

Hyperreality in Tom Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound* Introduction

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Reality has been one of man's major concerns in different ages. Finding the actual reality becomes more intense in postmodern era due to the fact that most of realities are only considered as "social constructs" and they are subject to change (Tiedemann 62). Besides, as Hicks states, there is no "absolute truth" in this era (18). In other words, postmodernism lacks the ability to provide exact and meaningful statements about an "independently existing reality" and replaces only a "social-linguistic, constructionist account of reality" (Hicks 6). Therefore, as Hoover holds, it renders "plurality" and multiplicity instead of individualism (xxvii). Post-structuralism which "parallels" with postmodernism (Abrams 169), presents this plurality, Sarup mentions, by referring to the "floating signifier system" (3), in which the signifiers and the signifieds are not "fixed" entities, and each "signifier" may refer to several signifieds (Roman 309).

Postmodern era is bombarded with representation or re-imagining and distortions of reality, simulation and hyperreality which cast doubt, raise uncertainty about the real's validity, and make reality be masked and hidden. Tom Stoppard is an outstanding British playwright whose mind is occupied by investigating reality (Mackean 1) as the word 'real' in titles and themes of his plays suggest, but he tries to hide the truth in his plays and persuade his audiences that it is not a theater and; thus, fills their minds with "convincing illusions" (Jenkins x). Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to discuss the concept of hyperreality in Tom Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968) in the light of Jean Baudrillard's theory of Hyperreality.

To apply Baudrillard's hyperreality to Stoppard's play researchers examine some characteristics such as blurred boundaries between reality and fantasy, plurality and shifting of identities, repetition, priority of models, lack of originality, and seductive power of media which lead to experience hyperreality that postmodern man is struggling with.

Postmodern life, Baudrillard declares in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, is "fluctuating in indeterminacy" because "hyperreality" and "simulation" absorb reality. It is the "principle of simulation" and "models" (120), not that of reality, which govern and determine social life. In hyper-realization, icons, images and copies which "bear no resemblance to any reality" rule and the "simulation, the simulacrum and the copy become the real" (Powell 56).

Baudrillard offers "three orders of simulacra" and states that a third-order simulacrum produces a "hyperreal" or "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (*Simulation* 2). This order, as Kellner argues, is called simulation which is based on the "reproducibility of objects" according to a "binary model." The objects are reproduced, consequently, they become indistinguishable from each other and from the "generated model" (*Reader* 171). In the first and second-order simulacra, the real still exists, and the success of simulation against the real is measurable. Baudrillard is concerned with the third order, what he calls "hyperreality," that is, a "world without a real origin" (*Simulation* 2). Therefore, in the "third-order simulacrum", reality is no longer even as part of the equation (Lane 86-7).

Hyperreality is an "order of representation" that, as Powell restates, has "replaced reality." It is not only "more than real" (58), but also, as Baudrillard claims, "more real than real" (*Fatal Strategies* 188). Hyperreality is, as Mark Poster assures, "a world of self-referential signs" (6). The hyperreal is the result of simulation process in which the natural world and its reference are replaced by "self-referential signs." Therefore, the subject-object distance dissolves and the real is vanished, independent object world is assimilated and artificial codes and simulation models define it (Kellner, *Reader* 53-54).

In terms of signification relations, the three orders of simulacra are defined as three kinds of links; in the first order, "imitation," there are "direct signifiers-signified links." "Indirect signifier-signified links" exist at the second order, "production." The third order, simulation or "hyperreal," includes "signifier-signifier links" (Kellner, *Reader* 120). In other words, the number of the signifieds of a signifier is not "fixed." Not only are they changeable but also each signified is signifier of another referent or signified. Thus, signifiers refer just to each other and an "endless chain of signification" occurs (Roman 309). Baudrillard states, in *Simulacra and Simulations*, the hyperreal world is introduced by "liquidation" or extermination "of all referentials" (167). "All the referentials intermingle their discourses," Baudrillard states, "in a circular, Moebian compulsion" (176). He uses the "Moebius strip" as a metaphor for the rapid increase of models and simulation process which is an entangled "spiraled structure." This makes, Kellner mentions, a complicated and "circular" system without any starting or ending points, and any exact referents (*JB* 83). In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, he reiterates that the "finalities have disappeared." This statement equals death of "all referentials" (120).

In the era of hyperreality and simulation, signs, models and "modes of representation" obtain autonomy to make "the real" in interaction with other signs. For clarifying such an idea, Baudrillard points to the "commodity signs" and "media" which refer to other commodity signs and "media representations" than to any outside world or external signifieds or referents which recalls "intertextuality" (Kellner, *JB* 63).

In postmodern era, Baudrillard in *Symbolic Exchange* states, "determination" has gone out and "indeterminacy" has taken its place. It is the uncertainty which rules the universe because of the substitutability of the "truth" and the "false" of media, of the real and the unreal in the world (126). He also in *Simulations and Simulacra* considers "Disneyland" an ideal model and instance of the third order of simulacra. It is a game of "illusions" and "phantasms" in an "imaginary" world. Disneyland is shown as imaginary to make people believe that everything except what is in Disneyland is real, whereas all America and Los Angeles are "no longer real," but they are owned by "hyperreal" order and "simulation." Therefore, the fact that "the real is no longer real" is hidden. Disneyland was there to conceal that it, Disneyland, is the "real" country and the "real America is Disneyland" (171). Generally, Baudrillard believes that media plays an important role in making the postmodern universe. He states that "mass media fabricate non-communication" because communication means an exchange of speech and response. Having nostalgic feelings for a face-to-face communication, Baudrillard asserts that mass media "prevents response" (Kellner, *JB* 67), and delineates it as a "simulation machine" which generates the reproduction of ideas, signs, codes and images results in existence and developments of the domain of hyperreality. Once media were thought to show, reflect or even "mirror" reality, whereas a new "media reality," that is, "hyperreality," seems even "more real than the real itself," rules the world. It makes the real be "subordinate" to the representation. Thus, the relation between reality and representation is reversed and the real fades away (Kellner, *JB* 68). Generally, media produce a sense of hyperreality to "homogenize" or manipulate the mass audiences (Kellner, *JB* 69). Powell, borrowing Fredric Jameson's idea about "postmodern city-dwellers" holds that they are living in a "hallucination", an "exhilarating blur," or "a reality evaporating into mere images and spectacles" (37) or, as Butler states, "a society of the image"(112).

The world of hyperreality and simulation, Kellner emphasizes, is without static limits, "fixed reference" or definitive construction. Rejection of all endings (*JB* 90), that is, "liquidation of all referentials," (Baudrillard, *S & S* 167), "meaninglessness and indifference" (Kellner, *JB* 118), uncertainty and "indeterminacy" (*Symbolic Exchange* 126) about the actuality and originality of reality, leads him to feel the sense of "skepticism" and "dark nihilism" (*JB* 90).

Tom Stoppard's play, *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968), Antony Jenkins states, is a "whodunit" play (50) and a "spoof" of "Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*" (Burwick 279). The play presents two worlds at the same time: the world of critics, Birdboot and Moon, or that of reality, and the world of the play-within-the-play, or the world of illusion and fantasy. When the lines between these two worlds are blurred and the outer play fuses with the inner one, reality is disguised and hyperreality takes its place. At first Stoppard draws and emphasizes a "rigid line of structural demarcation" between the real world and the world of play (Hodgson 55), but the line is

violated when the critics enter the inner play. For instance, reality begins to be blurred when Moon claims that he saw Birdboot out on the town with Felicity, a female character and actress of the inner play. Besides, when Birdboot steps on the stage in order to pick up the ringing phone, he crosses the line between audience and stage; in other words, he leaps from the world of reality into the world of illusion. He accepts the new position and even he takes Simon's different roles, as if he is unaware of the world, hyperreal, which like the "treacherous swamps" (*Hound* 12) surrounds characters.

The distinction between the two worlds is also blurred when Birdboot steps on the stage to answer the phone. But as Hound indicates the phone "lines have been cut!" (*Hound* 30). Besides, the corpse bridges the gap between the real world and the world of the play because the other critic, Moon, crosses this border and enters the world of play to detect the body. This crossing is not just from the outer world of the play into the inner one. Simon and Inspector Hound, characters of the play-within-the-play, leave it and enter the other world as spectators. Therefore, the border between the actors and the real characters is also blurred. When the separation between these two worlds has been "delineated," Jayaram argues, Stoppard "deconstructs" the "opposition" by "integrating" them with "recursion" (15) of this blurring. The characters' movements between audience and stage present the "fuzziness of the border between the two settings" (Mancewicz 90). Mrs. Drudge's dialogue "The fog is very treacherous around here-it rolls off the sea without warning, shrouding the cliffs in a deadly mantle of blind man's buff" (*Hound* 12), presents two key hints about the fusion of the outer world into the inner one.

Firstly, fog destroys the clearness and direct understanding which signifies illusion. Secondly, fog comes 'without warning' which denotes that there is no specific time or place for disappearing or blurring the border between reality and illusion. Critics' comments on the play emphasize the borders between the two worlds. "It's [play] a sort of thriller" (*Hound* 7), "[it's] derivative, of course" (11), "I must be waiting for Higgs to die" (13), "keep your eye on Magnus" (15), and "It was her." "Felicity! That lady I saw you with last night!" (17). These demarcations between reality and fiction, and between character's previous roles and the new roles are blurred and questioned in the play. Even the "barriers between theater and stage audience,"

Hodgson states, dissolve (54). The theater spectators are motivated, or even forced, to rethink about the barrier between the real world in which they are living and the world of play that they are watching. The audience, even the pre-audience and now characters, that is, Birdboot and Moon, cannot detect when and how the replacement of reality by hyperreality occurs. *Hound* as a metadrama "breaks the fourth wall," (Cahnmann-Taylor 5) an invisible hindrance which separates the characters on the stage from audience, and gives the characters and audience the chance to replace their roles. Therefore, speaking to the audience deconstructs the barriers between audience

and stage, blurs the boundaries between reality and unreality, and results in the production of a state, say, hyperreality, that its reality is doubtful by spectators.

The world of dream in which one's longings come true is a world of unreality or illusion. The characters leave the world of reality and enter the world of unreality and dreams. For instance Birdboot plays the role of Simon, Cynthia's lover, because of his desire to Cynthia, and Moon, "ambitious to step into the shoes of the first-stringer, Higgs" (Jayaram 14), plays the role of the Inspector. "Sometimes I dream of Higgs," (*Hound* 7) "Sometimes I dream that I've killed him," (*Hound* 23) and "I think I must be waiting for Higgs to die," Moon says (*Hound* 13). He mentions "Where-is-Higgs? Perhaps he's dead at last or trapped in a lift somewhere, or succumbed to amnesia, wandering the land with his turn-ups stuffed with ticket-stubs" (*Hound* 6). These sentences by Moon show his hidden intentions for getting rid of Higgs and becoming the first string critic. Being worried to be accused of killing his rival Higgs, Moon pretends to show the reality by playing the role of the Inspector, but apparently hides it. This hiding of truth makes characters, even the audience, enter a world of reality in which no base or origin roots at its background, that is, hyperreality.

There are multiple role-playings, several known and unknown identities in *Hound*. The identity of the one who should detect the real identity of others, Hound, is one of the most unknown one in the play. Stoppard writes "The body of a man lies sprawled on the floor in front of a large settee" (*Hound* 5). His face cannot be seen; therefore, his real identity is hard to discover. In detective stories the identity of the victim is investigated but when Hound stands on the top of the body he asks "Is there anything you have forgotten to tell me?" (*Hound* 29). Hound's question emphasize the identity of the victim not that of the killer. In *Hound*, Stoppard presents Moon and Birdboot as simulacra of real audience who are reproduced in the inner play, and the actors of the play-within-the-play cannot distinguish them from Simon and Inspector Hound.

Birdboot adopts Simon's "dramatic role" (Glasgow 132) when he steps on the stage to answer the ringing phone. "Transformation" occurs not just for Birdboot, it also happens for Moon. When Moon "crosses the border," he faces a similar destiny of "inescapable altered identity" (Jayaram 15). Moon finds himself playing the role of Inspector Hound, but not the real Inspector one. Besides, the critics, the previous audiences, lose their seats as critics or victimizers and enter the play as the actors or victims, and the actors, Simon and Hound, become the spectators. At the end of the play, Magnus peels the mask from his face to reveal that "I am the real Inspector Hound!" Moon calls Magnus "Puckeridge! You killed Higgs" (*Hound* 44). He shoots Moon and says: "I have waited a long time for this moment." "So you are the real Inspector Hound," Cynthia hesitates. Magnus discloses that "Not only that! I have been leading a double life-at least!" "It is me, Albert!" (*Hound* 44). Therefore, Major Magnus reveals to be the Real

Inspector Hound, Albert Muldoon and Puckeridge. The audience may doubt that with multiple identities he presents, can his claims about his multiple identities at the same time be trusted?!

Identity, which Moon directly refers to in the play as "we are concerned with what I have referred to elsewhere as the nature of identity" (*Hound* 24), shows each person's origin. In this play, there are multiple identities like those of Magnus, and several shifts in identities such as Birdboot, Moon, Simon and Hound. In other words, the character's identities or reality are not fixed or stable. They are just, Baudrillard believes, "generated without any origin or reality," "hyperreality" (*Simulation* 2). Besides, names of the characters are instable in the play. A character's name, a signifier, refers to different signifieds or referents. For instance, the detective is first nominated to Hound, then to Moon and finally to Magnus. Even Magnus as a signified is signifier of other signifieds such as Puckeridge, Inspector Hound and Albert Muldoon. Therefore, the hyperreal world that is generated by the implication of these multiple identities, role-playings and signifier/signified relations in the play, make the audience or even the characters themselves be uncertain and doubtful about their exact identifications.

The performance of some characters is repeated without any change in dialogue or behavior. The conversation between Felicity and Simon is the same as the conversation between Felicity and Birdboot on stage. Even the same dialogues are used by Cynthia while she is talking to Simon and the misidentified Birdboot as Simon and vice versa. For instance, both Simon and Birdboot leave Felicity for Cynthia. Felicity tells Simon and Birdboot that "I'll kill you for this, Simon Gasoyne!" (*Hound* 33). The outcome of the simulated conversation of Felicity with Simon and Birdboot is the same: "She [Felicity] leaves in tears, passing Mrs. Drudge who has entered in time to overhear her last remark." Mrs. Drudge utters exactly the same sentence to Birdboot that she says to Simon after Felicity left crying: "I have come to set the card table, sir" (*Hound* 17, 35). They both say they cannot stay. "Oh, Lady Muldoon will be disappointed," (*Hound* 17, 35) Mrs. Drudge says. Simon and Birdboot want to know if Lady Muldoon, Cynthia, knows that they are there. "Oh yes, sir, I just told her and it put her in quite a tizzy" (*Hound* 17, 37). Cynthia to Simon and Birdboot mentions, "Don't say anything for a moment-just hold me," "we can't go on meeting like this," "but darling, this is madness!" (18, 34), are some examples of simulated conversations which suggests the play is kept going without any pause.

Generally, this kind of conversation is a pre-designed, constructed and simulated one from a model or code. Stoppard through the mouth of Moon mocks and criticizes the postmodern crisis of copying, modeling and simulation. "I am Moon, continues Moon, in my own shoes, Moon in June, April, September and no member of the human race keeps warm my bit of space" (*Hound* 13). Although Moon emphasizes that he is the same person by the pass of months and no one can take

his place, not only Simon and Hound simply take his and Birdboot's seats, but also he loses his own identity as Moon, even he has lost the constructed identity that he takes as Inspector Hound.

In postmodern era, Baudrillard states, "instantiations of models" dominates the world (Kellner, *JB* 83). In *Hound*, there are some codes or models for being an Inspector. When Moon takes the inspector's role, he becomes skeptical of everyone and asks routine questions commonly made by inspectors. Moon utters "I'm going to find out who did this! I want everyone to go to the positions they occupied when the shot was fired-No one will leave the house!" (*Hound* 41). Both Hound and Moon as Inspector make a fake tale or constructed reality about McCoy. His name, Inspector Hound, is just an arbitrary nomination, a code or a model which does not refer to any stable thing. Therefore, in the second half of the *Hound*, as Jenkins mentions, nothing special occurs because the "actors" just "repeat their lines" (51).

The third kind of relations becomes clear by Baudrillard's definition of hyperreality as what is believed as reality but "without origin" (*Simulations* 2). Stoppard in his play-within-the-play of *Hound* parodies the genre of detective fiction by presenting humoristic images. A settled genre, detective fiction, as a reality is distorted and a constructed, parodied genre is replaced. "Detective stories," as Charles Rzepka states, "contain a detective of some kind, an unsolved mystery," and "an investigation by which the mystery is eventually solved" (10). Therefore, in such stories, it is expected that the mystery be solved by the detective at the end, and reassurance comes back to the entangled situation. But in this play, such certainty is not achieved at the end. Besides, Moon mentions that the play is "derivative, of course" (*Hound* 11). This direct statement about the derivative nature of the play in addition to the deliberate parodying Christie's *Mousetrap*, and intertextual links between these works, presents lack of originality of Stoppard's play. After Simon and Hound occupy the critics seats, Simon criticizes the play as "it is without pace, point, focus, interest, drama, wit or originality" (40). Stoppard writes *Hound* from a postmodern attitude. Due to the fact that the postmodern idea that everything in this world is not original and it is a copy of another thing, roots in each part of his text, for instance, replacement of the two critics with the actors, multiple identities, simulated and repeated conversations.

Stoppard's first sentence of the play, the "audience appear to be confronted by their own reflection in a huge mirror" (*Hound* 5), signifies that the barrier between the audience including critics and the players is blurred. The mirror on the stage signifies that the play is mirroring real life. If it is mirroring the real life of audience, it will testify that such shifts from reality into another world or crossing such borders will happen in their own real lives. Stoppard's word "impossible" (*Hound* 5), while he is talking about the mirror on stage, presents his expectation of the audience's reactions against the acceptance of mixing of reality with the constructed reality. Considering the mirror on stage, the "set is intended," Jenkins believes, "to implicate the audience"

(51). The mirror on stage, Hodgson mentions, fulfills Stoppard's intention to "draw the audience in" (55). The mirror which reflects or projects the audience's images on the stage, presents them as active participants in the play not just inactive consumers. The audience is faced with the audience in the theater to assure them that what they are watching is the real thing because they are real. "The audience," Schwanitz believes, "is led to doubt its own faculty of distinguishing between levels of reality and frames of reference" (140). Therefore, the audience cannot find out the distinction between real and unreal. *Hound*, for instance, as Brassell mentions, "demonstrates the unreality of all acting, and invites the audience to consider whether, in terms of another focus beyond their perception, they too are no more than actors in a play" (101). The critics' role playings, who were the previous audience of the play, make the spectators doubt about their future involvement in an unreal reality. Stoppard deliberately throws his audience into uncertainty. The audience is skeptical of the reality they are observing, for instance, although the real Inspector Hound is discovered at the end, the audience remains doubtful about his real identity. The theater spectator may even ponder what about him to be the real Inspector Hound. The spectator of the play, according to the repeated aspects of the play, is faced with the illusion that the play will be kept going and will never be finished.

In the play, Moon considers Birdboot's entering the play and taking Simon's role as something illogical, and repeatedly asks him to leave it by saying "Stop making an ass of yourself. Come back" (*Hound* 34). "Have you taken leave of your tiny mind?" and "You keep out of this" (*Hound* 35). Having been fascinated by the world of hyperreality, that reminds Baudrillard's Disneyland, Birdboot replies Moon that "I don't need your two penny Grubb street prognostications-I have found something bigger and finer-" (*Hound* 35). Birdboot's acknowledgement of finding something better in the world of the play presents that he is too enchanted by it and he consciously accepts an unreal situation as the more real than any reality, say, hyperreality in which undesirable things, Birdboot's wife, Myrtle, whose repeated phone calls disturb him, are replaced by desirable ones, Cynthia's love and presence. Besides, "phones," accessible to everyone in the present age, Patrick Jones believes, "separate individuals from reality and locates them in the hyperreal condition" (1). Phone is frequently rings in play to which different characters answer. At first Mrs. Drudge picks it up and replies that "I'm afraid there is no one of that name here, this is all very mysterious and I'm sure it's leading up to something" (11). Her second sentence, especially the word "mysterious" indicates that a reality is hidden. It rings again and she replies "The same, half an hour later?... No, I'm sorry-there's no one of that name here" (24). Repeated phone calls of Birdboot's wife, referred to as "transgressive phone calls" (15) by Jayaram, forces Birdboot to step on the stage to answer the phone that makes him take the role of Simon Gascoyne. Birdboot to the phone says "Oh, for God's sake, Myrtle!-I've

told you never to phone me at work!" (32). He tries to persuade her that there is nothing between him and another woman. Therefore, the phone rings for Birdboot, an audience in the real world, who becomes an actor in an unreal world or illusion, and is fascinated by the hyperreal world of the play. Consequently, Birdboot prefers and enjoys this hyperreal world where he can forget and get rid of his undesirable life.

In *Hound*, some frightening messages are announced by Radio, a kind of mass media. It says "We interrupt our program for a special police message. The search still goes on for the escaped madman who is on the run in Essex" (9). Radio continues that Inspector Hound reports that he is around Muldoon Manor and describes his clothes. In another message it mentions that "police are searching in vain for the madman" (14). Radio as the single speaker, through a magic box, intrudes on the life of the inhabitants of Muldoon Manor. Although its messages are announced for the characters of the play-within-the-play, but these messages affect the critics and audience, and scare or warn them of something which never does exist or happen. Characters, critics and audience of the play, nervous and fearful of what heard, believe the radio message as reality. This instance indicates how media imposes on the mass audience to think, feel and react as the media desires. In other words, media produces a sense of hyperreality to manipulate the mass audience and make them enjoy what "hyperreal" world provides for them.

Conclusion

Tom Stoppard's play, *The Real Inspector Hound*, could be summed up in one phrase as drama for questioning reality. Although it investigates reality but there are some obstacles in the process of representing reality which hide and distort the actual reality, and make a constructed reality without any origin, that is, hyperreality, presents as reality. Obstacles such as plays-within-play, intertextuality, lack of originality, shifting of identities, characters' taking several roles and metadrama in the plays result in blurred boundaries between reality and fantasy. Therefore, this merging of reality into unreality makes a hyperreal world for the audience, and even the characters. They get confuse about when they are watching the outer play or reality and when they are watching unreal scenes or inner plays.

As Baudrillard claims reproducibility is a requisite factor in a hyperreal world. In Stoppard's selected plays, such reproducibility is presented through repetition of frequent events, scenes and dialogues, plurality of signifiers and signifieds, multiplicity of identities and names. Besides, frequent repetitions and twining feed to audience's uncertainty about the presented reality because of the possibility of existence of multiple interpretations and meanings.

Media plays an outstanding role in making the hyperreal world. Media with its seductive and fascinating power manipulates the audience's mind toward media's tendencies and provides a

captivating context for spectators to fulfill their dreams and enjoy the presented fake reality. Therefore, Stoppard presents hyperreality in his play, that is, he distorts and hides the real reality in entangled labyrinth to provide his spectators with signs of hyperreal world in order not to blindly accept what is presented to them as reality.

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A theater critic reviewing the play in the absence of Higgs. His existence revolves around the absence of Higgs which he fantasises about his death. He realises that the other critic Puckeridge probably wishes the same on him. Becomes caught up in the play assuming the role of Inspector Hound. Birdboot. A renowned theater critic and rumored womaniser. Married to Myrtle but is having an affair with Felicity. Becomes caught up in the play assuming the role of Simon Gascoyne. Higgs. The critic that Moon stands in for. The dead man on the floor of Muldoon Manor. Puckeridge. The Real Inspector Hound is a short, one-act play by Tom Stoppard. The plot follows two theatre critics named Moon and Birdboot who are watching a ludicrous setup of a country house murder mystery, in the style of a whodunit. By chance, they become involved in the action causing a series of events that parallel the play they are watching. The play was written between 1961 and 1962, drawing on Stoppard's experiences as a Bristol theatre critic. It was initially named *The Stand-ins* and later, *The Tom Stoppard Plays: The Real Inspector Hound/Dirty Linen/Dogg's Hamlet/Cahoot's Macbeth/After Magritte/ New-found-land (Contemporary Classics)*. Tom Stoppard. 5.0 out of 5 stars 2. Paperback. \$16.95. Next. Product details. So far I've only read the Real Inspector Hound. I saw it about 30 years ago. It was stunning. Only beat by *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Read more. One person found this helpful. Helpful.