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**Quadrinomial Perspective on Art by
Means of Style Variation and
Dramatic Form**

A Linguistic Analysis of
Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* (1974)

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1. Introduction

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term “travesty” denotes

“a literary composition which aims at exciting laughter by burlesque and ludicrous treatment of a serious work; [...] hence, a grotesque or debased imitation or likeness; a caricature”¹.

In 1974, *Travesties*, a comedic memory play by the British playwright Tom Stoppard, was first performed at the Aldwych Theatre in London. Three historical revolutionary personalities of the 20th Century and the minor British consular official Henry Carr, who “is likewise taken from history” [p.11], appear as characters in the play which is set up on two different time frames. The outer time frame concerns the elder Henry Carr of 1974 who recounts the events of 1917, which constitute the inner time frame. The play’s major setting is neutral Zurich in 1917, “the still centre of the wheel of war” [p.26]. There, the lives of the Irish modernist writer James Joyce, the Rumanian poet Tristan Tzara, and the Russian socialist Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin) coincide, as a doting Henry Carr of 1974 recounts. As a matter of fact, all three of these personalities lived in Zurich during the First World War, yet, they were not acquainted in real life. As Stoppard puts it in one of his stage directions most of the play “is under the erratic control of Old Carr’s memory, which is not notably reliable, and also of his various prejudices and delusions” [p. 27]. Carr perceives himself as consul, resuming that “the encouragement of poetry writing [] was not the primary concern of the British Consulate in Zurich in 1917” [p.22].

Early in the play, Stoppard establishes the drawing room theme which bears a direct reference to Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Carr’s performance as “Ernest, not Ernest, the other one” [p.25] in James Joyce’s amateur production of the Wildean play governs Carr’s recount decidedly². Situations from Wilde’s *Earnest* feature prominently within the action and, thus, shape the plot’s structure. Moreover, Stoppard’s characters deliver converted speeches from Wilde’s play.

This term paper focuses on the role of language, the variation in style, and the employment of various linguistic features as a means of representing and parodying the controversial views on art and the artist embodied by the four major characters of the play. The paper also looks into aspects such as theatricality and intertextuality, as they account decisively for the play, its language, and the style variety used. Finally, the paper attempts to unfold why Stoppard employed the title *Travesties*. In short: how is parody conveyed by language and which themes and ideas are affected by this parody?

¹ The OED.

² V.L. Cahn: *Beyond Absurdity*. P. 132.

2. Style Variation in *Travesties*: The Debate on Art and the Function of the Artist

The very first scene of the two-act play is set in the Zurich Public Library in the year of 1917. It features the main protagonists of the play who are preoccupied with the utterance of seemingly nonsensical English. Tristan Tzara reads out an English poem in a Rumanian accent: “Eel ate enormous appletzara key dairy chef’s [...]” [P.18]. According to the Dadaist canon, which promotes “anti-art” as a means to contradict “contemporary academic and cultured values of art”³, he has composed the poem by writing words on slips of papers and cutting them up and shaking them out of a hat. Meanwhile, Joyce dictates utterances such as “Deshill holles eamus” or “Hoopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa!” [P.18] to his amuensis Gwendolen, and Lenin and his wife Nadya talk in Russian. This is followed by a clumsy “quadrilingual courtesy”⁴ between Lenin and Joyce: “Pardon!...Entschuldigung!... Scusi! ...Excuse me!” [P.20]. The scene ends with Joyce reciting a limerick⁵ about “A librarianness of Zurrisssh” and singing “Galway Bay”. When Cecily tries to cut him off with another “Sssh”, Joyce outwits her by completing⁶:

JOYCE: [...] when a lack of response
 [...] obliged her to utter the plea — —
CECILY: — sssssh! [P.20]

This incomprehensible and seemingly nonsensical mixture of languages and neologisms forebodes the tenor in which the play is written. Each character is to perform speeches in accordance with his view on art. This means that a character’s personality - that is heritage, beliefs, and personal background – and the concept of art this character embodies are represented through the way he talks. Although the characters are portrayed as being serious about their view on art, the mingling and intertwining of the aforementioned invocations evokes a humorous effect.

The library scene, thus, functions as prologue to the forthcoming play. The audience is prepared to listen to an ostensibly absurd parody, a “travesty” as the title suggests, but concurrently these preposterous scraps of conversation bear meaning which has to be deciphered. Four opposing viewpoints on art can be specified in Stoppard’s play.

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dadaism>

⁴ T.R. Whitaker: Tom Stoppard. P.110.

⁵ A five-line poem, popularized by Edward Lear. The rhyme scheme is usually AABBA.

⁶ J. Hunter: Tom Stoppard’s Plays. P.26.

2.1 The Futile Dadaism of Tristan Tzara

Travesties portrays three famous personalities of the 20th century who were in some way innovative and revolutionary. Tristan Tzara (1896-1963) was a Rumanian poet and essayist and one of the founders of the Dada movement. When Old Carr resumes about Dada he declares: “You remember Dada! – historical halfway house between Futurism and Surrealism [...] Dada! – down with reason, logic, causality, coherence, tradition, proportion, sense and consequence [...]” [p.25]. In *Travesties*, Tzara advocates his seemingly preposterous art by explaining that “music is corrupted, language conscripted. Words are taken to stand for opposite facts, opposite ideas. That is why anti-art is the art of our time.” Tzara claims that “[] an artist is someone who makes art mean the things he does” [38]. He wants his art “to mirror the essential chaos of the world, a world without reason, without order.”⁷ Tzara’s attitude stems from “[...] the War which has made everything meaningless”⁸. But Tzara’s seemingly nonsensical Dadaist cut-up poem, which he draws out of a hat, bears in fact meaning once the words are pronounced in French:

“Il est un homme, s’appelle Tzara.	He is a man called Tzara
Qui des richesses a-t-il nonpareil (?)	who has unparalleled talent
Il reste à la Suisse	He lives in Switzerland
parcequ’ il est un artiste.	because he is an artist.
‘Nous n’avons que l’art,’ il déclara.”	‘We have only art,’ he declared. ⁹

Although Tzara claims that “doing the things by which is meant Art is no longer considered the proper concern of the artist. [...]” [p.43], he performs the conventional role of a *littérateur*: he conveys sentiment and meaning by imbedding them into a literary work of art.

2.2 James Joyce as “High Priest of Art”

Stoppard’s depiction of the Irish modernist writer James Joyce (1882-1941) in the first Act is characterized by Joyce’s twofold approach to art.

In the beginning of Act I, the audience learns that “most of the action takes place within Carr’s memory” [P.17], which is noticeably faulty and distorted. Old Carr’s account of James Joyce is jaundiced by their personal feud, as the following statement indicates: “[...] unpleasant as it is to be dragged through the courts for a few francs” [p.22]. Hence, Carr’s portrayal of the Irish artist, whom he identifies as “a liar and a hypocrite” [p.23], is

⁷ V.L. Cahn: *Beyond Absurdity*. P.134.

⁸ A. Jenkins: *The Theatre of Tom Stoppard*. P.116.

⁹ J. Hunter: *Tom Stoppard’s Plays*. P.240.

distinctly defamatory and unedifying. Thus, Carr appears “totally unable to maintain the biographer’s traditional objectivity.”¹⁰

After dictating incomprehensible invocations of *Ulysses*, which show the novel most inaccessible, Joyce appears – according to Stoppard’s stage direction – as “an Irish nonsense” [p.33]. He steps into Carr’s drawing room introducing himself with a limerick:

JOYCE: Top o’ the morning! – James Joyce!
I hope you’ll allow me to voice
My regrets in advance
For coming on the off-chance –
B’jasus I hadn’t much choice! [p.33]

Carr then sceptically requires if Joyce is “some kind of a poet [...] from Lim’rick” [p.33], referring both to Joyce’s Irish origin and the writer’s delivery of speech in limericks. Interestingly, the five-line-poem, which usually rhymes AABBA, is perceived as a low form of art. This image of Joyce as a demotic and insipid poet is underlined when Joyce recites the Irish National Anthem [p.21].

As the Act proceeds, Joyce’s versification and citation of different literary works (e.g. a sonnet by William Shakespeare) becomes gradually more innovative and original. At some point, Joyce recites his own poem *Dooleysprudence* which travesties and defames “Mr. Dooley”, a character created by Chicago-born newspaper writer Finley Peter Dunne (1867-1936). Mr. Dooley, a saloon-keeper of Irish descent, functions as Dunne’s satirical mouthpiece, commenting vividly and humorously on current events. The fact that Mr. Dooley was ill received by native Irish immigrants served as a starting point for Joyce’s seemingly celebratory parody of Dunne’s character.

Much later in Act I, Joyce’s artistic qualities are fully revealed. Being involved in a debate on art with Tristan Tzara, Joyce palpably expresses his appreciation of art. According to Joyce, who employs the example of Homer’s *Odyssey*, the artist grants meaning and significance to “a [otherwise] minor redistribution of broken pots” [p.62] by way of his literary work. The metaphor of the Trojan War is extended, when Joyce discerns:

“The temples are built and brought down around [the artist], continuously and contiguously, from Troy to the fields of Flanders. If there is any meaning in any of it, it is in what survives as art, [...] What now of the Trojan War if it had been passed over by the artist’s touch? Dust. [...] But it is we who stand enriched, by a tale of heroes, of a golden apple, a wooden horse [...]” [p.62].

¹⁰ T. Bassell: Tom Stoppard. P. 141.

In contrast to Tzara's acceptance of absurdity and meaninglessness Joyce affirms and justifies the role of the artist¹¹. Despite Joyce's appearance as a defamatory farce of himself in the beginning of the first Act, the metaphorical conversion of his aesthetic sense demonstrates his function "as the high priest of art"¹² in the play. Joyce argues that "the artist is the magician put among men to gratify— capriciously – their urge for immortality" [p.62]. Later in the scene Joyce appears as a magician conjuring a white rabbit out of his hat, hence, displaying the veracity of his artistic competence. This image correlates with the historical figure James Joyce. The Irish writer was a dedicated artist and far more interested in his artistic work than in the course or outcome of the First World War¹³. When an exasperated and uncompromising Carr demands "and what did you do in the Great War?" Joyce simply replies: "I wrote Ulysses." "What did you do?" Bloody nerve." [p. 43].

2.3 Henry Carr's Victorian Conservatism

The events of 1917 are reflected through the fragmentary memory of Henry Carr, historically a minor British consular official in Zurich and a supporting actor in James Joyce's amateur production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In *Travesties*, Old Carr perceives himself as British consulate and as having taken up the leading part in *Earnest*. The real-life consulate Bennett is reduced to Carr's manservant and, thus, corresponds to the role of Lane in Wilde's play.

As the first Act of *Travesties* proceeds, Carr's inherent dislike for the artist becomes obvious – a consequence of his hatred for Joyce. When arguing with Tzara about the role of the artist, Carr refuses to accept that an artist should inherit a higher form of human existence. Instead, he attacks Tzara: "You're nothing. You're an artist." [p.83]. For Carr

"an artist is someone who is gifted in some way that enables him to do something more or less well which can only be done badly or not at all by someone who is not thus gifted. If there is any point in using language at all it is that a word is taken to stand for a particular fact or idea and not for other facts or ideas." [p.38].

Carr asks for clearness and rationality in art and he is in definite favour of realism, thus, opposing the Dadaist art of Tzara. According to Carr, every word is codified by one single meaning; to him other connotations are unthinkable. As a consequence, he confronts Tzara: "[...] you are [] asking me to accept that the word Art means whatever you wish it to mean; but I do not accept it." [p.39] Carr's open conservatism towards art is conveyed by

¹¹ V.L. Cahn: *Beyond Absurdity*. P.134.

¹² Katherine E. Kelly (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Tom Stoppard*. p. 123.

¹³ J. Hunter: *Tom Stoppard's Plays*. P.237.

his language used. He stoically clings to set phrases such as “patriotism, duty, [...] love of freedom, [] hatred of tyranny” [p.38], following the Victorian nomenclature.

As Carr’s anecdotes are always couched into Wilde’s play, the style variety of his speeches resembles 19th Century dandyism. Incidentally, Carr employs the refined language of a Wildean dandy: “I don’t know if I approve of these Benthamite ideas, Tristan. I realise they are all the rage in Zurich – [...]” [p.36]. Moreover, he announces to his manservant Bennett: “Tonight I incline to the theatre; get me out the straight cut trouser with the blue satin stripe and the silk cutaway. I’ll wear the opal studs.” [p.26]. The clothes theme is extended, when the audience later learns that Carr “ruined several pairs of trousers” [p.37] during the war. The triviality of the trouser-theme forms a stark contrast to the seriousness of the war and the debate on aestheticism.

However, Carr cannot adhere to the established image of the refined dandy. Every now and then he vulgarly expresses his infuriation: “My God, you little Rumanian wog – you bloody dago – you jumped-up phrase-making smart-alecy arty-intellectual Balkan turd!!!” [p.40].

To some extent Carr’s condemnation of the artist derives from envy: “For every thousand people there’s nine hundred doing the work, ninety doing well, nine doing good, and one lucky bastard who’s the artist.” [p.46]. By rejecting the various idealisms of Tzara, Joyce and Lenin Carr presents an independent position of his own.¹⁴

Carr finally dismantles his Victorian appreciation of art when his senile alter ego exemplifies how art can be reformulated. Carr’s distorted memory produces several time-slips in his account. This results in an often faulty and prismatic image of history. The rearrangement of history, then, directs the debate on art into a new direction whenever a time slip takes place. In Act I, Bennett offers five times: “I have put the newspapers and the telegrams on the sideboard, sir.” [p.26]. Through this rearranging of past events different fragments are put newly together and will eventually formulate new meaning.

2.4 Lenin’s Stalinist Utilitarianism

After the extensive debate on art between Carr and Tzara, Lenin’s harangue starts relatively late. Whereas the other characters’ viewpoints are presented in the form of a dialectical disquisition, Lenin directly addresses his audience. The speech is supposed to resemble “a much produced photograph of Lenin addressing the crowd in a public square in May 1920” [p.84]. According to Stoppard’s stage directions, “it is structurally important to

¹⁴ The Artist as Critic. P.73.

the Act that the [] speech is delivered from the strongest possible position [...]” [p.84]. Lenin’s appearance as political revolutionary is supported by his autocratic and steadfast way of speaking, as the appliance of Victor Klemperer’s¹⁵ work *LTI - The Language of the Third Reich: A Philologist's Notebook*¹⁶ shows.

According to this work, the Nazi propagandists frequently employed adjectives such as “pugnacious”, “heroic” and “fanatic”, misused figures¹⁷ as in the random use of “hundreds” and “thousands”, and applied acronyms such as “Gestapo” or “BDM”.¹⁸

Lenin’s harangue is composed of manifold examples characteristic for autocratic speeches: The monitoring phrase¹⁹ “Calm yourselves, Ladies and Gentlemen!” [p.85], with which Lenin addresses his audience, incorporates and ties the listener to what has been said. The repetitive employment of the personal pronoun “we” and the auxiliary verb “must” generalizes and, hence, legitimates Lenin’s claims (i.e. “[...] libraries [...] must all be under party control. We want to establish and we shall establish [...]” [p. 85]).

Klemperer also points out the frequent appliance of scholarly terms and expressions in autocratic speeches: “Man pflegt das Schiller- Distichon von der ‘gebildeten Sprache, die für dich dichtet und denkt’” [p.21]. Circuitous terms such as “bourgeois-intellectual individualism” or “Social Democratic mechanism” [p.85] deliberately place the speaker over his audience. In order to understand Lenin’s monologue it is also important to incorporate Klemperer’s notion of revolution:

“In jeder Revolution, ob sie nun Politisches und Soziales betrifft oder die Kunst oder die Literatur, sind immer zwei Tendenzen wirksam: einmal der Wille zu völlig Neuem, wobei der Gegensatz zu dem bisherig Gültigen [] betont wird, sodann aber auch das Bedürfnis nach Anknüpfung, nach rechtfertigender Tradition. Man [...] kehrt zurück [...] zum wahren Wesen der Kunst [...]. Beide Tendenzen zeigen sich deutlich in Namensgebungen und Umbenennungen.”²⁰

Other than Joyce or Tzara, Lenin claims that “Literature must become a part of the common cause of the proletariat” and, consequently, be “free from bourgeois anarchist individualism” [p.85]. Lenin’s aestheticism focuses on the conformism of literature, as

¹⁵ Klemperer (1881-1960), a German journalist and eventually Professor of Literature, was born into a Jewish family and experienced the constraints and atrocities of Nazi regime in Germany after the National Socialists’ rise to power in 1933. Klemperer kept a diary from 1933 till 1945, which depicts everyday life under tyranny and the struggle for survival among Jews in the Third Reich. The diary also instructively illustrates the Nazis’ perversion of the German language for propaganda purposes. Klemperer’s notes would later form the basis for his book *LTI*¹⁵.

¹⁶ Original title: *LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii: Notibuch eines Philologen* (1947).

¹⁷ V. Klemperer: *LTI: „Zahlenmissbrauch“*. P.78.

¹⁸ V. Klemperer: *LTI*. P. II f.

¹⁹ M. Short: *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*. P.91.

²⁰ V. Klemperer: *LTI*. P.81 f.

“literature must become party literature.” [p.85]. Lenin’s art which does not question “but simply obey is directly opposed to the self-conscious delinquency urged by Tzara”²¹.

Finally, Klemperer assesses that propagandistic speeches abound in chaste, self-evident assertions²². In Lenin’s harangue, such declarations are notably stressed with an exclamation mark: “Down with non-partisan literature! Down with literary supermen!” [p.85]. These sentences allow for a twofold approach: on the level of syntax, the parallel structure hints at the repetitive use of such catchy phrases, which is typical of dictatorial speeches; as regards content, the demand for censorship itself refers to a totalitarian regime. The incorporation of rhetoric questions such as “Are you free [...], Mr. Writer?” [p.85] indicate the ironic and presumptuous tenor of the monologue.

Lenin’s speech is intended to function as a wake-up call. His appearance as political revolutionary “challenges the significance of Joyce and Tzara”²³. Artistic revolution is opposed to political revolution and the question is put forth “how much [] artistic revolutions ultimately matter”²⁴.

Later in the second act, Lenin presents himself as “an emotionally conservative human being”²⁵, who is afraid to display any kind of sentiment. Yet, it is Lenin who gives “perhaps the most expressive testimony to art in the play”²⁶:

“I don’t know of anything greater than the *Appassionata*. Amazing, superhuman music. It always makes me feel, perhaps naively, it makes me feel, proud of the miracles that human beings can perform” [p.89].

3. The Play Itself and its Form as a Means of Exploring Art

None of Stoppard’s antagonists win the aesthetic debate. “The real centre of Stoppard’s dramatic strategies [lies] in the form of the play itself. It is the paramount achievement of *Travesties* that it addresses itself to the debate about the nature of art not by means of a spokesman but by its own method of procedure.”²⁷

3.1 The Aspect of Intertextuality

Throughout the play all major characters refer to various texts of the different literary genres, i.e. drama, poetry, and prose. This linguistic feature is coined ‘intertextuality’, as

²¹ N. Sammells: *The Artist as Critic*. P.74.

²² V. Klemperer: *LTI*. P. 78f.

²³ R. Hayman: *Tom Stoppard*. P.118.

²⁴ R. Hayman: *Tom Stoppard*. P.118.

²⁵ J. Hunter: *Tom Stoppard’s Plays*. P. 32.

²⁶ J. Hunter: *Tom Stoppard’s Plays*. P. 32.

²⁷ *The Artist as Critic*. P.73.

the narrator or speaker establishes relations between one text and another in order to confirm or parody the connotations related to the text in question.

3.1.1 Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* as Structural Device

The Importance of Being Earnest by the Irish playwright Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), which was first performed in 1895 and which was intended to mock the seriousness and stiffness of Victorian society, forms the structural basis for Stoppard's play. The historical amateur production by James Joyce affects Old Carr's recount decidedly²⁸. The elder Henry Carr assigns the character of Jack Worthing to Tristan Tzara, Joyce is to perform the role of Aunt Augusta and Henry Carr himself takes up the role of Algernon Montgrieff. The protagonists' speeches are delivered accordingly, garnished with Wildean epigrams and set phrases, thus, Tzara and Carr "appear [...] as two dandies right out of Wilde's play"²⁹:

CARR: How are you, my dear Tristan? What brings you here?

TZARA: Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring anyone anywhere? [P.36]³⁰

This image is established early in the play when Henry Carr is presented as a man who "dresses in a most elegant way and is especially interested in the cut of his trousers" [P.9], the latter information being a hint at the historical Carr's judicial claim to the refunding of a pair of trousers, which he had purchased for his performance as Algernon Montgrieff.

3.1.2 Stoppard's Approach to Art: Literary References to *The 18th Sonnet*, *Ulysses*, and *Artist Descending a Staircase*

'Intertextuality' describes the establishment of a literary reference system within a work. Besides the intertwining of *Travesties* and Wilde's *Earnest*, Stoppard's play abounds in literary references to William Shakespeare, James Joyce, and, curiously, to Tom Stoppard himself. Joyce's invocations in the prologue such as "Deshill holles eamus" [P.18] are taken from the hart-to-grasp "Oxen in the Sun" episode of Joyce's very own novel *Ulysses*, the utterances itself being "a travesty of English prose styles", as emphasized by Ellman³¹. The investigative style of the conversation between Tzara and Joyce resemble, firstly, the question-and-answer dialogue between Lady Bracknell and Jack Worthing, and, secondly, the 'Ithaca' episode of *Ulysses*³².

²⁸ V.L. Cahn: *Beyond Absurdity*. P. 132.

²⁹ V.L. Cahn: *Beyond Absurdity*. P. 132.

³⁰ Vgl.: O. Wilde: *The Importance of Being Earnest*. P. 254.

³¹ T. Bassell: *Tom Stoppard*. P.146.

³² T. Bassell: *Tom Stoppard*. P.147.

In order to impress Gwendolen, Tzara recites a Shakespearean sonnet. Following his Dada formula, he cuts the poem up in scraps of papers and then draws them out of a hat. The preceding dialogue with Gwendolen is comprised of various Shakespearean works including *Hamlet* (“These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.” [p.54]), *Much Ado About Nothing* (“I was not born under a rhyming planet” [p.54]) and *Othello* (“Thy honesty and love doth mince this matter.”[p.54]), which turns the whole conversation into a farce. Above that, the audience once more experiences the merging of “a collaborative meaning [...] from random bits and pieces”³³. It is “another game for the literary invalid.”³⁴

Ultimately, Stoppard transplants several lines from *Artist Descending a Staircase* into *Travesties*. Carr’s introducing monologue commemorates an occasion on which Tzara “wrote his name in the snow with a walking stick and said: ‘There! I think I’ll call it The Alps’” [P.25]. The very same incident is mentioned by Beauchamps in *Artist Descending a Staircase* with almost the same wording. Stoppard thereby stresses “the bonds between Donner and Beauchamp and Henry Carr”³⁵. In addition, by quoting his own work alongside Shakespeare and Joyce, Stoppard equates his literary achievements with those influential and popular writers, which hints at his own view on art.

3.2 The Aspect of Theatricality

Besides the play’s referential and erudite nature, *Travesties* also displays a strong self-awareness as a theatrical production, which is coined ‘theatricality’ in literary criticism. This self-reflexive element sheds light on Stoppard’s own estimation of theatre productions.

3.2.1 A Play within a Play

In Carr’s recollections the two plays, namely *Travesties* and *Earnest*, intertwine constantly, establishing the pattern of a-play-within-a-play³⁶. Incidentally, this dramatic feature was repeatedly used by William Shakespeare, e.g. in *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and, thus, the appliance of this devise bears another reference to the Elizabethan playwright.

³³ T.R. Whitaker: Tom Stoppard. P. 116.

³⁴ J. Hunter: Tom Stoppard’s Plays. P.241.

³⁵ V.L. Cahn: Beyond Absurdity. p.131 f.

³⁶ R. Hayman: Tom Stoppard. P.122.

3.2.2 Parodying of the Well-Made Play

As the above paragraphs have already shown, the audience of Stoppard's play needs to be highly literate in order to fully grasp the underlying meaning of *Travesties*. Such an audience is supposed to comprehend all the literary references and especially those to 19th and 20th Century drama, which is closely linked to the concept of the well-made play as it was codified by Eugène Scribe and the parody of the same, as carried out by Oscar Wilde in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

The theatrical genre of the well-made play intends to project real-life situations on stage in order to analyse “the ‘cause and effect’ of human behaviour”³⁷. This genre is usually marked by a range of plot complications which are linked through causality³⁸. Typically, a plot twist is achieved by confusing papers and letters. In *Travesties*, the swapping of folders parodies this steadfast theme of the well-made play. Moreover, the application of Stoppardian puns varies the old theme of accident and causality: When Carr and Tzara are trapped in a confused scene out of Wilde's play, the characters comment on their eating and drinking habits while neglecting a logical and traceable narrative:

“I believe it is done to drink a glass of hock and seltzer before luncheon, and it is well done to drink it well before luncheon. I took to drinking hock and seltzer for my nerves at a time when nerves were fashionable in good society. This season it is trenchfoot, but I drink it regardless because I feel much better after it.” [p.36]

Finally, the well-made play intends to moralize and to fulfil the audience's expectation of having ‘a great night out’. In literary criticism “Aunt Edna” became the taunting embodiment of such a rather conservative audience. In *Travesties*, the concept of “Aunt Edna” is challenged:

TZARA: All literature is obscene!
The classics – tradition – vomit on it!
GWEN: (Oh!)
TZARA: Beethoven! Mozart! I spit on it! [...]
GWEN: Consider your aunts! [p.35]

In another scene, Stoppard adverts to the obsolescence of the well-made play by having Tzara persist in a Wildean epithet: “But, my dear Henry, causality is no longer fashionable owing to the war.”[p.36]

³⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Well-Made_Play

³⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Well-Made_Play

3.3 The Aspect of Language: Travesty in *Travesties*

As the above paragraphs have shown, the different notions of art are not only expressed in respect to content, but also through the variety in style. This final paragraph points out some stylistic features which have been neglected so far.

The first encounter between Tzara, Carr, Gwendolen and Joyce is carried out in a pastiche³⁹ of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Tzara appears as "a Rumanian nonsense", delivering his speech strangely accentuated: "Plaizure, plaizure! What else? Eating ez usual, I see, 'Enri?!'", whereas Joyce, cast as Lady Bracknell and perceived as "an Irish nonsense", introduces himself with a limerick, which will then lead to a "manic explosion of shared limericks"⁴⁰, which even pick up the "Aunt Edna"-theme:

CARR: I don't see why not. For my part,
H.M.G.⁴¹ is considered pro-Art.
TZARA: Consider me anti.
GWENDOLEN: Consider your auntie?
JOYCE: A pound would do for a start. [P.34]

Carr's playful attitude towards language is revealed when he reconsiders diverse titles for the memoirs he is going to recount: "Memories of James Joyce. James Joyce as I knew him. Through the courts with James Joyce" [p.22]. The mode of switching between the different styles is a obvious feature in *Travesties*: besides limericks, Shakespearean rhymes, Joycean puns such as "empirical purple", "mucus mutantis" [p.23] or "the joyce of spring"⁴², a "Mr Gallagher and Mr Shean"-song and Wildean epiphets, the stylistic variations go as far as to include a Baudeville song and a lengthy lecture on Lenin⁴³.

Carr's confident handling of language is also expressed in his sceptical response to the cause of the Great War: "[...] Brave little Serbia...? No, I don't think so. The newspapers would never have risked calling the British public to arms without a proper regard for succinct alliteration." [p.36].

Joyce's tendency to switch between different narrative styles is parodied by a Stoppardian pastiche: the catechism sequence in *Ulysses* is picked up in Joyce's Bracknellish interrogation of Tzara-Worthing⁴⁴. Whitaker correctly resumes that "the mode of *Travesties* itself results from a fusion of Wildean farce, Joycean fiction, Dadaist spontaneous negation, epic theatre, and Shavian dialectic. Balancing an array of radical

³⁹ it.: pasticcio; the imitation of a literary style.

⁴⁰ T.R. Whitaker: Tom Stoppard. P. 112.

⁴¹ His Majesty's Government (Carr's employer), Vgl. J. Hunter: Tom Stoppard's Plays. P.241.

⁴² R.Hayman: Tom Stoppard.P.127.

⁴³ R.Hayman: Tom Stoppard.P.123.

⁴⁴ R.Hayman: Tom Stoppard.P.123.

principles and egocentric procedures, *Travesties* suggests that our ‘reality’ is at best a shared construction from fragmentary data.”⁴⁵

4. Conclusion

Stoppard’s *Travesties* ends with Old Carr resuming:

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

By employing this tautology Stoppard leaves the question of the role of the artist unanswered. Yet, the structure of the play, the themes touched, and the style variation employed hint at Stoppard’s appreciation of art and his estimation of theatrical productions.

As the 1917 revolution in Russia is “not the sort of thing Auntie goes to the theatre to laugh at”⁴⁶, the playwright of Czech descent clearly distances himself from the well-made play. Whereas the well-made play adheres to formal aspects such as the unity of place and time (Aristotle), social homogeneity of the characters involved, and naturalistic correspondences between character and speech⁴⁷, Stoppard denies and even ridicules these theatrical conventions. For instance, according to the tradition of the flashback, past events are shown as they actually occurred⁴⁸, whereas in *Travesties* the retrospective account of Carr is blurred due to his dotage.

Old Carr’s geriatric and fragmentary memory functions as a starting point to establish a prismatic and distorted picture of history and, hence, reality. This distortion can be perceived on many different levels in the play, which accumulate to Stoppard’s telling title *Travesties*. As regards content, it is the historical production by Joyce and Old Carr’s recollections of the aforementioned influential figures which provide the basis for a dialectical and often scoffing disquisition of art, politics and revolution. In linguistic terms, Tom Stoppard employs various theatrical and linguistic devices within the play in order to explore art and the role of the artist within society.

Stoppard shows a strong awareness of the cause and affect of language and the intertwining of history and fiction. Consequently, one of the main subjects in *Travesties* is a conflict of style. The audience has to realize that – against Carr’s conservative outlook – language can be conscripted into the service of different ideologies and does not necessarily

⁴⁵ T.R. Whitaker: Tom Stoppard. P. 113.

⁴⁶ J. Hunter: Tom Stoppard’s Plays. p.27.

⁴⁷ G. Krieger: Das englische Drama des 20. Jahrhunderts. P.76.

⁴⁸ R. Hayman: Tom Stoppard. P.115.

stand for one meaning, whereby Stoppard exemplifies the potential falsification of history and distances himself from historical drama which identifies unimpeachable titans as characters.

Moreover, by demonstrating that the seemingly nonsensical fragments of English bear meaning, once the literary reference system applied is understood, Stoppard actually meditates on his own aestheticism. The playwright shows how the decoding of a literary work gives way to new ideas and solutions. In order to fully grasp a work of art it needs to be deciphered and understood in its context. Carr's speeches may resemble Wilde's *Earnest*; yet, the meaning behind these invocations is a very different one in *Travesties* where the correspondence to Wilde's play creates a humorous effect.

Whereas Carr functions as the mouthpiece of conservatism, prompting art to entertain, to confirm societal values, and to be a moral uplift, Stoppard denies these philistine ideas in favour of an art which needs to be deciphered and decoded and which does not offer evident solutions. Stoppard does not suggest a way out of the dilemma established. Anthony Jenkins rightly resumes that "Stoppard does not intend to show that" one ideological position is better than the other, for they "are simply different attitudes to the same problem: how the artist serves society for the common good."⁴⁹

In *Travesties*, the three different literary genres poetry, drama, and prose are parodied equally and none is favoured over the other. Yet, the appliance of a certain reference system indicates Stoppard's perception of art, especially when he elaborately demonstrates the literary genius of James Joyce.

With the use of a dramatized narrator such as Henry Carr the discussion of arts is in fact predetermined: the unreliable Carr inherits an element of subjectivity and historical insignificance. This image corresponds with the conclusions drawn, namely that art is always subjective, highly imaginative, and hermeneutically alterable. Thus, with *Travesties* Stoppard manages the virtually impossible task to appraise literature by ridiculing it.

⁴⁹ A. Jenkins. *The Theatre of Tom Stoppard*. p. 119.

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Drama in Eastern cultures. Drama and communal belief. Influences on the dramatist. The role of theory. Western theory. Dramatic literature has a remarkable facility in bringing together elements from other performing and nonperforming arts: design and mime, dance and music, poetry and narrative. It may be that the dramatic impulse itself, the desire to recreate a picture of life for others through impersonation, is at the root of all the arts. Certainly, the performing arts continually have need of dramatic literature to support them. A common way of describing an opera, for example, is to say that it is a play set to music. The "action" in a dramatic monologue is mental, psychological and verbal. Browning also became adept at indicating physical action and gesture but the important one is the act of speaking-of arguing, pleading informing, reminiscing, of thinking aloud or of justifying oneself. The form also allowed him to indulge his fondness for eccentric or often morally reprehensible characters and opinions while, it freed him from the responsibility of bringing his villain to justice. Browning chose the Renaissance as the historical setting of many of his poems because it was a time of great energy and chan