence demythologises war by saying that it is fought for oil wells and coaling stations. For him wars are just historical accidents as they are never fought for any honour. He proves that art is just chance by cutting the words of other people's poems into small pieces of paper and shaking them into a hat brings out a poem of his own. According to him "all poetry is a reshuffle of a pack of picture cards" (T 53).

As far as Lenin is concerned, he considers art as a
hand-maid to the society. Art is a force for social change. For him art for art's sake is unacceptable and he holds the view that art should be always committed. Lenin thinks that art and society should be interrelated and any literature is meaningful only if it is party literature. This is only one side of the coin. Lenin is also fond of Beethoven's music and Chekhov's novels which have nothing to do with the transformation of the society in the way Lenin would expect. Stoppard parodies Lenin's views by making Lenin himself shift his stance. Carr may be a minor character, but it is he who creates all other characters.

Carr does not accept that logic and causality have collapsed. He claims that he went to war because of patriotism and exclaims about the war in the words of Wordsworth, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven" (196) and changes them as "Bliss it was to see the dawn! To be alive was very heaven!"(T 27). He has the romantic view of war as he sees it as a sense of duty and love of freedom. Carr does not accept the definition of Tzara on art, namely the artist is someone who makes art mean the things he does. Carr thinks that changing of labels does not change reality. For him art is something done well by somebody which is not possible for others. He says, "An artist is someone who is gifted in some way that enables him to do something more or less well which can only
be done badly or not at all by someone who is not thus gifted" (T 38). He holds the traditional view of art as something which beautifies existence. Carr does not give overrated importance to art as Tzara or Joyce give. He thinks that just because one is an artist he abandons serious concerns. When the whole world is fighting only an artist can be unconcerned about it as he says, "to be an artist at all is like living in Switzerland during a world war" (T 38). He thinks that artists are a sort of lucky dogs.

Carr What is an artist? For every thousand people there's nine hundred doing the work, ninety doing well, nine doing good, and one lucky bastard who's the artist. (T 46)

The dialogue among these four people, Joyce, Tzara, Lenin and Carr provides the engaging debate, which is parodic. It is an attempt at arriving at reality. Each one may have some salient points but no one has the totality of truth. Truth is multilayered. When such conflicting views are brought together, comedy arises. In an effort to find the relevance of an artist, meaning of war and the relationship between the two, contradictory and complementary views are presented touching upon design and chance, appearance and reality, art and delusion. Stoppard knew that artists are considered as decorators and embroiders, as they do not contribute in a way as one
contributes a bicycle or a pound of butter. So the question whether an artist has a right to exist arises. Similarly the question whether art has meaning even if it does not have political relevance arises. Stoppard tries to answer these questions not directly but through an engaging debate among the protagonists. By bringing opposed camps together, Stoppard maintains not only an intellectual debate, but also provides lot of fun. Stoppard only "hurls the ideas at us and leaves us to pick our way through them" (Billington 100).

ATTRACTIVE CHAOS

Travesties has a bewildering variety of snatches of songs, limerics, passages from Shakespeare, Wilde and Joyce, laborious speeches and soliloquies resulting in a chaos as seen by a senile old man, Carr. The reader is attracted to this chaos as it resembles life's seeming randomness. The chaos also provides fun. The way the word 'Dada' is used is chaotic but every utterance gains meaning according to the context. The chaotic use of the word can be seen in the following references from the text. Carr uses it in the sense of Dadaism.

Carr: Dada! down with reason, logic, causality, coherence, tradition, proportion, sense and consequence, my art belongs to Dada. (T 25)

Nadya uses the same word 'dada' in the sense of yes.
Nadya nods "da, da" (T 20)

Tzara and Gwen use the same word 'dada' in the sense of dear.

Tzara Have you ever seen my magazine "Dada" darling?

Like this the meaning of the word "dada" depends upon the context.

COMEDY REBOUNDS

The comedy rebounds on the reader because every school of thought is championed as well as ridiculed. The various theories proposed are that man can be a revolutionary, or man can be an artist or man can be a revolutionary artist or man can be absolutely nothing at all. Various theories are woven into one texture to throw light on the confusions, ambiguities and paradoxes. The confusion is created by mixing together Dadaism, modernism in literature and revolutionism in politics. No distinct and articulate opinion is presented. The play takes up each position and subjects it to "parodic distortions, stripping them of their self-imposed dignities, but never to the extent of dismissing any one of them" (Dutton 189-190). At one time the ideals of Joyce's 'art for art's sake' is held aloft over all other dogmas. At another time Lenin emerges as a modern hero with his hammer and sickle. Then Tzara comes up
with Dadaism. There is no linear progression of highlighting one single position. Stoppard switches from one level to the other creating uncertainty. The audience is always kept guessing without knowing which path to pursue. This is illustrated in what Enoch Brater points out:

Here is Stoppard’s three-ring circus of twentieth century alternatives. Which way should we turn? Where can authenticity be found? Does the artist need to justify himself in political terms? At what point do political realities begin to corrupt human values? When is "revolution" only a code word for crass materialism and bourgeois art? (125)

COMEDY THROUGH PARODY

Stoppard achieves comedy with the collision of two or more levels. For example, James Joyce, the great genius, the author of Ulysses is shown to be involved in a trivial affair of a law suit with Henry Carr over the price of five tickets. His contention is that Carr has not returned the money of the five tickets he has sold for the play. Joyce as a great genius of creative writer is one level. The triviality of the law suit is another level. Since both levels are made to collide there is fun.
Amidst towering heroes like Joyce, Lenin and Tzara, Carr is brought to the centre stage as these heroes are seen through the eyes of Carr. He is not gifted in any extraordinary way as he is a petty man flawed in many ways. This very limitation increases his suitability. This petty man represents humanity in all its fallibility. He comes across the political messiah Lenin, but remains untouched by the teachings of Lenin on class. However Carr stands for the economically motivated modern man as he is prepared to face the court suit over twenty francs. He comes across Tzara and is neither able to accept or reject Dadaism. As regards Joyce, Carr provides the material for the character, Leopold Bloom is Ulysses. Because of coming to know these great men in history, Carr has not changed much as Craig Werner points out, "Stoppard creates a Carr who remains stubbornly unredeemed despite his personal contact with the would be messiahs of the various mythologies" (231). Presenting such a small man and making him look at historical giants makes the play funny. Stoppard takes the individual lives and achievements of these great men to serve as the pretext for a playfully disrespectful comedy. About Carr Stoppard says, "I conjured up an elderly gentleman still living in Zurich, married to a girl he met in the library during the Lenin years, and recollecting, perhaps not with entire accuracy,
his encounters with Joyce and the Dadaist Tzara” (T 12). This recollection lacking accuracy is very handy for Stoppard to make the account playful. Carr is a character in the periphery brought to the centre stage. Besides being insignificant his memory is unreliable. Here there is double parody. Carr is so old that he is said to be the “leaky sieve of an unreliable memory” (Corballis 157) making him unable even to recall the name of Joyce. Joyce becomes for him Doris, Janice and Phyllis (T 49, 51, 53). When such a person “a man whose life is relegated to the footnotes of history” (Cave 93), looks at historical celebrities, there is obviously double parody. The great heroes are not presented as wonderful giants or powerful figures. They are just ordinary men, struggling like any ordinary person. Carr himself is as Gabrielle Robinson says, “another version of Riley in Enter a Free Man, Guildenstern, and Moore—the man, thrown into an incomprehensible world, who is constantly trying to catch up with events and constantly out of his depth. He is that most typical Stoppard character, the spectator as hero” (42).

THE TITLE AND THE COMEDY

The word travesty comes from the Latin word transvestire which means to change clothes. In the sixteenth century it meant disguise which was used as a comic
device. In the literary sense Coppelia Kahn defines it as follows: Travesty means to clothe a character or situation from a known literary work in the 'dress' or style that specifically makes it ridiculous or grotesque, that debases it (190). In Travesties Stoppard takes Wilde's play The Importance of Being Earnest, and parodies both its content and the style. Wilde's play is upper class artificial drawing room comedy mocking pretence, sham and artifice. Stoppard takes the same characters and puts them in the revolutionary ferment of Zurich in 1917. The travesty occurs since Stoppard takes the tone and structure of Wilde's comedy for his weightier subjects of art and politics. He mixes the historic importance of Lenin, Joyce and Tzara in the farcical confusions of Wilde's courtship plot. Comedy arises when Stoppard questions the validity of art in the context of World War I. Far reaching calamity and extensive destruction make art insignificant. The question of the role of art in the face of cataclysmic changes arises. World War I and the Russian Revolution were responsible for the loss of countless lives shattering the familiar beliefs on which the edifice of European culture was built. The play parodies the right of art to exist when countless people die.
FICTION MAKING AS OPTICAL ILLUSION

Carr appearing on the stage is the only fact and all the rest is fiction. Whether it be literature or history, ability to transcend actual facts is necessary. The Trojan wars do not become literature unless they are transcended as Homer has done. That is why Joyce says, "what now of the Trojan War if it had been passed over by the artist's touch? Dust" (T 62). So in order to make the events of Zurich into fiction, Carr's memory, however faulty, is necessary. It is the memory which unifies the most disjointed events of the past. Carr may not present an objective account of his past but certainly presents a unified account of his past. Memory puts together what have disappeared from senses. It deals with images that which are invisible to everybody else. In other words fiction making is optical illusion. There is comedy since the process of fiction making is effected through the unreliable and erratic memory of Carr. The words of Shakespeare, in A Midsummer Night's Dream, "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,/ Are of imagination all compact" (187) come true when Stoppard creates Travesties through the defective memory of Carr similar to that of a mad man. Carr's memory is a means of bringing comic variety and intellectual antithesis into the play while yet retaining some sort of unity in the shape of his consciousness.
COMEDY THROUGH PUN

Puns are an important device Stoppard uses for extracting comedy. They abound in this play. It can be seen in the conversation between Cecily and Carr. Cecily, as an ardent socialist and disciple of Lenin believes that the class of servants should be abolished. Carr is the exponent of just the opposite view as nothing could change the society. With this frame of mind they talk to each other.

Cecily I am afraid that I disapprove of servants.
Carr You are quite right to do. Most of them are without scruples.
Cecily In the socialist future, no one will have any.
Carr So I believe. (T 73)

They are talking at different wavelengths as Hersh Zeifman says that "it is like a conversation between two different species, each of whom inhabits a totally different world, speaks, in effect, almost literally a different language" (188). Cecily says that she disapproves of servants because of her belief as socialist whereas Carr says that he disapproves of them as they are not conscientious. Cecily declares that there will not be any more servants because of the class upheaval whereas Carr says that there will not be any conscientious servant. Through such puns Stoppard makes the play comical.
HALL OF MIRRORS

The age-old theme that stage is a mirror of life is shown in the play. Besides stage being the mirror, Stoppard extends the image of mirror to the characters. Carr mirrors all the three revolutionaries of the world, art and literature represented by Lenin, Tzara and Joyce. Lenin stands for transforming the world and Tzara stands for art. Lenin's stand is opposed to that of Tzara, as Lenin believes entirely in the world as a reality whereas Tzara does not at all believe in the world as a reality. Lenin mirrors Tzara in so far as he is in love with the musical pieces of Beethoven. The play Travesties mirrors Wilde's play The Importance of Being Earnest. Thus the play is like a hall of mirrors, stage mirroring art, character mirroring character, art mirroring world raising the question whether reality lies in dreams or in life. This many levelled mirroring helps Stoppard in mingling life and dream. Comedy arises as life is equated to dream and dream equated to life.

Travesties brings many things together like history, art and politics and parodies them. Michael Billington pays rich tributes to the play and it can be summed up in his words:

Here was a play that combined Wildean parody, political lecture, spoof reminiscence, song-and-
dance. Here was a play that dealt with the fallibility of memory, the role of the artist, the logical flaw in Marxist revolution, the relativity of language, the aesthetic conservatism of political revolutionaries, the absurdity of history when seen from the side lines. (97)

*Artist Descending a Staircase* is a precursor to *Travesties*. It is about artists who have avant-garde leanings and a woman called Sophie. The artists are Donner, Martello and Beauchamp. Sophie suffers from failing eyesight as she encounters these artists. She is attracted to one of them without knowing his name. The three agree that her lover is Beauchamp and hence she lives with him. Later on Martello tells Donner that the person she was actually in love with could be Donner. The confusion of the real lover arises because on the day she chose the lover all the three were dressed alike and the lover had to be identified from the description she gave of the painting. The play deals with questions like problems of truth, love and art. To these is added the question of who killed Donner.

Beauchamp thinks that Martello must have killed Donner. Martello thinks that Beauchamp must have killed Donner. The reason for this supposition in the recorded words in the tape recorder "Ah, there you are" (Artist 13). Only at the end the reader comes to know that these are the words of Donner himself as he is trying to hit a fly. His words are
caught in the tape recorder. As he tries to hit a fly he falls down crashing through the old railings.

As Carr has defective memory, Sophie also has unreliable memory. That the arrival at the truth is difficult is shown by the fact that Beauchamp and Martello interpret the sound of the tape recorder in the wrong way.

What one sees need not be the objective reality as Sophie sees one thing and describes something else as the lovers get mixed up. What one hears cannot be trusted as Beauchamp and Martello interpret wrongly the sound of the tape recorder. Memory cannot be trusted as Sophie’s mix up of lovers is because of inaccurate memory. Comedy arises as the play deals with such uncertainties of arriving at the truth. There is comedy when Stoppard shows that Donner who survived the loss of love from Sophie should die when he comes to know that she really loved him.

Where Are They Now? is a play which deals with a group of students who come back to their alma mater for a dinner. They reminisce about their school days just like Carr does in Travesties. The action moves on the old setting of school days and the present Alumni Dinner. The memories are intertwined with their Latin Master Dobson and the French Master Jenkins. French Master is dead and gone. There is another Jenkins who finds his way into this dinner group by
mistake. The recollections of the students and Jenkins are incongruent and they are a great source of comedy.

When all are asked to stand up as a mark of respect to the memory of Jenkins, there is laughter as Gale refuses to stand up saying, "I'm sitting down for Jenkins. We stood for Jerkins long enough" (WAT 74).

The foregoing section proves the fact that Stoppard is a master comedian. He extracts comedy through themes, characterizations, theatrical and dramatic techniques. He singles out philosophy, art, politics and history for special parodying, though there are very many areas which are touched upon by him. Stoppard makes plays very comical through pun and language games. There is comedy as Stoppard constructs dialogue with contrasting ideas. Playfulness is Stoppard's forte. Stoppard says, "there is a perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce or perhaps even high comedy" (Hudson 7). In constructing his dialogues Stoppard fuses together the various conflicting strands of view points so that the dialogue proves to be a source of fun and laughter. Some consider this not as strength but as weakness. Very often the accusation hurled at Stoppard is that he is all the time playing shying away from social issues. Stoppard wanted to silence his critics by writing plays dealing with social issues.