

Experiments with time structure in Tom Stoppard's dramas

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Abstract: The present study aims to analyse selected plays of Tom Stoppard for the stage and the radio from the perspective of experimenting with time structures. In all cases, chronological time schemes are abandoned and replaced by different constructs. In the radio drama *Artist Descending a Staircase*, the piece starts in the present then, over a sequence of scenes, moves several years backwards only to return to the present again at its end. Another radio play, *Where Are They Now*, interweaves scenes in which school graduates meet in the present with past moments when they were still at school. *Travesties* composes its account from the viewpoint of the memories of old Henry Carr, who is trying to recall the past but is not quite able to do so because of his erratic memory. In this stage drama, scenes from the past are introduced by the Old Carr's appearance on the stage. Finally, *Arcadia* is set in two time periods which, at first, follow each other separately only to become fused at the end of the drama, when the characters from the past and the present dance a waltz together. In all cases, the specific treatment of time adds to the overall richness of the pieces' texture.

Keywords: Stoppard, radio and theatre drama, time, experiment

As varied and divergent as Tom Stoppard's oeuvre may be, it still contains certain recurrent thematic and structural elements which are characteristic of his output. While "contriving the perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce or perhaps even high comedy" (Hudson 1974, 8), the playwright deals with a variety of themes: the relativity of human identity and reality, the difficulties pertaining to describing reality by means of language or artistic creativity, moral issues, history, mathematics and physics. This multitude of themes is paralleled by the appearance of multiple dramatic means which include, among others, the use of play within a play, intertextual references to a wide spectrum of fields of knowledge and specific disruption of chronological time.

The technique of distracting the linear flow of time varies depending on the requirements of effectively presenting the thematic issues concerned. The aim of the present study is to discuss the experimental treatment of time in Stoppard's selected stage and radio plays.

In his first drama, *Enter a Free Man*, Stoppard includes a specific disruption of both time and space to illustrate the discrepancy between what Riley, the titular character, actually is and what he would like to be. Ronald Hayman has described the drama, arguing that it "looks like a realistic play about a man with an unrealistic image of himself" (1974, 20). The stage is divided into two sets. On the left, there is the pub where Riley is pretending to be a successful businessman and a free man, while on the right the space signifies his home where he appears to be an unemployed dreamer and loser taking weekly allowances from his daughter, Linda, who is the money earner in the family. The drama starts at home with Linda and her mother talking about trivial issues after Riley's departure to the pub. The lights slowly fade out on the bar, while Linda's sentence "There is two of everyone" is heard. As the audience now view the pub scene, Riley's loud announcement "Enter a free man" is followed by Linda's remark at home "Poor old Dad" (Stoppard 1977, 10). Stephen Hu, when discussing the scene, argues:

The transitional device that Stoppard uses twice to shift locales in Act I is known in film and video editing as an audio bridge, a relatively uncommon technique in which aural and/or verbal cues from a scene bear some informational relationship to elements in the scene to follow. Visuals in the second scene begin to dissolve-in or fade-in while the audio of the first scene continues, sometimes as a voice-over narrative. (1989, 16)

The audio bridge connects the two settings and at the same time introduces the contrast between two selves of the main character evident in Riley's boastful announcement and the pitiful remark of Linda. The same can be noticed in the case of the second audio bridge, which is much longer than the previous one. Here Riley gives a lengthy speech in the pub, dealing with his monotonous existence at home, as the bar set fades out. We then see Persephone watering the plants as Riley continues to talk shifting, unexpectedly, reality back to his home before the speech has ended:

and when I came down this morning, there she was, just watering the flowers from a jug, as usual . . . That was the first thing that happens this morning . . . (To PERSEPHONE.) There's no need- (Stoppard 1977, 35)

Even though this scene contains an audio bridge, the treatment of time is different, as while changing the locale, Riley, and the audience alike, moves backwards in time to the morning. What follows next is a quarrel at home with Linda, Riley taking his allowance and leaving for the bar again. Therefore, this indicates another repetition emphasising the monotonous and repetitive quality of his existence and unfulfillment both at home and in the pub. Anthony Jenkins concedes: "By backtracking, Stoppard allows us to view Riley's complaints about his family's lack of appreciation with prior knowledge that he will be equally frustrated and inadequate in the outside world" (1988, 4). It transpires that despite his efforts to create an image of himself as a free man, he does not live up to this standard both at home and in the pub despite all his attempts to impress the people there. It should be added that the audio bridges are a means not only of disrupting the chronological sequence but also of shattering the theatrical illusion, a way of reminding the audience that what they are watching is not reality, but only its artistic, theatrical representation.

When *Travesties* starts, we watch a scene set in the library and listen to a succession of exchanges between Gwen and Joyce, Lenin and Nadya, Tristan Tsara and Cecily, the librarian. As the prologue comes to an end with Joyce's departure:

The stage now belongs to OLD CARR. The LIBRARY must now be replaced by the ROOM. Needless to say, the change should occur with as little disruption as possible, and the use of music as a bridge is probably desirable. . . . It is possible that CARR has been immobile on stage from the beginning, an old man remembering. (Stoppard 1976, 21)

The whole play is a reproduction of the past as remembered by old Carr and not necessarily as it actually was. As Peter Wood concedes, the past is "seen prismatically through the view of Henry Carr. At one point, Tom was thinking of calling it *Prism*" (qtd. in Sammells 1986, 381). The printed text of the play acknowledges Stoppard's indebtedness to Lenin's *Collected Writings*, Nadezhda Krupskaya's *Memoirs of Lenin*, to six books about Lenin, an illustrated history

of the First World War, two books on James Joyce and two on Dada, which, while indicating Stoppard's main sources of information on the period, simultaneously points to the importance of concrete historical material in the play (Stoppard 1976, 15). Despite his thorough historical knowledge, Stoppard was still aware that he could not unmistakably reproduce the past as it actually was and thus explained the importance of Carr for the structure of the play in an interview with Nancy Shields Hardin:

I tend to remove situations from reality [...]. In *Travesties*, once you've decided that the whole thing is happening in an old man's head, you are liberated from the somewhat tedious inconvenience of having to stick to any kind of historical truth. (Hardin 1981, 163)

The play is, as its title suggests, a travesty not only of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, in the production of which Joyce and Carr participated and which forms the backbone of *Travesties*, but it also is a travesty of the past. In the stage directions, Stoppard indicates the great extent to which form and content of the play are shaped by Carr's narrative interventions:

... the scene (and 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. One result is that the story (like a toy train perhaps) occasionally jumps the rails and has to be restarted at the point where it goes wild. (1976, 27)

The fallibility of Carr's memory is signalled by means of the repetition of certain scenes in different variants, questioning, in a sense, the reliability of his accounts of the past. The introduction of Carr as narrator and the disruption of the chronological time sequence resulting from his memory failures may be treated as a kind of disclaimer indicating the narrator's unreliability. This point is made explicit at the end of the play where, with "most of the fading light" centred on Carr, he presents his last speech and recollection of the past:

Great days ... Zurich during the war. Refugees, spies, exiles, poets, writers, radicals of all kinds. I knew them all. Used to argue far into night ... at the Odeon, the Terrasse ... I learned three things

in Zurich during the war. I wrote them down. Firstly, you're either a revolutionary or you're not, and if you're not you might as well be an artist as anything else. Secondly, if you can't be an artist, you might as well be a revolutionary ... I forgot the third thing. (Stoppard 1976, 98-99)

Similarly to *Travesties*, *Arcadia* dramatises two periods of time, yet their relationship is considerably different to that in the play about the modernist literary and political revolutionaries. Whereas the earlier drama presented the past as a retrospection of old Carr narrating in the present, *Arcadia* shows the scenes from the past and the present interchangeably as happening on stage, which, according to Pavis, is "both the time of the performance underway and of the spectator watching it" (1998, 409). When the play starts, we see "a room on the garden front of a very large country house in Derbyshire in April 1809" (Stoppard 1993, 1); the room is occupied by Thomasina Coverly and her tutor, Septimus Hodge. The first words are uttered by Thomasina, who enquires what a "carnal embrace" is and gets the answer: "Carnal embrace is the practice of throwing one's arms around a side of beef" (Stoppard 1993, 1). As the disappointed girl pushes for further definition, referring to Mrs Charter being seen in a carnal embrace with Septimus in the gazebo, the conversation starts to become filled with sexual undertones causing the tutor to remind her what she should be thinking about and concentrating on: "I thought you were finding a proof of Fermat's last theorem" (Stoppard 1993, 2). Thus, the initial moments of the drama introduce us to two of its main topics: love and science. On the one hand, Thomasina, in the initial scenes thirteen years old then later sixteen, is involved in the scientific debate of the play. On the other hand, she has a soft spot for her tutor and tries to win his interest and affection. In the scenes from the past, there is a number of different characters, many of them being involved in romances or hoping to be so. It is also in these scenes that Lord Byron, even though remaining an off-stage character, plays an important part. In the scenes of the present, there are only a few characters, the foremost being; Valentine Coverly, aged around thirty, a post-graduate biologist and mathematician, an expert at computers; Hanna Jarvis a research worker and author of a book on Caroline Lamb. At present Hanna is working on a book about gardens, developing the idea that romantic gardens marked "the decline from thinking to feeling" (Stoppard 1993, 28). There is also Bernard Nightingale, an Oxford don trying

to reconstruct the story of Byron's stay at Sidley park. The modern times characters either investigate the past to try to specify it in the case of Hannah and Bernard or explain scientific riddles which were a mystery to Thomasina and Septimus, as in the case of Valentine.

The theory of chaos serves as a kind of basis for both the apparent randomness and underlying order. The theory's main points can be explained in Stoppard's words as follows:

[the theory] suggested itself as a quite interesting and powerful metaphor for human behaviour, not just behaviour, but about the way it suggested a determined life, a life ruled by determinism, and a life which is subject simply to random causes and effects. Those two ideas about life were irreconcilable. Chaos mathematics has precisely to do with the unpredictability of determinism. (qtd. in Gussow 1995, 84)

Valentine not only explains "the New Geometry of Irregular Forms discovered by Thomasina," as found in her notes by Hannah, but he is also the one who calls it "an iterated algorithm" (Stoppard 1993, 43) concluding Thomasina's premonition, "the melancholy certitude of a world without light and life ... as a wooden stove that must consume itself until ash and stove are one, and heat is gone from the earth" is nothing else than "the second law of thermodynamics" (Stoppard 1993, 65). The science introduced in the play functions on two levels, thematic and structural, as the drama is built in a non-linear form, alternating scenes from past to present. In the last scene, Stoppard shows the two time phases side by side, simultaneously. John Fleming writes:

When I asked Stoppard what led to the decision to intermingle two time periods in the final scene, he gave both a practical and a thematic answer. On the one hand it was "just to change the deck" so that "just at the point when the audience thinks it can guess what's coming next, you have to fool them" (Fleming 1993, 23). When pressed further on the topic, Stoppard added: "I have a secret agenda, but I wouldn't lay it on the audience. The play mimics the way an algorithm goes through bifurcations into chaos, as a matter of fact. In a very compressed way" (Fleming 1993, 24).

Elsewhere, he added: “The play bifurcates two or three times and then goes into the last section which is all mixed up. So, it’s very chaos structured” (Demasces and Kelly 1994, 5). Thus, as in keeping with the strongest science plays, the form and content wed as the very structure of the play not only embodies the spirit of deterministic chaos but also creates a very crude diagram of bifurcation into chaos. (Fleming 2008, 52)

The setting of the scenes in two periods has a number of consequences, the first of these concerns objects appearing on the stage. A number of the same objects belong to the past in scenes from the nineteenth century and to the present in modern scenes. So, for instance, the apple given by the silent Gus, a teenager who stopped speaking at the age of five and who has a youthful crush on Hannah in scene two (Stoppard 1993, 33), reappears in the schoolroom of Thomasina and Septimus in scene three, as indicated in the stage directions: “*There is also an apple on the table now, the same from all appearances*” (Stoppard 1993, 35). Later on in the scene, Thomasina picks up the apple leaf and says: “I will plot the leaf and deduce its equation” (Stoppard 1993, 37). Her diagram, found later in her portfolio, is discussed by Hannah and Valentine in scene four when the latter explains the nature of the iterated algorithm. Later, when Hannah picks up an apple leaf from the table she says: “So you couldn’t make a picture of this leaf by iterating a whatsit?” and gets the answer “Oh yes, you could do that” (Stoppard 1993, 47). Finally, in scene seven, Thomasina’s diagram of the apple leaf is drawn by her in the past (Stoppard 1993, 87) to be inspected by Valentine and Hannah when the scene shifts a few moments later to the present. The apple seems to function on two levels, not only as far as the phases of time are concerned but also in the two thematic motifs of the play: love and science. It is not only the diagram which appears in two-time spheres in this scene, as Thomasina also draws a picture of Septimus and his tortoise Plautus. The picture is then found by Gus and given to Hannah, helping her to solve the mystery of the hermit from the past.

A few words should be said about Gus, the mysterious, silent teenager. When he appears in the last scene, like most of the other modern characters he is dressed in Regent clothes, as everybody is dressing up, getting ready for the party which is about to take place in the marquee. The stage directions read “*It takes a moment to realize that he is not Lord Augustus, perhaps not until Hannah*

sees him" (Stoppard 1993, 96). For some time, the audience is not aware of whom they are watching – Gus from the present or Augustus, Thomasina's brother from the past. Stoppard observes:

Gus is about as far as I'm prepared to go into metaphysics, I suppose. By which I mean, intellectually and temperamentally – I don't know which it is – I don't believe in a mechanistic universe. I don't think that's a complete description. So Gus represents, I suppose, my feeling that there is something more mysterious than that. And we don't know how it works, and there's no point in explaining Gus because that would say I do know how it works. But in the first place, I don't know how it works; in the second place I don't think anybody does know; in the third place I don't think it's possible to know; in the fourth place I don't think it's necessary to know. It's that kind of feeling. (qtd. in Fleming 1993, 41)

There is yet another mystery in the play, that concerns the music to which the characters both from the past and present are dancing at the end of the play. The music can be heard at many moments during the play. When the piano is audible for the first time (Stoppard 1993, 76), we do not know who is playing it and whether it is being played in the nineteenth century or now, as the characters from both periods are present on the stage. Later on, it is specified by Thomasina and Septimus that it is Thomasina's mother who is playing with a Count from Poland, and Thomasina then asks her tutor to start teaching her to waltz (Stoppard 1993, 81). However, another kind of music is heard: "*The music changes to party music from the marquee,*" as the two of them kiss (Stoppard 1993, 92). Then "*SEPTIMUS takes her in his arms carefully and the waltz lesson, to the music of marquee, begins*" (Stoppard 1993, 94). At the beginning, they dance "*with the slight awkwardness of a lesson,*" then they are "*waltzing freely*" (Stoppard 1993, 95, 96). While they are still waltzing, Gus hands over to Hannah the drawing presenting Plautus and Septimus and "*Then, rather awkwardly, he bows to her. A Regency bow, an invitation to dance,*" and they "*start to dance, rather awkwardly*" (Stoppard 1993, 96). The final stage directions of the play read: "*SEPTIMUS and THOMASINA continue to dance, fluently, to the piano*" (Stoppard 1993, 96). The end of the printed text indicates a change of music so that each couple now dances to the music of their times. Septimus and Thomasina dance to piano

music, while Hannah and Gus to modern music. Such a solution is possible in a printed text but not in the reality of a theatre production when a concrete music must be heard. The modern couple does bear some characteristics of the old times, such as Gus's Regent costume and bow. Their dancing rather awkwardly may be due to Gus's shyness or inability to dance. What is certain is the fact that in the final moments of the drama the two phases of time are mixed completely together as the past and present melt into one entity and the two couples from different times dance together. For this, a solution concerning the music must be found. The two couples must be dancing to one kind of music; no other way is possible. In a brilliant article concerning the time structure of Stoppard's drama, Jerzy Limon argues:

it becomes obligatory to signal the difference in behaviour or reaction between the two dancing couples. The difference signals parallel but separate indexical functions operating, by which we understand that Hannah and Gus are dancing ('awkwardly') to the modern music we cannot hear, whereas Thomasina and Septimus waltz to the music we can hear, incompatible as though it might seem. (2008, 228)

Such an interpretation might be supported by the fact that when Septimus and Thomasina start dancing to the marquee music, they dance awkwardly. This solution demands a change in the music at the very end of the drama from modern to piano, as indicated in the stage directions. This can be done slowly, blending one kind of music into another, just like the two periods of time melt into one.

Where Are They Now? and *Artist Descending a Staircase* were created before *Travesties* and *Arcadia* but will be discussed now, as these two dramas were written for the radio, a medium in which time fulfils a slightly different function to theatre plays. These short radio plays may be considered as a kind of warm-up exercise for the theatre plays, as there are certain aural ambushes set in them which the audience is required to solve successfully in order to be able to correctly interpret the sounds they hear and thus the meaning of the play. Stoppard, who claims his aim is to "entertain a roomful of people" (1974, 6), experiments with the audience's ability to make discoveries while decoding the meaning of the pieces. He has commented on this aspect of his writing on several

occasions. He has called his art "the theatre of audacity" (Hayman 1979, 9), one of whose assets are "the dislocation of the audience's assumptions" (Hayman 1979, 143). In the interview for *Theatre Quarterly* Stoppard observed:

I tend to write through 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. But my preoccupation as a writer, which possibly betokens a degree of insecurity, takes the form of contriving to inject some sort of interest and colour into every line, rather than counting on the general situation having a general interest which will hold an audience. (1974, 6)

Where Are They Now?, a short 35-minute radio play commissioned by BBC Schools Radio and transmitted on 28 January 1970, presents a Hove school reunion with three central characters. In a note preceding the published text, Stoppard indicates:

The play is set in two intercut locations, School Dinner (1945) and Old Boys' Dinner (1969). Part of the idea is to move between the two without using any of the familiar grammar of fading down or fading up; the action is continuous. (1973b, 61)

Thus the play makes use of a specific structural experiment with time, providing the continuous rendering of two periods, separated by a passage of twenty-five years in the story. The structure of the play depicts the simultaneous existence of the characters on three levels: past scenes from 1945, present scenes from 1969, and the past as now remembered by the three friends and not necessarily as it was. We can, therefore, view the characters from at least three different perspectives. The action is, as Stoppard argues, "continuous," in most cases, with scenes changing unobtrusively and bridged by the same repeated word or sound. Such is the case with scenes one and two, linked by the same words "old man" (Stoppard 1973b, 64). The words are identical, but they have a different referent. In the first case, they are used by Chico as an explanation of the root of the word "senile" – "senex – senis – old man!" during the boys' conversation with their Latin master in the past (Stoppard 1973b, 64). In the second case, they are used in a scene set in the present, starting with Dobson, the same teacher,

saying “Splendid, Brindley, old man” (Stoppard 1973b, 64). At first, we might suspect that the teacher is praising the pupil for giving a correct answer, yet it soon transpires that this is not the case, as indicated by the name “Brindley” and not a nickname from the past “Chico” being used and then further clarified when the teacher continues: “Splendid to see you” (Stoppard 1973b, 64). Similarly, later on, one scene ends with a “*Thump*” (Stoppard 1973b, 73) indicative of the sound of being beaten by the teacher as a punishment. The stage directions, introducing the next scene read: “*Thump. Thump. The headmaster’s gavel. Silence overtakes the OLD BOY’s dinner*” (Stoppard 1973b, 73). Listening to this radio play demands the special attention of listeners who are requested to decode and interpret the aural signals, no matter whether verbal or merely acoustic.

The last play to be discussed, *Artist Descending a Staircase*, also contains a number of ambushes for the audience connected with the proper decoding of different signals, many of these being aural as expected in a radio play. There are two main ambushes set by the play, the first one being connected with properly decoding of the identity of the man with whom Sophie falls in love during an art exhibition. She identifies him as the artist who painted “black railings on a field of snow” (Stoppard 1973a, 38) and it was assumed by all to be Beauchamp. It might have been, however, Donner who painted a white fence: “Thick white posts, top to bottom across the whole canvas, an inch or two apart, black in the gaps – ” (Stoppard 1973a, 51). In the course of the play, it transpires that she may have fallen victim to an optical illusion and been in a relationship with the wrong man, which in the end leads to her suicide.

The second ambush concerns the ability to properly decode the aural signals the listeners hear and to distinguish the difference between what is actually happening in the radio play and what is a recording within it, or a recording within a recording similar to play within a play technique (Limon 2003, 151). The play aims to teach us how to interpret properly the sounds we hear, as in doing so we will be able to understand the aural reality we encounter in the play and grasp the specific time structure of the drama. The play opens and ends with a tape recording registering the moment of Donner’s falling down some stairs, which is interpreted on both occasions by the stage directions to attentive listeners of this radio piece. What comes in between is a sequence of scenes following a specific time pattern: “in the sequence ABCDEFDCBA” where “A = here and now, B = a couple of hours ago, C = last week, D = 1922, E = 1920 and F = 1914” (Stoppard 1973a, 11). Thus the play

has a V shape with scene A being set in the present at Donner's death and F marking the most distant point in the past. Moving from one scene to the next, retreating more and more into the past, is marked by a repetition of a signal which, although acoustically the same, specifies something else on both occasions. Scene A, presenting the tape registering the fall of Donner, and introducing Beauchamp and Martello, ends with the former's mentioning of a "master tape" which is listened to at the beginning of the next scene. Similarly, the second scene E, following the scene set in 1914 showing the artists walking amid the events of World War Two starts with all three men "*chanting out directions: Left! ... left ... right ... right ... turn ... right a bit ... turn ... left ... turn ... stop!*" (Stoppard 1973a, 47-48). We might initially assume that what we are listening to is a military drill only to discover that this is not the case. The three men are having a game with Sophie, trying to specify the place she occupies in the room. This aural signal helps us realise that sometimes a given sound may, in different contexts, signify different things. Such is also the case with the recording preserved on the tape registering Donner's fall down the stairs. When we hear the tape for the first time, we listen to the sounds specified in the stage directions and interpreted by Martello and Beauchamp as follows:

- (a) DONNER *dozing: an irregular droning noise.*
 - (b) *Careful footsteps approach. The effect is stealthy. A board creaks.*
 - (c) *This wakes DONNER, i.e. the droning stops in mid-beat.*
 - (d) *The footsteps freeze.*
 - (e) *DONNER's voice, unalarmed: 'Ah! There you are ...'*
 - (f) *Two more quick steps, and then Thump! He falls heavily down the stairs, with a final sickening thump when he hits the bottom. Silence.*
- (Stoppard 1973a,13)

As already stated, the play teaches us to interpret sounds correctly and thus not to be mistaken in their decoding. In the course of the drama, there are numerous references to a buzzing fly: "*either verbal*" (Stoppard 1973a,16, 22, 45, 47, and 58) or "*aural*" in which "*the buzzing is actually heard*" (Stoppard 1973a, 45, 57, and 58) or simply as information "*the fly is smacked by one of the characters*" – one or more times (Stoppard 1973a, 22, 24, 45, 47, 56). As the play ends, the listeners hear Beauchamp chasing and finally killing the fly. Then they listen to the recording registered on the tape once more:

- (a) *Fly droning.*
- (b) *Careful footsteps approach. A board creaks.*
- (c) *The fly settles.*
- (d) BEAUCHAMP *halts.*
- (e) BEAUCHAMP: *'Ah! There you are.'*
- (f) *Two more quick steps and then Thump!* (Stoppard 1973a, 54)

The sounds on the tape described identically on both occasions as “droning” are identified as the snoring of Donner and the buzzing of a fly. Thus the unhappy coincidence of falling down the stairs is seen by the two artists as referring to the murder of Donner. The play, therefore, solves the mystery of Donner’s death, suggesting that it was not a case of whodunit but an unhappy accident.

In all the plays discussed, and others not analysed here, time fulfils a thematic or structural role, or both simultaneously. The employment of specific temporal structures, juxtaposing two phases of time or fusing them in intriguing ways marks Stoppard’s mastery of the use of the given medium and his experiments with the self-reflexive qualities of the pieces. The artist draws the attention of the audiences to a number of different issues: the past as it is remembered by people is seldom the same as it actually was, the recollections of the past may sometimes be considered erroneous, and the same quality of not only words but also of sounds rendering different meanings.

The dramas under discussion use time as a thematic and structural element in a number of different ways. The radio plays, *Where Are They Now* and *Artist Descending the Stairs*, juxtapose scenes from the past interwoven in a masterly way with those from the present. The audience is invited to guess at what time the given scene takes place, by decoding the reoccurring sounds, which in each case denote something different. To some extent these pieces also skilfully compare the past as it actually was and as it is remembered. The stage play *Travesties* uses a slightly different time structure by which we are continually reminded that the scenes from the past do not necessarily represent what actually was but only as it is remembered by an erratic memory. The construction of *Arcadia* also intertwines two time phases, yet in this case, the characters from the present do not recall their past but try to reconstruct somebody else’s. Suwalska-Kołecka approaches the play from the perspective of the semioticians of history, citing Yury Lotman and Boris Uspienski whom she follows in respect of “scepticism concerning the availability of history to us” (2003, 90).

In the case of *Arcadia*, this scepticism refers to both Hannah Jarvis and Bernard Nightingale, who, being literary sleuths, while analysing concrete historical events, erroneously interpret the past.

While discussing his creative process, Stoppard argues: "the only useful metaphor I can think of for the way I think I write my plays is convergence of different threads. Perhaps carpet-making would suggest something similar" (qtd. in Hayman 1979, 4-5). This seems to be a successful metaphor for what the artist achieves - he weaves magical carpets using a number of different threads, one of these being the structural and thematic use of time.

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