Chapter V: Parody and the Play.

Parody renders Stoppard’s theater to be an entertaining performance with serious morals. However, the serious intents are by no means a legitimate formula for old assumptions and beliefs to revive; the more significant purpose rather is to reclaim the fundamentals of life’s values and the freedom of conviction. To Stoppard the freedom of conviction is not to be exercised from certain imposed presuppositions; in other words, it may be cultivated in interactive discourses, in dialogic processes such as the present is in a dialogue with the past, the self-reflexive contemporary with the self-legitimating traditions. On looking at the characterization in Stoppard’s major plays, a steady impression is gathered that his characters are not individuals engaged in exploring from a distance what has been conventionally held as truth; rather they appear in spirit to be more Socratic or even pre-Socratic in fresh dialectics on various traditional postulates from radical perspectives. ‘Dialectic, the final stage of education for a philosopher is also serious play,’ as Krentz observes. ‘The very topic of the Republic, which of a just life in a just society, reveals a Socrates addressing a serious issue in a playful frame: he jokes with Adeimantos and Glaucon, he uses allegories, comparisons and irony.’

Stoppard’s dramatic approach comes close to the dialectically playful serious mode rather than the self-perpetuating monologic dogmas or illusionary realism. And in this interplay of views, discourses and premises charting plays of Stoppard, parody creates a full state of play in the playful sense. Thus parody has its
preeminent position in an entire dialogic relationship to make truth as open-ended as life is.

In the *Travesties*, Carr provides some of the best parodies by his reactionary exchanges, while presenting crucial clashes of philosophy that demean the position of both Joyce and the Dadaist Tzara:

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.²

Further, Carr argues:

Artists are members of a privileged class. Art is absurdly overrated by artists, which is understandable, but what is strange is that it is absurdly overrated by everyone else….

The idea of artist as a special human being is art’s greatest achievement, and it’s a fake!³

The crisscross of views held by great ideologues in the play unfolds that every structure, every image, every opinion is subject to interrogation from a different angle, and that no meaning is universally stable.

Robert Phiddian makes up a case that is built on the Derridean sense of deconstruction that parody and deconstruction are almost the same thing. Considering a passage from *Of Grammatology*, Phiddian remarks:
It is clear that deconstruction, especially as Derrida practices it, nests in the structure of the texts and ideas it criticizes, as a cuckoo infiltrates and takes over the nests of other birds. It operates from inside the arguments of metaphysical texts and systems such as structuralism and phenomenology, showing how they cannot totalize the visions they proclaim, and precisely where they double and collapse. It is not primary thought, always secondary, always “borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure.” And this is precisely what parody does too.4

Since the beginning of the present thesis, it is strongly felt that Stoppard’s plays are also examples which illustrate the Derridean sense of deconstruction and play.

Stoppard’s susceptibility to word-play is wonderfully diverting, but it is no more ‘diversionary’ than Shakespeare’s cultivation of the quibble. Like Beckett, he knows that the precision and flexibility of our language measures the breadth and generosity of our vision of life. A concern with ‘the way language and logic can be used and misused’ is in the end a moral concern, as well as a source of amusement. And Stoppard’s own achievement, in spite of his talk about ‘seriousness compromised by frivolity,’ endorses his claim that ‘art . . . is important because it provides the moral matrix, the moral sensibility, from which we make our judgments about the world.’5

Sometimes, the confusion arises when the participants approach a conversation with different sets of assumptions about the context in which it is being
conducted. As Clive James has put it, in one of the most perceptive accounts of the significance of Stoppard’s word-games:

[. . . ]he is at his strongest when one precise meaning is transformed into another precise meaning with the context full-blown in each case . . . it is the plurality of contexts that concerns Stoppard: ambiguities are just places where contexts join.\textsuperscript{6}

English theater has been adorned with celebrated names having distinctive parodic intent such as G B Shaw, Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett, to name only a few among others. In certain aspects of drama, Stoppard resembles each of his predecessors only at certain moments. However, his plays consistently exploit and celebrate the semiotic energy of intertextuality in which the inverting and re-contextualizing art of parody and the paradoxical involvement of play are invariably present.

Literary critics, philosophers and cultural theorists express deep interest in the concept of play and playfulness of human consciousness. Some critics affirm that play exists actually as “a way of being, not only a way of knowing”\textsuperscript{7} Contemporary critics and playwrights are now advancing play (playfulness) as an important dimension of serious action inherent and present in the expression of artistic and non-artistic human. A journey into various philosophical undertakings of its concept seems to lead to the conclusion that play is crucial as traditional philosophical concepts like truth, knowledge, meaning, and value are in drama. The sense of play however mostly undermines the self-authenticated reference of the traditional. In \textit{Dirty Linen}, Stoppard induces such type of advancement of play
where forth the political system of the House of Commons have been artistically postulated parodying the political system of his times. A meeting held in the chairman’s chamber discusses about newspapers and columnists:

Maddie: It isn’t the people, it’s the newspapers.

Mc Teazle: That’s true.

Cocklebury Smythe: Well the newspapers are the people in a sense—they are the channel of the government’s answerability to the governed. The Fourth Estate of the realm speaking for the hearts and minds of the people.

Mrs. Ebury: And on top of that they’re as smug a collection of inaccurate, hypocritical, self-important, bullying, shoddily printed sag-bags as you’d hope to find in a month of Sundays, and dailies, and weeklies aren’t much better.⁸

Stoppard plays with the political House of Commons and the committee under it. It’s just that, “you can’t have a committee washing dirty linen in the corridors of power unless every member is above suspicion.”⁹ This system has been ideologically inclined playing the minds of the commons by the authority. Stoppard names his characters in the play appropriately, for instance Miss Maddie Gotobed is the secretary who ironically gets her job “with flying knickers.”¹⁰ Mr Mc Teazle a member of the committee seems to be a teaser and Cocklebury-Smythe a womanizer.
Derrida’s idea of play postulates that the relationship between world and things is one of intimacy, but not fusion. It is a relationship in which the entities—world and thing—penetrate each other, divide and remain separated: “The intimacy of world and thing is present in the separation of the between; it is present in the difference”\textsuperscript{11}. According to Derrida, “différance is literally neither a word nor a concept.”\textsuperscript{12} Differance are rather opposites that are already united; they depend on each other integrally, thus, no presence without absence.

Stoppardian play seems to mean dealing with philosophical concepts in a witty, ironic and linguistically complex way, usually with multiple timelines and visual humour. A good example is Arcadia (1993), a bittersweet country-house comedy that sweeps between Regency England and today, taking in discussions of romanticism, classicism and thermodynamics. The play suggests that we are forever re-enacting the patterns of the past with mild variations – or, in other words, that the human heart beats to an iterated algorithm. Thomasina’s distant relatives echo her lines through time, with a word misplaced. When Thomasina weeps for the destruction of the library of Alexandria and all the lost plays of the Athenians, Septimus says:

You should no more grieve for [them] than for a buckle from your first shoe, or for your lesson book which shall be lost when you are old. We shed as we pick up, like travelers who must carry everything in our arms, and what we let fall will be picked up by those behind. The procession is very long and life is very short. But there is nothing outside the march, so nothing can be lost.\textsuperscript{13}
The most important speech in the play, Hannah suggests that the answer lies in the process of trying to understand, while we can. We find meaning by questing on, even in the face of failure and extinction. She tells Valentine:

It’s all trivial – your grouse, my hermit, Bernard's Byron. Comparing what we're looking for misses the point. It’s wanting to know that makes us matter. That’s why you can’t believe in the afterlife, Valentine. Believe in the after, by all means, but not the life. Believe in God, the soul, the spirit, believe in angels if you like, but not in the great celestial get-together for an exchange of views. If the answers are in the back of the book I can wait, but what a drag. Better to struggle on knowing that failure is final.¹⁴

This is a sardonic comment on afterlife, holiness; endorsement of faith in life. And so in the end, Stoppard suggests the division that obsessed the 18th century – between romantics and classicists – exists in all of us. Hannah prides herself on her classical reserve, but by the final scene, it is faltering. She finally agrees to dance with Gus, the mysterious, mute young son of the house who seems to have an inexplicable knowledge of the distant past. He is a symbol of all the things that lie beyond her rational explanations – and she embraces him. Septimus is a stern scientist who venerates geometry, but he ends as the most romantic figure of all – hermit in a Gothic garden trying vainly to vindicate the theories of his lost love. In this light, it may be said that Stoppard believes that a fully human self does not deny its being by holding together all mutually discontented tendencies; in other words, as his characters exemplify, contextually above, without both halves of the 18th
century self, an impulse to understand the rules that govern the world, and an impulse to overthrow them and create ourselves anew, we are not fully human.\textsuperscript{15}

In the last scene (\textit{Arcadia}), the characters from the 18th century and the 20th century are on stage together, occupying the same space. They cannot see each other, yet they seem to be speaking to each other all the same, as the implications of Thomasina’s discoveries tumble out. As the music rises, Thomasina and Septimus waltz together for the last time – a dance that is another iterated algorithm, always the same, always slightly different – and Hannah takes Gus’s hand for a dance of their own. The sound of the coming fire slowly rises. The waltzing couples dance in circles past each other, oblivious to each other, and intensely aware of each other, all at once.

It is a moment that shows the power of the play of ideas to fuse together concepts and characters into a theatrical grenade. This final scene is the waltz that takes place inside all of us – of our ancestors dancing with our present, of reason dancing with irrationality, and of hope dancing with despair, as the roaring, crackling sound of the heat-death draws ever closer.\textsuperscript{16}

Johan Huizinga defines in his \textit{Homo Ludens} (1938) humans as playful beings and argues that play is a fundamental fact of every human expression. For him, play is older than culture, because culture presupposes human society, but “animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing.”\textsuperscript{17} Law, poetry, war, culture, and music, all encompass playfulness in both their essence and manifestation:
The spirit of playful competition is, as a social impulse, older than culture itself and pervades all life like a veritable ferment. Ritual grew up in sacred play; poetry was born in play and nourished on play; music and dancing were pure play...We have to conclude, therefore, that civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come from play...it arises in and as play, and never leaves it.¹⁸

In “The Ontology of the Work of Art and its Hermeneutic Significance” in his Truth and Method (1960), Hans Georg Gadamer discusses play in the context of philosophy. To him play is neither the state of mind of the author, nor the work of art, nor the freedom of subjectivity in play, but “the mode of being of the work of art itself.”¹⁹ The existentialist philosopher clarifies that play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play. He also mentions Huizinga, who investigated the element of play anthropologically in all cultures and who wrote that “the savage himself knows no conceptual distinctions between being and playing.”²⁰ In conclusion Gadamer observes that “man too, plays”. He significantly states, “all the sacred games of art are only remote imitations of the infinite play of the world, the eternally self-creating work of art.”²¹ In Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Stoppard induces the playfulness of the Player. The Player and his band are also on the ship, but he is not especially surprised to learn of this treacherous turn of events, saying, “In our experience, most things end in death.” Infuriated, Guildenstern plunges a knife into the Player’s throat and watches him die spectacularly. After a moment, the Player jumps up, brushes himself off and reveals the knife to be a spring-loaded fake. Guildenstern is too distraught to be impressed,
saying that dying is not a romantic idea and death is not a game that will soon be over.\textsuperscript{22}

It may be said that death unsettles the monologic of absolute beliefs, presupposed truths of life; it is ‘not’. Further, ironic inversion, i.e. an essential characteristic of all parody can be appropriately seen in the context of Ros and Guil, when Shakespeare’s minor characters are pertinently recalled. Even the Stoppardian thought uncannily reminds us of the Derridian differance, particularly in terms of game and play. If difference is realized in the process by a spirit of play, death is weirdly experienced only in the process of living. Death is defined as “the absence of presence.” The phrase ‘nothing more’ does the travestying of death’s mythologized terror. Derrida’s \textit{Margins of Philosophy} conceives the notion of play as inseparable from différance, which is neither existence, nor essence. Bass has brought out its fine implications thus:

It (differenace) cannot be followed by the lines of logical-philosophical discourse or by empirical-logical approaches. Différance is not; where “not” is the silent/invisible unfolding of the ontological difference. Différance is not a being or phenomenon, neither is it a sign or a concept. This process is both temporal and spatial. Derrida describes it as the trace beyond that which profoundly links fundamental ontology and phenomenology. Always differing and deferring, the trace is never as it is in the presentation of itself.\textsuperscript{23}
In the end, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern resign themselves to their fate, though Guildenstern says: “There must have been a moment, at the beginning, when we could have said -- no. But somehow we missed it.” Missing a possibility speaks also of having accepted a responsibility at a certain time. In the flow of time, one rarely reaches back to the beginning for a new start in life. So the clowns slide on without of course any movement to transformation. In Derrida’s thought, as *Of Grammatology* insistently repeats, originary moments are hardly traceable: all begins with the trace, but there is no originary trace; this spells out the disappearance of the logocentric presence. As Marian Hobson notes, “again against Nietzsche, Heidegger, says Derrida, points to a rupture between what he calls ‘voice of being’ and sound, *phonè*, between originary sense of being and the word, between the call of being and articulated sound.” For Derrida, ‘But as that (originary) sense is nothing outside of language and the language of words, it is tied, if not to a particular word or to a particular system of language (concesso non dato), at least to the possibility of the word in general.’ They have already been consigned to death in their conception; so the play ends with two ambassadors from England informing Horatio that, at long last, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.

Stoppard’s dramatic writing is interesting to read and also spectacular rather than internally structured in the classical sense. Each play by Stoppard has been conceived with an aim to engender semiotic energy on the stage, suggesting brand-new perspectives to actors, directors, and stage-costume-lighting designers as well as a new mode of perception to the spectator. The Stoppardian “play text” serves as a bridge between the “spectacle” and the contexts that interest through a constant process of association and dissociation. The pleasure to be
derived from a production of a play by Stoppard hinges on the artist’s and spectator’s capacity to keep up with the varying doses of “attachment” and “detachment” that the dynamic structuring of the stage-event requires.\(^{28}\)

Theatre is particularly suited to enriching our experience, vicariously and acceptably, by such representations; it is also particularly good at the study of deception itself…The potentially religious force of theatre, like the potentially sensationalized, is there in Jumpers and Travesties as well as in more solemn plays; and they are performances, for us to watch together.\(^{29}\)

Towards the end of Stoppard’s play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Rosencrantz an actor gives a convincing rendering of death in agony. It is clear to the audience that these two characters are only playing the part of ‘death’ which can ‘never be acted from personal experience.’ Jim Hunter comments:

[...]since the actor is in this case acting an actor (Player) who has previously boasted that his team can die ‘heroically, comically, ironically, slowly, suddenly, distinguishingly, charmingly, or from a great height’, we are also not sure whether he is acting death, or only acting an actor acting death. It is partly on whose reaction we watch: if we watch Guil’s, we see he is sure he has killed the Player; so is Ros; if we watch the tragedians, we see on their faces only ‘interest’. So, theatre shows us different reactions, which become different versions of the event. If Guil has ‘really’ killed the Player, [...] it means the gentle, fastidious Guil has committed murder; and it means
that he has proved himself able to interfere in the fixed destiny of himself.\textsuperscript{30}

Stoppard’s sense of play does mostly not evidence a predetermined field of play unlike Gadamer’s theory of play in which certain fundamental rules guide and maintain game and play, the breaking of which would invite some disaster. It may reasonably be assumed that in art as in Stoppard’s drama, difference and discursivity set the spirit of play for the spectacle that each play of his turns out. On the other hand, Stoppard’s examples might illustrate nearly what Roland Barthes says of a literary text.

Barthes’s work informs the reader that “the text is structured like play—children’s play, musical performance, or the excess motion in a machine.”\textsuperscript{31} For Barthes, In \textit{From Work to Text}, Barthes presents in structuralist terms a Bakhtinian view: the text exhibits an infinite playfulness of the signifier; the text provokes “the activity of associations, contiguities, carryings-over coincides with a liberation of symbolic energy (lacking it, man would die)”\textsuperscript{32} Text is also “a system with neither close, nor centre”\textsuperscript{33}. For Barthes: the author is dead, and the act of reading is not an act of playing with a text. “Text itself plays,” and what the reader does, is he/she “plays twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game”\textsuperscript{34} Extrapolating from Barthes’s position, God, as a writer of a six-day play and a reader during the seventh day, may actually play twice over even while seen in a non-play state.

In spite of the more recent reader-response theories of Wolfgang Iser or Stanley Fish, the center, or the power of reading has shifted historically from the work of art to author, then to reader, and seems to be now centered on the critic as
the most indispensable part in the process. Stoppard places the two theater critics Birdboot and Moon at the centre of the play *The Real Inspector Hound*. He goes on to satirize the profession of theater critics by exploring the hierarchy of society, particularly the role of fill-ins, second-strings, and substitutes in relation to their “betters”. Nowhere else is this more evident than in the fretting of Moon over the existence of Higgs:

Moon: It is as if we only existed one at a time, combining to achieve continuity. I keep space warm for Higgs. My presence defines his absence, his absence confirms my presence, his presence precludes mine […]35

The play also explores the cynical approach that critics take to plays and appears to deliver a message claiming that all critiques are subject to their own ideologies or biases. While Moon and Birdboot are understandably extreme examples, Stoppard uses these characters to show how self-aggrandizement can muddle the true purpose of a play through Moon (who uses the play as an attempt to show off his skills in the brief period where Higgs, the person he is standing in for, is absent) or how other interests can jeopardize the integrity of a play through Birdboot, who pens lavish reviews as long as there are visually pleasing female leads in the play:

It is at this point that the play for me comes alive. The groundwork has been well and truly laid, and the author has taken the trouble to learn from the masters of the genre. He has created a real situation, and few will doubt his ability to resolve it with a startling
denouement. Certainly that is what it so far lacks, but it has a
beginning, a middle and I have no doubt it will prove to have an end.
For this let us give thanks, and double thanks for a good clean show
without a trace of smut. But perhaps even all this would be for
nothing, were it not for a performance which I consider to be one of
the summits in the range of contemporary theatre. In what is possibly
the finest Cynthia since the war.  

Critics are holding the key to the multiple, layered mysteries of the play by
having a more comprehensive view upon the intricate rules; no informed reader
could dream to compete with those who master the scholarship of the theory of
language and literature. The reader’s anxiety becomes the following: how will the
multiple, dead, or decentered author continue to play/write with such accompanying
deconstructive critical Cerberus eyeing him/her? readers are allowed the power of
their own interpretive community, for every reader will appreciate a work of art
according to his/her own socially or otherwise determined standards of taste.
Stanley Fish has multi-layered the play, decentering the center again: the
interpretation game is taking place today among various “interpretive communities,”
working the same path as language did once heteroglossically for Bakhtin.

Play according to Whitaker is something “grounded not in impotent
mastery but in spontaneous reciprocity, inherent mutuality.” Gussow gives his
opinion about Stoppard’s art in theater:

(H)is plays have a brilliant theatricality. He is, in fact, an exemplary
autodidact, and a very quick study. In the plays, things are never
quite what they seem to be. (...) Time plays tricks, as past and present coexist and sometimes brush against each other on the same stage. In many of his plays, there are echoes of his previous writings. The subject matter may shift from moral philosophy to quantum physics, but the voice is that of the author caught in the act of badinage, arguing himself in and out of a quandary.\textsuperscript{39}

Stoppard induces parody and the role of playing in his plays as well as in everyday life. He plays the conscious mind and postulates life as a comic event staged in front of the audience, mimicking life. Stoppard has his own ethics in writing plays, he states that:

The subject matter of the play exists before the story and it is always something abstract. I get interested by a notion of some kind and see that it has dramatic possibilities. Gradually I see how a pure idea can be married with a dramatic event. But it is still not a play until you invent a plausible narrative.\textsuperscript{40}

The different concepts informing ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ become apparent here. He talks about the importance of stage settings, but what most important to him is the conscious mind of the writer connecting his spectators with puns. Our ordinary day to day lives are inherent in a play. The act of talking, singing, speaking all imposes upon play. Stoppard further states that:
In the theater there is often a tension, almost a contradiction, between the way real people would think and behave, and a kind of imposed dramaticness. I like dialogue that is slightly more brittle than life.\textsuperscript{41}

Stoppard imposes something which is dramatic and contradicts reality with playfulness. His plays induce a kind of humour which seems quite amusing with laughter and caricature. He goes on to say that:

I write plays from beginning to end, without making stabs at intermediate scenes, so the first thing I write is the first line of the play. By that time I have formed some idea of the set, but I don’t write that down. I don’t write down anything that I can keep in my head—stage directions and so on. When I have got to the end of the play—which I write with a fountain pen, you can’t scribble with a typewriter—there is almost nothing on the page except what people say. Then I dictate the play, ad-libbing all the stage directions, into a tape machine from which my secretary transcribes the first script.\textsuperscript{42}

Theater has been and always will be a part of life in the world that we live in. It can be used as a means of portraying the day to day life of a culture, group of persons, identity, political, social and economic aspects of life and living. Stoppard deems important human values and paves towards the norm of making his plays interesting, absorbing, and comic by making his plays wide and open in such a way that every idea has a role to play in the big game of life. He implies the truth of life in his plays, life which is filled with chaos trying to hide our worse enemy through perfection and denial. Jim Hunter talks about Stoppard’s theatricality:
Stoppard takes abundant risks; and although he likes to be involved in the first production of the play, and has admitted a Beckettian fantasy of being able to score every detail and gesture, he also admits the fantasy is misguided, and he hands his director and actors an unpredictable, restless text with many changes of mood, many theatrical set-pieces, and a number of options.  

Stoppard feels that a play should be well equipped with a perfect setting fit for the mood and theme of a play. In *Travesties*, Stoppard takes care that every detail is kept in mind, in Act I of the play, he postulates a relevant stage setting:

*The play is set in Zurich, in two locations: the drawing room of Henry Carr’s apartment (‘THE ROOM’), and a section of the Zurich Public Library (“THE LIBRARY”). Most of the action takes place within Carr’s memory, which goes back to the period of the First World War, and this period is reflected appropriately in the design and costumes, etc. It is supposed that Old Carr has lived in the same apartment since that time.*

As well as in Act II, the library has been staged carefully with the right amount of light:

*The set however is not “lit” at the beginning of the Act.*

*Apart from the bookcases, etc. the Library’s furniture includes CECILY’S desk, which is perhaps more like a counter forming three sides of a square.*
Most of the light is on CECILY who stands patiently at the front of the stage, waiting for the last members of the audience to come in and sit down.45

The play is a memory play, Carr’s memory has been portrayed as faulty, taking place in two time frames, one in 1974, during Carr’s old age and the other in 1917, when Carr’s life intersected with those of three major thinkers: writer James Joyce, artist Tristan Tzara and the revolutionary Lenin.

Stoppard brilliantly trivializes language and playful action in his play, which Frank Marcus approves in Travesties:

The effect of Travesties […] is exhilarating! It is nothing short of miraculous […] brilliant and replete with limericks, puns, wordplay, contradiction and paradoxes.46

He induces ideas in his plays in such a way that it entertains his audiences as well as portrays the harsh realities of life through stage performances. To accept life as it is by being conscious of the hardships in life that one has to face through truth and reality. In Enter a Free Man, George Riley faces life as it is, he seems to be the prototype of a postmodernist character. Riley’s friend Harry talks about humanity:

[…] This is every man for himself. Survival of the fittest. Dog eat dog. Sink or swim. That’s how things are in this cruel commercial world. It offends a man of my sensitive nature.47
Stoppard’s plays tell us at once that the happenings and characters in them are of the playwright’s invention. The playwright images and adds reason by observing the world. Thus instigating truth not only because they convince us of real occurrences or existing persons, but because they show the reality of the dramatic imagination, instanced by the playwright and also by that of his characters. We may also say that for Stoppard “The play's the thing.”

In *The Real Inspector Hound* While the story is set in a theatre, the play within the play is set in Muldoon Manor, a lavish manor surrounded by “desolate marshes” and “treacherous swamps” and paradoxically also located near a cliff. It is a direct parody of Agatha Christie’s “closed” settings in which no one can enter or leave, so the characters know that the murderer must be one of them. A happy juxtaposition between fantasy and reality is observed in *The Real Inspector Hound* as Birdboot and Moon are able to live out their fantasies through their involvement in the play. Birdboot becomes the handsome young dapper who promiscuously gallivants about the stage in the role formerly occupied by Simon, while Moon finally transforms into the first-string critic and is able to play the role of the leading man when he puts on the shoes of Inspector Hound. Both critics become the characters of their dreams; they no longer are the husband that sneaks around behind his wife's back and the man who desperately wants to be recognized and admired. They in essence become the characters of the play, further blurring the line between a “stage world” and reality.

So, at times, Stoppard’s theater resembles Brecht’s Epic Theater in that it reacts against the naturalistic modes of the impressionistic drama. As in Brecht, the
Stoppardian atmosphere wants his audiences to adopt a critical perspective in order to recognize social injustice and exploitation and to be moved to go forth from the theater and effect change in the world outside. By highlighting the constructed nature of the theatrical event, Stoppard like Brecht hopes to communicate that the audience’s reality was equally constructed and, as such, was changeable. From his actors Stoppard demanded not realism and identification with the role but an objective style of playing, to become in a sense detached observers. The dominant mode of representing ideas concerning realism and philosophy in Stoppard has been one of parody and play.

The sense of play and parody may be realized from the players’ situation of uncertainties in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* where Stoppard employs such ways of inducing reality in the real where communication deems meaningless between the two major characters Ros and Guil:

Guil : Why is he mad?

Ros : I don’t know!

Player : The old man thinks he is in love with his daughter.

Ros (appalled) : Good God! We’re out of our depth here.

Player : No, no, no - he hasn’t got a daughter - the old man thinks he’s in love with his daughter.

Ros : the old man is?
Player: Hamlet, in love with the old man’s daughter, the old man thinks.

Ros: Ha! It’s beginning to make sense.49

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are in a world where reason and expectations does not seem to be operating. The game that they play, a game of questions, for passing time is also quite ironic. The two characters play a game by asking questions and answer with another question, instigating the audience that the world is full of questions for which we have no answers but another question and this goes on and never seem to end in our lives.

For Derrida, identity and meaning are not necessarily stable or permanent, they are processes. Thus, what is at play is the differentiation between elements in an open-ended un-ordered temporal arrangement. Whatever can be thought is always conceived in relation to something else, differing from something else, and consequently always in the process of forming its own identity; any concept, any sign, any structure, any being.50

Stoppard’s works are full of intellectual arguments. He uses playful manner to present serious matters like perspectives of art and science. His critics are of different opinions, while some sing praises on his intellectuality, others degrade the very fact that his plays lack intensity:

To his detractors, his plays are devoid of feeling and sensibility: improbably shallow people saying improbably deep things in an emotionally sterile context. But, to his supporters, his passion for
theatrical conundrums has created a new dramatic style which melds the moral questioning of Shaw with the incongruity of Ionesco.\textsuperscript{51}

Stoppard’s theater works to the point of a spectacle most of the times. His characters do not project the progress of truth from the Shavian war of ideas, nor do they develop from the dark inner conflicts as in Pinter’s plays. However conscious of the traditions of Shaw, Pinter and Beckett among others, Stoppard has developed a postmodern theater which successfully and playfully renders the message, political or otherwise, by modes of parody and play.
Works Cited


3 Ibid 46-47.


6 James, Clive. ‘Count Zero Splits the Infinite: Tom Stoppard’s plays,’ Encounter, XLV, No.5, 1974, 70.


9 Ibid 29.

10 Ibid 28.

12 Ibid.


14 Ibid 75.

15 Ibid 15.

16 Ibid 96.


18 Ibid 173.


20 Ibid 104.

21 Ibid 105.


26 Ibid 18.


30 Ibid 22.


33 Ibid 159.

34 Ibid 162.


36 Ibid 35.


40 Stoppard, Tom. *The Art of Theater No. 7. An Interview with Shusha Guppy*.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.


