

# Stoppard Gone Wilde: The Invention of Identity

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## INTRODUCTION

Tom Stoppard is perhaps best known for writing plays inspired by other texts, especially those of William Shakespeare. Stoppard's first theatrical success, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966), was such a play; it combines text from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with a scenario reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1955). Indeed, several of Stoppard's early pieces draw on Shakespeare as source material. His short plays *Dogg's Hamlet* (1976) and *Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979) parody the Shakespearean texts in their titles, and even *Jumpers* (1972) – Stoppard's first full-length play after *Rosencrantz* – incorporates several lines from *Macbeth*. Indubitably, Stoppard “owes his greatest popular successes” to Shakespeare (Hesse 190), especially since co-writing the 1998 film *Shakespeare in Love*.

However predominant Shakespeare's inspirational effect, we cannot ignore the other writer whose influence is apparent in Stoppard's works: Oscar Wilde, the late nineteenth century's famously flamboyant playwright, author, poet, critic, and celebrity. Wilde, likewise, inspired two of Stoppard's major plays. *Travesties* (1974) re-works Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* does *Hamlet*; and *The Invention of Love* (1997) presents a fictional version of Wilde, as *Shakespeare in Love* shows a fictionalized Shakespeare. The more one examines Stoppard's works, the more

allusions to Wilde become apparent. Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* articulates some of the forces at work in the literary relationship of Stoppard and Wilde. "Poetic influence need not make poets less original," Bloom writes, "as often it makes them more original, though not therefore necessarily better" (7). Had William Shakespeare never existed, Tom Stoppard's plays would have lost a source of inspiration, but only a source. Had Oscar Wilde never existed, then the essence of Tom Stoppard's works would not be the same in its characteristic style and theme. This examination will introduce the three major connections between the two writers: their biographical parallels, their shared style of writing, and common themes in their work.

### **Shared Biographies**

Journalists often invoke Oscar Wilde when characterizing Tom Stoppard in interviews or profiles. Reporters take note of Stoppard's every word – as he once said himself, "There's no point in being quoted if one isn't going to be quotable" (Bradshaw 99) – and pay close attention to the details of his attire: "The playwright wore a blue imitation-leather suit, purple shoes emblazoned with red stars, and a black-and-white striped scarf into which was knitted in red the word *travesties*" (Bradshaw 90). Theater critic Kenneth Tynan (also a friend of Stoppard's) describes Stoppard's attitude about artistic truth and reality with a quotation from Wilde: "A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true" (Tynan 48). Tynan also notes that Stoppard displays one of Wilde's letters in his study, almost as a sign of a disciple (101). In addition to these commonalities, the

biographies of the two playwrights exhibit some important parallels, including their national origins and their reputations for cleverness.

Oscar Wilde was born in 1854 in Dublin. He attended primary and secondary school in Ireland, and matriculated to Magdalen College, Oxford, for his university education. In the early 1880s, Wilde moved to London, where he lived for most of his adult life. He began his career writing poetry and art criticism (his social circle at this time included James McNeill Whistler, John Everett Millais, and Edward Burne-Jones). He also gave public lectures, most notably on a tour of the United States in 1882. He published short stories and a novel before his first fully staged play, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, premiered in 1891. His plays were wildly successful, playing in America as well as England. However, success attracted scandal. When his love affair with Lord Alfred Douglas was made public in 1895, Wilde tried, unsuccessfully, to sue Douglas's father for libel. He then was put on trial for, and found guilty of, the crime of "gross indecency," for which he was sentenced to two years' hard labor. Upon his sentencing, Wilde's name was removed from the marquees of the West End theaters where *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *An Ideal Husband* were playing, and the shows closed soon after (Ellmann 458). Following his release from prison, Wilde spent the last years of his life in France. He wrote only one more major work, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), which was attributed to "Prisoner C.3.3," although its author's identity was public knowledge (Ellmann 560). The publication, an epic poem about prison life, sold well, but Wilde had

amassed large debts from his legal fees and continued to live beyond his means. No other new works were published in his lifetime. He never fully recovered his health after his imprisonment and in 1900, at the age of 46, he passed away in Paris, practically penniless.

Tom Stoppard, then named Tomáš Straüssler, was born in Czechoslovakia in 1937, but his family fled to eastern Asia in 1941 to avoid persecution by the Third Reich. Stoppard's grandparents on both sides were Jewish, a fact he did not learn of until he was in his fifties; they all perished in the Holocaust. Stoppard received his early education at an English convent in Singapore, then at an American Methodist boarding school in India (Delaney "Chronology" 1). Martha Straüssler, his mother, was widowed in the war. Her second marriage was to Major Kenneth Stoppard, who moved the family to England after finishing his service in the British Army. He adopted the Straüssler boys as his own, and gave them his surname. Tom Stoppard never went to university; instead he began to work as a journalist immediately after finishing high school. He worked for local newspapers and wrote about subjects as diverse as the theater and automobile design until 1960, when he began to concentrate on writing plays. Six years later, his career took off with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Although known for his original plays, his works also include screenplays, adaptations of foreign-language plays, and the novel, *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon*. Stoppard's most recent screenplay credit is the 2001 espionage film *Enigma*, although he is rumored to have made uncredited contributions to other films, including *Star*

*Wars: Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (2005). His latest stage adaptation was the playwright Gerald Sibleyras's *Le Vent des Peupliers*, produced as *Heroes* in fall 2005, and *Rock 'n' Roll*, his newest original play, is scheduled to open in June 2006.

A comparison of the two writers' biographies reveals surprising parallels and connections. They are both considered British writers, but neither was born English – a coincidental but important link between the two, and one that sets them apart from many of their contemporaries. At the beginnings of both men's careers, they avoided dwelling on their pasts and strove for "Englishness": Wilde spent time trying to conceal his Irishness and worked to lose his accent, while Stoppard did nothing to conceal his past, but knew very little of his family's history before they had come to England (this remained a mysterious part of his public profile for years). As their careers progressed, both writers embraced their pasts and ethnic roots to a greater degree. Wilde joined the Dublin Literary Society which his mother, Lady Jane "Speranza" Wilde, a published poet, had founded; Stoppard took an interest in Eastern European politics and worked to raise awareness of Soviet political prisoners in the 1970s and '80s.<sup>1</sup>

### **Shared Styles**

Along with the coincidental facts of their biographies, the playwrights also show a notable resemblance in their style of writing. They share a similar sense of

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<sup>1</sup> In an article on The Free Theater of Belarus, an underground theatrical troupe, Stephen Lee Meyers of *The New York Times* reported that Stoppard "recently" became the troupe's patron, and led a workshop in Belarus last year ("A Troupe Is a Potent Force In Belarus's Underground," 8 Feb. 2006).



humor, characteristically both highbrow and lowbrow. Each delights in puns and wordplay, and in making jokes by subverting the audience's expectations. Stoppard once described his ideal of playwriting as "mak[ing] a serious point by flinging a custard pie around the stage for a couple of hours" (qtd. in Bradshaw 95). For both playwrights, inversion of syntax results in an inversion of meaning, which leads to comedy. As aristocratic Algernon Moncrieff complains in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, "If the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them?" Algernon further feels that the lower classes seem to be lacking "a sense of moral responsibility" – a reversal of situation, as the sense of moral responsibility is traditionally assumed to lie with the *upper* classes (*Earnest* 322). In Stoppard's plays, even the action is sometimes an inversion of what's expected: in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, we see "on stage the things that are supposed to happen off" (*R&G* 20). Inversion in *The Invention of Love* occurs not just in the text, but also in the characters' lives as a euphemism for homosexuality as well as a literary technique. A Wildean trademark, employed by Stoppard, is the elevation of trivial matters to a level of the greatest importance. Stoppard once said that *Earnest* is an "important" play, "but it says nothing about anything," a remark that he could (and did) apply to some of his own works (qtd. in Tynan 47). Stoppard's and Wilde's plays, for the most part, are not about changing the world: they are mainly about art. What is said, and the way it is said, is at least important as whatever thought or emotion the words may evoke. In both playwrights' work, there is often little difference between the

voices of various characters; everyone, more or less, sounds like the author. This is not necessarily a bad thing: each author has a distinct voice that makes it easy to recognize when other writers try to imitate it. In *The Invention of Love*, Stoppard mimics Wilde's style so closely that it is sometimes difficult to tell which lines are Wilde originals and which are fabricated by Stoppard. Often a line is Wildean in spirit but with sillier, Stoppardian words.

### **Shared Themes**

Wilde and Stoppard share one theme that is more pervasive, yet also more amorphous, than a mere coincidence of comparable personal histories or a similar authorial voice. Both playwrights are concerned about the relationship between life and art. They are especially interested in reality on stage as opposed to reality in life, and style as opposed to substance, especially on occasions when style equals substance. Common motifs in their stories include doubled people, who are often deceptive; doubled texts, which hold different meanings; and the doubleness of portraits, which reveal aspects of both the artist's and the subject's selves. Each of these different types of doubling offers a way of looking at the overall theme of identity – the playwright's identity as well as the characters' in their stories. The goal of this study is not only to show that Wilde is a near-constant presence throughout Stoppard's body of work, apparent in their similar writing style and shared themes of identity, but also to argue that Wilde is intrinsic to Stoppard's identity as a writer.

“Identity” itself has a double meaning: the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *identity* as “absolute or essential sameness; oneness,” and also as someone’s personality or unique characteristics (“Identity”). The word comes from the Latin root, *idem*, meaning “same.” While a person’s identity makes him uniquely himself and sets him apart from others, it is also a way that he connects with the rest of the world. Groups establish an identity for themselves by finding a shared trait, such as a style of dress, an interest, or a philosophy. Stoppard identifies himself with Oscar Wilde through intertextual references – as he does with many other authors, including Shakespeare, August Strindberg (*The Real Thing*, 1982), and Beckett (*Rosencrantz*). Both Wilde and Stoppard are especially interested in identifying what is real (or “in earnest”) and what is created or imagined (art, performance, the stage). The differences – and similarities – between reality and artifice incorporate further levels of paradox in their writing.

Chapter One of this study will follow Stoppard’s career from the novel *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon* (1966) through *Travesties* (1974), his first work to exhibit a major Wilde connection. This chapter’s primary focus will be on physical doubles: characters who have a twin – not necessarily a sibling – who looks like them. *Malquist & Moon* prefigures of much of Stoppard’s theatrical career; and both it and *Travesties* employ a Wildean use of physical doubles – or twins – to question the protagonist’s identity. Twins in this case are not just siblings: they are multiple versions of the same character, or two characters who

are so similar as to be almost the same person. The inanimate painting in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), changing over the course of the story, becomes as much a character as the walking and talking Dorian. The portrait and the person are two sides of the same Dorian, and are at first identical in every detail. When he finally destroys the decrepit painting, and himself, the decades of corruption render his corpse unrecognizable, except for the rings on its fingers (*DG* 167). In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* the title characters are mistaken for one another so often, they could almost be related; not because they look alike, but because they might as well be the same person. *Travesties'* narrator Henry Carr appears onstage as both his present-day self and his younger self; both parts are played by the same actor. Similarly, A.E. Housman, the protagonist of *The Invention of Love*, appears as his younger and older self, but the two versions of the character are played by different actors – the character is physically twinned on stage.

The theme of doubles will continue in Chapter Two. I will expand the definition of “twins” to encompass the deliberate duplication of, and allusion to, texts. The concept of physical doubling in both Wilde and Stoppard's characters gives way to an internalized division – double identities. The chapter begins with an exploration of intertextuality in *Travesties* and concludes with the next major Wilde connection, *The Invention of Love*. Housman and “AEH” in *Invention* are

an example of the split or doubled personality that Stoppard borrows from Wilde.<sup>2</sup> Dorian Gray's portrait is more than just a split personality: it is a reflection of his hidden, inner self – a self that becomes more real to him than its exterior. The painting begins as a direct reflection of his external appearance, but is transformed into a distorted inversion of his physical beauty. I will also use Stoppard's *The Real Thing* (1982) to demonstrate that intertextuality is more than mere doubling: it is the construction of one identity out of many others.

The invention of identity, that is, constructing a personality, whether it is one's own or someone else's, is an art form. Chapter Three will explore the boundaries of history, art, and life, using Wilde's "The Decay of Lying" (1889) to discuss how Stoppard deals with those boundaries in his biographical and historical plays. In his essay "History," Ralph Waldo Emerson states that *all* history comes to us as biography: "We are always coming up with the emphatic facts of history in our personal experience, and verifying them here" (qtd. in Bloom xxvi). In Emerson's view, as I believe Stoppard's plays illustrate, "[a]ll history becomes subjective...there is properly no history; only biography" (qtd. in Bloom xxvi).<sup>3</sup> Stoppard's historical plays – *Travesties*, *Invention*, *Arcadia*, *Indian Ink*, and *The Coast of Utopia* – are as much about the construction of biography as they are about history. These plays all feature actual people from history:

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<sup>2</sup> From this point on, for the sake of clarity, I will refer to characters as Stoppard and Wilde identify them in the scripts. Old Carr and Carr (*Travesties*) are two versions of the same person, as are AEH and Housman (*The Invention of Love*). Some characters, such as Eldon Pike, are designated by last name; others, like Bernard Nightingale, by their first.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Bloom cites Emerson's and Nietzsche's writings on perspectivism and history as early inspiration for his 1973 critical text *The Anxiety of Influence* (Bloom xxvi).

fictionalized versions of famous artists or writers or political revolutionaries. These people do not always literally appear on stage, but their figurative presence affects the plot and the rest of the characters. Chapter Three will pay particular attention to one type of biography: the painted portrait, an unusual choice of historical document for a writer, which is the focal point of multiple works by both Wilde and Stoppard.

An attempt to cover the entirety of both writers' careers would be unrealistic due to the sheer volume of literature, so I will focus on those works of Wilde's and Stoppard's that have the strongest intertextual or thematic connections. I refer to critical writing about Stoppard's plays whenever possible; but note that although scholars have paid considerable attention to *Travesties* and *The Real Thing*, less has been written about *The Invention of Love* and the wide-reaching correlations between Wilde and Stoppard. When comparing the two very similar writers, it is important to remember the vastly different social conditions under which each was writing. Wilde faced strict censorship from the British government under the Licensing Act of 1737, which required that every play performed in England pass through the Lord Chamberlain's office for approval. Stoppard was fortunate to follow the generation of "Angry Young Men" playwrights, including John Osborne and Edward Bond, whose plays pushed the boundaries of scenes and language considered acceptable for the stage and led to

the removal of the Licensing Act under the Theatre Acts of 1968.<sup>4</sup> While Wilde showed an interest in politics early in his career – his first play, *Vera, or The Nihilists* (1880), was about socialism and revolution in Russia – the censoring laws prevented him from writing any theatrical commentary on current political situations. The law forbade the depiction of Biblical characters and contemporary politicians in drama, and the Censor could refuse to grant a performance license based on *anything* he found objectionable.<sup>5</sup>

This study will attempt to show how Wilde’s presence is felt through most of Stoppard’s *oeuvre*. It is the same way that Lord Byron’s presence is felt in *Arcadia* (1993): people mention him so often, although not always by name, that it feels he is *there*, despite not being physically present. It seems that he is just waiting for a scholar to come along and point him out. Although two decades pass between Stoppard’s two Wildean plays, I would contest Beatrix Hesse’s claim that Wilde “had not haunted a Stoppard play for twenty years” (195), only returning to Stoppard at his appearance onstage in *Invention*.<sup>6</sup> As a reader makes her way through Stoppard’s work, she should become gradually more aware of Wilde’s influence, an experience which can be compared to Thomasina’s discovery of chaos theory in *Arcadia*:

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<sup>4</sup> The law’s wording was vague and provided few specific guidelines, leaving the censorship decisions to the discretion of the individual Chamberlain. The justifications for “censoring plays or cutting scenes, incidents or words were not publicly divulged” (De Jongh ix).

<sup>5</sup> Wilde’s *Salome* was banned from performance in England because of the rule against depicting Biblical characters; eventually, it premiered in France (Ellmann 372).

<sup>6</sup> Hesse’s 2002 article “Stoppard’s Oscar Wilde: Travesty and Invention” explores Wilde’s fictionalized and dramatized appearances in *Travesties* and *Invention*. It was a key starting point for this project; however, Hesse’s perspective is more Wilde-centric than Stoppard-centric, and makes no attempt to explore further throughout Stoppard’s career.

When you stir your rice pudding, Septimus, the spoonful of jam spreads itself round making red trails like the picture of a meteor in my astronomical atlas. But if you stir backward, the jam will not come together again. Indeed, the pudding does not notice and continues to turn pink just as before. (Stoppard 12)

Thomasina adds, “You cannot stir things apart,” just as the extent of Wilde’s influence becomes ever more obvious throughout Stoppard’s plays.



## I. DOUBLE IDENTITIES: THE INVENTION OF *TRAVESTIES*

Stoppard's use of doubling in his early works reflects his indebtedness to Oscar Wilde. There are several forms of Stoppardian doubles. First, the physical doubling of a character, which may be a case of twins (siblings); two characters who are like twins in that they look or act alike; a pair of characters in which one is a duplicate version of another within the play; or two characters who are frequently mistaken for one another. Stoppard also frequently doubles actions, by repeating a scene within a play; sometimes, a small variation in word choice or staging changes the meaning of the scene entirely. Finally, Stoppard commonly duplicates the texts of other authors, including excerpted or paraphrased versions of entire lines or scenes in the context of his own play.

The first, clearest connection to Wilde is Stoppard's 1974 play *Travesties*, itself a double of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). *Travesties* is a play about doubles and mistaken identity; it duplicates not only Wilde's use of doubled characters in *Earnest*, but also his plot structure and much of his dialogue. Although *Travesties* is Stoppard's first explicitly Wildean play, the nineteenth-century playwright's influence is also clear in Stoppard's earliest successes, *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.

*Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon*

Stoppard's debt to Wilde for his use of doubles is evident as early as his first (and only) novel, *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon* (1966). The novel predicts much of Stoppard's later dramatic work in three ways. First, in its characters: several of them double each other in appearance or behavior; additionally, the central character is an underdog, not the type of person about whom stories are typically written. Next, the book introduces the theme of a paradoxical relation between art and life. Finally, it introduces the theme of inventing a biography, and the process by which life becomes art.

The novel was published the same week in 1966 that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. In a 1973 interview with *The Guardian*, Stoppard recalled that "there was no doubt in my mind whatsoever that the novel would make my reputation, and the play would be of little consequence either way" (qtd. in Watts 47). Instead, rave reviews immediately greeted *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, and *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon* sold a grand total of 481 copies in its first run (Tynan 54). The book was praised for its cleverness, but was also criticized for being rather too clever. In my research, I have found that *Malquist & Moon* is rarely studied; I would not have pursued it had it not been for Beatrix Hesse's reference to Oscar Wilde's character Lord Henry Wotton, a mentor to Dorian Gray, as an inspiration for Stoppard's Lord Malquist (Hesse 190). While Lord Malquist is the novel's most

direct association with Oscar Wilde, the book as a whole is notable for the way it previews themes in Stoppard's subsequent plays, and for its connections not only to its companion work *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, but even to the later plays *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968) and *After Magritte* (1970).<sup>7</sup>

The coincidence of their simultaneous production is not the only valid reason to compare *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*. Stoppard's signature style is already apparent in the plays' structure: his choice of central characters inverts the typical expectation. Moon, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern, are all minor figures in service to apparently major ones, insignificant men whom Stoppard turns into the heroes of the story. (Ironically, *Malquist & Moon* and *Rosencrantz* as texts follow this pattern of inversion: Stoppard expected the novel to launch his career, but it was the play that would be taught in classrooms around the world and made into a feature film.) The two works also share a characteristic Stoppardian form: the text focuses on mundane actions while another event, one of pomp and circumstance and historical significance, occurs in the background. Many of the scenes of inconsequential, everyday actions happen again and again: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern flipping coins; Moon trying to bandage his wounds. These trivialities seem much less important than a dispute over the succession to the throne, court intrigues, or a state funeral – but the big events have little effect on

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<sup>7</sup> *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* has its own connection to Wilde: a line paraphrased from *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The original line, spoken by Miss Prism, "The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means," becomes "The bad end unhappily, the good unluckily. That is what tragedy means," in the Player's explanation of his profession (*Earnest* 341, *R&G* 58).

Stoppard's characters, and their daily lives remain much the same. They go from minor event to minor event, with only brief interludes of greatness. As Rosencrantz protests, "All we get are incidents. Dear God, is it too much to expect a little sustained action?!" (*R&G* 85).

Even though the genres of the novel and the play seem vastly different, theatrical touches in *Malquist & Moon* identify its author as a playwright. The first section, titled "Dramatis Personæ and Other Coincidences," begins the novel as if it were a play: with an introduction of all of the characters. The second section, "A Couple of Deaths and Exits," reflects both an accepted convention of drama – to be alive is to be on stage, to exit is to die, and vice-versa – and a truth specific to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, in which the main characters are trapped on the stage until they simply "disappear from view," exiting into the unknown (*R&G* 91). Death in *Rosencrantz* means an exit from one world but, "every exit being an entrance somewhere else" (*R&G* 20), the possibility of their coming out in a new place tempers the finality of their exit.

*Malquist & Moon* – like a good Oscar Wilde play – conflates substance with style until they are nearly inseparable, but a brief plot summary is still useful. Lord Malquist is the ninth (and last) of the Earls of Malquist; having no children to carry on the name, he hires Moon to write his biography, which will be his legacy. On Moon's first day on the job, Lord Malquist's coach runs over a woman in the street and kills her. Moon finds himself under great pressure, which includes not only the dead woman in the street, but also the two corpses that

appear in his sitting room. Additionally, he feels that society has gone to pot. Moon decides that he alone must set the world aright; he will use a bomb to do it. His plan goes awry when the bomb – set to go off during a massive state funeral – doesn't explode as expected; instead, it plays "God Save the Queen" and inflates a balloon printed with two words, their message "familiar, unequivocal and obscene" but never spelled out in the text (167). Moon, defeated, resolves to end it all. He takes Lord Malquist's hat, cloak and walking stick, and boards the coach, whereupon he is hit with a bomb intended for the earl. Moon and the ninth earl's coach find themselves, like the imaginary invalid Bunbury in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, quite exploded. The bomb is thrown by the husband of the woman who was killed in the first chapter, which brings the story full-circle in an entirely unexpected way.

A running gag in the novel – which returns in some of Stoppard's plays as well – involves a daffy wife whose husband catches her in apparently compromising positions with other men. When Moon wants to introduce Lord Malquist to his wife, Jane, they find the cowboy Jasper Jones rubbing her buttocks while she is stretched out on a couch. Later, Moon sees the ninth earl feeling Jane's breast. The truth of the scene is always more innocuous than it seems: Jones is rubbing cold cream onto a bruise; Lord Malquist is reassuring Jane that she doesn't have breast cancer. Stoppard often mis-directs his audience to form incorrect conclusions about the events they see; critic Hersh Zeifman calls this technique a "comedy of ambush" (Zeifman 217). Stoppard once said that his

writing tends to be “a series of small, large and microscopic ambushes – which might consist of a body falling out of a cupboard, or simply an unexpected word in a sentence” (qtd. in Zeifman 220). Wilde’s use of a similar ambush technique, and its influence on Stoppard, will be discussed further in the next chapter.

### **Physical Doubling**

In addition to the themes I have described, doubles are a significant theme in *Malquist & Moon*, as underscored by the psychedelic cover art on the Ballantine edition of the book (U.S., 1969). A man’s head, in the center of the page, is flanked by the mirror images of two women. Immediately below the women, two cowboys face each other with their guns drawn, loosely connected by the wavy lines of smoke coming out of their pistols – another mirror image. If a line were drawn down the middle of the page, the images on either side of the line would be virtually identical. Presumably Moon is the man in the center, and Lord Malquist is the top-hat-wearing gentleman who seems to be sprouting out of the top of Moon’s head. The composition is balanced with a round bomb centered on the bottom of the page; it is painted with the Union Jack, and tendrils of smoke from its fuse curlicue up the sides to frame the cowboys.

At first, I assumed that the trippy artwork – printed in eye-popping hues of blue, green, and orange – was simply a product of its time and had little to do with the story. A re-examination of the cover led me to recognize how well the art encapsulates the story. The two cowboys are Jasper Jones and Long John Slaughter, who fight over Jane Moon. They are twin anomalies, riding around on

horseback, getting into shoot-outs, and behaving exactly like Hollywood cowboys should – but in 1960s London. The two women are Jane Moon and Lady Laura Malquist, whose feminine wiles distract and titillate the male characters. Finally, the Moon and Malquist figures are only slightly distinguishable from one another – the only real difference is the fancy hat that one of them wears.

Moon doubles two characters – Lord Malquist and The Risen Christ – in different ways. First, he is the earl's inverse double: people mistake Moon for Lord Malquist several times, as if they were twins, but anyone who had met them would not make that mistake. The stressed-out, poorly dressed, and rather inept Moon doesn't compare to the always-at-ease, dandified Lord Malquist. (Moon could never be a dandy because he finds mirrors too unsettling: looking into a hinged, dressing-table mirror, he discovers that mirrors can multiply a duplicate many times over, into infinity; he panics.) Moon's other double is an Irishman who has declared himself The Risen Christ. Moon's behavior shows that he is much more Christ-like than the self-declared Savior: he acquires wounds on his hands and feet over the course of the plot, and sacrifices himself to a bomb in the end so that society might begin anew. (Moon believes that people need to be shocked "into a moment of recognition" of the terrible state of the world, "so that they might make a total reassessment" (115).) The Risen Christ identifies himself as the Savior by wearing a nightgown, growing a beard, and traveling by donkey, but he easily succumbs to the temptations of liquor and women, and lacks a sense of self-sacrifice. Moon is never mistaken for The Risen Christ, especially not

based on his physical appearance (most people, looking at The Risen Christ, see a man in a nightshirt rather than the Savior), but Moon's actions speak to a greater sense of self-sacrifice and honor than do The Risen Christ's.

Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Moon all have the similar problem of being mistaken for someone else – Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for each other, and Moon for an aristocrat. Several different people incorrectly guess that Moon is Lord Malquist, although anyone who had actually met the earl should not make that mistake. Moon takes advantage of this confusion in the end, deliberately donning the earl's cloak and hat, and getting into the earl's coach with the full knowledge that Lord Malquist had received death threats. Perhaps Moon sees this gesture as a second chance to make a *bang* in the world, in light of the failure of his first bomb.

### **Physical doubling as expression of double ideas**

Moon is an early example of Stoppard's presenting conflicting ideas through his characters. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have each other to bounce ideas off of, and tell jokes with; Moon has only himself, but he still has arguments. Again, because of the novel's form, Moon can argue with himself in a way that characters on a stage simply are not able. The novel's omniscient narrator sometimes permits the reader to see what Moon is thinking, and to compare and contrast this with what he is saying. Moon's interior monologue as it is rendered on the page is superior to a soliloquy on stage, because it requires less suspension of the reader's disbelief. (Stoppard's plays rarely feature soliloquies,



nor do Wilde's; this fact may contribute to the common criticism that their plays are all surface and no substance.) Moon explains that he "take[s] both parts...leapfrogging myself along the great moral issues, refuting myself and rebutting the refutation towards a truth that must be a compound of two opposite half-truths, and you never reach it because there is always something more to say" (*Malquist* 51). In an interview with *Theatre Quarterly*, Stoppard echoed his character in a discussion of his plays' lack of "a single, clear statement:" there is instead "a series of conflicting statements...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" (qtd. in Hudson, et al. 58-59). Stoppard once said that he writes plays "because dialogue is the most respectable way of contradicting myself" (qtd. in Watts 49). His early divisions of Moon's internal and external voices would evolve into a complete division of one character into two people in *Night and Day* (1978) and *The Invention of Love* (1997), as we will see in Chapter Two.

The central plot of *Malquist & Moon* is Moon's struggle to invent an identity for himself. He wants to be a historian and biographer, and owns Boswell Inc. ("Posterity assured. Copyright respected. Publication arranged"), where he can build his identity by writing himself into his clients' biographies (*Malquist* 55). He doesn't even have a first name (Lady Malquist calls him "Bosie," derived from the name of Samuel Johnson's biographer, "Boswell;" incidentally, the nickname is shared by Wilde's lover Lord Alfred Douglas), so writing the

biography of Lord Malquist should be a chance for Moon literally to make (or make up) a name for himself. Moon's opportunity for self-expression in the text is the shortest section of the book, entitled "Chronicler of Our Time." Moon gives his first-person account of the previous three chapters' events as though he were an eighteenth-century diarist preparing his life for publication. His version of the story glosses over much of what actually happened; it reads as though he were in control of it all, instead of swept up along the edge. Tragically (but comically), Moon lacks any skill for recording the precise details of Lord Malquist's personality: he catches only half of what the earl says and mixes it all up. Moon's literary legacy will be jumbled and incomplete, no rival of the Boswellian standard of record-keeping to which he aspires.

Comparing what actually happens to what Moon's records *say* happened suggests Stoppard's view of art's inability to capture life, and the futility of striving for an "objective" historic record. Boswellian Moon's lack of artistic skill and writing ability implies that biography is an art as well as a science. From the beginning of his career, Stoppard showed the subjectivity inherent to history and biography. Moon's life is already so absurd and artificial that it doesn't actually seem like life. He despairs over the lack of "natural" behavior among the people in his life: "they all behave the way they think they are supposed to be; as if they'd read about themselves or seen themselves at the pictures" (*Malquist* 52). And yet, when he writes his chronicle of the time, nothing about it sounds natural. Like everyone else who performs unnaturally in life, Moon writes himself as he

wishes he could be. Lord Malquist, like Oscar Wilde, “stand[s] for style” – he lives with great style, and has no apparent practical skills (61). The story is set in the present century but Lord Malquist is a revenant from an earlier time: he travels in a horse-drawn coach, dresses in the flamboyant style of the Gilded Age, and speaks like an Oscar Wilde character (“If they are all so obsessed with change,” he says of a group of protesters, “they should begin by changing for dinner” (4)). His only real purpose or duty in life is to be stylish; fortunately, he excels at it.

Although Lord Malquist gets first billing in the title, *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon* is more Moon’s story than his. To put it in theatrical terms, Moon is always onstage, and Lord Malquist is only “on” when he encounters Moon. Even though he is the center of the story, Moon’s sense of self comes from his relationship with Lord Malquist, and the world at large. The world’s vastness overwhelms Moon: with every move he makes, he sees “the billion connecting moments that lay behind and led to his simplest action” (*Malquist* 67). As simple an act as straightening his tie is “the culminating act of a sequence that fled back into pre-history and began with the shift of a glacier” (*Malquist* 68). Moon seems mad, but he is no less sane than Lord Malquist, whose opposite world-view concentrates on the details of his own life to the exclusion of everything else. Moon sets out to write a book about his personal history, but it expands to encompass the entire world’s history; Malquist contemplates writing a book about Shakespeare as a source of book titles, but re-focuses his task on *Hamlet* alone, in order to produce

a “slim and useless” book rather than “a fat cumbersome object” (67). Lord Malquist knows how he wants the book to look long before he has completed its content, reminding us once again that he only cares about surfaces.<sup>8</sup>

A direct line may be drawn from *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon* to *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968) and *After Magritte* (1970), two one-act plays less notable for plot than carefully constructed stage business. In *Inspector Hound*, the main characters are two theater critics named Moon and Birdboot. (Another trait shared by Wilde and Stoppard: when they find a name they like, they recycle it – see also the name Mrs. Erlynne in Wilde’s story “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime” [1891] and in his play *Lady Windermere’s Fan* [1892].) The audience watches Moon and Birdboot, who watch a *Mousetrap*-style murder mystery. The barrier between art and life fades to a barely-visible line of demarcation: the *Inspector Hound* critics watch and then join in with the murder-mystery play-within-the-play, and we see again a corpse under the sofa (like the Moons’ late, unlamented maid), who this time turns out to be a fellow theater critic.

*After Magritte* is about making sense out of a confusing scene; by the end it, like Jane Moon’s odd social encounters, makes complete logical sense. When the play begins, we see a woman in a ball-gown crawling across the floor, a body laid out on an ironing board, and a man wearing hip-waders, standing on a table and staring up at a lamp and a hanging basket of fruit. It looks utterly absurd, but

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<sup>8</sup> Lord Malquist’s exacting specifications for his book are also reminiscent of Oscar Wilde’s attention to detail on some of his books, like the first edition of *Salomé* (1893): the cover’s lettering was done “in ‘fading’ or ‘tired’ silver,” and the book was “bound in ‘Tyrian purple’ wrappers to go with Alfred Douglas’s gilt hair” (Ellmann 374).

all is quickly made clear: the hanging lamp's counterweight broke, scattering its weights – .22 caliber lead slugs – across the floor. The woman is trying to pick up all of the lead slugs; the fruit basket is a temporary counterweight for the lamp; the man needs to plug the iron into the lamp's socket – but the bulb is hot; and the body on the ironing board is not a corpse, just a lady with a bad back. *After Magritte* ends on a scene of entirely new chaos, but the audience has heard all of the dialogue and so understands why the cast is behaving so absurdly.

Stoppard's first full-length play to follow *Rosencrantz* was 1972's *Jumpers*, which expands on the philosophical questions raised in *Malquist & Moon*. A disillusioned Moon says, "I do not believe in Man, and you expect me to believe in God" (*Malquist* 59); George Moore, professor of religion and *Jumpers*' protagonist, poses a related question: "Is God?" (*Jumpers* 9). Like *After Magritte*, *Jumpers* begins with absurdly theatrical stage business: a woman on a swinging trapeze strips off her clothes, while a pyramid of acrobats is destroyed below her, falling apart when one man is shot and killed. George's wife Dotty entertains her male callers much like Jane Moon; the strange men in her bedroom turn out to be her doctor or a detective (investigating the death of the acrobat, who was one of George's colleagues). *Jumpers* skewers academics and philosophy in a way that will be familiar in Stoppard's later plays.

*Jumpers*, Stoppard remarked shortly after its premiere, "breaks its neck to be entertaining as well" as presenting debates about philosophy and religion (Hudson et al. 69). *Travesties* (1974), the next original play to follow *Jumpers*,

also covers issues such as the role of art and the artist in society in a humorous, often ridiculous way. Stoppard acknowledged the two plays' similarities in a 1974 interview with Ronald Hayman:

[T]hey're so similar that were I to do it a third time it would be a bore. 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 . . . there are senses in which *Travesties* is a great advance on *Jumpers*, but it's the same kind of pig's breakfast. (qtd. in Hunter 129)

### *Travesties and Earnest*

In spite of its similarities to the earlier *Jumpers*, *Travesties* was, as Beatrix Hesse writes, "a 'watershed' in Stoppard's career" (189). It marks the start of a stylistic transition from plays with technically complicated, highly scripted business, to dream-like memory plays. Rather than simply presenting the action on the stage, as in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* or *Jumpers*, Stoppard filters the story through the problematic perspective of one character who acts as a narrator (Hesse 189).

*Travesties* is the most obviously Wildean of Stoppard's plays; its plot structure and much of its dialogue come from Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, so any discussion of *Travesties* must begin with Wilde's play. In brief, *Earnest* is about finding one's identity. Jack Worthing knows he is a gentleman, but he lacks definitive knowledge of his parentage; a kindly country gentleman found the infant Jack in an abandoned handbag and adopted him. In order to skive off to town whenever he feels like it, Jack has invented "a very useful younger

brother” called Ernest, who lives in town and tends to indulge in wicked excesses that demand immediate attention (*Earnest* 326). Ernest is not just an imaginary person: it is as though he exists when Jack is in town, because Jack’s London friends all know him as “Ernest.” An unfortunate, silly girl falls in love with Jack because she adores the name “Ernest,” and could never marry anyone with a name so plain as “Jack.” At the play’s end, it is revealed that Jack was christened Ernest, so he has been an Ernest all along, even when he wasn’t acting in earnest. He thought he was lying in town, but was actually telling the truth the entire time – for which he apologizes.

The character “Ernest” has a twin of his own within the play: not only does Jack play Ernest in town, but Jack’s friend Algernon disguises himself as Ernest in order to visit the country. Algernon finds, upon stepping into the shoes of the imaginary Ernest, that a life and identity has already been created for him. Jack has made up stories about his “younger brother” and Cecily, Jack’s ward, has dreamed up an elaborate romance between herself and Ernest, which all took place in the pages of her diary without her ever having met him.

Algernon Moncrieff, the erstwhile “wicked younger brother Ernest,” is quite familiar with imaginary friends. Not only did he invent a friend himself, “an invaluable permanent invalid” named Bunbury, he also created a term to describe the practice of creating such friends (*Earnest* 326). A “Bunburyist” is someone who invents a friend in order to come up to town, or go down to the country, or otherwise escape from social obligations. (Likewise, the practice of inventing

such friends is called “Bunburying”.) Without his realizing it, Jack has become “one of the most advanced Bunburyists” because he has invented an entire personality for Ernest that he, Jack, needs to maintain – Jack has heaps of money, for example, but he can’t dine out freely in town because *Ernest* doesn’t have money (*Earnest* 326).

Jack and Algernon’s Bunburying is an innocent form of the double life: they are deceiving their acquaintances, but not from any truly malicious intent; they simply need a way to avoid dull dinner parties. Their author, of course, led a double life that was not so innocent: from 1893 to 1895, Wilde carried on an affair with Lord Alfred Douglas, while maintaining the public appearance of his marriage to Constance Lloyd Wilde. Wilde’s protagonist in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (published in 1891, before Wilde and Douglas had met), illustrates the diabolical side of such a double life. Dorian spends his time in occupations that corrupt his own life, and the lives of other innocents, but his outward appearance allows him to get away with it. By the standards of nineteenth-century pseudosciences like physiognomy, no one with a face like Dorian’s can do wrong. He *looks* good – he has “the look of one who had kept himself unspotted from the world” – therefore, he must *be* good (*DG* 102). The portrait, hidden away in an upper room, bears the physical scars; “the leprosy of sins were slowly eating the thing away” (*DG* 122). As Richard Ellmann notes, Dorian Gray’s “fearsome lechery” becomes “mild gluttony” – Algernon’s insatiable taste for cucumber sandwiches – in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (422). Bunburying is a more



innocent pastime than Dorian's double life; Jack's and Algernon's worst activity is flagrant overspending, most likely on extravagant food and clothing. Ironically, their double lives make them seem more virtuous rather than more depraved: Bunbury and Ernest are charity cases, so Algernon and Jack appear to be doing good deeds by devoting their time to taking care of their friends.

The double lives in *Travesties* retain aspects of both Algernon's relative innocence and Dorian Gray's sense of danger: characters don disguises and impersonate each other in the service of international espionage and intrigue, but no one acts so diabolically as Dorian. *Travesties* concerns one British man in Zurich, Switzerland, who is caught in the crux of multiple historical events: the end of World War I, the birth of Dadaism, and the eve of the Russian Revolution. The man, Henry Carr, encounters three major figures of literature, art and politics, who are also in Zurich at this moment: James Joyce, author of *Ulysses*; Tristan Tzara, one of the founding Dadaists; and Vladimir Lenin, soon-to-be Soviet dictator. The play germinated from the fact that Joyce, Tzara and Lenin *were* coincidentally in Zurich within a period of two years. Such historical coincidences evidently influenced many of Stoppard's later plays, which also use fictionalized versions of historical people as characters.) The play is Carr's recollection, many years later, of his time in Zurich, filtered through the lens of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.<sup>9</sup> It is striking here how art shapes life and history in *Travesties*.

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<sup>9</sup> Another of Stoppard's plays reminiscent of *Earnest* is *Hapgood* (1988), a complicated, confusing play about Cold War spies and physics, in which characters don disguises and complex family lineages are revealed. The title character Hapgood disguises herself as her imaginary twin sister "Celia" (also a possible reference to Shakespeare's *As You Like It*) in order to bust Agent

Stoppard's Carr is a caricature that is sketched from the known facts about the historical Henry Carr. Carr *was* in Zurich at the end of World War I; he played Algernon Moncrieff in a 1918 production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*; and he sued the theatrical troupe's business manager – Joyce – for the cost of several items of clothing he had purchased for a costume. It therefore seems logical, in the exaggerated world of *Travesties*, that Stoppard's Joyce piques Carr's interest in playing Algernon by describing the play in terms of costumes instead of plot.

Each *Travesties* character doubles someone in the *Earnest* plot: Cecily and Gwendolen's names come directly from *Earnest*, although Stoppard has re-invented their personalities; James Joyce corresponds to Lady Augusta Bracknell; Tristan Tzara to Jack Worthing; and Henry Carr, the non-celebrity, to Algernon. Vladimir Lenin is a writer like Miss Prism, but appears in disguise as a priest (the Rev. Canon Chasuble), and Nadya Lenin appears dressed as a Miss Prism character. The Lenins remain mostly outside the sphere of Wildean influence, only rarely speaking his words in a scene. *Travesties* may be the best example of the Bloomian "anxiety of influence" at work in the Stoppard-Wilde relationship: "the new [work's] achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later [artist] himself had written the precursor's characteristic work" (Bloom 16; qtd. in Hesse 189).

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Ridley and his (rather wicked) twin brother, who is called Ernest. *Hapgood* ends with a revelation of parentage: the father of Hapgood's son turns out to be her sometime-enemy Agent Kerner, an unexpected twist akin to Jack Worthing's discovering that he is his friend Algernon's long-lost brother in *Earnest*.

The plot follows *Earnest* fairly closely, with some important shifts. The major characters all correspond to the major characters in *Earnest*, but the Algernon character (Carr) is the narrator and the central figure of the play, instead of the Jack character. Stoppard changes the locations so that, instead of town and country as in *Earnest*, the scenes in *Travesties* take place in Carr's apartment and the Zurich Public Library. No one in Zurich is overtly described as a Bunburyist, but deception is necessary even in neutral Switzerland, mostly for reasons of self-preservation. Vladimir Lenin needs to leave the country unnoticed by British officials, so he disguises himself as a priest. Tristan Tzara, trying to avoid Lenin's animosity towards Dadaism, disassociates himself from the movement by lying that it is his younger brother Tristan who is the artist, and a disgrace to the family. Lenin continues watching him while Tzara applies for a library ticket; Tzara is paranoid and writes down "Jack" – and so he is left with the name "Tristan in the Meierei Bar and Jack in the library," which parallels Jack Worthing's explanation that he is "Ernest in town and Jack in the country" (*Travesties* 27; *Earnest* 325). Like Algernon, Carr pretends to be the no-good younger brother using his friend's alter ego; he dresses as Tzara and borrows his business card ("Tristan Tzara. Dada, Dada, Dada.") in order to meet Cecily – but this isn't just a light-hearted Bunburying expedition for Carr, because he is also (ineffectually) spying on Lenin (*Travesties* 46).

### Two Versions of the Same Character: Henry Carr

In addition to doubling for Algernon, Henry Carr doubles himself: appearing both as the present-day old Carr, and the youthful Carr of the Consulate, as he remembers himself. Like his *Earnest* counterpart, Old Carr is a Bunburyist, briefly escaping his present life by reminiscing about an invented past version of himself. For Old Carr, Bunburying is an opportunity for idealization – a chance to invent the biography that Old Carr wishes he had had, as Moon does with his written account of the day with Lord Malquist. Old Carr remembers being wittier (quoting Oscar Wilde in daily conversation) and more sly (the ‘Tristan Tzara’ disguise) than he actually was.<sup>10</sup> From the very beginning, Carr tries to establish himself in relation to the famous people he met in Zurich: he runs through a list of memoir titles (“Memories of James Joyce. James Joyce As I Knew Him. The James Joyce I Knew. Through the Courts With James Joyce...”) and begins with a self-important statement about knowing Joyce “at the height of his powers, his genius in full flood” (*Travesties* 6). Carr contradicts himself in his description of Joyce, first describing him “in short” as “a complex personality, an enigma,” and then as “a liar and a hypocrite, a tight-fisted, sponging, fornicating drunk” – and Carr quickly establishes himself as an unreliable narrator who imposes his own biases on any story (6-7). Carr’s taking control of his own story is another appearance of the theme of biographical (re-)invention. He is “mentioned in the books” (of history and literature) as two things: a man who

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<sup>10</sup> This theme of the invention of personality comes out even more plainly, as we will see, in *The Invention of Love*.

sued James Joyce for the cost of a pair of trousers, and as the drunken, foul-mouthed Private Carr who punches Stephen Dedalus (a character whom Joyce loosely based on himself) in Joyce's *Ulysses* (9).

Regardless of his prior literary incarnation, Stoppard's Henry Carr is a recognizably Wildean character, especially in his fashion sense. This Carr recalls his clothing as clearly as, or even more clearly than, the events at which he wore them. When the Great War broke out, Carr tells us, he was in Savile Row to order new clothes – already wearing “a hounds-tooth check slightly flared behind the knee, quite unusual” – and he commemorated the occasion by ordering “a complete suit of Harris knicker-bockers” before shipping off to France (*Travesties* 11). Carr clearly suffers from the psychological damage expected of a veteran, but those scars are obscured by his distress at the damage suffered by his clothes:

CARR: Nobody who has not been in the trenches can have the faintest conception of the horror of it. I had hardly set foot in France before I sank in up to the knees in a pair of twill jodhpurs . . . And so it went on – the sixteen ounce serge, the heavy worsteds, the silk flannel mixture – until I was invalided out with a bullet through the calf of an irreplaceable lambswool dyed khaki in the yarn to my own specification. I tell you, there is nothing in Switzerland to compare with it.

TZARA: Oh, come now, Henry, your trousers always look –

CARR: I mean with trench warfare. (20)

Carr's clothes are vitally important for two reasons. First, his dedication to fashion is another example of Stoppard's comedy of inversion, which gives the most serious consideration to trivial matters. Second, Carr's clothing determines his identity on stage: only a “hat and dressing gown” mark the difference between Old Carr and young Henry Carr (*Travesties* 9). Practically speaking, costuming

helps identify any character on a stage, but Carr's costumes gain greater importance because the character cares so much about what he is wearing. At the beginning of the second act, Carr enters in a "Tzara" disguise: "monocled and wearing blazer, cream flannels, boater..." (45). The audience may even mistake him for Tzara when he first comes on stage, which makes it all the more understandable when Cecily supposes him to be the "decadent nihilist younger brother" (*Travesties* 46).

*Travesties*, like *Earnest*, concludes by unmasking its lead character. In the stage directions, Stoppard alerts his readers (and performers) early on to the frequent "time-slips" that will occur when "Carr's memory drops a scene" (11); Old Carr clarifies the technique for a viewing audience by acknowledging that he "got [his] wires crossed a bit here and there" (43). Carr's unreliable memory is a boon to Stoppard, who can then attribute any historical inaccuracies to his narrator's faulty mind rather than to the playwright's questionable research. *Travesties* presents utterly subjective versions of biography and history, as Old Cecily reminds us at the end of the play. Carr, like Jack and Algernon, is unmasked in his Bunburying. Old Cecily officially debunks most of the plot:

No, no, no, no it's pathetic though there was a court case I admit, and your trousers came into it, I don't deny, but you never got close to Vladimir Ilyich, and I don't remember the other one [Tzara]. I do remember Joyce, yes you are quite right and he was Irish with glasses but that was the year after – 1918 – and the train had long gone from the station! (70)

*Travesties'* ending is unexpectedly poignant. At first, it looks as if Stoppard will end with a conventional comedy ending of two happy couples and marriages all

around. But he sends all characters offstage, except for Old Carr, alone with his unreliable memories. The unreliability of memory, and the creation of history, would come to be more frequently repeated themes in Stoppard's later works.

*Travesties* and *Earnest* have much in common, including a recurring theme of mistaken identity and defining one's own identity; however, they are unlikely ever to be mistaken for each other. *Travesties* illustrates Stoppard's borrowing from other playwrights, in which he can keep some of the original dialogue but has the freedom to change other sections. Indeed, he also adapts and translates foreign language plays for the English stage.<sup>11</sup>

Is *Travesties* an adaptation of *Earnest*, or is it a twentieth-century translation? A new version of *Earnest* seems unnecessarily difficult to write because Wilde's play is so particular to its original era. It would be difficult to adapt the script by changing location alone; 1890s London is a world apart from most twentieth- or twenty-first century cities. *Travesties* has the location and time period change requisite for an adaptation, but the characters are so greatly different from the source material that Stoppard creates a play that is uniquely his own. What makes an original text, then, if an author may borrow from another? *The Invention of Love*, Wilde's next major appearance in Stoppard's works, will address this question and several others about the creation and criticism of texts.

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<sup>11</sup> In 2005, Stoppard discussed his latest translation, *Heroes*, with Aleks Sierz of the *Daily Telegraph*. Stoppard noted the difference between adaptations and translations: the writer's intent. Adaptations allow for significant changes by the second playwright. 1984's *Rough Crossing* was originally "set in a castle in Hungary," but Stoppard moved it to "an ocean liner going to New York" (Sierz 2005). A translation, in contrast, must "be utterly faithful to the original," but the dialogue still needs to sound "natural" in English (qtd. in Sierz).

## II. INTERTEXTUALITIES: *THE INVENTION OF LOVE*

Just as *Travesties* can stand for the first decade of Tom Stoppard's career, *The Invention of Love* is representative of the most recent decade. The utterly absurd action "with a redeeming streak of seriousness" of the early plays lasted approximately from *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* to *Travesties* (Stoppard, qtd. in Bradshaw 95). Later in the 1970s, Stoppard's plays become more emotional and serious, "with a redeeming streak of frivolity," beginning with *Night and Day* (1978) and *The Real Thing* (1982) and continuing to the present (qtd. in Bradshaw 95).

Stoppard's next play with a major Wilde connection is *The Invention of Love*, which premiered in 1997. In this play, Oscar Wilde appears onstage twice: the first time as a parody version of himself – like the James Joyce character in *Travesties*, who delivers his first full scene in limericks – and the second time as the real Oscar Wilde, who converses with the protagonist. Wilde's presence is felt throughout the play, which centers on A.E. Housman, the poet and classical scholar. Wilde and Housman's academic careers at Oxford overlapped by one year (1877), but there is no historical record of their ever meeting.

Stoppard's stylistic use of doubles continues in *The Invention of Love*. There is, first, physical doubling and twinning: two versions of Wilde and two versions of Housman appear onstage, and Stoppard presents the flashy Wilde as a



foil to Housman's Victorian repression. Once again, Stoppard bases whole scenes on texts from other writers, such as Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* (1889),<sup>12</sup> in addition to borrowing lines from Housman's and Wilde's own writings. Certain scenes are repeated, particularly one of Housman's college memories, which gains new significance each time we see it. This chapter is about texts: how Stoppard uses other people's texts, including but not limited to Oscar Wilde's, to build his scripts, and the way that intertextuality shapes his identity as a writer.

Referring to other writers is a major component of the Stoppardian style. *Travesties* includes references to Shakespeare ("...who was he to Radek, or Radek to him" is an echo – and inversion – of Hamlet's "What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he should weep for her" [*Travesties* 7; *Hamlet* II.2.511-12]); Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas; and direct quotations from Vladimir Lenin's letters. Stoppard also alludes to James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) both stylistically and by directly borrowing lines. Such nonsense as "Deshill holles eamus" and "Hoopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa," in the chaotic opening scene, makes slightly more sense in retrospect (*Travesties* 2): these lines begin the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter in Joyce's *Ulysses*, the manuscript of which is mistaken for a chapter of Lenin's *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) when two folders are accidentally switched. Everything, including the characters, their costumes, and

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<sup>12</sup> Jerome's novel is a picaresque tale of the adventures of three men, their dog, and their boat, which Stoppard adapted for television in 1975 (Delaney, "Chronology": 4). A Jerome character makes a cameo appearance in *Invention*, declaring that Wilde's "decadence" will be outlasted by "wholesome humour and a rattling good yarn," like his own book (*Invention* 85).

the setting, has two or more meanings: one within *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and another– which could be the same, or different – in Stoppard’s script. In early drafts, *Travesties* was entitled *Prism*, after Cecily’s governess in *Earnest* (Hunter 114). The image of a prism seems apt: the angled piece of glass can break a beam of light into its disparate parts, rendering visible the components of the whole, or change the multi-colored rays of light into a single unified beam – just as Stoppard does with his various sources.

### **Intertextuality after *Travesties*: *The Real Thing***

In *The Real Thing* (1982), as in *Travesties*, intertextuality not only serves the plot but also strengthens it. Excerpts of other dramas (none by Wilde, this time) fit into the story in which the main character is a playwright who moves from one marriage with an actress to another. Henry, the playwright, and Annie, an actress, are having an affair. Annie’s husband finds out about them and asks for a divorce. In Act Two, which takes place a few years later, we see Henry and Annie married; but Henry fears that Annie will have an affair with her new co-star. (His fear is justified: she does.) Even so, the play ends optimistically, with a feeling of hope that Henry and Annie will try again to make their marriage work.

*The Real Thing* contains allusions to several plays, including Shakespeare’s *Othello* (Annie and Henry’s original affair is betrayed by a handkerchief), but is most indebted to three major plays about adultery: Stoppard reproduces dialogue from John Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (c. 1630), August Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* (1888), and Noël Coward’s *Private Lives* (1930).

(Stoppard also integrates 1960s pop songs into his text, which reflect on the happier stages of love.) Annie's career as an actress provides Stoppard the opportunity to incorporate Strindberg and Ford's words into the script completely unchanged: an actress's life is full of rehearsals. In one scene, Henry helps her practice her lines for *Miss Julie*, a play about a romance between a servant and his mistress; the cross-class pairing echoes Annie's relationship with the working-class Brodie, and foreshadows the age dichotomy in her relationship with Billy, the new co-star (Delaney 1985: 54).

By incorporating dialogue from the other plays, Stoppard encourages the audience to think like Henry and to compare the various pictures of stage love to real love. Billy and Annie begin their love affair while playing the roles of an incestuous brother and sister in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*; the actors' innocent working relationship is corrupted by adultery in the same manner that incest corrupts the innocent relationship of the siblings. Henry compares art and life, bringing *Private Lives* into an argument about how real love, unlike stage love, demands a show of feelings and even ugliness: "I don't believe in debonair relationships. 'How's your lover today, Amanda?' 'In the pink, Charles. How's yours?' I believe in mess, tears, pain, self-abasement, loss of self-respect, nakedness" (RT 231). Even though Henry's playwright's brain demands highly articulate (and therefore unrealistic) dialogue from characters on stage, he "disclaims privacy, dignity and stagey sophistication" and "reject[s]...brittle stage banter" in his life (Delaney 1985: 57). Henry's job as a playwright is to write

unrealistic dialogue that will be staged as if it is natural; he wants to reflect the emotions of life without using the same banal or dreadfully dramatic words as his predecessors.

Even the title of *The Real Thing* has a thematic intertextual connection: it is likely a reference to Henry James's 1893 short story "The Real Thing," which is about a painter looking to illustrate his models authentically in any given scenario – as Stoppard's Henry aspires to write real love for the stage. James's nameless narrator hires the ironically-named Monarchs, a middle-class husband and wife, who answer his advertisement for models. Try as the artist might to draw them in different situations, the Monarchs always look like their middle-class selves. The artist's other two models are a flower-seller and a valet, with lower-class backgrounds, who effortlessly inhabit a range of characters from classical mythology to royalty. The Monarchs are so "real" they cannot be anything *but* themselves, and they therefore look artificial on the illustrated page; the other two are able to pretend, so the artist can create something that looks like "the real thing" and feels natural. Stoppard's comic-dramatic *The Real Thing* picks up, in addition to the title, one of James's major themes: that "reality" in art is paradoxically less convincing, less real, and sometimes less moving, than obvious artifice. *The Real Thing's* protagonist Henry (possibly another reference to James), a Stoppardesque playwright, is better known for his snappy dialogue than for any emotional depth to his writing. When Henry is stuck for new play ideas, his wife Annie persuades him to rewrite a play by Private Brodie, a political

activist and inexperienced writer. Brodie's play is bogged down by what Henry calls "ham-fisted" attempts at naturalistic dialogue (*RT* 206); his characters speak like everyday people, or like everyday people trying to be clever, which is worse.

*The Invention of Love* (1997), like *The Real Thing*, tells a story about love and texts. *Invention* invites its readers to ask the question, How original is an original text, if it borrows from others? The play tells the story of a scholar, who builds a career out of translating classical Greek poetry; and of a poet, who draws upon Greek poetry for inspiration. The poet and scholar are one and the same person: A.E. Housman, famous for his poetry volume entitled *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), is also a professor of classical literature. Housman the scholar exemplifies Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence": he admires the scholars who preceded him for their work in reconstructing classical texts, but he feels that he could do much better, and works always towards the ultimate goal of coming as close as possible to the original text. I will return to the concept of two Housmans and two lives – poet and scholar – later, in greater detail.

### ***The Invention of Love***

*The Invention of Love* is as much about texts and textuality as it is about love. As a scholar, AEH focuses on the purity and restoration of original texts: he strives to recreate the author's original intent as closely as possible. This theme of finding the truest meaning and original intention of texts is especially interesting in light of Stoppard's frequent use of other texts in his own plays. If all the world's texts of Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, for example, were somehow lost, some

lines would survive in Stoppard's *The Real Thing* – as fragments of Aeschylus's lost play *Myrmidones*, mentioned by Housman in *Invention*, survive in Plato's *Symposium*. Stoppard incorporates some of Wilde's and Housman's texts (Wilde's *De Profundis* and some of his famous epigrams, and Housman's poetry) into his dialogue. He borrows a character, an incarnation of Oscar Wilde, directly from Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *Patience* (1881). Jerome K. Jerome's novel *Three Men in a Boat* serves both as a source for a visual scene and a multi-layered joke. Stoppard replaces Jerome's jovial, light-hearted "men in a boat" with Housman and his college friends, whose relationships are complicated by homoeroticism; and turns Jerome's subtitle – "To Say Nothing of the Dog" – into an allusion to Cerberus, Hades' guard-dog (*Invention* 102).

*The Invention of Love* takes place on the banks of the river Styx, outside of Hades – an appropriate afterlife for Housman, a scholar of classics. "AEH" reviews memories of his life and converses with shades, including Oscar Wilde and "Housman," a sixty-years' younger version of himself. AEH does not recognize Housman when they first meet; once the young man introduces himself, they discuss his studies, and AEH offers him advice. At the time of their meeting, Housman is in his senior year at St. John's College, Oxford. One sees the contrast between the optimistic Housman and the weary AEH as stark as that between Dorian Gray and his aged portrait; the young man is full of promise, and the old one bears the scars of his life. The action drifts – often literally, with characters in boats – from one scene to the next, one memory (real or imagined) at a time. It is

not clear until the end of the story whether AEH is dreaming or dead while he interacts with his past. In the end, AEH *is* dreaming, not dead – asleep in a nursing home, passing “the busy hours between the tucking up and the wakey-wakey thermometer” (*Invention* 101) – so we know that none of the action really happened. Even the scenes that take place in the past – and might have happened in a similar way, if not exactly as we see them onstage – are untrue, because they are filtered through the logic of a dream. For most of the play, however, it doesn’t matter if AEH is dreaming or dead: the audience follows him through his story, as it did with Old Carr in *Travesties*.

### **One Character, Two Voices**

Like Old Carr, AEH comments on the past from the present day. Unlike Carr, AEH and his younger self are played by two actors – “A.E. Housman” is made up of two distinct voices. The missing link between Henry Carr’s double voice (in the present and in the past, but not at the same time) and AEH’s doubled voice and doubled person (past and present together, in one place) is a character named Ruth, in one of Stoppard’s least produced plays. *Night and Day* (1978) is a play about the collision of African politics and Western journalism, in which the inner thoughts of Ruth, the heroine, are occasionally shared with the audience – but not through the traditional technique of a soliloquy. The text gives no guidelines on how the effect should be achieved so that the viewing audience understands the concept of ‘Ruth,’ except that “ideally” there is no “technical indication” (e.g. a light or sound cue) to differentiate ‘Ruth’ and Ruth (*N&D* 252).

“When Ruth’s thoughts are audible,” Stoppard tells us in a note before the text, “she is simply called ‘Ruth’ in quotes, and treated as a separate character” (252). Ruth is the only character with an audible interior monologue; ‘Ruth’ spouts asides and song lyrics throughout the play, in order to comment on and react to the action as it happens. Ruth has some long speeches, but ‘Ruth’ rarely speaks more than one or two lines at a time. ‘Ruth’ doesn’t break the fourth wall by addressing the audience. She is simply a division of the character in the present moment, who reveals Ruth’s thoughts about the action as it happens.

There is not a direct line of development from Ruth to Housman, but by the time Stoppard arrives at 1997’s *Invention*, he has found the ideal in splitting the Housman character between two actors. The pair can interact and disagree, and are in fact rather similar to another pair, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are like two sides of the same coin – “two sides of one temperament” – they are so much alike, even *they* have trouble telling themselves apart (Stoppard, qtd. in Nadel 303). As in Shakespeare, the two men are interchangeable in the eyes of the rest of the world; and Stoppard extends this confusion so that each even answers to the other’s name. The double-character device allows Stoppard more freedom to debate ideas within a play in a way that is both thought-provoking and entertaining. AEH and Housman, for instance, can discuss subjects as abstruse as the relative merits of different Propertius translations, and as broad as the value of being a poet or a scholar, without the audience becoming bored. One man speaking on a stage, no matter how relevant



his points of discussion are, will probably have trouble keeping an audience's attention. (*Waiting for Godot* would be pretty darn boring with just one person waiting.) Stoppard has said that he writes "argument plays," and "tend[s] to write for two people rather than for One Voice [*sic*]" (qtd. in Nadel 303). The two Housmans can argue and present the author's different ideas without confronting the audience directly, breaking the fourth wall and the flow of the story.

Stoppard has used double voices throughout his career, but his presentation of AEH and Housman is different from any in his work that had come before. In *Travesties*, the device in which young and old Henry Carr are played by the same actor allows the story to move between present commentary and past action on a single line of dialogue. In *The Invention of Love*, the division of the protagonist into two parts permits the past and present to co-exist on the stage simultaneously, because there are two actors. The present in *Travesties* feels like an interruption of the story, but the past and present of *Invention* interact fluidly. (Stoppard's increased ease in shifting between time periods may have developed also from his use of a similar technique in *Arcadia* (1993) and *Indian Ink* (1995).)

AEH at first seems a more reliable guide through memory than Old Carr, which makes the revelation that the action has all been a dream more affecting. However, if AEH were to recount what we see enacted on stage, we would consider him an unreliable narrator. Carr speaks directly to the audience, quickly establishing himself as rather a pompous windbag (as discussed in the previous

chapter), but AEH doesn't address us until the end of the play. Like Old Carr's senile mind, AEH's dreaming mind at times "jumps the rails" a bit, and takes him to a place or time he didn't expect (*Travesties* 11). Even so, AEH's memories seem more or less reliable until late in the second act, when they are quietly exploded. One scene with Housman and his two friends, rowing down the river from Iffley for a picnic, is repeated four or five times throughout the play. Housman explains to an acquaintance, "the three of us used to take a boat down to Hades, with a picnic;" but his friend Pollard corrects him and says that "it was only once" (*Invention* 66). The conversation quickly continues, but the reader or audience member who catches Pollard's line suddenly sees the earlier scenes in a different light. With each subsequent repetition, the refrain "Picnic! Locusts! Honey!" signals the re-appearance of the picnic scene (cf. *Invention* 29, 46, 66, 99). Each time the scenes repeat, the viewer finds a new emotional undercurrent, gradually building a rich, multilayered sense of Housman's character. The revelation of AEH's dream-state explains the repetition: this single day was one of the happiest of his life, so his subconscious returns to it again and again.

### **Double Lives**

AEH and Housman are two versions of one person; historically, A.E. Housman also led two potentially conflicting lives, as a poet and a scholar. Charon, the boatman to the land of the dead, is confused when he sees only AEH: he has been told to expect "a poet and a scholar," which "sounded like two different people" (*Invention* 2). Poetry and scholarship do seem as if they should

be very different things, and it is odd to think that one person should do both so well. Housman's poetry brought him fame, but his classical studies were his principal career. When Stoppard began the background research on the play that would become *The Invention of Love*, he was familiar with Housman's poetry, and knew he had also been a classics scholar; the playwright was attracted to the possibilities of "the idea of two people in one – the Latin scholar and the poet, the classical and the romantic" (qtd. in Nadel 502). A romantic nature, Stoppard's version of Housman argues, would get in the way of scholarship: as AEH says, "there are always poetical people ready to protest that a corrupt line is exquisite" (*Invention* 36). Housman's poetic and romantic nature, and interest in the classics, enables him to frame his relationship with Moses Jackson as the ideal embodiment of the classical Platonic friendship, rather than to acknowledge the homosexual feelings he has for his friend. Housman tries to reconcile his attraction to Jackson by framing it with the history of Plato, who was a mentor to young scholars, or the heroic stories of Achilles and Patroclus, who fought battles side by side – theirs would be the ideal love of friends, rather than the kind of love "that gets you sacked at Oxford" (*Invention* 40).

We may feel that poets and artists are not supposed to care about accuracy; their mission is to stimulate the imagination and evoke emotions in an audience. "A scholar is all scruple, an artist is none," according to Stoppard's

Oscar Wilde (*Invention* 96).<sup>13</sup> Housman based his scholarly career on careful scrutiny of other people's work; he demanded the utmost accuracy in his own translations and deplored the lack of attention to detail in those of his colleagues. However, Housman was *not* scrupulous about facts in his poetry: he had never visited Shropshire before writing the poems in *A Shropshire Lad*, and so added his own details to the landscape; unfortunately, the church in Hughley “doesn't even have a steeple!, never mind a graveyard full of suicides” (*Invention* 89). Housman's uncharacteristic academic failure probably helped his poetry career more than harming it: his pain over Moses Jackson and his unfulfilled university career evidently prompted an outpouring of poetry, that would be collected in *A Shropshire Lad*, a volume that proved to be immensely popular. Stoppard seems to ask us: does the scruple and care of a scholar's profession carry over into his personal life?

Furthermore, do poets really not make good scholars? AEH tells Housman that “literary enthusiasm has never made a scholar, and unmade many. Taste is not knowledge” (*Invention* 37). AEH's point is not unlike one made by Wilde's Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, who says that “a really great poet is the most unpoetical of all creatures” (*DG* 46). John Keats wrote in an 1818 letter, “A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence.”<sup>14</sup> Wilde's allusion

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<sup>13</sup> Stoppard's Wilde closely replicates the real thing: in *The Decay of Lying* (1889) (which will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapter), Oscar Wilde wrote that “poets are universally recognized as being absolutely unreliable” (980).

<sup>14</sup> From a letter to Richard Woodhouse, October 27, 1818: “A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence because he has no Identity; he is continually in for and filling some other Body. The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical

is probably deliberate, for he was a dedicated devotee of Keats. Perhaps Wilde and Lord Henry Wotton are right: to be truly scholarly or poetical, a person needs to have an objective point of view on what he writes about, or be capable of taking many viewpoints. But poets and scholars also need to be passionate about their subjects; otherwise, why write about them? “Literary enthusiasm” does not guarantee good writing, it’s true, or new developments in old ways of thinking. Over-enthusiasm is easily mocked, bad writing even more so, and Stoppard does his share of mocking both in his portrayals of absurd scholars like George Moore (*Jumpers*), Bernard Nightingale (*Arcadia*), and Eldon Pike (*Indian Ink*). Bernard, for example, is less passionate than he is simply dogged in his pursuit of Lord Byron’s biographical facts, with which he hopes to win fame and accolades. He cares less about checking his facts than about publishing as quickly as possible, and the play has many laughs at his expense. The creation of biography, and the connections between art and history, will be discussed further in the following chapter.

### **Wilde and Housman: Two Double Lives**

Wilde and Housman invite comparison personally as well as professionally. Part of *Invention*’s appeal lies in this juxtaposition of the double lives of both Oscar Wilde and A.E. Housman. The magic of theater and Stoppard’s vision of the afterlife allows Wilde and AEH to meet, as they never

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and have about them an unchangeable attribute. The poet has none; no identity.” (Keats 2002: 195.) Keats here proposes a third kind of identity, where we thought there were only two: identity comes from similarities and unique characteristics, but it also comes from what one *is not*, or *does not* have. It is a paradox: the lack of an identity is intrinsic to the poet’s identity as a Poet.

did in history. The pair have much in common: not only did both Wilde and Housman lead double lives, but many aspects of their biographies match, especially in their academic careers. Although Wilde doubled Housman in some ways, he was his exact opposite in others. Both men were critics as well as artists, but Wilde's principal career was built on art and Housman's on criticism. Housman did not achieve nearly the same "burst of light" that Wilde did with his career, but his fall was not so spectacular, either (96). Wilde's public love affair left him spectacularly ruined, and Housman lived out his life alone, but peacefully. He did not sit his exams at Oxford, so he never officially completed his university education, yet he returned to the study of classical texts on his own, eventually gaining a position on the classics faculty at the University of London. Housman's scholarly career, in the end, was just as successful as his literary one: he is still respected in classics studies today.

In Stoppard's play, Housman is even briefly mistaken for Wilde (as Mr. Moon had been for Lord Malquist). Jowett, Master of Balliol College, tells Housman that he may be capable of great things, "if you can rid yourself of your levity and your cynicism, and find another way to dissimulate your Irish provincialism than by making affected remarks about your blue china and going about in plum-colored velvet breeches, which you don't, and cut your hair – you're not him at all, are you?" (*Invention* 22). *Invention* might have been successful without a scene between Wilde and Housman; it would still have been a compelling play about an interesting life, even if the more famous poet never

appeared. But we would feel the loss of the strong connection between the two figures. The audience likely knows more about Oscar Wilde than about A.E. Housman before the play begins. That knowledge of Wilde's public persona informs one's reading of Housman, giving the reader a short-cut to a partial understanding of Housman's personality, and adds another dimension to it above and beyond the information given by the play.

It is fortunate that Wilde appears in the play at all; he could have been kept always offstage, like another literary figure who is central to but does not actually appear in *Arcadia*.<sup>15</sup> Critic Beatrix Hesse suggests that playgoers who are familiar with Byron's absence from *Arcadia* "may very well assume [Wilde] never will" appear in *Invention* (Hesse 193). Wilde is mentioned so much – at least as often as Byron is mentioned at the Coverleys' breakfast table – that he may as well be present in the scenes that take place in Oxford. Hesse also suggests that the audience would naturally expect "a play about 'the love that dare not speak its name'" to be about Wilde. However, Stoppard claims that he began writing *Invention* without any knowledge of Housman's sexuality ("Wilma Theatre Symposium"). The play did not begin as *The Invention of The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name*; it began with an idea about Housman as a poet-scholar, and Wilde was not intended as the focus. When Stoppard learned about Housman's homosexuality, the play became a story of unrequited love, framed by

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<sup>15</sup> *Arcadia* takes place in two eras – the early nineteenth century, and our own – simultaneously. In the modern-day story, several scholars are looking for information about the people and events we see in the nineteenth-century scenes. Lord Byron is supposed to have visited Sidley Park, but he is never seen onstage.

the classical poetry – about love, both platonic and romantic – that Housman studied. Homosexuality becomes a significant theme, but I would argue that the questions about texts, and the reconciliation of the scholarly and the poetic, are at least as important as the love story.

Not only does Stoppard present two versions of Housman on the stage, but, in a different way, he also shows two Oscar Wildes. Long before Wilde actually appears in the play, the audience hears a great deal about him through Oxford gossip and reports from a trio of journalists – Henry Labouchère, Frank Harris, and W.T. Stead (all three were real-life acquaintances of Wilde's) – as his social stardom grows. Like James Joyce in *Travesties*, who enters speaking in limericks, Wilde first appears in Stoppard's play as a parody: Bunthorne, a character from W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's comic opera *Patience*, appears briefly to sing about “walk[ing] down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily in [his] medieval hand” (Gilbert and Sullivan, qtd. in *Invention* 52). Reginald Bunthorne and Archibald Grosvenor are rival aesthetic poets, with amalgamated traits from many of the well-known contemporary aesthetes and Pre-Raphaelites; both characters “have aspects that come unmistakably from Wilde as the most articulate standardbearer of aestheticism at the time” (Ellmann 135). George Grossmith, who originated the role of Bunthorne, patterned the character physically after James MacNeill Whistler; when the production opened in New York the following year, Bunthorne's makeup was altered to make him look like Oscar Wilde, in order to capitalize on his concurrent North American lecture tour.



As Wilde's fame became more universal, the Wilde-looking Bunthorne became the standard for that character – so *Invention's* Bunthorne follows the tradition, for maximum recognition. Bunthorne is Wilde at the beginning of his ascent to fame: long hair, knee breeches, and a floppy necktie; in other words, a replica of the widely circulated pictures taken by New York photographer Napoleon Sarony in 1882 (photos in Ellmann 204-05).

When we finally see Stoppard's version of the real Wilde embodied, he is a vastly different man: it is apparently 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, and Wilde is living in Dieppe, France, following the completion of his prison sentence. In contrast to Bunthorne, who appears briefly to sing a jaunty tune, this Wilde is onstage for several pages, during which he is prone to weeping. Many of his lines are Wilde originals, or slightly modified Wildean phrases, but Stoppard waits for the final exit to give him the most familiar lines. As Charon poles across the river Styx, Wilde is heard reciting three of his classic epigrams, including "One should always be a little improbable" (*Invention* 102).<sup>16</sup> Indeed, both Wilde and AEH were more than "a little improbable" in their lives as scholars, poets, playwrights, and lovers.

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<sup>16</sup> All three epigrams were originally published as part of "Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young," Wilde's contribution to *The Chameleon* (December 1894), edited by Lord Alfred Douglas (*Complete Works* 1205-06). This particular issue of the *Chameleon* became infamous when it was presented as evidence at Wilde's 1895 trial because it featured Douglas's poem, "Two Loves," which concludes with the line "I am the Love that dare not speak its name."

### Public and Private Identities

As I discussed earlier, definitions of “identity” encompass not just uniqueness (an individual personality), but also sameness (certain traits common among members of a group). Furthermore, an individual has multiple roles to fulfill in his own life; he has more than one identity. For example, Tom Stoppard is *the* current president of the London Library – a unique position – but is primarily known as “Tom Stoppard, Playwright,” and is part of a large group of successful playwrights working in Britain. He is also a screenwriter, a father, and “Sir Tom Stoppard, Knight of the British Empire.” Stoppard does not often allow the separate areas of his life to overlap in public ways. He seldom discusses his home life in interviews, keeping his private life separate from his public persona. He keeps his family out of his work, downplaying the autobiographical elements in his plays – such as Henry’s playwriting career in *The Real Thing* – as mere coincidence.

Oscar Wilde also had two lives, as a private man and a public figure; but he had an additional life that was curiously, simultaneously, a public and a private one: he was frequently seen in the company of Lord Alfred Douglas and other young, fashionable men. Wilde gave generous gifts to many of these acquaintances, who were admirers both of him and his art; several of them were later called upon to testify against him in court. Wilde conducted his affairs with men surprisingly publicly, treating Lord Alfred Douglas and groups of young men to the theater and to dinner. His audacity in taking the Marquess of Queensberry

to court was all the greater because he and Douglas were so public about their affair, so that many people in their social circles knew or suspected the true nature of their relationship. One of Wilde's major concerns, which recurs often in his writing, is the sharp division between the public and the private spheres of one's life. Wilde clearly had a personal investment in the subject, carrying on a double life himself as a married man and a homosexual, but he was also divided between living a (relatively) normal life and being a celebrity. Wilde's public life was hyper-public; he made himself into as high-profile a character as he possibly could. I previously noted that he was famous for being himself at parties long before he was famous for writing anything; even at Oxford, he was known for saying clever things and dressing flamboyantly before he won the Newdigate Prize in his fourth year. In his public life, Oscar Wilde created a character out of himself almost as much as he created Dorian Gray and Jack Worthing. Sometimes, reading his works, it seems as though he was unable to create any characters who *weren't* like himself. He acknowledged feeling closely connected to his characters in *Dorian Gray*: "Basil...is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: [and] Dorian is what I'd like to be – in other ages, perhaps" (qtd. in Ellmann 319).

### **False Apperception – Deceptive Doubling**

The double life naturally implies a degree of deception. When this type of deception is enacted onstage – what Wilde called Bunburying – the audience is entertained by the dramatic irony of knowing more than the characters do. There

is another type of double deception in drama which *fools* with the audience's perceptions; it depends not on letting the audience in on the joke, but on deceiving them until the end. This is what Raymond J. Wilson calls "false apperception," a key technique of both Wilde and Stoppard. In a 1998 article about the comedies of Wilde, Somerset Maugham, and Stoppard, Wilson asserts that the success of Wilde's comedies is in part due to "false apperception" – essentially, when the action defies, or acts in the opposite direction of, audience expectation. He argues that Wilde's comedies helped resurrect the British dramatic tradition, moribund for much of the nineteenth century, and that this tradition continues through the twenty-first century with Tom Stoppard as Wilde's latest literary descendant. Wilson defines *apperception* as it evolves from *perception*: a viewer *perceives* one side of a cube – the side that is visible – and also *apperceives* the other, unseen side (Wilson 154). *False apperception* occurs when the viewer apperceives something that is not actually there; if the cube were a two-dimensional set piece painted to look like a cube, the viewer could still apperceive the unseen side, but it would be a false apperception. Wilson does not mention, but could have, the manner in which Henry in *The Real Thing* elaborates on the different ways of perceiving a coffee mug:

There is...a world of objects which have a certain form, like this coffee mug. I turn it, and it has no handle. I tilt it, and it has no cavity. But there is something real here which is always a mug with a handle. I suppose. (RT 206)

Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) is built, says Wilson, around the false apperceptions of its audience and its characters. Lady Windermere

apperceives that her husband is having an affair with Mrs. Erlynne. The audience has no reason not to believe this as well, until Wilde reveals that Mrs. Erlynne is actually Lady Windermere's mother. The evidence of the affair – records of payments made by Lord Windermere to Mrs. Erlynne – turns out to be evidence of blackmail, paid to preserve the Windermere's social standing. “The falseness of the apperception,” Wilson writes, “is the key to laughter:”

Not only does the discovery of the mistake have the surprise reversal value of the classic joke, but it also lets the audience members off the hook. They no longer have to face the choice of approving Lady Windermere's pain or accepting the threatening concept that their society is organized wrongly. (Wilson 156)

A false apperception also occurs later in *The Importance of Being Earnest's* founding plot. When Jack learns that he was christened Ernest Moncrieff – tying him to a family of repute and wealth, and rendering him a suitable husband for Gwendolen Fairfax – the humor comes from the recognition that both the audience and Jack had falsely apperceived that the origins of anyone found in a handbag must be lower class.

I would argue that *The Invention of Love* also offers an example of false apperception, although in a less comic way. Wilson distinguishes apperception from simple inference as mov[ing] along “confidently until something *disrupts* [my italics] that confidence” (163). We apperceive that *Invention* takes place in AEH's afterlife, but it is revealed to be just a dream. Stoppard deliberately confuses his audience regarding the location of the action in time and space, only revealing it at the end. *Invention* also raises questions of what makes love real,

and what fits the definition of real love. *The Real Thing* addresses these same questions about the nature of love, and illustrates another variant of false apperception: “intertextual apperception” (Wilson 159).

Each text that we read, according to the reader-response school of criticism, has some influence on the way we read and perceive every subsequent text.<sup>17</sup> Wilson shows how W. Somerset Maugham’s 1921 play *The Circle* might provoke different expectations in an audience familiar with Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan*. Maugham’s plot initially seems similar to Wilde’s, and an informed audience might be persuaded to apperceive a similar ending: the good wife chooses to stay with her husband whom she believes to be unfaithful. When Maugham’s heroine chooses to leave her husband and escape with her lover, the apperception is shown to be false and the audience is amused. Wilson cites Mikhail Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination*, a discussion of apperception between texts. Bakhtin posits that we call a text “original” when it surprises us in some way, through “intertextual dialogism,” or “the reader’s active response to a text which itself contains the author’s active response to other texts” (qtd. in Wilson 160). The comedy of false apperception is based on this sense of surprise, when things don’t turn out as we expect them. Surprise occurs “at the moment”

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<sup>17</sup> I would argue that a reader of Tom Stoppard ought to read every play with what Peter Rabinowitz calls “the Rule of Hyperdense Intertextuality” in mind: “any intertextual connection whatsoever is significant” (142). Stoppard’s *The Invention of Love* in particular is so concerned with texts, intertextuality, and the ways that literature influences itself, that it, like Joyce’s works, “not only encourages us to assume that any intertextual connection is interpretively relevant” but “that any perceived overlap, no matter how small, is sufficient justification” for claiming such a connection (Rabinowitz 143).

the reader's reaction to a work intersects with its author's reply to preceding works (Wilson 161).

Stoppard's *The Real Thing* takes the audience's familiarity with "apperceived adultery" (Wilson 161) as a topic of drama – without any overt references to Wilde's or Maugham's plays – and offers a new twist on the old false apperceptions. First, Stoppard switches the husband-and-wife roles: the opening scene shows Max accusing his wife Charlotte of carrying on an affair. Max confronts Charlotte with apparently damning details: she claims to be returning from a business trip to Switzerland, but he has found her passport still in the house. Charlotte neither confirms nor denies Max's suspicions, and exits the scene with her suitcase.

We apperceive this scene to be the first scene of Stoppard's play; it is actually a play-within-the-play, called *House of Cards*, written by the main character, Henry. The text makes no reference to the fact that the first scene is a separate play: we read it or view it, and are prepared to expect that *House of Cards* is "the real thing," A New Play by Tom Stoppard. Bakhtin's "intertextual dialogism" focuses on authors in conversation with one another, but I would add that intertextual false apperception can also occur within one author's *oeuvre* – he is in conversation with himself. By the 1980s, Stoppard's reputation as a playwright was established: he was known for grandstanding dialogue, puns, and witty asides. These are to be expected in a Stoppard work, as are highly theatrical, non-verbal scenes, like a man building a house of cards (in *The Real Thing*) or a

pyramid of acrobats – with a gap where one man was shot out (*Jumpers*, ten years earlier). Stoppard is fully aware of his self-intertextuality – as an example, jokes about Switzerland, where Charlotte’s character allegedly went, is a running joke that dates at least from *Travesties* – and he uses it to his comedic advantage. In *The Real Thing*, our false apperception is proved false yet again, as it turns out that although Charlotte *is* involved in an adulterous marriage, it is her husband who is the adulterer.

Another, more subtle example of Stoppard’s intertextuality with himself is Wilde’s appearance in *The Invention of Love*. As previously discussed, an audience well-versed in Stoppard’s works might assume that, based on Lord Byron’s conspicuous absence from *Arcadia*, Wilde will never actually appear on stage. When Wilde does appear, for a revealing conversation with AEH, that apperception is shown to be false, and we see another identity of Wilde’s, doubling the parodic Bunthorne character.

*The Invention of Love* is one of many Stoppard plays in which the author borrows a line of dialogue from Oscar Wilde; in fact, Stoppard has used certain lines from *The Importance of Being Earnest* so many times that his appropriation of Wilde has become a trope of his auto-intertextuality. In *The Real Thing*, Henry congratulates Annie’s ex-husband Max on his upcoming marriage by reminding him that “To marry one actress is unfortunate; to marry two is simply asking for it” (244). The audience has a two-part “a-ha!” moment of recognition: the Wildean origin of the line, and the reference to Stoppard’s earlier plays that



reference Wilde. In the first act of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Lady Bracknell utters the immortal line, “To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune...to lose both seems like carelessness” (333). Stoppard alters the line slightly and gives it to Lenin when he travesties *Earnest*: “To lose one revolution is unfortunate. To lose two would look like carelessness!” (*Travesties* 58). Stoppard ensures that his audience “gets” the *Earnest* quote by adding a meta-textual comment from Old Carr: “Sorry – did you notice?” Carr makes the audience feel smart, because “of course you did...you thought, he’s doing it again” (*Travesties* 58). This self-intertextuality is yet one more authorial trait that Stoppard shares with Wilde, who would gladly use a particularly good line more than once in his writing or in conversation. For example, Algernon’s comment in *The Importance of Being Earnest* regarding Lady Harbury, whose “hair has turned quite gold from grief” (*Earnest* 328), was originally uttered by Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, written four years earlier: “Her capacity for family affection is extraordinary. When her third husband died, her hair turned quite gold from grief” (*DG* 136). In Stoppard’s and Wilde’s work, textuality – the author’s own entertainment in referring to other authors – becomes intertextuality, and is also self-reflexive intertextuality: the audience is entertained by recognizing Stoppard’s allusions to another author, and also to himself.

*Travesties* and *The Invention of Love* are both semi-biographical plays that re-create and reinvent a life by using doubles. Intertextuality, as we have seen in *Invention*, is doubling in a textual form. In the next chapter, I will examine the

storytelling technique of intertextuality as it relates to constructing – and *re-*constructing – history; Stoppard's concerns about the role of history and life in literature reflect an affinity with Wilde's writing on these subjects. Biography, history, and truthful storytelling were themes in Stoppard's works as early as *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon*, and these themes only gain importance as his style evolves.

### III. THE INVENTION OF BIOGRAPHY

In the 1990s, a new subgenre emerged in Stoppard's work, in which multiple time periods interact on the same stage, re-telling the story of a life. In *Arcadia*, *Indian Ink*, and *The Invention of Love*, the audience has the sense of reconstructing the past along with characters who exist in the play's present. *The Coast of Utopia* (2002) departs from this technique by eliminating a present-day plot; instead, we follow three nineteenth-century men who unsuccessfully try to start a revolution in Russia. According to Arkady Ostrovsky, who translated the trilogy into Russian for the National Theater in Moscow, these characters – Mikhail Bakunin, Vissarion Belinsky, and Alexander Herzen – are perceived “not as real people, but as school portraits” in their native country (Ostrovsky 2003); Stoppard offers a glimpse into their private lives and reveals the real people behind the dry history.

Rather than using a single Stoppard work as a Wildean touchstone, this chapter will emphasize the thematic connection between biography and art in both Stoppard's and Wilde's works. Both authors seem to ask us, Can biography be art, or are the two things mutually exclusive? What happens to truth when facts are transfigured into art? *Travesties* and *The Invention of Love* are both memory plays based on the lives of real people –not just any people, but artists. Accordingly, the plays present an artistic rather than a scholarly form of biography, without cross-

references and footnotes for every fact; they enact, in fact, a Wildean type of biography, in which overall truth is more important than facts. “Art takes life as part of her rough material,” Wilde writes, “recreates it, and refashions it in fresh forms, [and] is absolutely indifferent to fact” (“Decay of Lying” 978). Stoppard is so far from being “absolutely indifferent to fact” in his plays that historical fact is often more than the mere seed for a plot; plays like *Arcadia* center on getting the facts right. Even in *Indian Ink*, in which the protagonist Flora Crewe is invented, Stoppard emphasizes historical accuracy; Flora’s sister calls biography “the worst possible excuse for getting people wrong” (373). Biography brings art and life together, two prevalent themes in Stoppard’s and Wilde’s works. *Travesties* and *The Invention of Love* illustrate the dichotomy between art and reality, but the plays themselves create a biography at the intersection of art and life.

### **Wilde on art and life**

Again and again, Wilde asks questions about Art and Life. How much should Art draw from Life? Does Art reflect Life, or is it the other way around? “The Decay of Lying” (1889), one of Wilde’s prose works, blurs the line between fiction and non-fiction. Wilde presents the piece, subtitled “An Observation” (970), as a dramatic dialogue between Vivian and Cyril, two idle gentlemen of the leisure class (who share their names, if not the names’ exact spelling, with Wilde’s two sons<sup>18</sup>). Vivian has written an essay he calls “The Decay of Lying: A Protest,” which suggests that the “decay of Lying as an art, a science, and a social

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<sup>18</sup> The Wildes’ sons, Cyril and Vyvyan, were born in 1885 and 1886; their names’ appearing in “The Decay of Lying” must be more than mere coincidence.

pleasure” is the reason nineteenth-century literature is so “curiously commonplace” (972). Vivian reads Cyril his essay, and Cyril argues some of Vivian’s points, picking out places where he contradicts himself. Wilde uses the two characters the same way that Stoppard uses his doubled characters, like AEH and Housman, or Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: Vivian presents one point of view about Art, and Cyril agrees or disagrees. The author can take both sides of the debate, and articulate *his* thoughts on the matter through his characters.

Cyril contests Vivian’s assertion that Life imitates Art: if “Life holds the mirror up to art” (“Lying” 985), then all of Life, even Nature, must be an imitation of Art. Vivian offers the famous London fogs as an example of Nature’s imitating Art, and Art’s influence on how people react to the world. “Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets?” he asks:

At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist till Art had invented them. (986)

Vivian sees his essay as the foundation for a new aestheticism, which seeks to investigate larger truths about the world by leaving behind the usual truths and looking at them in a new way. The story’s dramatic foundation reinforces the idea of finding truth – reality – in what is untrue: the two characters do not exist in the real world, but their presence in the story prompts us to think about how we see the world and its varied truths.

### Stoppard's historical plays

Stoppard's use of history has increased in the latest decade of his career. He puts the lives of real people on the stage, but his styles of dialogue and presentation defy purely realistic staging. Wilde's character Vivian bemoans the state of English art and literature in the nineteenth century, with its characters who "are taken directly from life and reproduce its vulgarity down to the smallest detail" and who "would pass unnoticed in a third-class railway carriage" ("Lying" 979). Stoppard's characters, whether based on real people or not, seldom seem like people one could meet on the street. The well-spoken, intelligent-sounding people in Stoppard's plays illustrate the anti-realism philosophy Wilde puts forth in "The Decay of Lying": "If a novelist [or a playwright] is base enough to go to life for his personages he should at least pretend that they are creations, and not boast of them as copies" (975). Setting *Travesties* in Old Carr's unreliable memory and *Invention* in AEH's dream absolves Stoppard of complete responsibility to history, allowing him the freedom to create characters rather than copies of the real people. Art focuses on subjective historiography rather than (ostensibly) objective history – that is, on the author's tone and the audience's emotions and perceptions, rather than on the actual facts of the event. Even when writing about "real people in real places" in the *Coast of Utopia* trilogy, Stoppard has said that he felt a greater need for "the books, not the places...to protect [him]self from reality" (qtd. in Ostrovsky). In the same interview, Stoppard expresses shock upon arriving at the real Bakunin estate: "One tends to think one

has invented the world of the play” even when writing about real people (qtd. in Ostrovsky). Wilde would probably have agreed; in “The Decay of Lying,” Vivian declares that “the only real people [in literature and drama] are the people who never existed” (975).

### ***Dorian Gray: Art is reality***

“The Decay of Lying” also outlines a certain doubleness in Art which emerges from the observer’s perception of it in relation to Life. Portraits comprise a peculiar type of biographical object that, because it is art, illuminates the personality of both its subject and its creator. Ideally, a portrait acts as a window of insight into a person and a time period; the viewer connects with the image across great expanses of time and space, and comes away feeling something for the person in the painting. Portraits “use life as rough material” as Wilde posits that most art does (“Lying” 978), but each portrait reveals two lives. The artist’s perspective in turn may influence the viewer’s perspective of the subject; and Life in the “real world” can begin to mirror Art. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), as we have seen, centers on a young man who foolishly wishes that his portrait would age while he remains forever young and handsome. Dorian and his portrait begin as exact physical doubles; by the end, they have become more like AEH and Housman in their double-ness: two sides of the same person made visible. The painting “held the secret of his life, and told his story...[and] taught him to love his own beauty” (*DG* 78). Dorian’s innocent-looking exterior remains the same – it is as though *he* has become the unchanging work of art – and his picture

gradually loses its youthful appearance, aging and decaying with every malicious or unsavory thing he does. Dorian begins to fear the picture, and therefore himself, seeing in it “something that would breed horrors and yet would never die” (96).

Dorian’s picture is more than just his double; it is a mirror that shows the state of his soul – a reflection of his internal corruption instead of his external perfection – and highlights his lack of self-awareness.<sup>19</sup> The first mark appears on the portrait after Dorian inadvertently drives his sweetheart Sibyl Vane to kill herself: he notices “lines of cruelty round the mouth” of the portrait “as clearly as if he had been looking into a mirror after he had done some dreadful thing” (*DG* 77). He thinks back to their last meeting; the painting exhibiting the truth of what had happened: “Cruelty! Had he been cruel? It was the girl’s fault, not his” (*DG* 78). Dorian compares the painted image to his own reflection in a hand mirror, finding “no line like that warped his red lips” (77). Every time he commits some other misdeed, he needs to race home and see how it has changed the painting. Art becomes reality for Dorian Gray: the living man “comes to embody the picture” that was first painted, and shows a moment frozen in time (Craft 2005: 121). Basil Hallward bitterly calls the portrait “the real Dorian” (*DG* 36). His physical body retains its same appearance from the moment in Life that the

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<sup>19</sup> Another recurring motif throughout Wilde’s works is Narcissus, the Greek youth who was so handsome that he fell in love with his own reflection. According to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus sat at the edge of a pool and at his own image until he wasted away. A flower – that now bears his name – grew up in the spot where he had sat. Several characters compare Dorian Gray’s handsome appearance to that of Narcissus, and Dorian is transfixed by the portrait of himself as Narcissus was transfixed by his reflection.



painting was completed, but the painted image gradually degrades further. The Art embodies the evidence of every one of Dorian's vices.

### **Art, Truth, and "Mr. W.H."**

Dorian's true nature is visible only in Art; likewise, only a painting and some poems affirm Will Hughes's historical existence in Wilde's "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." (1889). (As their similar titles suggest, "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." predicts "The Picture of Dorian Gray," which would be published as a short story one year later.) "Mr. W.H." follows one man's quest to identify the mysterious person to whom Shakespeare dedicated his sonnets. Wilde conjures up a young actor named Willie Hughes, who had a Platonic relationship – predictive, in fact, of that of Housman and Jackson – with Shakespeare. The story is written in the first person; however, at times it reads more like a nonfiction essay than a story. The false, constructed history illuminates a truth about reality in life and the fallibility of historical documents. Wilde's story purportedly reveals a new, true history of Shakespeare and Will Hughes, but Will Hughes is a piece of fiction (a boy actor only documented in a forged picture) founded on a piece of fiction (the painting and the boy grew out of Wilde's imagination).

The quest begins when an acquaintance shows the narrator a painting of a young man in Elizabethan garb who is allegedly the mysterious Mr. W.H. Unfortunately, the painting is a forgery, commissioned by an earlier, equally passionate scholar of Shakespeare in order to convince skeptics of Will Hughes's veracity. The narrator methodically uses excerpts from the sonnets to determine

Willie Hughes's identity. Ironically, given his task of finding out another man's true identity, the narrator remains an anonymous "I". The narrator's anonymity places the reader in a position similar to his: we are constantly deprived of concrete information about his identity. In the process of identifying Mr. W.H., he creates a new history of Shakespeare's early life.

Will Hughes's portrait *looks* authentic, even though it is not; similarly, the narrator's evidence reads like an authentic scholarly report, even though it is part of a work of fiction. The narrator depends on the painting alone to support his arguments, because no historical records of a "Will Hughes" can be found.<sup>20</sup> Mr. W.H. exists only in art – in Shakespeare's sonnets (even his name is derived from clues in the texts), and in the portrait – but people in the story are not only convinced that Will Hughes existed, they are absolutely passionate about proving it to others. The Hughes portrait is "a fine lie," as defined by Vivian in "The Decay of Lying": "simply that which is its own evidence" (971). "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." is a self-contained "fine lie" of a story: the text contains all of the evidence – the only evidence – that would confirm the man's identity; the fake history reveals a certain kind of truth. The narrator believes in Will Hughes with such conviction that he becomes real, in a way. What about paintings makes us believe in their truth? Wilde offers one answer in "The Decay of Lying:" "It is style that makes us believe in a thing – nothing but style" ("Lying" 989).

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<sup>20</sup> Mr. W.H.'s true identity is still in question today; scholars do not agree on a single person who he could be, although one, long-popular theory suggests that he was Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton (with the initials reversed).

### ***Rasa: Real Art in Stoppard***

Painting is a visual medium; how can we explain the appeal or the value of describing a portrait only in words? Art, specifically portraits, appear in several of Wilde's and Stoppard's works: in Wilde's "Decay of Lying," *Dorian Gray*, and "Mr. W.H.;" and in Stoppard's *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972; radio play), *Arcadia*, and *Indian Ink*. A portrait captures a person at a particular moment in time, in a specific context; however, a good portrait has something more magnetically appealing than pure style. In Stoppard's *Indian Ink* (1995), the painter Das describes this quality with the Indian term *rasa*: *rasa* "is not in the painting exactly...it is the emotion which the artist must arouse in you" (407). The painting's *rasa* depends on what the subject is thinking, doing, or feeling; and what the artist is thinking or feeling, too.

*Indian Ink*, like "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," tells a fictional story about a scholar coming across a portrait in his research on a poet; the rediscovered portrait, and its lost counterparts, become part of the poet's legacy and shed new light on her biography. The action of the play happens in two different time periods, which share a space on stage (as in *Arcadia*); the audience sees the modern-day scholar attempting to reconstruct the events of the past, and is privy to more information than the scholar Eldon Pike ever finds. The interplay of past and present undercuts the audience's faith in Pike's credibility, as his theories about the past are proved wrong before our eyes. To whatever extent that the play reveals the truth, the audience perceives it via the art of the play, learning the truth

only because of the unique perspective that reaches across time. Certain events in the past happen in *our* present, before our eyes on the stage, so that we know they happened for a fact. Pike looks at art only to see if it supports his preconceived theories about Flora; he wants to find her portrait so that he may add the artist to the list of Flora's lovers. Unfortunately for Pike, he never realizes this goal; even the audience remains ignorant of what actually happened between Flora and Nirad Das. We identify with Pike's yearning to know the truth, because we never find it ourselves. Stoppard's keeping some information from the audience reminds us once again that art and history are both controlled by their makers, and that being present at an event is the only way to know what truly happened.

### **Reconstructing a life: Scholarly Biography**

Wilde and Stoppard mock those who seek out only the facts and call them truth, especially when the truth at stake is about a person. As we have already seen in *The Invention of Love*, there can easily be two or more truths in one person's life. Bernard Nightingale in *Arcadia* and Eldon Pike in *Indian Ink* are two scholars who work from the same instinct: the conviction that they are absolutely right about the life of a poet. Bernard is a Byron scholar, who tries to prove that Lord Byron killed a minor poet in a duel after publishing two anonymous reviews panning the poet's work; Pike studies Flora Crewe, wants to publish her letters, and travels to India to find a portrait of her that was lost. Pike's philosophy applies equally well to Bernard's way of working: "God made writers" so "the rest of us can publish" (*Ink* 371). "Art cannot be subordinate to its

subject,” as Stoppard’s Wilde says in *The Invention of Love*, “otherwise it is not art, but biography, and biography is the mesh through which our real life escapes” (93). In other words, pure biography cannot capture a real person because it deals in facts, not truth. There are facts, but they do not equal an indisputable truth about a person’s life; I, like Harold Bloom, see truth and the truth of recorded history as being subjective and open to an individual’s interpretation.

Bernard and Pike do not succeed in making names for themselves in quite the way they expected. Bernard starts his project with an inference – that Byron killed the poet Chater – and works backwards to prove it is a fact, coming to the wrong conclusions about Byron’s Sidley Park connection, the authorship of the anonymous Chater reviews, and the circumstances of Chater’s death. Pike arrives in India determined to find Flora’s portrait, which he thinks will prove she had a relationship with the painter; but he fails to find it, because he fails to ask Flora’s sister the right questions that will convince her to share her knowledge with him. Pike’s desperation is clearly illustrated in the following exchange with his guide, Dilip:

DILIP: You are constructing an edifice of speculation on a smudge of paint on paper, which no longer exists.

PIKE: It must exist – look how far I’ve come to find it. (*Indian Ink* 452)

Pike’s tenacity brings him nothing but the recognition that some things are unknowable for the people who come later. Any kind of scholarship, or an attempt to re-create the past, runs into this problem because people need to relate to the past on a personal level to understand it. Emerson’s essay “History”

declared that *all* history was biography, because “every mind must know the whole lesson for itself...what it does not see, what it does not live, it will not know” (qtd. in Bloom xxvi). History becomes a part of ourselves as we learn to understand it. Bernard and Pike practice a different style of subjective history: each is so attached to his preconceived idea of what happened that he cannot be objective to look for any other possibilities. As Hannah tells Valentine, Bernard’s mode of subjective scholarship is “only performance art” and rhetoric, “not about being right” (*Arcadia* 92); the same could be said of Pike. *Indian Ink*, like *Arcadia* before it, takes place in two time periods: in 1930, Flora travels to India; in the mid-1980s, Pike interviews Flora’s sister in England and then retraces her footsteps in India. (The theatrical format reinforces this truth: the only people to find out all of the available answers are the members of the play’s audience.) Sketches can be torn up, and letters burned. Sometimes those missing documents are a blessing: they leave the story open to possibility and speculation.

#### **“Write me well:” reinvention**

According to Wilde’s “Decay of Lying,” imagination and art hold more truth than realistic art. The biographer has concerns loftier than just telling a good story: Bernard and Pike are interested in reconstructing the lives of their subjects, rather than inventing them. Writing about real people – especially for those major cultural figures like Shakespeare – requires careful research, even if the available documents don’t tell a complete story. Historical details add more to the story than a mere framing device: they add a sense that the story is connected to the real

world and to us in some way. Not only Wilde, but also Stoppard, takes advantage of missing historical facts to reinvent Shakespeare, imagining what might have taken place during a period of his life about which little is known. Wilde's "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." (1889) uses the established facts and evidence from the texts of Shakespeare's sonnets to imagine a new identity for the person whom the sonnets are about. Stoppard's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) offers an idea of the events that could have inspired Shakespeare to write *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*.

Film is a photographic medium that delivers a "realistic" image, encouraging its audience to believe in what is on screen. If *Shakespeare in Love* (co-written by Stoppard and Marc Norman) were filmed with a modern frame story, it could be subjected to greater criticism of the story's historical accuracy because its photorealism would grant it a degree of authority. Instead, the story takes place in a period of Shakespeare's life about which we know very little. The writers thus free themselves to invent almost anything they wish without the danger of being taken over by facts – no one can say "you'd have to be there to know that" when the entire story *is* there, in the past. The screenplay draws elements of its plot and a good deal of dialogue from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1593), and refers to other moments from later plays. In the film, the actor-writer Will Shakespeare has yet to write a hit play when he falls in love with Viola De Lesseps, the daughter of a wealthy gentleman. Viola is in love with the theater, and disguises herself as a boy in order to audition for Shakespeare's

newest play, *Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter*. She is cast as Romeo, and finds herself falling in love with the playwright. Will uses their passionate affair as inspiration for the new play, re-titled *Romeo and Juliet*. Unfortunately, Will is a married man, and Viola is promised to another; their affair is doomed from the start. Viola goes with her bridegroom to settle in the Virginia colony; in her farewell to Will, she suggests he use their story as inspiration for his next play (commissioned by the queen for Twelfth Night celebrations) and admonishes him to “write [her] well” (Stoppard and Norman 153).

Neither Wilde nor Stoppard presents his version of Shakespeare as the truth – “Mr. W.H.” and *Shakespeare in Love* are teasingly marked as fiction. The story of Will Hughes’s forged portrait is a frame for a close reading of the sonnets, but the fictional frame story encourages the reader to be less credulous of the information presented as fact within the story. Wilde had to do all of the research in order to write his story, of course, but he presents his “solution” to the mystery as fiction, so that the reader feels no need to take the analysis seriously. *Shakespeare in Love* similarly takes great pains to present itself as a fantasy, but the production designers meticulously recreate the realities of Elizabethan life. Part of the comedy comes from the deliberate anachronisms seamlessly integrated with the painstaking period detail – amid the bad teeth, filthy streets, and costumes that are accurate down to the buttons, we see boatmen who crack wise like cabdrivers; a pseudo-psychoanalyst; and a souvenir ceramic mug emblazoned with the slogan, “A Present from Stratford-upon-Avon.” Instead of a modern-day



frame, we have a multitude of anachronistic detail to jolt us out of accepting the events as truth; the film comments on itself as a fiction. Anachronism in *Shakespeare in Love* functions as the scholarly scenes did in *Arcadia*: it helps us connect to the far-away era. The film is emphatically clear: it is recreating the *appearance* of the past without the truth of the past. Therefore, even the fact that *Twelfth Night* was written several years after *Romeo and Juliet* (instead of several days after), and similar liberties Stoppard takes with the historical record, do not detract from the story.

A large part of the audience's pleasure in watching *Shakespeare in Love*, as with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and most of Stoppard's plays, comes from its obvious intertextuality.<sup>21</sup> A long sequence in the middle of the film uses Shakespeare's dialogue the same way that *The Real Thing* uses Strindberg's and Ford's – in that both works present public rehearsal scenes on the stage with the full cast, and private scenes where Will and Viola recite lines in bed. Viola's cross-dressing and inevitable emigration to America partially inspire the plot of *Twelfth Night*, which Will begins writing at the end of the film. Stoppard and Norman cleverly show Will drawing inspiration from the whole world around him, not only the events that immediately affect him. He stores away suggestions of names and titles from his acquaintances – rival playwright Christopher Marlowe contributes the name "Mercutio"; actor Ned Allyn suggests the title *Romeo and Juliet* – and adapts lines he hears in the street, such

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<sup>21</sup> Ironically, Stoppard and Norman's script won an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay.

as the Protestant preacher Makepeace's anti-theater protest: "[T]he Rose smells thusly rank by any name! I say a plague on both their houses!" (Stoppard and Norman 8). The screenplay's comic intertextuality with the rest of Shakespeare's canon feels appropriate because we know that Shakespeare liberally borrowed plots and speeches from a variety of historical sources, including Plutarch's *Lives of the Greeks and Romans*.

### **Reinventing one's own history**

*Shakespeare in Love* is an author's reinvention of an historical figure. As Emerson wrote, history is also biography (qtd. in Bloom xxvi); in fictionalized history, historical characters can also have a chance to re-invent their own biographies. In *Travesties*, for example, Stoppard re-imagines the past of the historical person Henry Carr, and Carr the character re-invents his past, remembering himself as more clever than he was. Although Henry Carr *was* a real person, Stoppard had so little documented information to work with that he was free to invent almost anything he wanted. Making Henry Carr slightly senile allowed Stoppard to imagine his own versions of Joyce, Tzara and Lenin. Old Carr misremembers their personalities as a combination of characters from *The Importance of Being Earnest*, in addition to their accepted history-book identities. Carr, like *Malquist's Moon*, loses important information but retains the trivial, such as Joyce's middle name (Augustine, but "registered, due to a clerical error, as...Augusta" (*Travesties* 24)). James Joyce in *Travesties* appears as Lord Malquist might have been in Moon's biography of him: a verbal portrait drawn

from half-finished thoughts and phrases melded together, resulting in a near-caricature that evokes only a vague idea of the real person.

What about autobiography? If Moon can re-invent Lord Malquist by writing a biography, couldn't he just as well re-invent himself by writing an autobiography? *Travesties* and *The Invention of Love* both address this question in that they are two stories that are told in the protagonist's mind. *Travesties* is Old Carr's opportunity to tell his story *his* way, and reinvent himself in literature. Before *Travesties*, Carr's only lasting literary legacy was an appearance in Joyce's *Ulysses* as the drunk and swearing Private Carr. In the play, Carr can have his revenge on Joyce: he has the power to make the Irishman seem as silly and ineffectual as he wants. He can paint Joyce in a glorious light: a man "at the height of his powers, his genius in full flood" (*Travesties* 6); or negatively, as "a liar and a hypocrite, a tight-fisted, sponging, fornicating drunk" (7). Carr's Joyce eventually settles somewhere between the two: he appears more fool than genius, and more inconsistent than deliberately hypocritical. In the end, facts are less important than the impression they leave: the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter of *Ulysses*, for example, was not begun until Joyce was in Trieste, in 1919 (Corballis 159). However, it fits the *Earnest* model: "The Oxen of the Sun" is the only chapter of *Ulysses* that takes place in a maternity hospital, so it is the natural double for *Earnest's* infant Jack, who was mistaken for a three-volume novel manuscript and abandoned in a handbag. Therefore, Lenin's *Imperialism* – the other manuscript in *Travesties* – corresponds to a three-volume Victorian novel,

and Lenin is equated to Miss Prism, the flighty governess and erstwhile novelist. The idea of Lenin as Miss Prism is a funny re-writing of Lenin's historical person: he was brusque, serious, and a powerful public speaker, certainly *not* flighty. And yet, the audience's perception of Lenin might change for good after having seen *Travesties*: he could be known as the silly man who said, "To lose one revolution is unfortunate. To lose two would look like carelessness!" (*Travesties* 58).

At the heart of any biography – as in most forms of art – lies the goal of creating an identity. Biography requires not only the construction of a subject's identity, but also the revelation of the creator's identity. A biography illuminates its writer's life, as well as that of its subject – whether the author is a Mr. Moon, who inserts himself intentionally into the story, or an Eldon Pike, whose pedantry leaves so little room for storytelling that his subject "can hardly get a word in sideways" (*Indian Ink* 401). Like an artist, a biographer creates a portrait of his subject; he presents one perspective, one way of looking at a person, which may become the definitive version of the person in the collective mind of the public. He also captures two moments of time – not only his subject's time period, but his own. Biography turns facts into an element of art, and the lies of the art reveal a truth again on the other side. "The Decay of Lying" shows how the lies of Art gradually come to influence Nature and Life – not just our perceptions of Nature and Life, but what actually happens.<sup>22</sup> A lie, repeated often enough or given the right evidence, becomes the truth. Stoppard and Wilde never resolve the give-and-

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<sup>22</sup> This is illustrated in *The Importance of Being Earnest*: Algernon needs only to dress up as Ernest to transform Jack's imaginary younger brother into a real person.

take between art and history. Artistic representation makes the history seem true. History lives on through art, and art becomes a subjective part of the historic record. Art grants history a timelessness that it wouldn't otherwise have; for the length of a performance on stage or the time it takes to read a story, the past is present and real. The lies of acting, of invented dialogue, of allowing history to speak for itself, are made true.

## CONCLUSION

In her article, “Stoppard’s Oscar Wilde: Travesty and Invention,” critic Beatrix Hesse wrote that when Wilde appeared in *Invention*, he “had not haunted a Stoppard play for twenty years” (Hesse 195). Yet Wilde, in fact, was never absent: he had haunted Stoppard’s works from the moment that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern flipped their first coin. Stoppard has used Wilde, whether consciously or not, to invent his own identity as a playwright. The creation of identity is vital to the work of both Stoppard and Wilde; both address identity by means of doubling. My paper traces doubles through Stoppard’s work, progressing from obvious physical doubling through more subtle intertextual doubling, to biographical doubling. I conclude with the fundamental philosophy about life and art shared by both writers.

Chapter One focused on the physical doubling of characters and action. I began my first chapter at the start of Stoppard’s literary career, with a discussion of his only novel *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon*. *Malquist & Moon* is predictive of both Stoppard’s playwriting career and this paper: the novel predicts Stoppard’s plays by introducing the themes of biography, identity, and doubling; these themes are the basis of my study. Oscar Wilde appears even this early in Stoppard’s writing, in the person of Lord Malquist. *Malquist & Moon* incorporates two kinds of physical doubles: Moon and Malquist are like twins in that they are mistaken for each other, but they are also inverse doubles who are

opposites. Following *Malquist & Moon*, I discussed *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *The Real Inspector Hound*, *After Magritte*, and *Jumpers*. These plays demonstrate both the trademark silliness and substantial physical doubling inherent to Stoppard's early work, exemplified by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's absurd inability to distinguish between themselves. I conclude my first chapter with a discussion of *Travesties*, the first play with a major connection to Wilde. *Travesties* introduces a doubled protagonist, Henry Carr, and is itself a physical double of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

In Chapter Two, I expanded the definition of doubling to include intertextuality. I used *Travesties* to illustrate the way that Stoppard employs various texts. I then introduced *The Real Thing* which, predicting my third chapter, discusses the theme of reality and art. From *The Real Thing* I proceeded to another story about love and texts: *The Invention of Love*. *Invention* incorporates outside texts including classical poetry, the poetry of A.E. Housman, and the works of Oscar Wilde. Using examples from *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, *Travesties*, and *Night and Day*, I showed that *Invention* ties back to the physical doubles discussed in Chapter One, including the double protagonist; this demonstrates Stoppard's continuity and auto-intertextuality.

Chapter Three argued that Stoppard shares Wilde's philosophical approach to the relationship between art and life. Wilde avers in "The Decay of Lying" that Art is more real than Life, and Life merely mirrors Art. Biography complicates this relationship. Portraits in Stoppard's plays are a two-fold form of

biography, which reveal both the subject and the creator. Biography is a way for the biographer to construct his or her identity while re-constructing the life of the subject. As his career progressed, Stoppard moved from silliness to more serious historical and biographical writing. In this chapter, I wrote about *Arcadia*, *Indian Ink*, “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.,” and *Shakespeare in Love* to discuss the creation of biography in Stoppard’s work.

Although we have seen that they have a great deal in common, Stoppard and Wilde are still two different playwrights writing in very different times. The state of English drama was quite different at the end of the nineteenth century compared to the end of the twentieth, especially with regard to government control over the arts. A play such as *Travesties*, which overtly bases its characters on historical figures, would not have passed the Lord Chamberlain’s censors. Wilde’s plays covertly skewer social hypocrisies, but Stoppard is free to highlight hypocrisy far more openly.

If I were to continue with this project, I would want to take my exploration of biography in Stoppard’s plays further. *The Coast of Utopia* is part of Stoppard’s pattern of biographical plays that began with *Travesties*, but also marks a significant departure from his previous works. *Utopia* is broader in scope, but more obscure in its subject; its plot is more grounded in the facts of the events than is other “historical” plays. *Utopia* also lacks a present-day narrative that parallels the “past” story; no addled old man or determined scholar is there to bridge the audience’s connection with the history. At this point in my project, it is



tempting to speculate about *Rock 'n' Roll*, Stoppard's play that is scheduled to premiere at the Royal Court Theatre next month: will he attempt to engage his audience with a different approach than *Utopia*? Current publicity on the Royal Court Theatre's website suggests he has returned to the more successful "double perspective" he uses in *Indian Ink*, with the action taking place concurrently in Prague, Czechoslovakia, and in Cambridge, England.

*Travesties* and *The Invention of Love* are not only two plays about Oscar Wilde: they are plays about the invention of identity, in which the protagonists invent themselves through art and doubling. *Travesties* is about re-creating an identity, and *Invention* is about creating a lasting one. At the close of *The Invention of Love*, Stoppard's Oscar Wilde, quoting from "De Profundis," says:

I made my life into my art and it was an unqualified success. The blaze of my immolation threw its light into every corner of the land where uncounted young men sat each in his own darkness. What would I have done in Megara!? – think what I would have missed! I awoke the imagination of the century. I banged Ruskin's and Pater's heads together, and from the moral severity of one and the aesthetic soul of the other I made art a philosophy that can look the twentieth century in the eye.  
(*Invention* 96)

Oscar Wilde paved the way for Tom Stoppard in the twentieth century. Wilde's influence manifests itself in Stoppard's frequent use of physical doubling, his use of intertextuality, and in his grappling with the relationship between art and life, two arenas of experience which are simultaneously dependent on, yet separate from, one another. In this paper, I have argued that Wilde is a near-constant presence throughout Stoppard's work, and is an intrinsic part of his identity as a writer; Tom Stoppard would not exist without Oscar Wilde.

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