Chapter VI: Conclusion.

The present study explores the creative construct of the Stoppardian play and examines how far the dramatist has succeeded in turning his construct into a meaningful experience for the spectator beyond the bounds of unhelpful criticism of his plays as the texts of plagiarism and pastiche. Still, one would agree with Stoppard that the play is the thing. He has emphasized that plays are events rather than texts, not to be merely interpreted by professionals. They are written to happen, not to be read. So, the interest of the present study consists in exploring the possibility of parody radically affecting his creative vision. As expressed in chapter I, Parody has been elevated as one of the most important artistic device, one of the agents of artistic creation and innovation. According to Greek writers, parody has been described as elements of a work reused but not necessarily ridiculed. There may also be inclinations towards the use of other intentions than ridicule. Pope and Dryden used satire as a dominant mode to ridicule prevalent social realities. Parody in the twentieth century, has been used as a weapon to target not only the parodied text but also something else. The postmodernist parodists move towards recontextualizing, connecting the past while registering differences brought by modernity.

Stoppard has been reputed as a writer of serious comedy. Evolving from the modernist tradition of English drama he has brilliantly moved a step ahead from his contemporaries. Being a radical parodist, Stoppard has made his way through recontextualizing and parodying the well known works of William Shakespeare,
Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Oscar Wilde, Arnold Wesker and Arthur Miller among others. His intellectual inclinations are with a difference portraying in his works uncertainties and incompatibilities between the ability of an individual and perception towards reality. Parody seems to play a major role in the plays of Stoppard which he does with deep interest and wit. For him, parody is a crucial element found in his dramatic art as well as in his theatricality. He imitates his predecessors with contrasting ideas and languages with a different perspective.

In chapter II, Stoppard makes creative use of intertextuality with a network of textual relationships. In Arcadia, Stoppard talks about knowledge and explores the nature of the world with questions that examine staple truths of science, religion and romanticism. He establishes that no being is superior to the other and that one is always connected with the other. Plurality of life and freedom of the perception is being shown. The splits between reason and desire have been treated in Stoppard. In Jumpers, Dotty in her desire to be noticed by her husband George Moore screams intentionally for his attention, but the philosopher husband seems to be only interested in preparing for a lecture on moral philosophy. Stoppard’s play Arcadia is an intertext of Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Ernest. The interweaving of time span from the present to past in the nineteenth century makes the Stoppardian reader aware that love and romance has been going on since olden times. The characters of the play are separated by centuries yet united by the mysteries of chaos and attraction in the concluding scene of the play where the two pairs Thomasina and Septimus, Hanna and Gus are dancing on the stage. Throughout, Arcadia reminds us of Derrida’s difference where opposites are placed and played simultaneously, where chaos and order, attraction and repulsion, past and
present, young and old seem to be dependent on each other integrally, henceforth, no presence is possible without absence and no absence without presence.

Through an intertextual reading of Stoppardian plays, “[…] all forms of interpretation involve interplay among texts.”¹ His predecessors from Shakespeare to Pinter, parodic innovations have been construed with language constructs through characters. Stoppard brilliantly exhorts the varied aspects of “textual interplay” and strictly controls the very aspects of defying the play. John Heilpern talks about stoppard’s art of interplay:

The dramatist of champagne ideas and intellectual curiosity can become dense and difficult in his joy of mind. But the “Shakespeare Defense” will not do. It is said that we don’t always understand Shakespeare’s plays, either. But Shakespeare is a breeze compared to Mr. Stoppard. And Mr. Stoppard doesn’t borrow other dramatists’ plots. He has no need. He has no plots.²

Parody as a device has been used by Stoppard in his plays not by imitating but by re-working and relating the original works of his predecessors from a different perspective. His plays are invested with critical as well as sympathetic innovations of the past text or contexts. Rosencrantz and Guildensern Are Dead parodies Shakespeare’s Hamlet, but without a narrative form. For Stoppard the narrative line in a play does not seem to be important, on the other hand he believes that ideas are not to be taken for granted. Unlike Beckett’s Waiting for Godot where communication is not possible, Stoppard radically induces in his plays a meandering signification of life. The two tramps Vladimir and Estragon have been dehumanized
in a meaningless world where life is stuck on existentialist waiting, waiting for
something that is unknown and unavoidable. Stoppard in *Rosencrantz and
Guildenstern Are Dead* parodies Beckett to some extent; Ros and Guil appear to be
more philosophical and communication between them seems to have more sense
compared to the stale mate situation of Vladimir and Estragon. Unlike the
modernist structures and traditions, Stoppard’s plays enact a postmodern situation
where an acknowledgement of the undecidable, however incoherently
comprehended, is met with realistic, identifiable men but with witty measures of
parody, inscribed with an enlivening sense of playfulness. The Absurd Theater as in
chapter III is thus taken to a next level in the hands of Stoppard.

Stoppard hypothesizes about the use of language in his plays. He reuses
Wittgeinstein’s idea of language which holds that language cannot mirror the real
world. This notion can be detected in Stoppard’s plays especially in *Dogg’s Hamlet*
where, a new kind of language called Dogg language which has been invented to
serve a particular purpose like a scaffold raised to the purpose of completing a
building. Stoppard’s neologism is supplemented by gestures and actions to render
the meaning possible, and it is felt towards the end of the play that the spectators are
well versed with the Dogg language postulated by playwright. The clashing of
conflicting ideas has been brought into account in his plays making use of dialogues
especially in *Travesties*. In the play Stoppard brings forth a rigorous dialogue
wherein ideas of different personalities like Tzara, Lenin, Joyce and Carr are
brought into account, each having their own personal stand. This portrayal of
diverse ideas in one situation has been one of the techniques of Stoppard postulating
the paradox in language. Nevertheless, he warns us like postmodernist of over-
The opposing elements of good and evil, heaven and hell, chaos and order have been worked by Stoppard as something that is and always be a part of politics, society, religion, ethics. These contradictory elements define one another and that no text can have a fixed meaning is what Stoppard implies. He radically uses the past text and molds it with a different perspective. For example in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Stoppard brilliantly interplays Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* making the minor characters visible giving them thought provoking roles. He complicates Ros and Guil by making them self-conscious yet helpless. Similarly, *Enter a Free Man* is a play about Riley who seems to be free yet bounded by social convictions. Riley is an inventor who has never succeeded in any of his inventions, becomes acceptable only when he conforms to the nuances of his daughter.
Metatheatere is one device Stoppard frequently uses in his plays. *The Real Inspector Hound* is a metaplay, an adaptation of Agatha Christie’s *Mousetrap*. The play is in a ‘whodunit’ style, where theatre critics enjoy themselves giving their own opinions and ending the play according to their perception. To Stoppard radical interrogations may confound the conventional mind, but it drives a moral that men need to give the hidden and suppressed view a thought. In an interview with Shusha Guppy, Stoppard goes on talking about theatre by stating:

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.³

Stoppard emerges as an intellectual and entertaining parodist in his plays. It can be said that parody has a seminal place in Stoppard’s dramatic art and theatrical performance. Likewise, chapter V has discussed Stoppard as a radical parodist and that energetic sense of play is insistent in his plays. The kind of parody Stoppard sensitively apprehends may be underlined as postmodern.
Kennedy’s talks about his opinion on Stoppard’s art:

For his own dialogue Stoppard does not resort to pastiche Shakespeare. He writes an exploratory dialogue in a collage of styles for the two attendants and the Player, marked by a short staccato form of stichomythia with echoes of *Waiting for Godot*. And this dialogue encircles the host play, probes it and swallows it. As befits parodic art, which self-consciously displays the codes of style it is discarding, the dialogue points to itself: tells of its failure to sustain structured action and laments its own decay. More than once Aristotelian principles are evoked with ironic nostalgia (in a situation where the ‘story’ cannot cohere, and all the mirrors reflect further mirrors).\(^4\)

Some of Stoppard’s plays frankly aim to be nothing more than what he calls ‘nuts-and-bolts comedy,’ farces ‘without an idea in their funny heads.’\(^5\) Even in the more substantial works, such as *Jumpers* and *Travesties*, this brand of verbal high-spirits has its place. Without being too solemn about what is intended as fun, however, these word-games can be seen as performing the additional function of keeping the audience alert to the endless possibilities for linguistic confusion.

Stoppard thus represents the postmodern views of existence that all meaning is culturally constructed and that no meaning is divinely ordained. There is neither single truth nor presence. Man’s identity is dependent or interrelated, good and bad, well-meaning and prejudiced, creative and destructive, at the same time and so is man’s conception. Stoppard’s postmodern theatre is more open, more
liberating, more democratic, and secular, more dialogic dealing with the dynamics of plurality. There cannot be a perfect orderly and planned life in reality and that these can only be presented in the imagination which never leads to reality. Stoppard’s mode of dialectic thus abundantly presents the moral of consensual attitude in every aspect of life.

Stoppard’s theater as already discussed is entertaining with serious morals. 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. Bhaktin’s idea of polyphony and carnivalesque are found relevant in explaining certain aspects of the Stoppardian play. Rodney comments on Stoppard’s play Travesties as having the texture of “shot-silk, always shifting and shining—and, like life, paradoxical.”

Tom Stoppard has been thus portrayed as a postmodernist playwright with high degree of intellect. His plays are worth examining giving insights into the theater world where life becomes more meaningful in different aspects of life whether it be social, political, religious, scientific or psychological. To him, “The subject matter of the play exists before the story and it is always something abstract.” He goes on to say “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.” Postmodern premises and analogies have been found to be invigorating his works whereby he proposes no absolutes.

On the basis of the forgone discussions undertaken in various chapters it may be concluded that Stoppard is a postmodern parodist as well as postmodern
realist. His radical interrogations of conventional beliefs and morality make of him politically a radical and critically a realist having brilliant capacities which playfully entertain as well as morally liberate.