

Tom Stoppard: The Amorality of the Artist

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Abstract—To maintain a healthy balanced loyalty, whether to art or society, posits a debatable issue. The artist is always on the look out for the potential tension between those two realms. Therefore, one of the most painful dilemmas the artist finds is how to function in a society without sacrificing the aesthetic values of his/her work. In other words, the life-long awareness of failure which derives from the concept of the artist as caught between unflattering social realities and the need to invent genuine art forms becomes a fertilizing soil for the artists to be tackled. Thus, within the framework of this dilemma, the question of the responsibility of the artist and the relationship of the art to politics will be illuminating. To a larger extent, however, in drama, this dilemma is represented by the fictional characters of the play.

The present paper tackles the idea of the amorality of the artist in selected plays by Tom Stoppard. However, Stoppard's awareness of his situation as a refugee has led him to keep at a distance from politics. He tried hard to avoid any intervention into the realms of political debate, especially in his earliest work. On the one hand, it is not meant that he did not interest in politics as such, but rather he preferred to question it than to create a fixed ideological position. On the other hand, Stoppard's refusal to intervene in politics is ascribed to his feeling of gratitude to Britain where he settled. As a result, Stoppard has frequently been criticized for a lack of political engagement and also for not leaning too much for the left when he does engage. His reaction to these public criticisms finds expression in his self-conscious statements which defensively stressed the artifice of his work. He, like Oscar Wilde thinks that the responsibility of the artist is devoted to the realm of his/her art. Consequently, his consciousness for the role of the artist is truly reflected in his two plays, *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972) and *Travesties* (1974).

Keywords—Amorality, responsibility, politics, ideology.

I. INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH the dilemma of the artist may refer to the personal questions that the actual playwright poses him/herself, it is focused on the dilemma of fictional characters. Having artists, as an integral part of the drama on stage involves "far more than simply thematic considerations" [1]. The representation of the artist-protagonist on stage can contribute to the question of self-reflexivity in art. In her article, "Visual Art and Artist in Contemporary Irish Drama," Csilla Bertha, an editor and translator states that "in the majority of works focusing on artists, the interrelations between art and life, artist and reality, an artist's human and artistic fulfilment traditionally form binary oppositions." [1, p. 347] This means that lacking wholeness and harmony with his/her environment, the artist finds him/herself alone against reality. As a result, he/she feels the chasm between his/her desires and the demands of real life. Herbert Marcuse argues

that "as soon as the artist demands individual fulfilment in his/her environment, s/he immediately experiences the curse of a culture, in which the ideal and reality, subject and object form sharp contrasts." [1, p. 347] In such a situation, the artist finds himself/herself obliged to accept this pressing duality out of his responsibility to society albeit it is against his/her desires. Accordingly, the source of the artist's dilemma comes from confronting the inevitable tension between the moral responsibility to real life and the aestheticism of the literary work. This dialectical relationship forms part of Stoppard's pronouncements on art as we shall see later.

Undoubtedly, Tom Stoppard was a unique voice in the context of the British theatre of the sixties and seventies. And now his plays gain significant recognition, especially when the "fringe" and "alternative" movements in Britain came to prominence. [2] Tim Brassell rightly states in his book, *Tom Stoppard: An Assessment* that "Tom Stoppard is unquestionably a major power in the contemporary theatre both in this country [Britain] and, increasingly, in America." [3] After his breakthrough success with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967), the door was widely opened for him to be a prominent figure in the world of theatre. Similarly, in a homage and highly praised attribute given to him, a "Newsweek" article of 15 August 1977, indicates to the high reputation Tom Stoppard has won:

Britain may be plagued by strikes, unemployment, inflation, a sinking pound and rising racial tension, but one of its institutions appears to be immune to be immune to 'the British disease.' British's theatre is alive and well and living off the fruitful imagination of more than a score of talented playwrights. Of them all, Stoppard is the most highly praised and widely exported British playwright since Harold Pinter and John Osborne. His plays have been performed by more than 350 companies in nineteen countries - from Hungary to Japan, from South America to South Africa - and they have been translated into 30 languages. He is one of the few living playwrights whose works... are studied in universities around the world. [4]

Born in Prague (3 July 1937) near the end of Czechoslovakia's brief independence, Tomáš Straussler lived in Singapore and Darjeeling, in north India, before his arrival in England. Being a refugee in these three different countries, Stoppard has been thrown into three alien cultures. This colourful background has constituted his frame of mind since he acquired the experience of family cultural heritage.

When Stoppard first entered into the London stage in the mid-1960s, William W. Demastes, an American author states that the theatrical trends of British theatre "[were] dominated by two distinct 'schools' of drama, one being the [sic] kitchen-

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sink realism embroiled in social consciousness-raising initiated by John Osborne and his landmark *Look Back in Anger*, and the other the distinctly anti-realistic 'absurdist' minimalism initiated by Samuel Beckett and his landmark *Waiting for Godot*." [5] By using kitchen sink setting and everyday language, British theatre moves away from farce plays to a more serious one which explores new issues and questions. Nonetheless, to place Stoppard and his work in its historical, social and aesthetic context, a historical view to the nature of the theatre which he entered will be helpful

II. BRITISH THEATRE IN THE 1970S

In *Modern British Playwriting: The 1970s*, Chris Megson's quotation on theatre in 1970s reads: "If the Sixties were a wild weekend and the Eighties a hectic day at the office, the Seventies were a long Sunday evening in winter, with cold leftovers for supper and a power cut expected at any moment." [6]

As mentioned before, the unremitting gloom which is described by Francis Wheen's view of the 1970s found expression in the social and political phenomena of Britain at that time. Among those phenomena are "a formidable economic downturn; unemployment and inflation." [6, p. 34] Although this situation threw its shadow on different walks of life, theatre seemed far beyond reach.

Looking back to British theatre since the late 1950s, we see that the seeds of change had already been planted as Brassell has noted that "since the advent of the English Stage Company and the arrival of Osborne our theatre, if not transformed, has been remarkably rejuvenated." He added:

British playwrights have advanced on several fronts: taking a more direct approach to social and political issues; bringing the language of their characters much closer to ordinary speech....Above all, perhaps, in reaching new audiences through the work of the 'fringe' and community theatre groups which have sprouted up across the country. [3, p. 25]

Unlike Mainland Europe in the swaying whirlpool of Sixties which has witnessed riots and student protests, Britain increased the state subsidies for arts. Consequently, this action has led to the theatrical expansion in regional and alternative theatres. Megson points out that

There were two events in the late 1960s that contributed to the exponential growth in alternative theatre at the start of the new decade. First, the Theatre Act (1968) abolished the state censorship of theatre and removed the powers invested in the Lord Chamberlain to license plays for performance....Second, there was a large expansion in public subsidy for theatre at the end of the 1960s. [6, p. 37]

This paved the way, then, for more freedom in discussing issues with topical and satirical content which had previously been restricted. Far from "only the most timidly naturalistic plays," [7] the British stage was now free to present plays with new theatrical discourses and non-naturalistic settings. Furthermore, there is no need to say that the European authors and their bolder approach to stagecraft and to theatricality in

general have a radical effect on British stage of the '60s and '70s. Within the European Theatre's attacks on naturalism, two different opposing points have emerged: "The Brechtian world-view, stressed man's role as an integral part of society, and the second, the Theatre of the Absurd, stressed man's role as a psychological outcast from society." [3, p. 30] However, Brecht's influence, during the 1960s and 1970s has been most discernible in the intellectual champion of a politically committed drama.

Aside from social realism, the "epic" and "agit-prop" plays stimulated their audiences to involve into political activism. This is achieved in a broad range of styles and images which discussed contemporary concerns. David Edgar has stated that

Most of the new playwrights of the 1970s came into the theatre at a time when there was a consensus between play-makers and their audiences that British society was rotten at the root, and that it was the proper business of the theatre to anatomise its rottenness and point the way to radical change. [3, p. 30]

In the same vein, Bruce Birchall, playwright and artistic director argues that

The post-1968 break-away movement became absorbed into the theatrical mainstream by state funding, and [...] what had begun as a piece of political practice ended up as a job, with the result that cultural workers began to see themselves as "left-wing artists", rather than as socialists who used artforms for political ends. [6, p. 59]

Politically speaking, British theatre has basically split into two camps. On one level, it presented a politically-active, left-leaning vision that change can be achieved via logic and reason. On the other level, some believed that "logic and reason had exhausted themselves and had in fact generated cataclysmic outcomes. [5] As previously mentioned, Stoppard commenced his success as a playwright in 1967 at a time when "dramatists were increasingly judged by their political commitment and approximation to social truth, by their willingness to tackle anything from the class system to Vietnam." [8] So, in an environment where socially and politically committed drama had long been valued, Stoppard's theatrical works set him apart from most of his contemporaries. Taking the imaginative boldness of the Absurdist and their philosophy, Stoppard pursues his "own paths of formal experimentation along non-naturalistic lines." [3, p.33] His philosophical and scientific inquiry about the dilemma of the artist and the relationship of art to politics are blended with the particular style and art forms which are embodied in pastiche and parody.

III. PASTICHE AND PARODY

No doubt, one of the priorities of the artist in playwriting is how to capture the audiences' interest by adopting a suitable form of writing. To do that the artist employs different styles and techniques. One of those techniques, used by Stoppard is parody and pastiche. In his article, "The Literature of Replenishment," John Barth has referred to these two techniques as true manifestations of the new approach which

dominated the post-war literary trends where “artistic conventions are likely to be re-tried, subverted, transcended, transformed, or even deployed against themselves to generate new and lively work.[9]As a literary form, pastiche offers a ready-made style or model, which is already proven. It is “a technique that borrows rather than invents as the writer combines, alters, or restructures existing form.” [10] In *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2006), pastiche as a technique implies two main meanings. The first kind of pastiche is the one the artist “seeks to recreate in a more extreme and accessible form the manner of major writers. It tends to eliminate tensions, to produce a more highly coloured and polished effect, picking out and reiterating favourite stylistic mannerism, and welding them into a new whole which has a superficial coherence and order.” The other meaning of pastiche carries a negative connotation. Its use “is not reverential and appreciative, but disrespectful and sometimes deflationary.” Here, the writer, instead of “ironing out ambiguities in its source(s)... highlights them.” [11] For Stoppard, this technique was irresistible, so it was heavily used at the beginning of his career as a writer. On a personal level, pastiche also “solves his problem in working out plots and originating characters, always a difficulty for him,” [10, p. 27] to use Ira B. Nadel’s words. Because of its flexibility, Stoppard discovers that working on an existing story could be more easily than originating a new one. So, Stoppard relies on the betrayal of stereotypes to breathe new life into the characters he presents. This technique of characterization is indicative of his confidence and commitment to stimulate his audience.

Due to its importance as a form of imitation, pastiche becomes a central concern of aesthetic production in the postmodern arts. Ingeborg Hoesterey argues that because of the existence of the vast archive of the artistic tradition, “the postmodern writer, visual artist, architect, composer consciously acknowledges this past by demonstratively borrowing from it, particularly from the classical archive.” [12] In contrast to the post-Marxist critic, Fredric Jameson, who referred to postmodern pastiche as “blank parody,” no more than “a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language,” [12, p. 508] Richard Dyer takes another position. In Dyer’s words, “pastiche embraces closeness; it accepts the possibility of being seduced, penetrated, dependent or ventriloquised, without seeing this as a significant and anxiety producing loss of autonomy.” [13] In other words, Dyer looks at pastiche as a unique form that imitates and quotes the original works without being mocked or expunged. On the contrary, pastiche, in Dyer’s perspective, “balances thinking and feeling by simultaneously positioning the audience both emotionally inside and analytically outside of its structure.” [13] This reveals, in particular Stoppard’s fascination with pastiche. His use of visual as well as verbal pastiche from *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* or *After Magritte* to *Artist Descending a Staircase* or *Travesties* illustrates this fact. Therefore, pastiche, for Stoppard is an efficient technique to imitate or borrow freely from one text to another for formulating a new one. Ira B. Nadel states that “whether he draws from or imitates *Macbeth* in *Cahoot’s Macbeth*, or Agatha Christie in

The Real Inspector Hound, or borrows lines and themes from Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* and John Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* in *The Real Thing*, the pastiche is a breezy strategy for creating the Stoppard style -.” [10, p. 27] In addition to use pastiche, however, Stoppard embraces parody as a structure for the ideas that preceded him. Through parody he not only celebrates but also regenerates the borrowed materials. In so doing, Stoppard “succeeds in making the borrowed elements his own, altering and developing them to suit his own ends.”¹ His originality lies in the fact that he takes the parodied materials and puts them in a new context which is suitable to the audiences’ interest. However, before turning to Stoppard’s plays, and in particular the ones which identify the dilemma of the artist, namely, *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972) and *Travesties* (1974), it is important to establish, in broad terms, Stoppard’s views on different issues such as the responsibility of the artist, the relationship between art, life and politics. An investigation of these views will lead to a fuller understanding of the dilemmas the artist finds in playwriting.

Tom Stoppard is well known for his ambiguous views on aesthetics, ethical, and political issues. This is due to the lack of an absolute “certainty about almost anything.” [14] His plays do not give particular answers and frustrate the audience with paradoxes and contradictions. From an interview in 1972, Stoppard maintained that “I write plays because dialogue is the most respectable way of contradicting yourself.” [15] And from another interview in 1979, he affirmed that “I don’t write plays with heroes who express my point of view. I write argument plays. I tend to write for two people rather than for One Voice.” [15, p. 1171] To Stoppard, writing plays is not meant to only entertain but to stimulate peoples’ thinking. So, in his theatre, audiences are invited to consider, debate and select. In other words, both the playwright and audience interact to resolve the codes of the play and unify the apparently disparate elements. Theatre, Stoppard said, is first and foremost a mysterious lived experience to be shared by an audience in the theatre. [16] From that experience in the theatre we are able ultimately to create “the moral matrix from which we draw our values about what the world ought to be like.” [17]

In many occasions, Stoppard confesses that he loves theatre since it gives him an opportunity to lay out multiple sides of any argument and does not enforce him to take any. His route in writing can be epitomized in his opinion: “When a playwright is putting lines down on paper, all he’s thinking about is that people shouldn’t leave early.” [18] Then, it can be argued that Stoppard is fascinated by Catastrophe Theory “because he can dramatically exploit dilemmas arising out of conflicting control factors...[and] it describes accurately the fundamental process of his art.” [14, p. 63]. Thus, he keeps his audiences entertained by creating suspense.

While Stoppard has championed both elements of writing, form and content, the aesthetics of the work has been a constant need for the play construction. For Stoppard, a writer’s only responsibility is “to write well,” [19] regardless of the play’s social content. Saying this does not mean that the plays are devoid of ideas. On the contrary, the style is used as

a catalyst, in the hands of the playwright to dig deep into reality. Terry Eagleton argues that

To write well is more than a matter of 'style'; it also means having at one's disposal an ideological perspective which can penetrate to the realities of men's experience in a certain situation...and it can do it, not just because its author happens to have an excellent prose- style, but because his historical situation allows him access to such insights. [20]

This view is shared by Thomas R. Whitaker, a theatre critic who asserts that while Stoppard champions style, it is not an end in itself. His stylistic display and theatricality are always connected to, and in service of, some more firm ideas. [21] For Stoppard, the form and content are mingled in such a way to serve the overall literary work. They are organically related. The two are deeply interrelated as Karl Marx explicitly declares that "form is of no value unless it is the form of its content." [22] In order to take this argument a step further, it is necessary to shed light on the relationship between form and content.

Concerning the relationship between form and content, this has represented the source of debate between Georg Lukács, a Hungarian Marxist philosopher and aesthetician, and Bertolt Brecht, a German playwright and theatre director in which the accusation of formalism was exchanged. In his essay "The Evolution of Modern Drama," (1909) Lukács points out that "the truly social element in literature is the form." [20, p. 20] He gives priority to form over content. For Lukács, the form-content relationship is embodied within the literary work itself and "the true bearers of ideology in art are the very forms, rather than abstractable content....We find the impress of history in the literary work precisely as *literary*, not as some superior form of social documentation." [20, p. 24] [Lukács's italics] Here, Lukács has avant-gardism in his mind with their use of unconventional forms that are "the expression of the blindness of bourgeois intellectual vis-à-vis real historical counter forces, working towards transformation of society." [23] So, these unconventional forms are not a true reflection of society since they are determined by commercial forces, imposed by bourgeoisie. Accordingly, Lukács, in his book, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (1958), argues that "modern writers should do more than merely reflect the despair and *ennui* of late bourgeois society; they should try to take up a critical perspective on this futility, revealing positive possibilities beyond it." [20, p. 53] The task of modern writer then is not only mirroring society but going deeper into the consciousness of modern bourgeois people.

Responding to Lukács's critical realism, Terry Eagleton accuses this critical realism as a new phase of formalism since "it is academic and unhistorical, drawn from the literary realm alone rather than responsive to the changing conditions in which literature is produced." [20, p. 71] This opinion has its resonance in Brecht's concept of realism which is not "a mere question of form," but "a kind of art which discovers social laws and developments, and unmask[s] prevailing ideologies by adopting the standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solution to social problems." [20, p. 72] Brecht's main

disagreement with Lukács, however, is embodied in their view of reality. While Lukács looks at it as "fixed, given and unchangeable," Brecht "posits the view that reality is a changing, discontinuous process, produced by men and so transformed by them." [20, p. 65] So the play is an experience in which combines both the playwright and the audience in a genuine critical thinking to different possibilities.

Although Lukács's proclamations on art are arguable, his insistence on the interrelation of a work of art to other prior existing forms finds a sense of truth in Stoppard's use of parody. This view is clearly reflected in Viktor Shklovsky, a Russian writer and theorist who claims that "a work of art is perceived against a background and by way of association with other works of art. The form of a work of art is determined by its relationship with other forms existing prior to it...." [24] So, using these forms are an assurance for more vigorous investigation. Accordingly, Lukács celebrates certain writers and calls for them to be imitated. However, the relationship between form and content within literary works takes more significant in the functionality of the art itself and its relation to life. Although Leo Trotsky, one of the Marxists who preoccupied themselves in unsolved debate with formalism grants art a certain degree of autonomy, he never denies its effect by life. A close reading of his treatise on *Literature and Revolution*, reveals that he firmly believes that art serves ideological ends even though he does not declare it explicitly. For Trotsky, there is no contradiction between art for own sake or the social content within which it is produced and consumed. The two laws often overlap. Accordingly, "artistic creation,...[is] a changing and a transformation of reality, in accordance with the peculiar laws of art." [25] This truth forms an essential part of Stoppard's social and political debate, especially in his later works. Stoppard comes to realize that there is no way out of life. Although he believes in the romantic view of the objectivity of art, the link between art and life is inextricable. Surprisingly, in his commentary on Stoppard's situation, Anthony Jenkins, an actor and director argues that "his dilemma is that of Yeats' 'Sailing to Byzantium,' where the artist, seeking an objective distance from the 'sensual music' of everyday life, finds that creative artifice, in order to be art, must still 'sing/To lords and ladies of Byzantium/Of what is past, or passing, or to come.'" [26] Whatever the artist is an imaginative or skilful, life is a realm which cannot be ignored. In this sense, the question of the usefulness of art and the role of the artist in society is significant to Stoppard's writing. Accordingly, Stoppard began to engage with the public life and political issues without sacrificing the other aspects of his wit. In a piece dated 5 January 1961 entitled "Critic and his Credo," Stoppard calls for the inseparable link between aesthetics and commitment. "You cannot divorce art from politics and life," he argues in defense of art. [27] In a similar vein, he challenges the idea that art holds a mirror up to life but instead suggesting that "art influences, interacts, and intertwines with life in ways the mirror metaphor fails to include." [28]

IV. ART AND POLITICS

As far as politics is concerned, Stoppard tried hard to avoid any intervention into the realms of political debate, especially in his earliest work. On the one hand, it is not meant that he was not interested in politics as such, but rather he preferred to question it than to create a fixed ideological position. In his speech about *Jumpers*, for instance, two years after its first production in 1972, Stoppard vehemently rejected to see the play as a political or ideological piece, but said that "it reflects my belief that all political acts have a moral basis to them and are meaningless without it." [19, p. 12] In fact, Stoppard firmly clings to the idea that the morality is inherent in human existence, and that, "all political acts must be judged in moral terms." [19, p. 12] On the other hand, Stoppard's refusal to intervene in politics is ascribed to his feeling of gratitude. James Saunders has said of his former friend's politics: "He's basically a displaced person. Therefore, he doesn't want to stick his neck out. He feels grateful to Britain, because he sees himself as a guest here and that makes it hard for him to criticize Britain. Probably the most damaging thing that could be said about him is that he's made no enemies." [27, p. 117] As a result, Stoppard has frequently been criticized for a lack of political engagement and also for not leaning too much to the left when he does engage. His reaction to these public criticisms finds expression in his self-conscious statements which defensively stress the artifice of his work and his ambivalent attitude: "I'm not impressed by art *because* it's political, I believe in art being good or bad, not relevant art or irrelevant art. The plain truth is that if you angered or disgusted by a particular injustice or immorality, and you want to do something about it, *now*, at once, then you can hardly do worse than write a play about it." [19, p. 14] [Stoppard's italics] To Stoppard, art deals with different important issues which do not mean to respond to it directly. He is against those who see immediate social change as the sole reason or purpose of art. [29] In contrast, social radical change requires a long-term commitment. His theatre is designed with the perception that "lasting change requires altered attitudes prior to- or simultaneous with-political legislation." [28, p. 114] He suggests that social change must go hand in hand with political change. And art is unique in its ability to alter existing laws and "generate a 'moral matrix' from which change can flow." [28, p. 35]

Stoppard's belief in the ability of art for social change has led him to defend human rights. He has been an active human rights supporter, condemning injustices and liberty violation. He criticizes any act which represses and limits the free expression in writing. [30] Stoppard's works, in the late 1970s and early 1980s are a true reflection of his political commitment. The subject of his plays, such as *Squaring the Circle* (1979), *Every Good Boy Deserves Favor* (1977), *Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979), *Professional Foul* (1977) and *The Coast of Utopia* (2002) is the violation of human rights in Eastern Europe. He focuses on individual freedom. People should be left free to choose. He sees that "individuals should be able to negotiate with the authorities or legislators even though a possible agreement is not expected." [31] His politics

then derives from his humanistic view which is embodied clearly in his continuous championing of human rights, his continued friendship with Václav Havel, Czech playwright whose theatre work and political activism Stoppard highly admired, and his attack on the Soviet regime by supporting the Czechoslovakian dissidents in the Charter 77 movement.

For Stoppard, Havel was a living example for the group of artists who refused to infuse their work with the "obligatory optimism" [32] imposed by the party in power. Even when attempts were made to set Havel free from jail and bring him to the Public Theatre in New York, he agreed on the condition that the Czech government also released all dissents. In fact, he spent his life in prison to face his death of pneumonia. [32, p. 18]

The point that wants to be clarified is that those artists stayed true to a personal political vision that kept them alive in the eyes of Czech people. In such concern, Carol Becker maintains that "because these dramatic changes are living proof that the role of the artist is an historical, social, construction. It is not an eternal fixed role. It is not romantic. It is not without context...It changes, evolves, grows, diminishes, dictates and is dictated to by history and by the market economy." [32, p. 19] In other words, the creative vision of the artist can be utilized either to further change society depending on the prevailing political system, In so doing, the dramatic tension in Stoppard's subsequent plays becomes centred on the role of the playwright as mouthpiece for the ideas that the plays embrace, or at least seek to discuss. As such the questions related to the main roles, responsibilities, and aims of the artist and what is the position they undertake in society form a genuine part of Stoppard's internal debate. John Fleming writes in his book *Stoppard's Theatre: Finding Order Amid Chaos*:

Questions about the social responsibilities of the artist, journalist, and politician appear in plays that examine the role and nature of art, the relative merits of a free press, and the injustices and human rights violations of pre-perestroika Eastern Bloc politics.... Cumulatively, Stoppard's work has been concerned with the social, moral, metaphysical, and personal condition of being human in an uncertain world. [33]

However, Stoppard's inquiry into the nature and function of art is never complete without looking at his portrayal of the artist in the light of rights and responsibilities which will reveal, in turn the possible dilemmas the artist may confront. So he followed *Jumpers* with two meditations on the nature of the art and the role of the artist. These plays are: *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972) and *Travesties* (1974). In such concern, Ronald Hayman, a British critic and dramatist maintains that "The mainspring of both [plays] is the debate about art which has been going on for years inside Stoppard's brain. Is art useless? Should it have a social purpose? Anyway, what is it? Does the artist need a special skill, or can anyone produce anything he pleases and then see whether other people are gullible enough to accept it as art?" [34] These enquires have represented the dilemmas the artist works hard to understand. This is clearly manifested in Stoppard's plays.

V. ARTIST DESCENDING A STAIRCASE (1972)

Around the arguments of art and the role of the artist in society, Stoppard's *Artist Descending a Staircase* (henceforward *Artist*) knots its plot. It tells the story of three aged artists who have lived together for years at the top of a house; now Donner has been discovered dead at the bottom of the stairs by Beauchamp and Martello, each of whom is gravely suspicious of the other. Having deduced from the sounds in tape-recording unmistakable evidence of foul play, both are suspects. Beauchamp construes from the sounds that Martello surprised the snoring Donner and murders him by pushing him through the balustrades. Martello, however, accuses Beauchamp of killing Donner as he is certain that he has not been in Donner's room at the time. Not before the end, we learn that it was an accident that Donner fell to his death after unsuccessfully chasing a fly. As it develops, the purpose of the play goes further than the solving of Donner's death to a serious discussion of the responsibility of the artist in society and a "simultaneous satire on trends in modern art over some fifty years." [3, p. 165] It is in the direct relation of the artists and their art to life in its worldly capacities that Stoppard is interested. Thus, the artists investigated by him are painters: Beauchamp, Martello and Donner. Significantly, their names are used as symbols to reflect a universal European message. They share the same concerns for art and the responsibility of the artist. However, the first scene opens with Martello and Beauchamp, who are now old, in a heated discussion over the reliability of their art. Martello makes a comparison between his art and Beauchamp's tonal one which reveals the ironic tone of Stoppard himself:

Martello: -no wonder I have achieved nothing with my life!-my brain is on a flying trapeze that outstrips all the possibilities of action. Mental acrobatics, Beauchamp-I have achieved nothing but mental acrobatics-*nothing!*- whereas you, however wrongly and for whatever reason, came to grips with life at least this once, and killed Donner. (p. 16) [35]

As already mentioned, the above lines reveal Stoppard's belief, especially in his later works that imaginative and skilful art have nothing to do with reality if it does not touch human life. To Martello, killing Donner is an indicative of a concrete evidence of reality that the artist has preoccupied with. Therefore, Martello celebrates Beauchamp's skilful talent as a sound artist even though he is not satisfied completely with his art since it lacks truth:

Martello: I tell you, Beauchamp, it's no secret between us that I never saw much point in your tonal art. I remember saying to Sophie, in the early days when you were still using gramophone discs, Beauchamp is wasting his time, I said, there'll be no revelations coming out of *that*; no truth. And the critics won't listen either. And they didn't. But this time you've got them by the ears. It has the impact of newsreel. In my opinion it's a *tour de force*. (p. 16)

However, the mystery with which the play opened, testifies to Stoppard's interest to incite the tension of the listener by generating theatrical suspense. What ensues is a wide-ranging

discussion of the relevance and methods of modern art during the twentieth century. This is manifested even by the structure of the play. Its scheme, with a V-shaped movement into the past, is strategically patterned. In his speech about the structure of the play when it is first appeared, Michael Billington argues that "I can, for instance, think of no radio play in history constructed quite like this one." [8, p. 93] Its eleven scenes are precisely arranged. The first and last scene is set in the present; scenes two and ten a couple of hours ago; three and nine last week; four and eight in 1922; five and seven in 1920 and the lowest point of V-shape represents the pivotal scene six in 1914 in the first year of the First World War.

As mentioned above, the play, among other things is "a conversation about modern art." [21, p. 7] This bit of wisdom is emphasized by Sophie, a blind woman:

But surely it is a fact about art- regardless of the artist' subject or his intentions- that it celebrates a world which includes itself- I mean, part of what there is to celebrate is the capability of the artist. (p. 38)

However, in a series of flashbacks, we are taken back to the early days of the three artists. We know that the three men have been friends for sixty years. Now Beauchamp is composing a "master work of accumulated silence" (p. 17) on a tape-recorder by using tonal art, whereas Donner has returned to "serious" art: "I very much enjoyed my years in that child's garden of easy victories known as the avant garde, but I am now engaged in the infinitely more difficult task of painting what the eye sees." (p. 19) Donner's rejection of the avant-garde and "return[s] to traditional values" (p. 24) suggests his accord with Sophie's taste and Stoppard's attempts to address "the problem of artistic innovation." [5] In an article entitled "Avant-Garde (1984)," Richard Kostelanetz, an American artist, author and critic argues that "One reason why avant-garde works should be initially hard to comprehend is not that they are intrinsically inscrutable or hermetic but that they challenge the perceptual procedures of artistically educated people....[So] in order to begin to comprehend them, people must work and think in unfamiliar way." In doing so, the audience learns to accept innovative works "in what they had previously perceived as noise" [36] just like the beginning of Stoppard's *Artist*. But because Avant-garde is directed to a limited audience, as Michael Kirby observes, "the avant-garde artist is writing [initially] for a very limited audience whose experience, understanding of historic developments and current concepts in the field, and interest make it possible for it to appreciate points that are unavailable to a general audience," [36, p. 33] Therefore, the creative attempts of the avant-garde are bound to fail so long as their achievements are limited to a small group of people which expresses their own philosophy. In doing so, their art will be a mechanical work devoid of truth. So Donner, unlike Beauchamp comes to realize that the responsibility of the artist is to reflect reality that encompasses all human beings. Accordingly, he devalues Beauchamp's art since it is wafted by imagination:

Donner: Those tape recordings of yours are the mechanical expression of a small intellectual idea, the

kind of notion in the business of drying between his toes. You can call it art if you like, but it is the commonplace of any ironic imagination, (p. 19-20)

Beauchamp justifies his attitude towards tonal art as a new means of communication which does not necessarily engage a commitment to a society. To quote Kostelanetz again, "It was a radical innovation of modernism to regard art as primarily about art and only incidentally about something else, and every genuine avant-garde has endeavoured to refine this peculiarly modernist understanding." [36, p. 34] To Beauchamp, in spite of greater mystery, his tapes represent a new innovation. He insists that:

If you played my tape on the radio, it would seem a meaningless noise, because it fulfils no expectations: people have been taught to expect certain kinds of insight but not others. The first duty of the artist is to capture the radio station. (p. 20)

Accordingly, as a revolutionary means, the first responsibility of the artist is to take the radio station for granted. In his argument about the radio as a means of communication, Brecht foresaw in a piece of writing that "The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him." [37] However, the discussion of the essential questions of art and society in our time goes on among the three artists. Arguably, they take different sides concerning the theories of art and their own practice. Beauchamp makes use of avant-garde tapes of unmelodious music, insisting that they could polarize millions of audience if only the BBC would support them. Martello sees that the artist cannot teach people to think in a unique way without being "paint[ed] an utterly simple shape in order to ambush the mind with something quite unexpected about that shape by hanging it in a frame and forcing you to see it, as it were, for the first time." (p. 39) So, the essential difference between them lies in the capability of the artist to make it imaginative. Although Donner insists that the artist is "someone who is gifted in some way which 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," (p.21) he downplays non-intentional avant-garde art:

Skill without imagination is craftsmanship and gives us many useful objects such as wickerwork picnic baskets. Imagination without skill gives us modern art. (p. 21)

In describing the poverty of modern art, Stoppard seemingly rejects non-intentional art. In other words, Stoppard's yearning for a return to a transcendent aesthetic in this play "is simply a particular manifestation of his general yearning for transcendent values that can be used to guide human conduct as well as to evaluate art." [38] Both aesthetics and ethical elements are required in art. However, Stoppard's eclecticism made him debate the nature of art before turning to *Travesties*. And *Artist* marks a turning point in Stoppard's career for two facts. Firstly, "the problem he considers here is

more specialized than those of his previous plays, and, second[ly], a wide variety of clues...suggests he is moving toward firm commitment, toward certain beliefs." [39] This fact is clearly shown in this play which expresses Stoppard's growing interest "for being a verbal rather than avisceral playwright." [30, p. 236] In the play, however, Stoppard gives Donner the most direct critique of modern art which anticipates his own attack. On the program, *Arts Commentary*, which broadcasted by BBC Radio Three in 10 November 1972, Stoppard asserted to Richard Mayne that "I'm a very square, conservative and traditional sort of mind." He added that "Donner is me." [40] Stoppard absolutely showed his agreement with Donner's discussion of art against Beauchamp's tape-recordings. He admitted that "I think that when Donner says that much modern art is the mechanical expression of a very simple idea which might have occurred to an intelligent man in his bath and be forgotten in the business of drying between his toes, that is me." [41] In addition, in his reference to Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* from which Stoppard parodies the title of *Artist*, Donner ironically agrees that

There are two ways of becoming an artist. The first way is to do the things by which is meant art. The second way is to make art mean the things you do.' What a stroke of genius! It made anything possible and everything safe!- safe from criticism, since our art admitted no standards outside itself; safe from comparison, since it had no history; safe from evaluation. (p. 24)

The above lines also show Stoppard's ironic tone of the avant-garde "assumptions about the nature of art and the merits of anti-art." [38, p. 192] Their preference for the abstract and the mechanical makes it away from human life.

Looking for something tangible, however, Donner wants art to meet a social purpose by making it edible: "How can one justify a work of art to a man with an empty belly? The answer, like all great insights, was simple: make it edible." (p.25) For Donner, art should have something to be given. Moreover, Donner is wary of art that appealed to the eye instead of the mind. Like Beauchamp, with his curious defense of his recordings: "I'm trying to liberate the visual *image* from the limitations of visual *art*. The idea is to create images-pictures-which are purely *mental*..." (p. 36) By presenting Beauchamp as the author of exclusively aural compositions, Stoppard again has Duchamp in his mind. In Duchamp's nude, "the aim of art in our time is the creation not of 'beauty' but of rare experience; the effect of innovative art is not 'pleasure' but universal perception." [36, p. 31] So, Donner wants art not only to entertain but also motivate peoples' mind. Thus, the responsibility of the artist goes beyond "art for art's sake" to art for society sake. In such concern, Sartre insists on the social responsibility of the artist by rejecting "art for art's sake." Today the writer, he said, "should in no case occupy himself with temporal affairs. Neither should he set up lines without meaning nor seek solely beauty of phrase and imagery." [42] Accordingly, art should serve as a catalyst to provoke people to change the world in which they live and in

turn change themselves. In such respect, Alvin Toffler, an American writer and futurist admirably states that “the arts cannot thrive unless they are organically related to the needs of the surrounding society, unless the arts reach out far beyond their traditional audiences....”[43] In doing so, the social factors should be fused with aesthetic elements in the artist's committed works. The artist as a human being could not separate himself from the society where he lives. Surely, the society is the place where the artist inspired.

The discussion has taken further by presenting the character of Sophie and her debate about art of paintings. Again, flashbacks take us back to the times of the first avantgardist art exhibition in London and most of the dialogue is devoted to the social and aesthetic value of various trends of modern art. Dramatically, Sophie is presented as a champion of an anachronistic tradition of painting which has “discredited in the eyes of the fauvists, cubists, and futurists for confining its subject and method to the slavish imitation of nature and for striving to please the eye above all other human sense and intelligence.” [38, p. 196] In her speech with Martello about naturalistic art, Sophie concentrates on the aesthetic aspect of art to create imagination:

Sophie: I think every artist willy-nilly is celebrating the impulse to paint in general, the imagination to paint something in particular, and the ability to make the painting in question....The more difficult it is to make the painting, the more there is to wonder at. (p. 38)

Martello, on the other hand, insists on the art which deals with reality:

Martello: I insist: painting nature, one way or another, is a technique and can be learned, like playing the piano. But how can you teach someone to think in a certain way?- to paint an utterly simple shape in order to ambush the mind with something quite unexpected about that shape by hanging it in a frame and forcing you to see it, for the first time-...And what, after all, is the point of excellence in naturalistic art-?How does one account for, and justify, the very notion of emulating nature? The greater the success, the more false the result. It is only when the imagination is dragged away from what the eye sees that a picture becomes interesting. (p. 39)

In his discussion with Sophie about the art of painting, Martello calls for the simplicity and spontaneity in art which surprises the viewer. In spite of its simplicity, this art has a deeper significance. As such, Martello repeats Duchamp's inquiry with “not art, but what lay behind art.” [44] Accordingly, the above lines imply Martello's dissatisfaction with naturalistic art which involves a subjective representation of nature or people with the least possible distortion or interpretation. This representation is a mere imitation of nature, covered by imagination which lacks shock. While Sophie thinks that what is more interesting to the artist is to have a sense for the history of art. The history which she has looked at as an ideal:

Sophie: I think it is chiefly interesting to the artist, and to those who respond to a sense of the history of art

rather than to pictures.... I am glad that I saw much of the pre-Raphaelites before my sight went completely. (p. 39)

In spite of championing both sides of the argument, Stoppard makes Sophie the spokeswoman who calls for a return to the past where art reflects the seriousness of life. In presenting the character of Sophie, Stoppard adopted her opinions of art to the extent that even the form of the play is a part of his argument. In an agreement with Mandel's interpretation of *Artist*, Elissa S. Guralnick is persuaded that “Stoppard may be said to side with Sophie (i.e., traditionalism, not with Donner and company (i.e., avant-gardism).” [45] This fact is felt by Donner himself throughout his relation with Sophie when he comes to realize that “the human factor in itself forms a dividing line between skilled talent and artistic truth, though whether the artist can have any direct impact on life continues to be the nagging question at the centre of Stoppard's work from this point on.” [26, p. 113] However, the significance of Sophie's character comes from the fact that she is used as an axel which combines all the three artists. All of them had fallen in love with her. But being blind, she, like the audience needs to be kept informed about what happens around her. As we learn, Sophie had fallen in love with the artist she had dimly seen standing in front of a black and white canvas. Later, by the time she had lost her sight, she had asked about the artist who had painted the black-white picture. Because of her poor vision, she had misinterpreted the picture as a snowscape rather than a thick white fence. In doing so, she determined that her lover “would be the aloof abstractionist Beauchamp rather than the love-struck Donner and led indirectly to her probable suicide.” [38, p. 197] Metaphorically, Sophie's death is indicative of her resistance to “the shifting ambiguities of the modernist aesthetic.” [38, p. 197] She remains loyal to her ideal of art, traditionalism.

Throughout *Artist*, Stoppard grapples with the avant-gardism of Beauchamp and Sophie's traditionalism. Accordingly, the argument between the role of the artist and his/her responsibility towards society is unsettled. The use of conventional or innovative styles to convey moral values becomes a point of argument. Within these two principles, Stoppard “tests the role of the artist and his value in a society and culture that is being destroyed.”[30, p. 239]

Beauchamp repeats Stoppard's question which is unsolved, “how can the artist justify himself in the community? What is his role? What is his reason?”(p. 43) In a passage in which Stoppard has frequently referred to as an accidental fortune of the playwright, Beauchamp justifies the artist to himself by emphasizing that

The artist is a lucky dog. That is all there is to say about him. In any community of a thousand souls there will be nine hundred doing the work, ninety doing well, nine doing good, and one lucky dog painting or writing about the other nine hundred and ninety-nine. (p. 43)

In the above lines, Beauchamp surrenders to the fact that there is no need to justify his place in the society. As such, the responsibility of the artist is to talk about his people as he has distinctive characteristics and traits.

The openendedness of the mystery with which the play opens and ends is a clear suggestion that Stoppard does not introduce simple answers to questions related to the value of modern art and the responsibility of the artist. Instead, his ironic tone complicates the matter. But this complex fades away if we know Stoppard's intentional taste for ambiguity, which is clearly reflected in his comment to Mel Gussow, an American theatre critic in 1972, in the same year that *Artist* was broadcast: "I write plays because dialogue is the most respectable way of contradicting yourself." [46] After all, the implications of *Artist* implicitly declares that "the artist's responsibilities are ultimately to his own sense of truth." [26, p. 115] which becomes the centre of debate in *Travesties*.

VI. TRAVESTIES (1974)

Stoppard's *Travesties*, produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company first in London (June 1974) and then in New York (October 1975), is a continuation of the debate about art that run through *Artist*. And it is in *Travesties*, not in any other plays, where the interplay of history, revolution, politics and art most successfully present Stoppard's vision of the role of the artist and art in society. In fact, most critical treatments of *Travesties* have characterized the play as a debate between art and politics. [47] However, although Stoppard had always striven to exclude politics from his plays, *Travesties* "meet[s] the jibes about his refusal to commit himself to direct political and social statement head-on." [26, p. 115] Here, Stoppard begins to address the role of politics in art.

In an imaginary constellation of real historical figures that have accidentally met in Zurich of 1917, Stoppard presents mutually different view points on social and aesthetic revolution. Although Stoppard uses them to discuss ideas of art and politics, he is really trying to preoccupy himself with a personal dilemma. This dilemma is concerned with the amorality of the artist which had troubled him long before *Travesties*. [48] Throughout his earlier works, Stoppard sees that the artist should distance himself from politics. The sense of neutrality made him think deeply in the status of the artist in society. In all cases, he describes the artist as one who lives in seclusion. This neutrality is reflected by the setting of the play. Switzerland, which is the home of *Travesties*, remained far from the first and second world war. It becomes a peaceful refuge for all those artists and leaders, including James Joyce, Tristan Tzara, Ulyanov Lenin and Henry Carr. More than setting for the action, Zurich is used symbolically to refer to art's transforming power. It has become, as Joyce remarks, "the theatrical centre of Europe" [49] because of the war. Being a neutral place, the world war is transformed into the war of art. Similarly, Zurich and artist are antithetical to war since "'neutrality,' uninvolvedness, is the artist's placidity in the face of life commitments." [50] So "To be an artist *at all*" Carr remarks, "is like living in Switzerland during a world war." (p. 38) Preferring to be there, the artists disclaims their responsibility as the mouthpiece of human beings. In other words, it is a kind of escapism. Therefore, the play comes to ask "whether an artist has to justify himself in political terms at all." [51] Again, like *Artist* we have four figures with

contrasting views on the issue of art and politics. Each one has sharply defined functions: Joyce is the champion of art for art's sake; Tzara represents Dadaist anti-art who advocated the destruction of traditional views.

Lenin, the political revolutionary who calls for art as a vehicle for social change in his own special opinion; and Henry Carr who heralds a new function for the artist as being in the service of class and nation. As Stoppard juxtaposes the divergent opinions of his characters on Dadaism, Modernism and Marxism, "he wishes to give the impression of straddling the fence in the art-politics debate." [52]

Travesties begins in the Zurich public Library with Joyce, Tzara and Lenin who engage in the act of writing. The stage direction tells us that the three major characters are preoccupied with "books, papers, pencils..." (p. 17) Amusingly, the opening scene gives a short literary background of the three characters by their language used: Tzara has just composed a Dadaist poem out of an English one by taking a large pair of scissors and cutting out each word, putting them into the hat, emptying out the pieces and then reciting it in a Romanian accent; Joyce dictates to Gwendolen fragmented words from *Ulysses*; Lenin talks in Russian about the revolution in Saint Petersburg. What is the commonplace among these three artists, as Kinereth Meyer remarks, is that "writing is central." [53] This in turn refers to the interrelation between art and politics.

As the events go on, we discover that we are really in Carr's memory. The conflicting notions about the value and purpose of art are presented by the jumbled and erratic recollections of Henry Carr whose memory of the three characters constitute the backbone of the play: "Joyce As I Knew him," (p. 22) "Lenin As I Knew Him," (p. 23), "*Memories of Dada by a Consular Friend of the Famous in Old Zurich: A Sketch.*" (p. 25) Interestingly, the whole events are seen within Carr's eye. The play makes it clear that the aesthetic-political views presented are a projection of his deteriorated memory. Carr, who is a minor official of the British Consulate in Zurich, finds himself in contact with these great men without realizing it. Through Carr's memory, Stoppard has brought together three archetypal attitudes to the debate of art and politics.

Carr's character wins our admiration because of his twin roles. He reflects Stoppard's character, "the spectator as hero." Carr introduces the three participants in the debate of aesthetic-political issue without ignoring his own position. By contrast, he defends against the opposing views of Tzara, Joyce and Lenin. His role as prompter and catalyst which enriches this, "as his trenchant and reactionary views fuel... the various stages of the debate." [3, p. 141] Furthermore, his active participation embodied in *Travesties*, reveals his "centrality to the aesthetic-political debate and a clearer picture of the position he espouses," [47, p. 536]

In Act I, Carr's views are contrasted with those of Tzara and Joyce. In a series of limericks, the dialogue among the three characters establishes their position about art and artist which will be developed later. Each character has a clear-cut contribution to the debate. This debate is commenced by Tzara who protests against the artistic and classical tradition

represented by Joyce. Tzara scorns Joyce's self-absorption and rejects both the artist and the civilization he represents: "It's too late for geniuses! Now we need vandals and desecrators,...to reconcile the shame and the necessity of being an artist!"(p. 62) On the contrary, Joyce asserts the value of his own work. He calls himself "[a] fine writer who writes caviar/for the general, hence poor."(p. 33) Carr takes the middle ground since both opinions are liable to more careful examination. Therefore, Carr's opening discussion with Tzara constitutes his first attempt to discuss extensively the aesthetic and political issues in *Travesties*.

Tzara's view of art and artist is connected with history and war. He argues that "the war has made a mockery of the values and the schemes of logic and causality which have served as the basis for traditional art." [47, p. 537] Tzara does not believe in logic as the prompter of art. Instead, he looks at art as no more than nonsense:

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 awfully 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. And it is the duty of the artist to jeer and howl and belch at the delusion that infinite generations of real effects can be inferred from the gross expression of apparent cause. (p. 37)

In contrast with Tzara who sees war as a capitalist project, Carr comes back with the fact that wars are fought not for words but for civilized ideals and making the world safe for artists. He argues that "The easiest way of knowing whether good has triumphed over evil is to examine the freedom of the artist."(p.39) Obviously, much of Carr's views reflect Stoppard's perspectives of art where he denies anything restricting art or artist. It suggests that "the playwright shares, on artistic matters, many of Carr's values." [33, p. 109]

As it is evident in the debate between Carr and Tzara on the origins of war, attitudes toward artist diverge as well. Traditionalist Carr starts with the claim that "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."(p.38)

While Tzara argues by expanding the definition of art to "Nowadays, an artist is someone who makes art mean the things he does.(p. 38) Tzara hopes that art can regain its role as an improver of the human condition and artist as a healer:

When the strongest began to fight for the tribe, and the fastest to hunt, it was the artist who become the priest-guardian of the magic that conjured the intelligence out of the appetites. Without him, man would be a coffee-mill Eat-grind-shit...The difference being a man and being a coffee-mill is art? (p. 47)

The above lines reveal Tzara's belief in the negative and positive role of the artist. Although Tzara sees art as an active

and superior quality, it can be used to divagate humanity. "Art created patrons and was corrupted," Tzara raves, "It began to celebrate the ambitions and acquisitions of the paymaster. The artist has negated himself-paint-eat-sculpt-grind-write-shit."(p. 47) Furthermore, Tzara states that in making 'Art' mean whatever he wants it to mean corresponds to what the Establishment does with "words like patriotism, duty, love, freedom, king and country."(p.39) This view of art resulted from the artist's reaction against the horrible horrors and the meaningless of the war atrocities.[54] In this sense, Dadaism comes from the rags of life that dominated Europe during World War I.

For Tzara, the negation of the artist is manifested in his rejection of art's autonomy. So, "anti-art is the art of our time."(p.39) For him, everything is governed by pure chance. Accordingly, "All poetry is a reshuffling of a pack of picture cards, and all poets are cheats. I offer you a Shakespeare sonnet, but it is no longer his. It comes from the wellspring where my atoms are uniquely organized and my signature is written in the hand of Chance." (p.53)

As far as Joyce is concerned, the responsibility of the artist is essentially devoted to the belief in art for art's sake. Here, the artist lost in the labyrinth of the work of art to "achieve permanence and stillness, but at the expense of life." [50, p. 1155] Significantly, it is important to know that the time of *Travesties* (1974) coincides with the years of the First World War in Europe. This devastating war caused numerous destructions and despair among the Europeans. Its impacts went beyond the frontiers of involved nations to dominate the whole twentieth century.

Among many destructive effects of the war was the long lasting clash between communism and capitalism. This struggle continued in the cold war years which left its unforgettable psychological impacts on millions of people. After the World War I, a new vision of the world has emerged. While the socialist and communist ideas strongly found their way in the Eastern Europe, the old ruling classes weakened. In this respect, the art which is flourished in Switzerland seemed far from the immediate human need and the remit of life. Thus, the artists remained enclosed within the ivory tower of their work. No doubt, the aesthetic position represented by Joyce reflects this fact.

Although Joyce was not included in the original plan of the play, Stoppard constructs *Travesties* on Wilde's play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Upon a friend's remark that Dadaist Tzara, Lenin, and perhaps Freud were living in Zurich in 1916, Stoppard decides to write "a two-act thing, with one act a Dadaist play on communist ideology and the other an ideological functional drama about Dadaists." [55] As he discovers that James Joyce was also in Zurich during World War I, Stoppard's attitude towards his initial material has changed. He justifies this modification to the fact that he wants to know "whether the artist and the revolutionary can be the same person or whether the activities are mutually exclusive.... How would you justify Ulysses to Lenin? Or Lenin to Joyce?" [56] However, Stoppard often declares that "I have no sympathy at all with Tristan Tzara." By contrast, "Joyce is an

artist I can respect” and admire as “the finest practitioner of a style of literature with which I temperamentally agree.” [29, p. 62]

Hinting through the sympathy and admiration of Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Stoppard shows his side with Joyce since the play “centres around the doctrine of art for art’s sake, that art exists for the sake of its beauty and that it need not serve any political, didactic, or other purpose.” [57] But the question that is worth asking, is it possible to do that? In an article entitled “The Responsibility of the Artist,” Jacques Maritain, a French philosopher and political thinker argues “to assume that it does not matter what one writes is permissible only to the insane; the artist is responsible to the good of human life, in himself and in his fellow men.” [58] Thus, the real dilemma originates from confronting the inevitable tension between moral responsibility to life and aesthetic. However, nearly at the end of act I, Joyce and Tzara engaged in a heated argument which reflects their views on art:

Tzara: ...Your art has failed. You’ve turned literature into a religion and it’s as dead as all the rest, it’s an overripe corpse and you’re cutting fancy figures at the wake. Joyce: You are an over-excited little man, with a need for self-expression far beyond the scope of your natural gifts. This is not discreditable. Neither does it make you an artist. An artist is the magician put among men to gratify-capriciously- their urge for immortality. The temples are built and brought down around him, continuously and contiguously, from Troy to the fields of Flanders. If there is any meaning in any of it, it is in what survives as art, yes even in the celebration of tyrants, yes even in the celebration of nonentities. What now of the Trojan War if had been passed over by the artist’s touch? Dust. (p. 62)

Joyce’s argument with Tzara proves his status as a champion of the traditional approach to art. In the above lines, Joyce celebrates the artist as a man with high quality who cares for human being and art alike. The power of the artist, to immortalize history is the main responsibility to Stoppard’s Joyce which is clearly manifested in the play by referring sometimes to mythical events and on other time to poets such as William Shakespeare.

Act II brings in another attitude to art. It begins with Cecily lecturing on Marxism with reference to Lenin and history:

Lenin was convinced, like Marx, that history worked dialectically, that it advanced through the clash of opposing forces and not through the pragmatic negotiation of stiles and stepping-stones. He was a hard-liner. (p. 68)

In fact, Stoppard makes it clear that *Travesties* is an attack on Lenin’s Marxism. His materialism of art and history is ridiculed by Stoppard who asserts that “a materialistic view of history is an insult to the human race.” [59] For Stoppard, “Marx got it wrong,” since his theory of art, value and revolution have all been refuted by modern economy and history. In apologetic tone, Carr reports to Cecily that Marx “was the victim of an historical accident,” which “made a

monkey out of him.” (p.76) Carr believes that a wrong turn of history has taken. So, Marx’s whole theory was based on the “false premise...that people were a sensational kind of material objects and would behave predictably in a material world.” (p. 76-7) However, Cecily, Lenin’s acolyte opens act two by reading lines from Lenin’s actual speech which reveal his views on the relationship between art and politics. The presentation of Lenin and Nadya is usually verbatim from primary historical sources. For art, it acquires a vital role in his philosophy. This philosophy is expressed by Cecily who maintains that art is valuable only if it is used as propaganda for political ends:

The sole duty and justification for art is social criticism...we live in an age when the social order is seen to be the work of material forces and we have been given an entirely new kind of responsibility, the responsibility of changing society. (p. 74) Therefore, she denies any form of nonpolitical art, including Joyce’s traditional and Tzara’s revolutionary forms. This attitude is shared by Lenin in his speech to the Russian crowd:

Today, literature must become party literature. Down with non-partisan literature! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become a part of the common Cause of the proletariat, a cog in the Social Democratic mechanism... (p. 85)

Although Lenin celebrates art as a superior value, it is with a limited and conditional version. What is important here is that Stoppard is keen in showing how art can be affected and dominated by political ideologies. In doing so, it becomes a means in the hands of politicians to achieve political agenda with sacrificing the rights of individual in the name of a given dogma. Stoppard shows the conflict between Lenin’s personal and political responses to art. Surely, Lenin places the party before art. He proclaims that the freedom of the artist is associated with the requirements of the party. Lenin’s philosophy, however, draws its origin from the doctrine of “socialist realism” which taught that the writer’s duty is “to provide a truthful, historic-concrete portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development,” taking into consideration “the problem of ideological transformation and the education of the workers in the spirit of socialism.” [20, p. 38] Accordingly, literature should be tendentious, “party-minded” literature which reveals its ideologies and future plans.

Tendentiousness has been connected with the idea of commitment. Although the earlier Marxists did not deny the politicization of art, they believed in the aestheticism of literary work. Engels states that if “the opinions of the author remain” implicit, “the work of art” will be better. [60] In same fashion, the later Marxists such as Benjamin and Brecht hold clear views about tendentiousness. In his study of “The Author as Producer” Benjamin points out that

the tendency of a work of literature can be politically correct only if it is also correct in the literary sense. That means that the tendency which is politically correct includes a literary tendency. And let me add at once: this literary tendency, which is implicitly or explicitly

included in every correct political tendency, this and nothing else makes up the quality of a work. [61]

However, rejecting the connection between art and politics is difficult. Even those who argue against the politicization of art find it difficult to do so since “nowadays nothing alive escapes politics.” [62] However, Lenin’s contradictory thoughts reveal his schizophrenic nature. Stoppard deliberately uses Lenin’s remarks about Beethoven’s *Appassionata* to prove this fact:

I don’t know of anything greater than the *Appassionata*. Amazing, superhuman music. It always makes me feel, perhaps naïvely, it makes me feel proud of the miracles that human beings can perform. But I can’t listen to music often. It affects my nerves, makes me want to say nice stupid things... (p. 89)

Art is seen as counter revolution. The humanizing factor of art looked at, by Lenin as a negative force. So, artists should be put under strict measures. Lenin is made to ruthlessly follow his revolutionary aims regardless of intrinsic values of art which he considers with suspicion or even hostility when it cannot be used as a political weapon. [2, p. 74]

The interchange between Cecily, Lenin’s spokesperson and Carr shows their disagreement. Unlike Lenin, Carr does not believe in the complete subordination of art to political ends. He also rejects Lenin’s philosophy of art as a means of social criticism. As a whole, Act II points out the contrast between Carr’s and Lenin’s view of art, just as Act I set up the oppositions between Carr and Tzara from one hand and Carr and Joyce from other hand.

The play concludes with Carr’s philosophy:

I learned three things in Zurich during the war. I wrote them down. Firstly you’re either a revolutionary or you’re not, and if you’re not you might as well be an artist as anything else. Secondly, if you can’t be an artist, you might as well be a revolutionary...I forget the third thing. (p. 98-99)

Art ends with the duality that revolutionary and artist are two separate entities. Yet I think that both of them are two faces for one coin. They interact in such a way that we cannot separate art from life. In so doing, the artist is a revolutionary against any wrong things in society. The third thing which has forgotten by Carr is the reciprocal relationship between art and life. Accordingly, art functions in quite different ways: for Tzara, art’s purpose is “scandal, provocation and moral outrage through art.”(p. 60) To Carr, the duty of the artist is exclusively “to beautify existence,” (p. 37) a fact which is valued by the artists.

Art becomes a constant truth in human life not only for its capability to beautify life but also for changing societies. However, Carr’s assertion of the importance of art is contrasted with Stoppard’s confession. His skepticism about the importance of art in effecting specific change in the short term makes him feel embarrassed and guilty. In such regards, Paul Delaney maintains that still, this is where we see Stoppard on the horns of a dilemma. He sees art as timeless, celebratory, and universal in the way that Joyce does and recognizes its capacity to immortalize whom it will. But at the

same time he balances Joyce’s flights of imagination against the less exalted view of a Carr,...which emphasizes the present, the here and now and the importance of such concerns as political freedom.[29, p. 74]

It has been clear that, within political domain, the dilemma of the artist lies in the fact that the artists have no free will to talk. They are governed by the bandage of political system. Consequently, “Art is absurdly overrated by artists, which is understandable, but what is strange is that it is absurdly overrated by everyone else,” (p. 46) since it lost its close ties with reality. However, although the four characters have different views on art, all of them agree that the artist enjoys a high degree of quality.

Finally, it seems that although Stoppard does not adopt a clear-cut idea about the dilemmas of the artist, he supports the views represented by the fictional characters. It is clear that he concentrates on those ideas in a number of plays which share the same themes. In an interview with him, Stoppard affirmed the thematic and stylistic similarity between *Artist* and *Travesties*. Thematically *Artist* offers what Stoppard called “a dry run” for ideas that appear extensively in *Travesties*. It was “two bites at the same apple. Sometimes the same bite at the same apple, actually.”[63] Thus, certain sections of the latter are similarly a clear development of ideas first explored in the former. Both plays present identical statements on the artist’s privileged position in society. But perhaps the most important link between the two is the definition of the artist as a gifted person that is first uttered by Donner and then by Henry Carr.

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