

*The Play as Intellectual Ping-Pong:
Art and Politics in Tom Stoppard's Travesties*

Dr. Hana' Khalief Ghani/

Translation Department

Throughout history, artists have played many important roles in society. Generally speaking, the role of the artist is defined by the society he is part of. Indeed, there are as many ideas as to the role of the artist and, ultimately the purpose of art in society, as there are types of art. This is, as a matter of fact, neither a new question- the dialogue has been present within art for centuries- nor probably one that will ever fully be answered.

Tom Stoppard came to prominence in the mid-sixties, when art and politics were closely linked, and theatre sought to change the world. Stoppard would have none of that: his work has no overt message, no political program. In fact, what Stoppard has resisted both in his plays and in his interviews is any idea of the theatre as an agent of change, as a form of art which is in any sense expressive and contributory to the nature of the society of which it is a part. (Philip Roberts, p.85) This is especially true of Stoppard's early dramatic works which, he told the *Gambit* in 1981, "could best be seen in terms of his sense of alienation from the Osbornian school of angry young men writing socially-engaged drama."(Neil Sammelles, p.131)

This aspect in Stoppard's early dramatic career did not go unnoticed by the critics who severely criticize him for his alleged indifference to contemporary social issues; a tendency which turned his early plays, according to Roberts, into apolitical opportunities for "wit, parody and metaphysical dalliance."(p.87)

In a response to the charge of being apolitical, as early as 1974, Stoppard voiced his "belief that all political acts have a moral basis to them and are meaningless without it."(Ambushes, p.12) He acknowledges that such a belief "goes against Marxist-Leninism in particular, and against all materialistic philosophy."(Ibid) In fact, Stoppard firmly holds the view that human existence is inherently moral, and that, "all political acts must be judged in moral terms."(Ibid) In Travesties (1974), Stoppard begins to address the role of politics in art. This was a real departure for the playwright who had always striven to exclude politics from his plays for fear it cheapened the work. In this play, Anthony Jenkins believes, Stoppard intends to "meet the jibes about his refusal to commit himself to direct political and social statement head-on."(p.115)

In fact, most critical treatments of Travesties have characterized the play as a debate about whether there should be any relationship between art and politics (David K. Rod in Bareham, p.177). The characters have divergent opinions on this topic, and Stoppard's inclusion of contradictory points of view results in none being privileged over the other.

The play focuses on the fictional meeting of three important revolutionary figures in Zurich in 1917: the Communist leader Lenin on the verge of revolutionary success in Russia; the modernist Joyce, engaged in the revolutionary edifice of Ulysses; and the poet Tristan Tzara, who with his fellow Dadaists, revolted against practically all established notions of art and culture. Henry Carr, who in real life knew Joyce, relates the trio's interactions through his unreliable memory. The play takes the form of a witty farce as it showcases the political and philosophical points of view of these three historical figures, who all had a profound influence on their times. As Stoppard juxtaposes his three central figures' theories on Dadaism, Modernism and Marxism, he addresses complex questions on the nature and function of politics and art and the role of the artist in society.

James Joyce was not included in the original plan of the play. The genesis of Travesties, Stoppard points out, begins in a friend's remark that "within a stone's throw of each other and using the same café were the Dadaist Tzara, and Lenin, and I think Freud, may be."(Paul Delaney, p.58-9) Look into it sparked Stoppard's consideration of the dramatic possibilities of this event. Stoppard first conceived of "a two-act thing, with one act a Dadaist play on communist ideology and the other an ideological functional drama about Dadaists." (Mel Gussow, 1972, p.54) However, instead of Freud, Stoppard chooses to present Joyce. He describes this modification as "a good idea," (Delaney, p.59) and points out that he decides to bring Joyce in the play "mainly because [he] didn't want Tzara and the Dadaists to carry the artistic banner in the play, and Joyce was an artist with whom [Stoppard] sympathizes a great deal."(Bernard Weiner, qtd in Ibid., p.67) This situation, said Stoppard, raised "a question worth asking, can the artist and the revolutionary be the same person or [are] their activities mutually exclusive? How would you justify Ulysses to Lenin or Lenin to Joyce?"(Gussow, 1974, p.36)

It is significant that the play opens at a Zurich public library where all the three major characters engage in the act of writing. They are preoccupied with "*books, papers, pencils...*," as the stage direction tells (Stoppard, p.17)(All subsequent Quotations refer to this edition). The opening scene is amusingly disorienting in that hardly a word of English is spoken: Tzara reads out in a Romanian accent an English poem that he has just composed, according to dada recipe, by taking a large pair of scissors to what he has just written, cut out each word, pops them into the hat, empties out the pieces and then recites the resulting 'poem;' Joyce dictates to Gwendolen fragmented words from what one may recognize as Ulysses; the Lenins talk in Russian about the revolution in St. Petersburg. What unites these three figures, Kinereth Meyer remarks, is that for all of them, as for their creator, "writing is central."(p.107)

It is also significant that the opening scene introduces everyone but Carr whom Stoppard makes the viewfinder of the most of the action. It is noteworthy that the aesthetic-political views of Carr are frequently ignored although the artistic-political debate, as the critics generally point out, occurs within his memory. Indeed, Carr's introductions of each of the other three participants in the debate emphasize their status as products of his memory: "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) Furthermore, Carr takes his own position on the aesthetic-political issue, a position which he defends against the opposing views of Tzara, Joyce and Lenin as he remembers them. A careful examination of the scenes in which Carr's views conflict with those of Tzara, Joyce, and Lenin will reveal both Carr's centrality to the aesthetic-political debate and a clearer picture of the position he espouses (Rod in Bareham, p.177).

The choice of Zurich as setting for Travesties is significant. In fact, by turning Switzerland into a metaphor of artistic detachment, Stoppard sheds "any lingering unease about his own artistic neutrality."(Jenkins, p.115) Delaney believes that the "mystical swissticality" of Zurich, "the still centre of the wheel of war," as Stoppard describes it (p.26), becomes an "emblem of the timeless locus of art amid the mutabilities of time."(p.75) However, the background imagery of the play, as Jim Hunter rightly observes, is of trench-warfare, of the cave-man, of Lenin 'hitting heads'. Round the periphery of the play, as round the borders of Switzerland, are war, revolution, suffering, death-the flux which the elegant and conflicting logics can inadequately treat(p.176). In this respect, Carr's skids into trench-memory are an effective reminder of the suffering raging outside Switzerland's borders; and what is projected is the difficulty of relating the values of art to immediate human need.

It is a well-known fact that the neutrality of Switzerland during World War I supplied an appropriate atmosphere and a congenial climate for the emergence of many artistic, social and political movements. Dadaism is one of those movements, whose followers' activities and work are true reflections of the craziness and senselessness that dominated the European continent in the early 1920s. The formation of Dadaism, as a matter of fact, came as a reaction against the appalling horrors and the meaninglessness of the war atrocities (Hans Richter, p.25). The Dadaist writers "emphasize and exploit the incongruous, bizarre and accidental in their painting and writing. They challenge, and even deny, established traditions of art, morality, social customs and thoughts." (C. Hugh Holman, p.118) In this sense, Tzara's Dadaism functions as Lenin would have art function-as social criticism (Joan F. Dean in Bareham. P. 172).

Tzara's attitude echoes the war which has made everything meaningless. He believes 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. Without logic, art must be nonsense, and Tzara rejects all attempts to present art other than nonsense. He firmly declares that "everything is Chance, including design" (p.37).

Tzara wants to redefine art: "Nowadays, an artist is someone who makes art mean the things he does. A man may be an artist by exhibiting his hindquarters. He may be a poet by drawing words out of a hat." (p.38) Moreover, Tzara believes that it is "the duty of the artist to jeer and howl and belch" at the notions of order and causality (p.37). By means of this definition, Tzara apparently hopes that art can regain the importance it once had as an improver of the human condition:

When the strongest began to fight for the tribe, and the fattest to hunt, it was the artist who became 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 between being a man and being a coffee-mill is art (p.47).

These lines reveal Tzara's belief that it is the artist who puts humanity on the first rung of the ladder to consecutive thought. In this sense, his anti-art is a protest against the abject prostitution of this exalted heritage (Sammelles, p.74). "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) Thus, in spite of his rejection of traditional art forms, Tzara sees art itself as a superior kind of activity(Rod in Bareham, p.179).

Furthermore, Tzara points out that, in making 'Art' mean whatever he wants it to mean, he is only doing what the Establishment does with "words like *patriotism, duty, love, freedom, king and country.*"(p.39) This idea that language can be 'conscripted' into the service of various ideologies lies at the heart of Stoppard's work and will be exemplified by Lenin(Jenkins, p.117). Stoppard once told Oleg Kerensky that "the way language and logic can be used or misused amuses me- it's a wonderful garden to enjoy."(p.170) Yet Carr, and part of Stoppard can not accept that. For them, these words cited by Tzara must "possess some unadulterated currency"(Jenkins, p117). Carr, in fact, believes that the Dadaists' cynical views "merely demonstrate the freedom of the artist to be ungrateful, hostile, self-centred and talentless." (p.39)

Tzara verbal vandalism is unleashed not only in his scissoring of Shakespeare's sonnet, but also in the violence he does to words in his own apologia for anti-art. He abuses language itself, physically by cutting up words, intellectually by trying to wrench the meaning of words by main force. Delaney remarks that in doing so "Tzara perversely sets out to smash the very building

blocks of the artist's craft and then stands amid the piles of rubble, claiming greater glory as an architect because of his supposed superiority to his materials."(p.65)

Here Stoppard presents Dadaism as "an extreme manifestation of the assault on language, which is inextricably bound up with an assault on traditional values." (Robert Wilcher, p.5-6). Stoppard, in fact, disparages Tzara's artistic methods saying that "Writing a poem by taking words out of a hat may be amusing fun, but let's not call the result poetry." "What it isn't," Stoppard asserts, "is art." Stoppard further declares "I have no interest in anarchic or unstructured art...I have no sympathy at all with Tristan Tzara."(qtd in Delaney, p.62) Meyer believes that Tzara's methods demonstrate Ronald Barthes' famous dictum about the "death of the author as an organizing consciousness," by showing how words in context may contain within themselves their own potential for de-contextualization. Like Barthes, Tzara sees writing not as the expression of individual voice, but as the destruction of voice (p.110).

For Tzara, the negation of the artist is logically connected to the play of intertextuality. He believes that "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) This means that Tzara denies authorial autonomy in the name of pure Chance. For him, since the autonomy of the artist is an illusion, then "anti-art is the art of our time."(p.39) It follows that "art is totally relative, beyond irrelevant and reactionary standards of beauty or excellence."(Meyer, p.109-110)

It is noteworthy that Stoppard himself mirrors Tzara through the intertextual techniques he employs in his plays, however, his conclusions regarding the implications of such artistic reshuffling are significantly different. Stoppard, like Joyce, "doubles the text as a way of affirming the logocentric core of both the

history and the theatrical play,"(Ibid, p.110) while Tzara sees this logocentrism as an "overripe corpse," the remnant of a religion of literature that must be destroyed. He tells Joyce "Now we need vandals and desecrators, simple-minded demolition men to smash centuries of baroque subtlety, to bring down the temple, and thus finally, to reconcile the shame and the necessity of being an artist! Dada! Dada! Dada!"(p.62) Ironically, Tzara's call to leave literature to the "hand of Chance", Meyer notes, is an "indirect acknowledgement of the presence, and not the negation of the artist." (Ibid)

Carr's position develops out of the interchange with Tzara. He disagrees with Tzara's account of the demise of traditional values and of logic and causality. He claims vehemently to have gone to war out of a sense of duty, for the sake of patriotism and love of freedom. He also dismisses Tzara's more cynical interpretation that war is "capitalism with the gloves off," waged for the purposes of "expansion and self-interest,"(p.39) as being "mere phrasemaking."(Rod, p.179) In fact, Carr's views on the war gains credence from his actually having served in the trenches. While he admits to having forgotten what the causes of war were, still he maintains that the war had causes and therefore can not be pointed to as proof of the inapplicability of causality to human affairs(p.36).

Carr affirms that freedom is worth fighting for, that patriotism is not to be derided, and that high-sounding cultural ideals can only be preserved through the defense of political freedom. However, Carr does not conceive of either the political or the aesthetic as the ultimate frame of reference. Like Stoppard, he places both politics and art within a context which is explicitly moral (Delaney, p.72). He believes that "The easiest way of knowing whether good has triumphed over evil is to examine the freedom of the artist."(p.39) Implicit in Carr's assertion is the belief not only that "moral values exist, but that good and evil are absolutes which can be used in judging a regime rather than negotiable commodities which

are culturally determined."(Delaney, p.72) If art and politics are connected, as Carr asserts they are, it is not that either is subservient to the other but that both are subject to a third realm. The ultimate frame of reference, as Carr presents it, is neither political nor aesthetic but moral (Ibid.).

It is crystal clear that, like Stoppard, Carr draws a clear connection between political freedom and civilized ideals, and firmly places both within an explicitly moral framework: "Wars are fought to make the world safe for artists," Carr asserts (p.39). Indeed, his insistence on the connection anticipates Stoppard's own affirmation three years later that political freedom is a "necessary condition" for civilization and that "the loss of freedom leads to civilization's decline."(Delaney, p.72)

However, although Carr associates art with civilized values and defends war as necessary in order to preserve both political freedom and civilization; he later discounts the importance of art. His notion that art is "absurdly overrated" (p.46) may seem inconsistent with his claim that art "gratifies a hunger that is common to princes and peasants."(p.74) However, as Delaney points out, Carr here is rejecting both Tzara's insistence on the supernal value of art and Cecily's Marxist-Leninist dogma that art must be ideological. In fact, his affirmation that art satisfies a longing wholly apart from its relevance to social change and his qualification that art is not of supreme importance speak for Stoppard (Delaney, p.74).

Carr refuses to accept Tzara's redefinition of art. Instead, he defines art in a more conventional manner: "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) Like much of Carr's thinking, this definition lacks brilliance but possesses a certain aura of practicality or common sense. Stoppard confirmed to Kenneth Tynan that he concurs in Carr's definition of the artist (Delaney, p.169).

Carr, furthermore, staunchly defends the objective meaning of language against Tzara's attempts to twist words to mean whatever he wishes them to mean. "If there is any point in using language at all," Carr insists, "it is that a word is taken to stand for particular fact or idea and not for other facts and ideas"(p.38) He insists that Tzara's reassigning of labels can not change the reality of the things labeled; just as to call a pedestrian activity 'flying' does not lift one off the ground, so to call a nonartistic activity 'art' does not make that activity artistic(p.38-39). Furthermore, Carr assigns to art a much lower valuation than Tzara does. To be an artist, according to him, is to abandon more serious concerns, such as those of the political realm: "to be an artist at all is like living in Switzerland during a world war."(p.38) The business of the artist, Carr believes, is to "beautify existence,"(p.37) and while this purpose has some importance, it does not have the overwhelming importance that has been assigned to it by the artists:

Carr: Art is absurdly overrated by artists, which is understandable, but what is strange is that it is absurdly overrated by everyone else.

Tzara: Because man can not live by bread alone.

Carr: Yes, he can. It's *art* he can't live on (p.46).

This assertion that art is absurdly overrated is echoed in Stoppard's confession that he is embarrassed by claims that art is important: "When Auden said his poetry didn't save one Jew from the gas chamber, he'd said it all...I've never felt this-that art is important. (Janet Watts, p.12). Stoppard has a special opinion of the importance of art. 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 Carr which emphasizes the present, the here and now, and the importance of such concerns as political freedom. Ultimately, although art may not

be important in effecting specific change in the short term, Stoppard insists that in the long term "art is important," because it "provides the moral matrix, the moral sensibility, from which we make our judgments about the world."(Ambushes, p.14)

In sum, Carr seems to consider art a form of clever nonsense, capable of providing amusement and even beauty to human life, but not deserving the kind of esteem that has been bestowed on it either for its contribution to the improvement of the human condition, as Tzara would have it, or for its own sake, as Joyce will argue.

The aesthetic position represented by Joyce is essentially a belief in art for art's sake. He takes the stance that an artist need not justify himself in political terms at all. And this is exactly why Stoppard describes Joyce as an artist he can "respect and admire as the finest practitioner of a style with which [Stoppard] temperamentally agree[s]." (Ronald Hayman, p.10) Joyce describes the artist as "the magician put among men to gratify-capriciously- their urge for immortality."(p.62) In direct antithesis to Lenin's art-as-social criticism aesthetic, Joyce cites the Trojan war as an example in which great art was derived from suffering and death that otherwise have been relegated to widely unknown ancient history (Joan F. Dean, p.174-5). Without art, Joyce believes, the Trojan War and by implication history itself, would be nothing except a "minor redistribution of broken pots." He says "If there is any meaning in any of it, it is in what survives as art...What now of the Trojan War if it has been passed over by the artist's touch? Dust. A forgotten expedition."(p.62) This means that unlike the Dadaists whose sole desire is to knock down the sacred temples, Joyce's role is to document the destruction of these temples and give them permanence.

Here the images of Troy resound with the splendor of an artistic heritage that stands as one of mankind's glories and which dramatizes Stoppard's most overt statement about the artist's function. Although he builds Joyce's speech up to an

anti-climatic exit- his Ulysses will add further vitality to the legend but will "leave the world precisely as it finds it"(p.63)- the force of these images proves his point. A work of art has no immediate effect on society but contributes in the long run to a cultural climate, ethical standards against which society measures itself (Jenkins, p.118).

It is against the mutabilities of life and history that Joyce celebrates an art which immortalizes even tyrants, and nonentities. This celebration of nonentities could serve as a paradigm of Stoppard's art (Delaney, 69). Such claims for art echo those offered by innumerable poets whose lyrics still live. The inclusion of Shakespeare's 18 sonnet which concludes with a memorable celebration of the immortality which art can grant to mortals is to the point and speak for both Joyce and Stoppard:

Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
So long as men can breath or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee (p.53-54).

In fact, Joyce sees writing as a doubling activity; in spite of the overwhelming nature of the immortal Ulysses theme, he declares, "Yet I with my Dublin Odyssey will double that immortality." (p.62) Later, he boasts that the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter of Ulysses uses "the gamut of English literature from Chaucer to Carlyle to describe events taking place in a lying-in hospital in Dublin."(p.97) From the mythic magnitude of the Trojan War to the more mundane proportions of events in a Dublin maternity ward, history is significant, even immortalized, according to Stoppard's Joyce, only because of the "power of the artist to present it in words, some of which will no doubt also be a doubling or a re-presentation of the words of others." (Meyer, 108) In fact, when he was alive,

Stoppard tells, "[Joyce] did say that the history of Ireland, troubles and all, was justified because it produces him and he produces Ulysses."(Ambushes, p.16)

Joyce's arguments with Tzara serve to establish his status as a defender of the traditional approach to art. He shares Tzara's evaluation of art as an activity of great importance. Joyce further asserts the value of his work. He calls himself "a fine writer who writes caviar/for the general, hence poor."(p.33) Here lies the importance of Carr in relation to the other characters. He is the common man whom Joyce, Lenin and Tzara address in their works. Actually, Carr serves as the spokesman and the embodiment for all of the world's lesser men. Moreover, Carr and Joyce, Delaney rightly observes, are natural allies. Carr objects to the abuse of language and Joyce is the conserver and renewer of language. Joyce is embarked, in Ulysses, on a monumental exaltation of the common life of humanity and Carr is a common human. Carr has sympathy with the underdog and Joyce, an impoverished writer afflicted with numerous eye ailments, private penury and public rejection is downtrodden. Both also know that civilization and the arts are connected. Carr tells Tzara "Wars are fought to make the world safe for the artists. It is never quite put in those terms but it is a useful way of grasping what civilized ideals are all about."(p.39) Besides, both show great respect for Wilde for his belief that art need not be politically or socially oriented (p.77).

It is quite clear that Carr and Joyce's views supplement each other. Wars are fought for freedom of artist expression; the artist transfigures and preserves society imaginatively because it can not be preserved physically. But a pervasive irony of the work is that although Carr and Joyce are natural allies, they never recognize each other as such. Joyce requires the material assistance and the political freedom which Carr can help provide; Carr needs the qualities of imagination and intellect with which Joyce is gifted (Ibid.).

Carr's centrality to the action of the play gains added weight in Act Two which focuses on pointing up the contrast between Carr's views and Lenin's, just as Act One set up oppositions between Carr and Tzara and between Carr and Joyce. In fact, Stoppard makes it clear that Travesties is his "first theatrical onslaught against Marxism."(Barry Norman, p.3) Here, one of the targets is Lenin's materialism and his dehumanizing theory of art and revolution. With relation to this, Stoppard firmly confirms that "One thing I feel sure about is that a materialistic view of history is an insult to the human race."(Ambushes, p.13) Stoppard explains why 'Marx got it wrong.' He points out

The great irony about Marx was that his impulses were deeply moral while his intellect insisted on a materialistic view of the world. His theory of capital, his theory of value, and his theory of revolution, have all been refuted by modern economic and by history (Ibid.).

In Travesties, this opinion is transmuted to Carr's pithy remark that Marx's "materialism made a monkey out of him."(p.76) Carr believes that Marx was "the victim of an historical accident" who encountered the capitalistic system after the industrial revolution had crowded people into slums but before it had "begun to bring them the benefits of an industrialized society."(Ibid.) Here Carr serves transparently as the spokesman for Stoppard's own views. Like Stoppard, he believes that 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)

Lenin and his ideological disciple, Cecily, uncritically accepted Marx's false premise and his false assumption that the classes would inexorably move further apart, a result demonstrable in every way but experience by "the inexorable working-out of Marx's theory of capital."(p.76) In fact, the confusions which Lenin

and Cecily express about the nature of art and society arise from their failure to apprehend reality in its complex wholeness. Both of them based their knowledge of, and approach to, life on a bookish intellectualism invalidated by experience. Lenin's revolutionism is not based on the needs of the masses, but on his own abstract systematic theory divorced from life. Cecily tells Carr that Lenin refused to help organize famine relief because "he understood that the famine was a force for the revolution, that it would help to ... bring Russia closer to ... the socialist revolution ... to the dictatorship of the proletariat ... to the Communist society."(p.77) That is, because of an intellectual system conceived privately; Lenin refused to respond to a real need. His theoretical perception drove out the reality of the suffering of those whom he intended to save (Delaney, p.65).

Although Carr shares Lenin's low estimation of the intrinsic value of art, he does not agree with the complete subordination of art to political ends. In this sense, Lenin's position, like Joyce's and Tzara's, constitutes an idealistic extreme, and Carr again chooses a more practical middle position. He points out to Cecily that her Marxist assertion about social criticism being the sole duty and function of art contradicts practical experience; in fact, a great of what is called art has no socially critical function (p.74). Carr notes that while Cecily purports to be describing the purpose of art, she is actually attempting to redefine it, and her proposed redefinition suffers from the same shortcomings as Tzara's.

Against Cecily's affirmation that art must serve and change society, Carr posits Wilde as the exemplum of the detached artist who feeds man's spirit. "Wilde was indifferent to politics. He may occasionally have been a little overdressed but he made up for it by being immensely uncommitted,"(p.74) Carr states. The significance of this statement, Dean remarks, lies in the fact that Carr praises Wilde, and by implication Joyce, by describing them as politically uncommitted.

Joyce specifically states this when he says "As an artist, naturally I attach no importance to the swings and roundabout of political history."(p.50)

However, Carr happens to be quite wrong about Wilde, and though he may act here as Stoppard's dislocating mouthpiece, his opinion panders to an image of Oscar-the-dandy that will probably be uppermost in the minds of those who know nothing of Wilde's "The Critic as Artist", and "The Soul of Man under Socialism"(Jenkins, p.122). It is noteworthy that there is a real sympathy between Stoppard and Wilde on issues involving the status of art. Wilde foresaw in 1891 that there could be no regular partnership between the arts and the state. He almost seems to have known what the masterpieces of Soviet Realism would look like. In "The Soul of Man under Socialism," Wilde wrote

Whenever a community or a powerful section of a community, or a government of any kind, attempts to dictate to the artist what he is to do, Art either entirely vanishes, or becomes stereotyped, or degenerates into a low and ignoble form of craft. A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want (Margaret M. Gold, p.61).

Stoppard has the benefit of hindsight. That is why in Act Two Lenin often refers to Gorky and Mayakovsky. Carr has learned the lesson well enough to tell Tzara, who has called for "the right to urinate in different colors,"(p.61) that "multi-colored micturition is no trick to those boys; they'll have you pissing blood."(p.83)

What Carr demands actually is that any definition of art corresponds not to the ideological goals of the definer, but to the phenomenon of art as it has been

experienced historically. He rejects Cecily's attempt to relegate to the realm of decadence all nonpolitical arts, including both Joyce's traditional and Tzara's revolutionary forms of art. He rejects also her definition of art because of the existence of Victorian High Comedy and, especially of Gilbert and Sullivan (p.74). In fact, he makes no great claims for the worth of Victorian High Comedy or of any other form of art, he contends only that they deserve to be called art and not artistic decadence. He does suggest, for the first time, that art satisfies a basic human need: "...in some way it gratifies a hunger that is common to princes and peasants."(p.74)

Lenin denies the artist a privileged role, and proclaims that everything to do with the printed word must come under party control. For him, there can be no artistic neutrality. Surely, Lenin places the party before art, and the reason for this grows out of his personal response to art, which is not, Dean remarks, "as predictable as his politics and which is one of the main causes of the failure of his aesthetic suggested by the Stoppard play."(p.174) In his speech to the Russian crowd, Lenin firmly states that "Today, Literature must become party literature... must become a part of the common cause of the proletariat, a cog in the social Democratic mechanism."(p.85) Lenin also maintains that his new political order will make the artist truly free. He is free to write whatever he wishes without any restrictions, although he should recognize that "every voluntary association, including the party, is also free to expel members who use the name of the party to advocate anti-party views."(p.85) These images grow all the more chilling when Lenin's wife, Nadya, explains from the sidelines that these words come from one of Lenin's actual speeches.

Lenin's views clearly demonstrate the failure of the Marxist aesthetic which is the principal point of the play's second act. Dean points out that the failure of Lenin's aesthetic theories is evident on two grounds: first, they are self-

contradictory and second, they are contradicted by his own visceral response to art(p.173). On the first account, Lenin argues that only the communist political state can free the artist from his capitalistic shackles and thereby offers him true independence. Simultaneously, he asserts that only one style of art, which came to be known as Social Realism is acceptable or even tolerable (Ibid.). To prove this, Stoppard juxtaposes Lenin's readings from letters to various party officials with Nadya's recollection of his reaction to plays, concerts and novels. Lenin preferred Pushkin to Mayakovski and changed his mind only after being told that Pushkin was bourgeois. He favored Checkov's Uncle Vanya over Gorki's The Lower Depths even though he recognized Gorki's politics as acceptable and Checkov's as inappropriate. His genuine visceral response to Beethoven's "Appassionata" which is the very archetype of romantic individualism evinces the second contradiction in Lenin's aesthetic; because art kindles in him a sense of human dignity and worth he must restrain himself from its enjoyment. In fact, his response to "Appassionata" provides a shining example of art's humanizing influence. However, he makes it clear that the conditions of the Revolution necessitate the sacrifice of such instincts:

Superhuman music. It always makes me feel, perhaps naively, 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, and pat the heads of those people who while living in this vile hell can create such beauty. Nowadays we can't pat heads or we'll get our heads bitten off (p.89).

In a noteworthy commentary on Lenin's speech, Hunter points out "This is perhaps the most expressive testimony to art in the play; and as the music of the 'Appassionata' 'swells in the dark', we leave Lenin as something like a tragic hero-

yet not purifying his community but taking it to tragedy with him."(p.32) Nadya's last words in Travesties are "Something went wrong. I forget what."(p.89)

While Lenin's last words emphasize the importance of the artist as guardian and nurturer of moral sensibility (Jenkins, p.118), they do indicate the paradoxical nature of the Marxist philosophy of art. Regardless of the question of the repression and the persecution of artists who do not conform to the party line, the failure of Lenin's aesthetic is self-evident-literally evident from his own response to art. This reminds us of Marx's saying that religion is the opiate of the people; Lenin seems to realize that art is dangerous for similar reasons (Dean, p.174).

At the end of the play, Carr is left alone on the stage, saying that he "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.98-9).

Implicit in this speech is the answer to the germinal question that evoked Travesties. Can the artist and the revolutionary be one and the same person? Quite clearly the final words of the play answer in the negative. One is either an artist or one is a revolutionary (Delaney, p.81). Lenin may be a revolutionary but his own visceral response to art demonstrates that his aesthetic theories are invalid. Tzara who aspires to be a revolutionary artist, evinces instead political paralysis and artistic aridity (Ibid, 66-7). In fact, the very idea of a revolutionary artist is not worth remembering. The first two points deny its very existence. Carr states "I forget the third thing." What is there to be besides being a revolutionary or being an artist? The third thing, Delaney believes, is to be Henry Carr, to be an ordinary human being, because even revolutionaries and artists are only Henry Carrs, and when people attempt to assert the contrary, i.e to destroy the Carr-ness in

humanity, they become inhuman, self-contradictory, and even dangerous (Ibid., p.81).

In the final analysis, Carr supports none of the views presented by the three major historical figures. Neither has he won the debate. Stoppard, Rod remarks, "creates a balance among the four opposing aesthetic viewpoints presented in the play, a balance that does not tip in Carr's favor even though his memory controls most of the events in the play."(qtd in Sammelles, p.73) Instead Carr presents an independent position of his own, a position which rejects the various idealisms of Tzara, Joyce, and Lenin in favor of what art has been and what it has accomplished. Hence, Carr's position is as worthy of consideration in its own right as any of the others that the play presents. Indeed, the characters viewpoints are simply different attitudes to the same problem: how can the artist serve society for the common good? Stoppard asserts that modifying our view of the world is precisely what art does adeptly:

Art is very much better at laying down inch-by-inch a matrix for the sensibilities which we ultimately use to make our value-judgments on society, than in making an immediate value judgment on an immediate situation. Particularly much better at that than changing a situation...Art is intensely important for reasons other than writing angrily about this morning's headlines (qtd in Delaney, p.7).

Such importance as art has, Stoppard insists, is inherently moral. Here Stoppard does indeed pit himself directly against the prevailing temper of the times by assuming a direct and open connection between art and morality. Stoppard actually suggests that though the artist, unlike the politician, has no immediate effect on society; it is his work which ultimately shapes our ethics because he refuses to submit to the State. In fact, Travesties implies that the artist's

responsibilities are ultimately to his own sense of truth and to the standards of historic tradition.

When Travesties appeared on the London stage in 1974, it soon reinforced Stoppard's reputation as one of the twentieth century most innovative and clever playwrights. In this later plays, Stoppard continued to deal with the ethics of political action and the aesthetic possibility of achieving immortality in the words of art.

Like the playwright whom they mirror, each of the three characters in Travesties, is preoccupied with defining the function of art in an age of uncertainty. It is noteworthy that both T. S. Eliot "The Waste Land" and Joyce's Ulysses were published within a year. Both works can be considered true reflections of the dramatic changes that got underway in the first half of the twentieth century. Through his characters, Stoppard seeks the connection between the words we use and the social, political and moral matrix in which words are embedded (Meyer, p.108). On the question of whether art must be an ideological attack on class structure as Lenin propounds, or part of an equally polemical attack on cultural heritage, as Tzara petulantly screams, there is no question but that Joyce's celebration of art which is not committed to a cause is also Stoppard's celebration and the play's celebration(Delaney, p.60). That Travesties shares a Joycean aesthetic is beyond doubt. This is revealed not only in the architectural form of the play, but also in its celebratory function. Joyce, just as Stoppard, celebrates both the immortality of art and the immortality which art grants to men.

The play, furthermore, shows Stoppard's preoccupation with the "points of view play." In 1974, he points out

There is very often no single, clear statement in my plays. What is there is a series of conflicting statements made by conflicting characters, and they tend to play a sort of infinite leap-frog. You know, an argument, a refutation, then a rebuttal of the

refutation, then a counter-rebuttal, so that there is never any point in this intellectual leap-frog at which I feel that is the speech to stop it onto, that is the last word (Amushes, p.6)

As for the structure of the play, Stoppard explains:

You start with a prologue which is slightly strange. Then you have an interminable monologue which is rather funny. Then you have scenes. Then you end up with another monologue. And you have unexpected bits of music and dance, and at the same time people are playing ping-pong with various intellectual arguments (Hayman, p.12).

Both Lenin and Tzara provide counter arguments to Joyce's credo of the centrality of the artist and the primacy of the word. While Lenin stresses that art is significant only if it is in service of those material forces which move history inexorably towards revolution, Tzara denies the significance of both art and the artist and calls for an anti-art of pure Chance.

Coppelia Kahn argues that whatever side Stoppard may be on, Travesties itself does not take sides: "Though Stoppard insistently poses the question of the social role of art, he refuses to answer it. He mocks Joyce's Homeric high priest of art and Tzara's barbaric yawper and Lenin's 'cog in the social democratic mechanism' with equal gusto and wit." (qtd in Delaney, p.63)

Finally, the intellectual debate about the proper relationship between art and politics is not over. It still generates a lot of heat among people.

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