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Biography cast in irony: Caveats, stylization, and indeterminacy in the biographical history plays of Tom Stoppard and Michael Frayn

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BIOGRAPHY CAST IN IRONY:
CAVEATS, STYLIZATION, AND INDETERMINACY IN THE BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY
PLAYS OF TOM STOPPARD AND MICHAEL FRAYN

by

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Michael Frayn,
written by Christopher M. Shonka,
has been approved for the Department of Theatre

Dr. Merrill Lessley

Dr. James Symons

Date____________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
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Biography Cast in Irony: Caveats, Stylization, and Indeterminacy in the Biographical History

Plays of Tom Stoppard and Michael Frayn

Thesis directed by Professor Merrill J. Lessley; Professor James Symons, second reader

Abstract

This study examines Tom Stoppard and Michael Frayn’s incorporation of epistemological themes related to the limits of historical knowledge within their recent biography-based plays. The primary works that are analyzed are Stoppard’s The Invention of Love (1997) and The Coast of Utopia trilogy (2002), and Frayn’s Copenhagen (1998), Democracy (2003), and Afterlife (2008). In these plays, caveats, or warnings, that illustrate sources of historical indeterminacy are combined with theatrical stylizations that overtly suggest the authors’ processes of interpretation and revisionism through an ironic distancing. These processes are analyzed and then placed in a broader context by comparing them with the general trends in historical representation found in deconstructionist and postmodernist plays by British authors in order to investigate how Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biography-based plays might resemble a continued questioning of biographical approaches similar to those found in new historicism and the study of historiography.

Chapter 1 details the context and parameters of this study, the analytical tools that are used, and how it is situated within the current literature. In chapters 2 and 3 the forms of Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical plays are examined along with their use of stylization, their expressed philosophies about historical representation, and analyses from other scholars. These analyses are contextualized with an examination of the presence of themes related to epistemology and historical indeterminacy in their other works. Chapter 4 compares Stoppard
and Frayn’s biography-based works and then places their general similarities in the context of the representative strategies found in deconstructionist and postmodern British history plays, observing that they more closely resemble deconstruction because, while they emphasize provisionality and historical indeterminacy through their play’s aesthetics, they do not go so far as to universally reduce their interpretations and the communication of their ideas to contingencies. Chapter 5 concludes this study with final observations about the nature of biographical representation and the potential benefits of Stoppard and Frayn’s strategies.
Dedication

To Merrill Lessley for his acumen, patient direction, and invaluable contributions as an advisor. This study could not have been created without the encouragement I received to pursue the path that most interested me.

To James Symons for his wonderful insight and guidance as second reader: enhancing this study with first rate (and terrifically difficult) questions.

To my family and friends for their continued encouragement while I worked on this project.

To my wife, Nicole, for her daily patience with a distracted husband, brilliant mind for sharing ideas, frequent laughter, unique delight in irony, and unwavering support throughout this pursuit.

*Biographically speaking, the bulk of this dissertation was completed in Houston, Texas in the company of two sleeping dogs and at an average room temperature of 74 degrees Fahrenheit. The view from the window was mostly sunny and green. The passing traffic minimal. The mailman’s deliveries irregular. And, in general, the events of the days a little too quiet.*
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Tom Stoppard’s *The Invention of Love* (1997) and *The Coast of Utopia* trilogy (2002), and Michael Frayn’s *Copenhagen* (1998), *Democracy* (2003), and *Afterlife* (2008), marked the return of these authors to writing biographical history plays since Stoppard’s *Travesties* (1974) and Frayn’s *Balmoral* (1978) were produced. While each of these authors based their works on extensive research, their plays contain a warning, or caveat, that cautions their audiences about the subjective position of the author and the indeterminate nature of historical representation. These caveats are facilitated by a stylization of the plays’ dramatic actions that enables the authors, through an ironic distancing, to illustrate themes related to epistemology: a philosophical examination of the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge. The epistemological themes related to historical understanding are presented in concert with the other themes that Stoppard and Frayn develop from their historical characters’ lives.

The presence of a self-conscious depiction of history in Stoppard and Frayn’s biographical history plays is not surprising when their other works are taken into consideration. For example, Stoppard has made folly of the work of biographers in *Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon* (1966), *Arcadia* (1993), and *Indian Ink* (1995) while pursuing epistemological interests in plays like *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1968) and *Jumpers* (1972). Frayn has written two novels centered on epistemological questions, *Constructions* (1974) and *The Human Touch* (2006), and echoed themes from these novels in fictionalized accounts of autobiography in *Headlong* (1999) and *Spies* (2002). Stoppard and Frayn’s similar approaches to historical indeterminism and their shared epistemological interests make this relatively recent intersection
of their playwriting careers an intriguing opportunity for comparing two critically acclaimed playwrights.

In the latter half of the 20th century, Stoppard and Frayn’s demonstrated interest in history-based epistemological questions was preceded by critics and playwrights who were interested in how historical knowledge was acquired, interpreted, and conveyed. New historicists such as Stephen Greenblatt and scholars of historiography such as Hayden White questioned the limits of historical knowledge while drawing attention to the subjective interpretations that are imbedded in historical description and narration. In the theatre, deconstructionist and postmodernist playwrights such as Howard Brenton and Caryl Churchill challenged hegemonic historical accounts through texts that depicted the invention and transmission of history as a limited construct that benefits the elite and overlooks those who are marginalized. In these plays the manner of presentation asserts a rhetorical message about the presence of subjective interpretations and indeterminacy in the communication of history.

This study will examine how Stoppard and Frayn’s epistemological themes condition the representation of biography in their recent biographical history plays by asking the question: What are the primary strategies that Stoppard and Frayn use to represent history in their recent biographical history plays and how do these strategies present a caveat of biographical indeterminacy? In the pursuit of this question, this dissertation will compare these plays by analyzing the authors’ usage of stylization, the form of the plays’ texts, author interviews and writings that address historical representation, and scholarly criticism of these authors’ works. Once these analyses are completed, Stoppard and Frayn’s strategies will be briefly compared with those of British deconstructionist and postmodernist playwrights in order to place their work in the broader context of British historical drama. The introduction to this study will define
some central terms, provide a concise depiction of Stoppard and Frayn as contemporaries, present a description of how the criticism found in new historicism and the study of historiography is reflected in deconstructionist and postmodernist plays, situate this line of questioning within the work of other scholars, and describe the methodology that will be used in the proceeding chapters.

a. Central Terms

The term *epistemology* refers to a diverse area of philosophical examination that interrogates what knowledge is, how it is acquired, and from what sources it is derived. An epistemic line of inquiry might examine whether there is a difference between knowledge, certainty, and belief. Other philosophers might focus on the origins of knowledge (e.g. a priori, a posteriori, and innate). Often included with these pursuits are strategies for addressing skepticism, not just in regard to the possibility of knowledge but to what degree something can be known.

In similar broad terms, the term epistemology can apply to the acquisition of historical knowledge. The epistemic interests in Stoppard and Frayn’s biographical history plays could be said to be present in the ways in which Stoppard and Frayn illustrate how historical knowledge is acquired while also describing the limits of historical knowledge, or the nature and sources of historical indeterminacy.

For the purposes of this study, the term *stylization* will be derived from Susan Sontag’s definition, as stated in her article titled “On Style:”

“Stylization” in a work of art, as distinct from style, reflects an ambivalence (affection contradicted by contempt, obsession contradicted by irony) toward the subject-matter. This ambivalence is handled by maintaining,
through the rhetorical overlay that is Stylization, a special distance from the subject. (141)

Stylization is an active process that is used by artists to disclose their work as a rhetorical creation, imbedding in the work a distancing that ironically comments on the work itself via external thematic rhetorical devices. In a dramatic text stylizations could take the form of both visual and verbal elements and/or a combination of the two. When this study addresses the role of stylization in these authors’ plays, it will be in regard to the usage of rhetorical overlays to maintain a “special distance” from the dramatization of their subjects, calling attention to the artifice behind their biography-based representations and communicating themes related to historical indeterminacy.

How does style differ from stylization? Sontag describes style saying, “. . . what is inevitable in a work of art is the style” (153). This is because “. . . all representation is incarnated in a given style” and thus, speaking of style is “one way of speaking about the totality of a work of art” (138-140). She notes that scholars often mistakenly attempt to separate components of an artist’s work, such as form and content, from its style but this is impossible: “Indeed, practically all metaphors for style amount to placing matter on the inside, style on the outside. It would be more to the point to reverse the metaphor. The matter, the subject, is on the outside; the style is on the inside” (139). Style is a “set of rules” and thus is an “artificial and arbitrary limit” from which form and content are derived. In contrast, “‘Stylization’ is what is present in a work of art precisely when an artist does make the by no means inevitable distinction between matter and manner, theme and form” (140). The use of stylization by an artist, should he or she do so, is part of that artist’s style.
The term form, in the course of this study, will be based on what Susan K. Langer describes as “commanding form.” This is the form playwrights dictate through context (setting and circumstance), dramatic action, dialogue, image, metaphor, and symbol (310-315). As Sontag would likely point out, the form of a play cannot be separated from its style or stylizations. However, for the purpose of this study, the term form will be used when addressing the way the playwright facilitates the play’s dramatic action. These factors will be context, arrangement of time and chronology, characterization (e.g. realistic or surreal), and literary tropes (e.g. tragedy, satire, and irony). In contrast, stylization will refer to rhetorical effects that are overlaid, or comment on, the play’s form. The overall combination of the two will be the components of the authors’ styles that are compared. The term biographical history play will be described in the following section.

b. Stoppard and Frayn as Contemporaries

A scholarly inquiry into Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays is warranted for two primary reasons. First, though their bodies of work differ in many regards, these authors are representative of a generation of post-war British playwrights that experimented with theatrical styles as a way of investigating intellectual ideas. Second, their recent biographical history plays were created in the same era of historical scholarship, after critical movements that questioned the biographical approach to history such as new historicism and the study of historiography had been established.

The scope of Stoppard and Frayn’s prolific careers is resistant to summarization. Stoppard was born in Czechoslovakia in 1937. During World War II he spent several years as a refugee in India until settling in England in 1946. He began his career as a journalist for the
Bristol Evening Standard (1960-1962) but quickly went on to write television plays, stage plays, screenplays, radio plays, opera librettos, and a novel titled Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon (1966).

To demonstrate the diversity of Stoppard’s playwriting, a small sampling of his more prominent works will be mentioned. Stoppard has had several successful productions transfer from London to New York City. His four works that won the Tony Award for Best Play are: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (1968), Travesties (1974), The Real Thing (1984), and The Coast of Utopia (2007). In these plays, Stoppard borrows from a diverse group of theatrical styles. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is a comedic exploration of two secondary characters in Shakespeare’s Hamlet (1603) that makes Beckett-like observations about the human condition in an absurdist context. Travesties is a surreal comedy based in part on a production of Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest that James Joyce produced in Zurich. The Real Thing is a domestic serio-comedy about marital infidelity that uses meta-theatrical, play-within-a-play, devices. The Coast of Utopia trilogy is an epic investigation into the lives and philosophies of Russian revolutionaries during the oppressive conditions of 19th century Tsarist rule.

Stoppard has written several history-based plays that are entirely fictional. New Found Land (1976), Arcadia (1993), Indian Ink (1995), and Rock N’ Roll (2007) are significant in that they all examine historical milieus through fictional characters. Arcadia and Rock N’ Roll directly make references to historical persons, Lord George Gordon Byron and Vaclav Havel respectively, though these characters do not appear in the plays. In contrast, the other plays mentioned above address history indirectly by examining it through a fictionalized context that closely resembles a specific historical period or events. New Found Land is an indirect tribute to Britain’s naturalization of author Ed Berman and Indian Ink represents sociopolitical conditions in India during the British Raj.
Michael Frayn was born in 1933 in London. He has had a diverse career as a writer of newspaper columns, novels, television plays, and plays for the theatre. Frayn began his career in the late 1950’s as a journalist and then as a satirical columnist for the Manchester Guardian. In 1965 he wrote his first novel titled Tin Men and in 1968 he wrote his first television play, Jamie on a Flying Visit. His first play, The Two of Us was written in 1970. Before the late 1990’s he was mostly known in the theatre for writing farces and Noises Off (1982) was his most recognized play. However, beginning in 1998 with Copenhagen and in 2003 with Democracy, Frayn turned his attention toward writing biographical history plays and these successful productions have influenced his identity as an author.

While the difference between the farcical Noises Off and the intellectual drama in his biographical history plays is striking, the diversity of Frayn’s playwriting styles is even wider. For example, in 1984 and 1985 Frayn had three plays running simultaneously in London that were equally distinct from each other: Noises Off, his translation/adaptation of Chekhov’s Wild Honey (Chekhov’s unpublished and untitled first full length play), and a serious-minded contemporary drama titled Benefactors which was described as “dramatizing his dour view of civilization” (Rich, screen 1).

Before his biographical history plays Copenhagen, Democracy, and Afterlife, Frayn had written just one other biography-based play, Balmoral (1978). Rewritten later as Liberty Hall (1980), Balmoral is based on an ahistorical premise that the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 occurred in Britain instead of Russia. The play’s characters include historical persons: Enid Blyton (a children’s writer), Hugh Walpole (a novelist), Godfrey Winn (a journalist), and Dornford Yates (alias for novelist William Mercer).
Frayn’s increased interest in dramatizing historical subjects extends to the novels that were written around the same time as his recent biographical plays. *Headlong* (1999) and *Spies* (2002), each feature a protagonist who attempts to understand events from the past by using his knowledge of history. In *Spies* the narrator revisits his childhood during World War II, reflecting on his experiences through the perspective and knowledge he has acquired over his lifetime. *Headlong* depicts the efforts of a character to interpret recent events in his life, with this interrogation of the past including forays into art history and the political history of the Netherlandish Renaissance.

Given the scope and diversity of history plays, the act of categorization can be a complicated process. In order to establish a common ground for the analyses in this study, the unifying definition of biographical history play that is used to place Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biography-based plays in the same category is taken from Richard H. Palmer’s *The Contemporary British History Play* (1998). Palmer, a professor at William and Mary College in Williamsburg Virginia, has demonstrated a diverse interest in the theatre including authorship of three other books: *The Critics’ Canon: Standards of Theatrical Reviewing in America* (1988); *The Lighting Art: The Aesthetics of Stage Lighting Design* (1985); and, *Tragedy and Tragic Theory: An Analytical Guide* (1992).

Palmer notes that the principal difference between biography-based plays and histories is that biographical works “concentrate on an individual, or in rare cases, a group of individuals,” while histories “emphasize events or institutions, with individuals seen only as contributors” (Palmer 23). For example, a history of the First Continental Congress of the United States would mention highlights of John Adams and Alexander Hamilton’s participation in the event. In
contrast, a biographical work might examine the life of Adams and Hamilton, noting in detail their contributions to the First Continental Congress.

When describing the biographical history play, Palmer carefully avoids dictating strict rules for the genre because of the plurality of approaches that an author might take when using biographical information. He outlines four main groups of biographical history plays: shaker and mover biographies, psychobiographies, domestic biographies, and loser’s biographies. Within these categories there are a wide range of strategies that authors use to dramatize their subjects.

Shaker and mover plays tend to be set in the public sphere and examine the role of prominent figures in shaping major events (13). These historical persons are usually, but not always, political (22). Many of these plays are conventional, with a single protagonist and clear dramatic through-line such as Robert Bolt’s *A Man for All Seasons* (1960). Others might focus on several characters, diffusing the dramatic action, such as John Arden’s *Left Handed Liberty* (1965). His play is based on the signing of the Magna Carta, depicting the conflict between King John and the barons who were seeking legal rights after the document was established. In the depicted events there are many protagonists who appear to be overshadowed by the scale of events in which they are taking part. While these two plays differ in regard to dramatic focus, they both represent a fact-based approach to the use of biography.

In contrast to the fact based plays above, some plays in the shaker and mover category use a biographical approach yet have completely fictionalized contexts. For example, Peter Barnes’ *Leonardo’s Last Supper* (1969) features a surprising depiction of Leonardo da Vinci. Palmer summarizes this play saying, “An impoverished family of morticians, confronted with an apparently resurrected Leonardo, excitedly imagining the great works that he can yet create, drown him in a bucket of filth in order to assure their fee” (37). While the use of biography in
this play might not appear to have much in common with *A Man for All Seasons* or *Left Handed Liberty*. Palmer claims that Barnes’ play “develops [a] metaphoric and thematic value as much as any detailed or engaging personal portraits” (37). In doing so, plays like *Leonardo’s Last Supper* disregard fact yet use biographical information in ways that, while entirely fictional, manage to represent the metaphoric and thematic value of their subjects.

Psychobiographies are plays that rely on specific psychiatric approaches to interpret the actions of an historical person. Of the four categories of biography plays that Palmer identifies, the psychohistories are the most clearly defined because they are founded in some form of diagnostic criteria, such as a Freudian-based analysis. John Osborne’s *Luther* (1961) is an example of a psychobiography with the main character, Martin Luther, portrayed as having an anal fixation. Psychobiography plays appear to be rarer than other biographical history plays because of the difficulty of acquiring the information needed for this approach.

In the domestic biography the primary focus is on the domestic experiences of the historical character/s. There may be public events in domestic biographical history plays but they emphasize an examination of the character/s in private for such purposes as: “humanizing characters, downsizing historic incident for dramatization, developing psychiatric explanations for behavior of historical personages, and exploring alternative ways of interpreting history” (46). Two examples of the domestic biographical history play are Terrence Rattigan’s *Adventure Story* (1949) and Alan Bennett’s *An Englishman Abroad* (1958). In the former, Rattigan depicts the life of Alexander the Great through ten private scenes set between 336 and 323. In this play, Rattigan uses an episodic structure in order to represent the psychological framework that connects Alexander’s domestic life to his military actions. In contrast, *An Englishman Abroad*, is an example of a biographical history play that examines an historical figure by focusing on just
one or two moments from that person’s life. This play examines the life of British diplomat Guy Burgess, a traitor who spied on Britain for the Soviet Union and then defected in 1958. Instead of providing a look at several pivotal moments from his life, Bennett creates a revealing portrayal through seemingly insignificant encounters. The contrast between these two works once again demonstrates the variety of contexts that authors might use to examine their subjects.

The “loser’s biography” is the category of biographical history play that present a kind of oppositional history that is featured prominently in the criticism found in new historicism: “In oppositional history, the failure of the protagonist results principally from external causes and calls into question the legitimacy of the dominant social order” (Palmer 76). One example of loser’s biography would be John Whiting’s The Devils (1961) which, having themes similar to Arthur Miller’s The Crucible, examines the persecution of Urban Grandier. In this drama, Whiting presents an historical person who is marginalized, but marginalized in a way that prevents him from being the kind of heroic figure that Miller’s John Proctor becomes. While Proctor is a reformed victim, returning to the dominant standards of society by repenting his adultery and becoming admirable by refusing to compromise his opposition to coercive forces, Grandier retains his flaws and remains outside the societal hegemony throughout his persecution.

Throughout Palmer’s chapter on biographical history plays, he illustrates the diversity within the genre. Authors of biographical history plays choose how much to focus on the private or public life of the historical person/s, whether to emphasize a social and/or political message, adapt their subjects to different types of criticism (e.g. Marxist), and use different methods of representation, negotiating chronology and context into different modalities of realism and symbolism.
Though Palmer does not offer a strict definition of the biographical history play there seem to be three common structural elements. First, all of the biographical history plays that he examines have at least one historical person as a character, though the ways that they are represented may differ. These characters might be fairly realistic, as in Arden’s *Left Handed Liberty*, or fantastical, as in Barnes’ *Leonardo’s Last Supper*. While the plays vary according to how realistic and how historically accurate they are, the presence of historical persons establishes a biographical foundation that places them in the same genre.

The second feature that these plays have in common is that the biographical information that they contain is essential to their themes and dramatic though-lines. This biographical information might be fact-based and chronologically organized, as in Rattigan’s *Adventure Story*. Or, in the case of *Leonardo’s Last Supper*, the biographical information used might serve a completely fictionalized context, supplementing the plot. Given Palmer’s examples, whether authors use a direct or indirect approach to examining their historical subject, the plays in this genre are those that are derived from biographical information.

Third, some degree of fictionalization is present in all of the biographical history plays that Palmer describes. As opposed to docudrama, which Gary Fisher Dawson says “comes as close as possible to an actual event with the exclusive reliance upon documentation from historically accurate materials” (*Documentary Theatre in the United States* 17), biographical history plays are largely drawn from authorial conjecture, using dramatic license to represent their subjects. While the events they depict may be based in fact and/or use some verbatim quotes, the preponderance of what is said and the moment to moment action of the play is an artificial construct. These plays may reveal different kinds of truths (e.g. literal or figurative).
about their subjects but they are not an attempt to faithfully reenact what transpired in an historical moment.

While Palmer does not explicitly define this genre according to these structural elements, they are the common components that are incorporated in all of the plays that he examines. For the purpose of this study, the term biographical history play will refer to plays that feature one or more historical persons as characters and whose biographical information is integral to their themes and dramatic action. This is the basic set of structural elements that links the plays by Stoppard and Frayn that are examined in this dissertation.

c. **New Historicism, The Study of Historiography, Deconstruction, and Postmodernism**

Stoppard and Frayn’s careers began during a revolutionary time in historical criticism. During the 1960’s and 1970’s, scholars of historiography and new historicism (e.g. Hayden White and Stephen Greenblatt) criticized traditional histories for perpetuating oppressive political and social systems of belief. These ideas contributed to a questioning, or self-consciousness, about the use of history, and perhaps influenced some playwrights to interrogate how history is represented. Authors such as Howard Brenton and Howard Barker blended fact with fiction, defied chronological order, and used non-realistic styles in their history-based plays. These history plays were often social/political commentaries, whether directly addressing contemporary situations, depicting the experiences of marginalized people, or simply representing history in unusual ways in order to expand its rhetorical potential.

The study of historiography became prominent after World War II with studies such as R. G. Collingwood’s *The Idea of History* (1946) and E. H. Carr’s book *What is History?* (1961). John Burrow describes historiography as the method historians use to explicate history, saying that “inquiry, systematic research, is not the only characteristic of historiography. Another is the
rendering of the results of the inquiry into connected historical prose: narrative” (5). At the center of historiography is the narrative that historians use to organize facts and communicate interpretations.

Contained within these narratives there might be political, religious, and sociological biases. As Burrow explains, the study of written histories reveals the socio-political context of the author’s time because authors tend to examine history in ways that can be related to their contemporary experiences (xv). Further, the narrative itself applies an interpretive lens to the historical subject. Hayden White, in his aptly titled *Content of the Form* (1987), examines how the form of a narrative (e.g. romance, satire, comedy, irony and tragedy) becomes the content, or interpretation, of history. White notes that historians shape their narratives by selecting and omitting facts, leading their readers toward what appear to be inevitable conclusions (10).

The study of historiography is one possible approach within the eclectic field of new historical criticism. New historicism emerged during the late 1970’s from the writings of scholars such as Clifford Geertz (*The Interpretation of Cultures* 1975) and Stephen Greenblatt (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 1988). Geertz is credited with utilizing strategies found in literary criticism as tools for anthropological studies, influencing the beginning of a multidisciplinary era of historical scholarship. New historicism is not a specific intellectual domain, but a shared interest in interrogating, and discovering new strategies for, historical representation. Lois Tyson, in *Critical Theory Today* (2006), describes some common characteristics of this eclectic approach, noting that new historicists deny the possibility of an objective historical account and reject the notion that the cause of an historical event can be fully understood. Literature is at the center of this argument. New historicists believe that the author’s point of view is “unavoidably subjective” and that written historical accounts, as narratives, contain culturally influenced
interpretations, reflecting the social and cultural influences of his or her time. What are commonly perceived as “facts” are considered suspect because human error and bias shape the way history is recorded. Due to these conditions, all texts represent points of view in competing sociopolitical discourses (e.g. Eurocentrism versus anti-colonialism). A single zeitgeist cannot define an age because there are always multiple discourses vying with each other. Further, though historical literature might lead the reader to believe that history is linear and progressive, new historicists do not believe that history proceeds on a causal or evolutionary (social) path (290-293).

Based on these assumptions, new historicists have developed alternative strategies for investigating history. New historicists often examine history by interrogating a work of historical literature in conjunction with other texts from, or about, that period. In doing so, they seek to situate the primary text within a broader context of sociopolitical discourses. As part of this strategy they deliberately reveal as much of their own cultural position in their writing as possible, openly disclosing how their interpretations might be prejudiced (Tyson 290-293). Anecdotal evidence and obscure literary works are commonly used to present a counter history, or as evidence for an alternative perspective, to historical narratives that promote sociopolitical hegemony through grand narratives, or metanarratives.

An example of this kind of criticism would be an analysis of Joseph Ellis’ biography of Thomas Jefferson titled American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson published in 1997. A new historicist might examine this historical account by evaluating how it depicts Jefferson’s alleged sexual conduct with Sally Hemings, a woman who was his slave. From this point of departure the new historicist might analyze this historical account to see if it reflects the author’s sociopolitical experiences at the time it was written, which was when President Clinton
was going through an impeachment related to his sexual indiscretions in the White House. Theoretically, the discourse presented in Ellis’ biography might reflect the author’s contemporary attitudes toward discourses related to current events. The new historicist might first establish this sociopolitical context, drawing from historical literature related to Clinton’s affairs with Monica Lewinsky and Paula Jones. Next, they might compare Ellis’ biography with other biographies written about Thomas Jefferson, both during the 1990’s and other time periods. In the process of this evaluation, the new historicist conducting this study would attempt to disclose his/her cultural biases in relation to the investigated subjects. Anecdotal evidence that may have been selectively left out of these different Jefferson biographies might be analyzed to reveal authorial agendas or biases.

Viewed together, scholars of historiography and new historicism share a common philosophy wherein any narration of history that is portrayed as objective is considered suspect because there are an infinite number of facts within an historic event and the act of selecting and assembling those facts naturally creates a subjective interpretation. Instead of giving up on the representation of history, both fields suggest exploring different methods. New historicists emphasize alternative methods of data collection and documentation while scholars in the field of historiography encourage authors to subvert the power of narrative in their accounts in order to avoid its trappings (e.g. Hayden White’s *Figural Realism* (2000)).

With objectivity deemed impossible, alternative methods for representing history, such as manipulating context, chronology, and characterization in the form of historical works is encouraged in order to examine history from different perspectives. In addition, the act of revealing the author’s “position”—calling attention to the work as an act of creation—could be considered to be maintaining a rhetorical overlay or, stylization. While new historicism and the
study of historiography are chiefly concerned with how histories and biographies are written, their general philosophy toward the way history/biography is represented is also relevant to a discussion of theatrical drama.

Stoppard and Frayn have each made statements that could be considered compatible with views related to new historicism and the study of historiography. In his postscript to Copenhagen, Frayn describes the challenge of representing history saying:

The great challenge facing the storyteller and the historian alike is to get inside people’s heads, to stand where they stood and see the world as they saw it, to make some informed estimate of their motives and intentions—and this is precisely where recorded and recordable history cannot reach. Even when all the external evidence has been mastered, only the way into the protagonists’ heads is through the imagination. (Copenhagen 81)

In this quote, Frayn describes the difficulty both dramatists and historians encounter when examining history saying that, even after “the external evidence has been mastered,” the imagination, as a means of putting oneself in the position of the other person, is a vital resource for interpreting history.

Stoppard, in a BBC interview with John Tusa, discussed the importance of research in his work on The Coast of Utopia trilogy saying,

I take notes from what I read. I have to read everything two or three times for it to stick, and even then I'm always going back to something I'd read a year earlier, two years earlier, to remind myself what I need. The notes for the trilogy occupy more paper than the trilogy occupies of course, and I don't think I managed the
process all that way. I felt I had to know everything in order to make the choice about which bits I'd want and use and so forth. (Tusa, screen 1)

Stoppard spent years doing research for the trilogy, taking time to carefully review his documents so that when he created a dramatization based on them, he would do so with an accurate understanding of his subject’s lives.

This emphasis on accuracy both enables him to feel confident in creating scenes while, at the same, makes it difficult for him to condense elements in order to make the dramatic action more efficient. He described this difficulty saying,

And I get a terrible early hang up about being accurate, unnecessarily accurate actually, and a lot of the time I'm trying to make things work the way they happened simply because that's exactly how they happened. And now looking back on the plays, I realize that from the play's point of view there's no difference between those passages which I invented or compressed and the ones which are faithful representations of a particular moment. The audience doesn't know the difference and there isn't any difference in that sense. (Tusa, screen 1)

Stoppard echoes statements made by Frayn on the subject of creating fictional dialogue and contexts that both serve the dramatic action of the play while being “faithful” to recorded history.

This study pursues how Stoppard and Frayn’s attitudes towards historical representation become transmuted into a caveat, or warning, that is stylized into their recent biographical history plays. If they have made statements that echo philosophies of new historicists and scholars of historiography, in what ways might the aesthetics of their plays fit into the context of other British history plays? Deconstructionist and postmodernist plays have been chosen as a
counterpoint because they are plays with aesthetics that are often targeted towards depicting some form of historical indeterminacy.

Deconstruction is often attributed to the post World War II writings of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man. In From New Criticism to Deconstruction (1988), Art Berman defines deconstruction saying,

Deconstruction, as literary critical practice, disassembles a text to reveal that what perhaps has appeared to be a consistent and unified work is a structure of rhetorical strategies and maneuvers. The uncovering of that structure subverts the presumption of a coherent, non-contradictory, comprehensible (clearly interpretable) meaning. It is not, of course, that the writer is a charlatan: language itself, having no origin in the immediacy of the perception of an external reality, is by its very nature an ungrounded chain of signifiers. . . . Deconstruction exposes this limit, exposes the inconsistency and ultimate indeterminacy at the heart of the text. (211)

Given the previous observations about new historicism and the study of historiography, deconstructionist thought clearly shares a deep suspicion about what is communicated through language, with historical narratives presenting a particularly charged target for this area of criticism. In addition, as Berman suggests, deconstructionist thought is not necessarily a disavowal of the historian as a “charlatan,” but instead sees the historian operating inside a subjective set of literary and sociopolitical texts from which it is impossible to escape. Indeterminacy is seen as an inherent side effect of communication.

The adoption of the thought found in deconstructionist theory can be found in the theatre in plays that have translated into visual and contextual elements a display of history as what
Berman describes as “a structure of rhetorical strategies and maneuvers.” Keith D. Peacock, in Radical Stages (1991) describes how Howard Brenton applies similar deconstructionist devices in his plays: Christie in Love (1969) and The Churchill Play (1974). In these plays a deceased historical figure is depicted as being resurrected in the manner of a parody of horror films. Peacock asserts that in these moments the audience’s “mythic preconceptions” about history are undermined saying,

> The technique brings the past into collision with the present in a manner that displays the very mechanics of historical drama and reveals with dramatic economy that history is the artifact of those who create it. . . . In each case he reviews the contemporary cultural status of the icon and thereby reveals and questions the myths that each embodies. (114)

In these moments of historical “resurrection” the figurative act of bringing a historical person to life on stage becomes a literalized reference to the selective processes involved in historical representation, exposing its limitations.

Postmodernism shares many characteristics of deconstruction, but where deconstruction remains invested in the potential discoveries that can be made from a critical stance, postmodernism appears to explode the fundamental concept of any comprehension of experience, presenting a kind of hermeneutical circle in which nothing can accurately be expressed about anything—with this same provision as an exception. In After Theory (2003) Terry Eagleton describes postmodernism saying,

> By 'postmodern', I mean, roughly speaking, the contemporary movement of thought which rejects totalities, universal values, grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence and the possibility of objective knowledge.
Postmodernism is skeptical of truth, unity and progress, opposes what it sees as elitism in culture, tends towards cultural relativism, and celebrates pluralism, discontinuity and heterogeneity. (13)

This perspective is certainly compatible with some aspects of new historicist criticism. In this regard Linda Hutcheon observes that in a postmodern writing of history “. . . the meaning and shape are not in the events [author’s emphasis], but in the systems which make those past ‘events’ into present historical ‘facts’” (A Poetics of Postmodernism 89). With this idea as a given, “. . . there is a deliberate contamination of the historical with didactic and situational discursive elements, thereby challenging the implied assumption of historical statements: objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of representation” (92). These ideas do not imply a denial of the past, but a denial of historical comprehension that amounts to a disregard of any critical or interpretive processes, a line that deconstructionist thought appears to travel near but does not cross.

Howard Barker’s play The Europeans (1990) provides an example of a postmodern history play in which the unconventional aspects are primarily derived from dialogue and characterization. In this play Barker depicts pseudo historical events in Vienna after the defeat of Islam by the Poles and Austrians in the 17th century but does so by combining somewhat rational dialogue with abstracted expressions while themes and characters traits are revealed without furthering the dramatization. Examples of these include seemingly disconnected fictional subplots involving an oblivious priest, a nymphomaniac, and a disfigured rape victim. History is presented in a way that is meant to disorient the efforts of interpretation as the audience is given the responsibility of creating any connections for themselves.
When compared, deconstructionist and postmodernist characterizations of history are similar in that they present historical representations in which their direct thematic emphasis is imbedded in their methods of presentation: the means of representation alone is viewed as having its own distinct potential for presenting challenges to hegemonic beliefs about history while emphasizing historical indeterminacy to varying degrees. The conclusion of this study will examine Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays from a similar perspective, placing their works into context by taking into account the thematic and aesthetic similarities that they might share with these areas of representation.

d. In the Context of Current Literature

At this time, there is no literature that compares Stoppard and Frayn’s biographical history plays. Within the current literature, this study’s analysis of their works could be considered a detailed investigation within the biographical history play category that Palmer describes in The Contemporary British History Play. Palmer’s book examines contemporary biographical history plays by analyzing several works spanning from T.S. Eliot’s Murder in the Cathedral (1935) through Stoppard’s The Invention of Love (1997). Restricted by the date of publication, The Invention of Love is the only recent biographical history play of Stoppard or Frayn’s that is mentioned in his book. Other books that address relevant lines of inquiry include: Christopher Innes’ Modern British Drama 1890-1990 (1992), Michael Patterson’s Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights (2003), Keith D. Peacock’s Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama (1991), Herbert Lindenberger’s, Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality (1975), Freddie Rokem’s Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre (2000), and Matthew Wikander’s The Play of Truth and State: Historical Drama from Shakespeare to Brecht (1986).
Between this study’s two authors, Tom Stoppard is the playwright that appears to have received the most scholarly attention regarding the representation of biography in his works. A published dissertation by Holger Südkamp of the University of Dusseldorf titled *Tom Stoppard’s Biographical Drama* (2008) appears to be the most comprehensive examination of Stoppard’s biography-based work available. His two chapters titled “The Invention of Love: The Subordination of Biographical Facts to Artistic Truth” and “The Coast of Utopia: The ‘Causal-Realistic’ Presentation of Biography” present analyses which are relevant to the central question of this study.

Südkamp’s central argument is that “with his focus on the individual in history, and by broaching the question of the (im)possibility of its reconstruction, Stoppard is in many respects not only an historical, but chiefly a biographical dramatist” (2). Südkamp’s study aims, in part, to differentiate a “historical” versus a “biographical” approach to history in Stoppard’s works. The larger goal of his work is to argue that Stoppard is a “biographical dramatist” by identifying the methods the author uses to present themes related to biographical representation and/or depict biographical information about his characters (fictional or historical). He devotes chapters to Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Travesties*, *Indian Ink*, and *Arcadia*.

John Fleming’s *Stoppard’s Theatre* (2001) is the most current, comprehensive book that evaluates Stoppard’s stage work. His book begins by examining Stoppard’s plays written before *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and covers all of his works through *The Invention of Love*. While Fleming does not focus on Stoppard’s use of history or biography, he does make several observations about the use of history in Stoppard’s plays. Other important studies of Stoppard’s plays written before *Invention of Love* and *The Coast of Utopia* trilogy include: *Tom

Aside from his biography titled Tom Stoppard: A Life, Ira Nadel has written three articles that are relevant to this study. His article titled “Tom Stoppard and the Invention of Biography” investigates how Stoppard often invents biographical facts about historical persons in his history plays. “Writing the Life of Tom Stoppard” is an article with a similar pursuit that describes how creating a biography for Stoppard is difficult because of his ambivalent attitudes toward a factual disclosure of his personal history. “Tom Stoppard: In the Russian Court,” examines Stoppard’s interest in depicting subjects related to Russian history (e.g. Travesties and The Coast of Utopia).

In his article titled “Allegories from the Past: Stoppard's Uses of History,” Christopher Innes asserts that, with the exception of Night and Day, Jumpers, Hapgood, The Real Thing, and Enter a Free Man, the majority of Stoppard’s other plays take place in the past, making him an historical playwright. Innes argues that Stoppard’s use of allegory “characteristically overlap[s] past and present, with a generally naturalistic slice of fairly recent history either intercut with, or mirroring, present-day action.” He claims that “both past events or social situations are used to provide perspective on today’s world” (224). Written in 2006, this article examines Stoppard’s plays through The Coast of Utopia trilogy.

There are two other articles about Stoppard’s biographical history plays that are relevant to this study: Herbert F. Tucker’s "History Played Back: In Defense of Stoppard's Coast of Utopia” defends Stoppard’s representations of history in the trilogy. In this article, he counters critics who charged that Stoppard’s use of history in these plays was misleading because of his use of dramatic license and omitting of important facts. Carol Billman’s article titled “The Art of
History in Tom Stoppard’s *Travesties* argues that Stoppard’s play demonstrates his tendency to avoid direct social messages or deal with interpretive absolutes by representing history in ways that avoid drawing conclusions about his subjects.

Frayn’s biographical history plays have not received the same degree of scholarly attention as Stoppard’s. At this time Merritt Moseley’s *Understanding Michael Frayn* (2006) presents the most comprehensive account of Frayn’s work, including his career as a newspaper columnist and novelist. In Michael Frayn’s *Stage Directions: Writing on Theatre, 1970-2008* (2008), the author put together a collection of essays about the writing and production of his plays. *Michael Frayn’s Copenhagen in Debate* (2005) is a collection of essays debating Frayn’s representation of history in *Copenhagen*. Susanne Bach’s *Frayn in Germany: Plays and Novels* (2008) is a collection of essays and interviews with Frayn that address his works that are either based in Germany or have been influential in German culture.

Currently, all of the journal articles written about Frayn’s use of history in his plays were reactions to *Copenhagen*. *Copenhagen* may have been a popular topic because the author entered into two controversial areas at once by attempting to create an epistemologically related metaphor out of particle physics while also portraying Werner Heisenberg as a morally ambiguous figure (instead of a villain). Several other journal articles address *Copenhagen* with regard to those two issues: David Barnett’s “Reading and Performing Uncertainty: Michael Frayn’s *Copenhagen* and the Postdramatic Theatre;” Reed Way Dasenbock’s “*Copenhagen: The Drama of History;” ” Harry Lustig and Kirsten Shepherd’s “Science as Theatre;” and Victoria Stewart’s “A Theatre of Uncertainties: Science and History in Michael Frayn’s *Copenhagen*. ”
e. Methodology

The primary methodology for this study will focus on developing an analysis of the texts of Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays and of their statements regarding the dramatization of historical persons. The form and role of stylization in these plays’ texts will be investigated by using their recent biographical history plays as primary sources and then integrating analyses from scholarly criticism, analyses of previous biographical history plays (Travesties and Balmoral), and author interviews and postscripts.

The analysis of the primary texts will be augmented by taking into account author interviews and writings on the representation of history from other periods in their careers and through examining other (non-biographical) history-based works by the authors, emphasizing the authors’ interests in epistemological inquiry. This information will be supplemented with scholarly criticism and theatre reviews that address the authors’ use of history in those plays.

The results of these inquiries will be used compare the strategies Stoppard and Frayn use in their biographical history plays, illustrating the similarities and differences between them. Any similarities will then be placed in a broader context, comparing them with the general trends in historical representation found in deconstructionist and postmodernist plays by British authors. In doing so, the concluding portion of this study will evaluate whether or not the form and role of stylization in Stoppard and Frayn’s biographical history plays demonstrates a continued questioning of the efficacy of biographical representation in the theatre.

This study is important to theatre history and criticism because Stoppard and Frayn belong to a generation of British authors who have continually challenged theatrical genres throughout their careers. By examining the form and stylizations of their biographical history plays, this dissertation will provide new insights into this influential generation of playwrights.
and their use of history in the making of theatre. Further, by examining the continuing development of biographical history plays and the philosophies behind their creation, this investigation will contribute to the study of the role of the theatre in the use and understanding of history.
Chapter 2

Tom Stoppard’s Biographical History Plays

I. Tom Stoppard: Biographee, Biography, and Biographers

“I like these kinds of experiments on my memory, on my brain—revisiting places; seeing what comes back; how much I remember. . .”

—Tom Stoppard (Interview with Ostrovsky, screen 1)

Tom Stoppard’s career long interest in subjects related to biography is not surprising considering his extraordinary experiences as a child during World War II, his personal reinvention as an English citizen, and the unexpected revelation of his Jewish heritage in the 1990’s. Early in his career, with his novel Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon (1966) and his play Travesties (1974), he demonstrated an interest in questioning how the past is perceived and represented. In the previous two decades Arcadia (1993), Indian Ink (1995), The Invention of Love (1997), and The Coast of Utopia trilogy (2002) presented a more direct effort to question of the nature of biography and/or dramatize the lives of historical persons. Of these works, Travesties, The Invention of Love, and The Coast of Utopia trilogy are biographical history plays. When Stoppard is examined as a biographee, taking into account his experiences from childhood to late adulthood, the inclusion of epistemological lines of inquiry in his recent biographical history plays appears to be a continuation of a career-long interest that is related to the mysteries within his own personal history.

John Tusa, in his interview with Stoppard for BBC Radio, described the playwright’s career as having “two clear phases:” the “Stoppard of the Mind” and the “Stoppard of the Heart”
These phases are divided by the emotionally charged *The Real Thing* (1982), with Stoppard beginning to lessen the focus on intellectual games in his plays in favor of providing the audience with empathetic characters and story lines. This notion is of interest because it delineates two “eras” in which *Travesties*, his first biographical history play, might be categorized as a play written by the “Stoppard of the Mind” while *The Invention of Love* and *The Coast of Utopia* trilogy were written by the “Stoppard of the Heart.”

Tusa is not the only person to indentify this emotional fault line in Stoppard’s career. Ira Nadel, biographer of *Tom Stoppard: A Life* (2002), puts forth the position that Stoppard’s initial works reflect the author’s “dislocation” from his family history, revealing his intellect without directly exposing any autobiographical features of his life. Nadel observes that Stoppard’s early plays do not contain dramatic contexts that draw heavily upon his empathic abilities, making them appear less emotional and thus, less personal than his later works.

Stoppard (then named Tomáš Straüssler) was born July 3rd 1937 in Zlín, Czechoslovakia, the son of a physician for the Bat’a Corporation. His mother, born Martha Becková, was raised as a Catholic but her grandparents had originally been Jewish before converting, presumably as a strategy to avoid persecution. His father, Eugen Straüssler was also at least a quarter Jewish, though he did not practice the faith. The couple may have been aware of their Jewish heritage while not considering themselves Jews, attempting to assimilate into a Slavic society that was not universally tolerant. His older brother, Petr (later anglicized to Peter), was born August 21st, 1935 (Nadel, *Tom Stoppard: A Life* 1-7).

The Munich agreement in 1938 broke up Czechoslovakia, parceling Germany one third of the country’s territory. This accommodation was not enough to satisfy Hitler’s ambitions and, as Czechoslovakia braced for military occupation, Eugen Straüssler prepared to flee with his
family, fearing their Jewish ancestry would lead to persecution. Eugen secured a position at the Bat’a Corporation hospital in Singapore and the family departed on the 23rd of March, 1939. His actions likely saved their lives: Stoppard’s paternal and maternal grandparents, one aunt and one cousin on his father’s side, and three aunts on his mother’s side were all murdered in concentration camps by 1944 (Tom Stoppard: A Life 8-16).

The Straüssler family enjoyed a brief period of peace before being forced to evacuate Singapore in 1942. The principal product of the Bat’a Corporation was shoes and Singapore was centrally located for the processing of Malaysian rubber. This factor that made their escape possible was also one of the factors that would eventually imperil their lives because Singapore possessed several resources coveted by the Japanese military. When Japanese forces invaded Singapore the island’s women and children were evacuated first and the Straüssler family was divided. Stoppard, his brother Peter, and his mother attempted to escape to Australia but were forced to settle in India instead. They never reunited with his father. By the time Eugen was able to leave Singapore the Japanese were routinely striking shipping convoys leaving the area. He was killed while trying to escape when Japanese forces destroyed the freighter on which he was a passenger (Tom Stoppard: A Life 16-27).

Tom, Peter, and Martha eventually learned of Eugen’s death. They continued to live in India, inhabiting Darjeeling for nearly four years. During this time Martha met and married Kenneth Stoppard, a British officer attached to the Indian army. Their union would bring some stability to his turbulent childhood. As Nadel points out, “Before he moved to England with a British stepfather, he had inhabited three countries; he had been a refugee thrown into at least three different cultures and four different languages: Czech, Chinese, Hindi, and, finally, English” (36). His new father, who had also suffered the loss of a father at a young age, adopted
Tom and Peter as his own. Kenneth Stoppard was steadfast in his British pride and expected Tom and Peter to abandon their Czech heritage and adopt England as their native state. In turn, his mother, fearing continued persecution, effectively erased the past for her sons who would not learn of their Jewish heritage until the 1990’s (Tom Stoppard: A Life 28-38).

In his article “Writing Tom Stoppard,” Nadel presents some key facets of Stoppard’s playwriting that he believes are derived from his experiences as both a refugee and as an English citizen. Beginning with language, Nadel states:

. . . his mastery of the English language and his Wildean wit displayed how well he could fit in. Indeed, words became his weapon of assimilation which validated his English identity while he repeatedly disengaged himself from such writers as Conrad or Nabokov because their encounter with English was secondary.

Stoppard’s first language was always English. (21)

Nadel suggests that Stoppard had an existential anxiety, relieved in part by a mastery of language that allowed him to shape his identity and give him a feeling of belonging.

Under these conditions, Stoppard’s drama was shaped by his feelings of dislocation, “. . . initiated by his mother’s unwillingness to reveal the family history” (Tom Stoppard: A Life 21). Martha’s abandonment of their family history contributed to a “repeated displacement” of Stoppard’s past wherein he was conditioned to avoid self-revelation, including a disclosure his emotional interior through his characters. Nadel notes that Stoppard’s plays began to have more emotional content after 1993-1994 when he finally had contact with previously unknown relatives from Czechoslovakia. In part, the timeliness of this contact may have been facilitated by improved political conditions in Czechoslovakia after the 1989 “Velvet Revolution.” Along these lines, it is interesting to note that Stoppard says that he originally conceived of the character
“Jan” in Rock 'n' Roll (2007) as being named Tomáš, the key figure in “an autobiography in a parallel world where I returned ‘home’ after the war” (Rock 'n' Roll ix). However, the “self-reference became too loose” as Stoppard began to work his other ideas into the play and he abandoned the parallel.

Nadel’s theory about Stoppard’s dislocation is demonstrated, in part, by what he refers to as the “doublings” within Stoppard’s drama, such as the undifferentiated characters in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (they are not sure who is who), the twins in Hapgood, and the two versions of Housman in The Invention of Love. Nadel contends that,” the repeated doublings in his work . . . mirror his own double identity as an Englishman and Czech, non-Jew and Jew” (21-22). The doublings reflect the dualities Stoppard may have had to negotiate while establishing his own identity and could potentially demonstrate the author’s appreciation of the selective process by which other people’s identities are created.

The third dramatic technique Nadel attributes to Stoppard’s traumatic and obscured past is his use of pastiche, a “ready-made style, model, or form of an already proven genre” (26). He claims that Stoppard “. . . discovered early on that he could more easily rework an existing story rather than originate one, a practice that has lasted throughout his career from Rosencrantz through The Coast of Utopia . . .” (27). Rosencrantz, of course, is derived from Shakespeare’s Hamlet (1603) while The Coast of Utopia relied heavily on E.H. Carr’s The Romantic Exiles (1933) and Isaiah Berlin’s Russian Thinkers (1978). Other examples include his use of the Agatha Christie-style murder-mystery genre in The Real Inspector Hound (1968), Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest (1895) in Travesties, and August Strindberg’s Miss Julie (1889) and Ford’s ’Tis Pity She’s a Whore (1633) in The Real Thing.
Nadel notes that this tendency to use pastiche changed throughout his career saying, “Since the late eighties, however, Stoppard seems to have struggled against his instinct for pastiche . . . he has become more candid and confident about himself” (28). This trend has continued into the past decade, with Stoppard relying more on historical research to base his stories. The act of following an historical timeline or using biographies to create character personalities is a less direct way to borrow from other texts compared to the use of pastiche in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Dead* and in *Travesties*, also making more realistic contexts and characters possible.

In another article, Nadel addresses the overall attitude toward biography that is present in Stoppard’s work in relation to his experience of having a concealed past. In “Tom Stoppard and the Invention of Biography,” Nadel describes the root of Stoppard’s distrust of biography saying, “His unease with the mystery of his own past began with his mother’s resistance in explaining to her two boys the details of their life in Czechoslovakia and Singapore, and of how their father died” (162). He contends that this insider’s view of necessitated biographical invention made Stoppard suspicious of biographical facts. “Stoppard’s private reinvention,” Nadel states, “soon projected itself onto his playful treatment of history and individuals in his work, supplemented by a persistent satire of biography and biographers, who are repeatedly shown to be mistaken, confused, over-imaginative, and misled” (158). Nadel implies that Stoppard’s personal reinvention made him feel free to manipulate biographical information while also distrusting the ability of biographers to represent their subjects.

Two examples of Stoppard’s more liberal use of biographical information include his plays *Travesties* and *The Invention of Love*. *Travesties*, depicts an encounter between James Joyce, Tristan Tzara, and Vladimir Lennon in Zurich during World War I. There is no
documented evidence to support that these men ever met during this time and Stoppard freely illustrates their meeting in a burlesque, using various types of pastiche. In *The Invention of Love*, Stoppard presents a fictionalized private world of A.E. Housman, drawn largely from biographical research. Set inside the mind of a dreaming A. E. Housman, this play contains scenes that are both fantastic and fairly realistic. Housman has an afterlife-like experience, viewing himself (and even interacting with himself) in the past, the mythical character of Charon ferries him through the Underworld, and Housman has a completely fictionalized encounter with Oscar Wilde (there is no evidence to suggest they knew each other).

Nadel notes that, in keeping with Stoppard’s liberal use of biography, a recurring theme in the author’s work is a dismissive attitude toward biographers. Three of his works lend evidence to this idea: they are Stoppard’s novel *Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon* and his plays *Arcadia* and *Indian Ink*. These fictional works present biographers “who are repeatedly shown to be mistaken, confused, over-imaginative, and misled.” In *Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon*, Mr. Moon is a pseudo-biographer who is disorganized, distracted, and unable to document basic facts as he attempts to take notes on Lord Malquist’s life. When Moon loses his notebook Lord Malquist consoles him saying, “. . . the secret to biography is to let your imagination flourish in key with your subject’s. In this way you will have a poetic truth that is the jewel for which facts are merely the setting” (187). For Stoppard, fiction and biography are inevitably linked. As Peter J. Rabinowitz also points out, Stoppard wrote this novel in a way that actively “calls attention to its own style,” mixing in separate story lines that exaggerate genres like “dime-novel westerns” (60). This self-reflexive use of these other modes of fiction could be said to further illuminate the artificial nature of biography because it frames the central relationship between Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon.
In *Arcadia*, a biographer named Bernard Nightingale attempts to unearth previously unknown information about the poet George Gordon Byron’s visit to Sidley Park. The setting and all the characters in *Arcadia* are fictional. Byron does not make an appearance, though he is referred to by the play’s characters as they enact portions of the history that Bernard attempts to uncover. Bernard tries to prove that Byron killed an obscure poet in a duel, only to be disproven at the end of the play by a note left in the margin of the estate gardener’s landscape sketches. Here Stoppard presents the image of an over eager and highly imaginative biographer who nearly deludes himself into making the wrong conclusions. The seemingly trivial detail that corrects him undermines the power of all the other more salient “facts” that he had used to establish his argument.

In *Indian Ink*, Stoppard depicts the efforts of a biographer named Eldon Pike to piece together events surrounding Flora Crewe’s extended stay in Jummapur, India (all of the characters and settings are fictional). During the course of the play Pike and Crewe often share the stage, each in their own respective time periods and locations. Unlike Bernard in *Arcadia*, here the biographer is initially right and then proves himself wrong. Pike reads from Crewe’s letters in an attempt to piece together her past in India. He makes mistakes, including incorrectly deciding against an initial conclusion that she was the subject of a nude painting. Further, his motives for creating the biography become suspect when he openly discloses that he is writing it to further his career.

Given these factors, Nadel uses the term “uncertainty principle” to characterize Stoppard’s attitude toward biography. It is a metaphorical usage similar to the one Frayn employs in *Copenhagen*. Nadel asserts that “According to this view, biography must reject Newtonian cause and effect for the Heisenberg-like uncertainty outlined by quantum mechanics”
(162). In support of this he cites a quote from a character named Kerner from Stoppard’s *Hapgood* (1988):

> . . . it [an electron or a person] can go from here to there without going in between; it can pass through two doors at the same time [. . .] It defeats surveillance because when you know what it’s doing you can’t be certain where it is, and when you know where it is you can’t be certain what it’s doing [. . .] because there is no such thing as an electron with a definite position and a definite momentum. (qtd. in “Tom Stoppard and the Invention of Biography” 162)

Kerner is a physicist working with a spy named Hapgood. The above quote is his attempt to describe the two people they have been gathering surveillance on who are also twins. Kerner is relating how “The particle world is the dream world of the intelligence officer,” implying that the nature of spying on people is akin to the nature of observing subatomic particles.

This idea is further explicated by another speech of Kerner’s when he says,

> It upset Einstein very much, you know, all that damned uncertainty, it spoiled his idea of God, which I tell you frankly is the only idea of Einstein’s I never understood. He couldn’t believe in a God who threw dice. He should have come to me, I would have told him, ‘Listen Albert, He threw you—look around, He never stops. . . . There is a straight ladder from the atom to the grain of sand, and the only real mystery in physics is the missing rung. Below it, particle physics; above it, classical physics; but in between, metaphysics. All the mystery in life turns out to be this same mystery, the join between things which are distinct and yet continuous, body and mind, free will and causality. . . . Who needed God
when everything worked like billiard balls? (Tom Stoppard: Collected Plays 5545)

Here is an attempt to understand the human condition, viewed through a poetic interpretation of physics (not unlike Stoppard’s use of thermodynamics in Arcadia) that expresses epistemological themes. Kerner is describing how physics relates to “all the mystery in life,” inferring that the difficulty in observing human beings, in addition to predicting and understanding their behavior, falls into a similar void of “metaphysics” that roughly resembles some of the problems presented in quantum mechanics.

Nadel only uses the first Kerner quote in his essay, but what he appears to suggest is that Kerner and Hapgood, as spies, perform a function similar to Mr. Moon’s. Namely, they are documenting human activity, interpreting it, and attempting to represent it based on facts. In the former, this process is carried out for the purpose of espionage; for the latter, it is done while creating a biography. The act of reading private letters, such as the case with Pike in Indian Ink, could be considered an invasion of privacy/spying just as Kerner and Hapgood’s attempts to document the activity of the people they are spying on could be considered an act of biography.

Nadel says this reflects the larger scope of Stoppard’s attitude toward biography saying, “Stoppard’s discovery that atoms, like individuals, cannot be pinned down or fixed provided scientific confirmation of his view of biography. Atoms, like people, are simply too complex” (162). He notes that Stoppard has said that he wants his own biography to be as “inaccurate as possible” and that he has also stated, “I never demand corrections. I quite like it really. If enough things that are untrue are said about you, no one will know what is really true” (160-161). In light of statements like these, Nadel contends that Stoppard’s ideal biography could be taken from Virginia Woolf’s mandate: “Let the biographer present fully, completely, accurately, the
known facts without comment, then let him write the life as a fiction‖ (160). Woolf’s quote expresses Stoppard’s view of the paradox within biography wherein fact is ideally divided from fiction yet “fact is always manipulative and unknowable” and “facts distort the narrative and interfere with an imaginative presentation of the truth.”

There is evidence for this statement in Stoppard’s biographical history plays. In Travesties, The Invention of Love, and The Coast of Utopia Stoppard readily dramatizes events that never happened, manipulates and distorts time and contexts, and freely invents emotional arcs for his historical characters. Yet, as will be examined in greater detail later, all of these plays are founded in extensive research, each of them taking years to develop before being realized on stage. These plays are fact-based and are derived from Stoppard’s attempt to understand his subjects and say something true about them through a dramatization. Stoppard appears to have implemented Woolf’s advice for the stage by first digesting “fully, completely, accurately, the known facts” and then, after all this is understood, writing “the life as a fiction.”

In his dissertation titled Tom Stoppard’s Biographical Drama (2008), Holger Südkamp also emphasizes the interest in biography that is demonstrated in Stoppard’s works. Südkamp’s analysis postdates Nadel’s and he makes several similar observations (interestingly, he does not reference the works of Nadel that are cited above, though he cites other Nadel articles from the same time period) but takes Nadel’s analysis a step further, extending the view of Stoppard’s biographical works by classifying Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Arcadia, and Indian Ink as “biographical drama.”

Südkamp’s definition differs from the definition borrowed from Richard H. Palmer that is used to categorize Stoppard and Frayn’s plays in this study. Südkamp qualifies the generalized term drama with biography while Palmer inserts history into his term, making the target of his
use of the word **biography** more specific. Palmer views biography plays as a type of history play and thus the word **biography** is modifying the word **history** so that his readers understand what type of history play he is talking about. In all of Palmer’s descriptions of biography he does not admit purely fictional works alongside those that feature historical persons. In contrast, Südkamp includes purely fictional works as **biographical drama**, based on the way they mimic biographical strategies or comment on biography as a topic.

The core of their differences is best exemplified by Südkamp’s analysis of Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* which he describes saying, “The play is actually one of Stoppard’s most complex and diversified biography plays to date” (85). Those who are familiar with the play might ask the question: If Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are fictional characters, where is the biography? Südkamp bases his argument on two fundamental principles. First, that the action of the play appears to reflect theories about the representation of biography found in New Criticism and, second, that *Hamlet* is so well known that Shakespeare’s fictional characters have, in effect, become like historical persons. As an example of the former, Südkamp asserts that the way Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Hamlet’s deaths are treated dispassionately and as perfunctory to the dramatic action, is similar to the strategies used in Stracheyan New Biography that sought to undermine the heroic visions presented in Victorian historical accounts (93). Südkamp considers these characters to be equal to historical persons because they are “mythopoetical,” citing scholars such as Jim Hunter who claim that “Shakespeare’s characters turn out to be far better known worldwide than almost any figures from history, politics, or even legend” (87).

While Palmer and Südkamp do not use the same term to describe their categories—**biographical history play** and **biographical drama**, respectively—Südkamp does wish to qualify
the term biography in respect to the traditional, non-fictional, concepts and strategies that are the basis of its colloquial definition. Of course, the definition of biography has been debated though time. Authors from Samuel Johnson to Virginia Woolf have put forth arguments on the proper method for representing the lives of historical persons and the fact that Palmer and Südkamp have individualized definitions is not unusual.

Given the two authors’ arguments, this study favors Palmer’s definition because his term accommodates a wide variety of uses of the term biography while keeping some basic components as limiting factors. Südkamp’s use of the term biographical drama for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead is vague and does not effectively demarcate biography from other kinds of drama. For example, the majority of modern drama, especially post-Freudian, is saturated with plays that examine fictional characters through their pasts, often resembling the investigative strategies used by biographers. Should all of these plays be considered biographical drama? Arthur Miller examined Willy Loman’s past in some ways that are similar to contemporary biographers like Ronald Chernow (Alexander Hamilton (2005)), depicting how experiences in someone’s formative years influence their adult philosophies. Based on Südkamp’s definition, any contemporary work that examines fictional characters’ pasts could be considered biographical. Further, if modern drama has been dominated by plays that examine the past, it is natural that Stoppard’s resistance to conventional dramatic devices would resemble new historical modes as a consequence.

In addition, Südkamp’s attempt to equate historical persons with mythical characters does not appear to correspond with even an early understanding of myth and history. From the writings of Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle, the Greeks appear to have distinguished the difference between history and myth, despite the permeation of myth in their culture. If
Südkamp’s position is accepted, at what point does a character’s “mythopoeticalness” become historical? How long do they have to saturate culture to achieve this status? Bart Simpson and Big Bird have both been on television for over 20 years and are recognized worldwide; should their television lives be the subject of biography?

The premise of Südkamp’s arguments suffers from inductive reasoning: If it is true that all rhinoceroses have horns, and a bull has horns, then is a bull a rhinoceros? Claiming that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is a biography play based on basic similarities between Strachey and Stoppard’s methodologies places the term *biography* in an extremely generalized definition that does not serve a practical examination. Südkamp creates a slippery argument wherein what is fiction and what actually drew breath on this earth is inevitably confused. The nature of discussing the uses and forms of biography is difficult enough without admitting this kind of methodological complication.

Though Südkamp’s definition of what biographical drama is differs from the one this study embraces, his work is well researched and he creates dynamic and insightful investigation into the ways that Stoppard has portrayed different aspects of biography in some of his plays. Further, whether or not *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Arcadia, and Indian Ink* are considered *biographical drama* or just *drama*, Südkamp describes the different ways that Stoppard depicts how the past shapes human experience and how, paradoxically, the past is something that can never be fully understood. He also presents a thorough analysis of the biographical history plays by Stoppard that are the focus of this dissertation (*The Invention of Love, and The Coast of Utopia*) which will be referred to later in this study.

Viewed together, Nadel and Südkamp’s assertions characterize Stoppard as an author who, from his personal experiences, has reason to have an acute interest in the representation of
biography. Whether he is creating pasts for fictional characters, dramatizing the work of biographers in his plays, or using historical research to create biography plays, Stoppard has shown a consistent attention to representations of the past and the epistemological problems that make them indeterminate. This fascination with the past manifests in his drama in two primary ways: first, stemming from his childhood, a resistance to self-revelation informed by a use of pastiche, character doublings, and substituting emotion with intellectualism; and second, a strong vision of historical indeterminacies has led him to be dismissive of biographers, feel at liberty to freely invent facts in order to pursue an historical truth, and attempt to alleviate the same indeterminacy with detailed research.

II. Travesties: A Predecessor in Pastiche

“It’s a play about a man who wishes to keep control of the other characters”

—Tom Stoppard (Conversations with Stoppard 30)

Travesties will not be directly compared with Frayn’s biographical history plays because the time of its origin does not meet the parameters of this study. However, a succinct analysis (as succinct as this complicated play will allow) of Travesties will be included because the play reflects some of the strategies toward biographical representation that are present in Stoppard’s more recent plays. All references to Travesties in this study will be to the version of the play that was published in 1975. In 1993, while being revived by the Royal Shakespeare Company, Stoppard made some significant changes to the text and that version has also been published. Since Travesties originated outside the given timeline for the other biographical history plays in
this study and was conceived under different intellectual conditions, the 1993 version will not be referenced.

Travesties was preceded by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead (1967), The Real Inspector Hound (1968), After Magritte (1970), and Jumpers (1972). The style of these plays defied conventional drama, using well known works such as Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Agatha Christie’s The Mouse Trap (1954), and the paintings of Magritte to explore intellectual interests in unexpected ways. Travesties represents a continuation of Stoppard’s interest in engaging complicated intellectual ideas with conceptually driven dramatic action. Stoppard described the play as “a minor anthology of styles-of-play, styles of language” (Marowitz 117). In creating this “anthology,” Stoppard borrows from Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, William Shakespeare, and a variety of other historical sources. He also introduces two non-historical characters: Cecily and Gwendolyn from Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest. The dialogue in this play ranges in style from surreal comedy to Wilde-esque prose, limericks, song, and an historical lecture. The play is so dominated by pastiche, seemingly random variations of prose and poetry, and lengthy intellectual banter that little room is left for character development, of which there is virtually none. In a review for The New York Times, Charles Marowitz aptly described Travesties as “a play-within-a-monologue” (117). Indeed, the play reads as if it is one long philosophical digression from the author.

The use of pastiche is at the center of both the form and stylizations in Travesties. Stoppard justifies the use of pastiche by contextualizing the majority of the play’s action in the memories of a senile man who must borrow from fictional works in order to create a working narrative of his remembrances. In the process, Stoppard’s pastiche creates a caveat that draws attention to his liberal representation of history, maintaining a pronounced ironic distance
between his themes and the play’s form. While this caveat conditions Stoppard’s portrayal of
other people’s lives, the warning does not appear to address the efficacy of the biographical
approach with same specificity demonstrated in his later biographical history plays or in Lord
Malquist and Mr. Moon, Indian Ink, and Arcadia.

This analysis of Travesties will combine form and stylization rather than separating them
because the prevailing use of pastiche in the play makes the separation of these features nearly
impossible. The presentation of history in Travesties is based on three organizing factors: 1),
Stoppard’s intertextual use of The Importance of Being Earnest along with documented historical
materials from Vladimir Lenin and his wife’s writings; 2), Stoppard’s temporal arrangements,
including “time slips;” and 3), Stoppard’s use of dialectics to synthesize his characters’
arguments.

a. Form and Stylization

Travesties’ context is derived from Stoppard’s interest in two historical events: the first
being that James Joyce, Tristan Tzara, and Lenin were all in Zurich in 1917; and second, a
ludicrous legal skirmish between Joyce and a man named Henry Carr who worked at the British
consulate at the time. Henry Carr became a minor footnote in the annals of history when he
played Algernon in a production of The Importance of Being Earnest that was produced by
Joyce. The two men went to court twice over disagreements related to the production. In one of
these legal actions Joyce sued Carr for slander, lost, and decided to take his revenge elsewhere
by naming a less than flattering character in Ulysses (1922) after him. With the addition of
Travesties, Carr now has the distinction of being immortalized by two brilliant authors.

Travesties is set in two locations: the drawing room of Carr’s apartment and the Zurich
Public Library. Time shifts between 1917 and the present with Carr in advanced years
remembering the past as “Old Carr,” and then enacting the past as Carr, his younger self; both are played by the same actor. Old Carr is given to addressing the audience directly, mimicking a literary style:

To those of us who knew him, Joyce’s genius was never in doubt. To be in his presence was to be aware of an amazing intellect bent on shaping itself into the permanent form of its own monument—the book the world now knows as Ulysses! Though at the time we were still calling it (I hope my memory serves) by its original title, Elasticated Bloomers. (22)

He returns every now and then to comment on the play’s action while time and location shift quickly between past and present.

Old Carr has trouble organizing his thoughts and he borrows from The Importance of Being Earnest, his single authentic link to the play’s historical characters, to organize his memories. He is vain, fancying himself interacting with Tzara and being a part of a plot to stop Lenin from returning to Russia. With Importance of Being Earnest used as a grand theatrical style for representing his idealized past, Old Carr depicts his younger self experiencing the world as Algernon does in Wilde’s play. Tzara has similarly been “cast” as Jack Worthing and Joyce loosely represents Aunt Augusta, with the three characters continually debating and interrogating each other as characters do in The Importance of Being Earnest.

These debates provide the central forum wherein Stoppard presents his rigorous intellectual inquiries. Stoppard’s pastiche of Wilde’s play allows him to facilitate complicated arguments in an efficient way that is justified by the style of the play, not the characters’ motivations. Without this technique, the kind of complicated arguments presented by Carr,
Cecily, Gwendolyn, Joyce, and Tzara might end up appearing extremely contrived. Instead, Stoppard avoids this danger by making contrivance part of the play’s entertainment.

The Importance of Being Earnest is also the primary source material for the comic theatrical tradition of travesty, or burlesque, that, in turn, provides an opening for other works and styles to be included. Stoppard layers style upon style, pastiche upon pastiche. For example, at one point in the play there is a break from the Wildean dialogue when Joyce suddenly becomes an Irish nonsense (Stoppard’s description), delivering his first line as a limerick with the other characters following suit (33-36). Other examples include when Tzara and Gwendolyn discuss poetry using dialogue from some of Shakespeare’s works (54), when Cecily performs the dancing style of a strip tease while “Colored lights begin to play over her body” (78), and when Cecily and Gwendolyn enact their famous argument over tea and cake while conversing to the rhythm and tune of Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Shean (89-93).

In contrast to the dominant hold The Importance of Being Earnest has on the organization of Act One, in Act Two the play’s most prominent use of pastiche is created through historical records related to Lenin and his wife, Marxism, and the Bolshevik Revolution. Stoppard still borrows from The Importance of Being Earnest in this act but the context and the significance of his Earnest characters’ actions is juxtaposed with a more scholarly historical presentation. Only Cecily, as a devoted follower of Lenin, introduces Marxist arguments into a dialogue with other characters (Carr in particular, in the equivalent of the courting scene between Algernon and Cecily in Earnest).

The historical lecture and personal letters that are presented to the audience at the fore of the stage in Act Two provide an exterior contextualization of the play with a documentary-esque vision of history. Stoppard says that he chose to present Lenin in this way because of the need to
more respectfully acknowledge the tragic consequences of his coming to power (Andretta 200).
The dramatic style of these lectures and letters also contrasts the surreal comedy found with
Carr’s treatment of history with something closer to the real world, implying more serious
implications for the ideas presented in the debates between Carr, Joyce, and Tzara.

Act Two begins with Cecily giving a long lecture on Marxism, Lenin, and the Bolshevik revolution. The stage directions call for the introduction of a new playing space for the actors: “THE LIBRARY. The set however is not ‘lit’ at the beginning of the Act. . . . Most of the light is on CECILY who stands patiently at the front of the stage, waiting for the last members of the audience to come in and sit down” (66). When Cecily and the Lenins appear at the fore of the stage they appear to be in the text but not within the previously established context of the play. Jim Hunter, in A Faber Critical Guide: Tom Stoppard (2000), supports this notion when he states, “The strangeness of Travesties comes partly from the fact that Stoppard determined to include Lenin onstage alongside, yet not part of, a glittering burlesque; and then from the fact that he chose not to fictionalize him” (125). After delivering this lecture, Cecily is only integrated back into Carr’s memory when the lights come up on the library setting. Other examples of this delineated staging include when Nadya addresses the audience “undramatically” with her memories of Lenin (79), and when Lenin enters and reads one of his letters to Nadya about his secret efforts to leave Zurich and return to Russia without being taken into custody by Russian forces (80). The presentation of documentary materials in Travesties even includes a visual tableau: Lenin is left alone on stage (“Everything black except a light on LENIN”) and Stoppard requests that the staging of this scene recreates a famous photo of Lenin taken in May 1920 (84).
Old Carr returns periodically to comment on the play’s action in Act Two, invariably he refers to the way the audience “may or may not have noticed that I got my wires crossed a bit here and there . . . when the old think-box gets stuck in a groove”(64). At the end of the play Old Carr enters while dancing with Old Cecily. Though somewhat forgetful herself, she corrects him on several points of fact. Old Carr is unaffected saying, “Great days . . . Zurich during the war. Refugees, spies, exiles, painters, poets, writers, radicals of all kinds. I knew them all” (98). The play ends as Carr attempts to summarize what he learned from his experiences.

This final scene references the second major source of Stoppard’s biographical caveats, the stylized presentation of time and memory. In the portions of the play that feature Carr, the scenes are subject to sudden revisions, or iterations, as Old Carr’s memory creates what Stoppard refers to as “time slips.” Stoppard describes these time slips saying,

. . . 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 the story (like a toy train perhaps) occasionally jumps the rails and has to be restarted at the point where it goes wild. (27)

For example, in the scene between Carr and Bennett (his former superior at the consulate, now turned butler in his memories) that occurs near the beginning of Act One, time “slips the rails” five times, each revised version of their conversation beginning with Bennett saying, “Yes, sir. I have put the newspapers and telegrams on the sideboard sir.” From the outset of the play’s action, Stoppard establishes the malleability of Carr’s memory and the convention of restarting scenes mid-stride. Other moments that prominently feature these time slips are Carr’s conversation with Tzara in Act One and his “courting” of Cecily in Act Two. Stoppard usually
returns to the style of *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the beginning of a time slip, a convention that restores the context of the scene to a readily identifiable point.

Stoppard uses this device to introduce new iterations of scenes that produce new arguments and/or different aesthetic experiences. As Andretta notes in his book *Tom Stoppard: An Analytical Study of His Plays*, “His time-slips or derailments stand for those sections which a dramatist feels he has to revise, rewrite or delete entirely in order to make his dialogue and plot more effective” (184). The time slips provide what might be called a “structure of discontinuity,” letting the audience know that as the play follows the loose paths established by Old Carr’s memory that they should expect to see different iterations of scenes as part of the experience.

The third major component of *Travesties*’ form is Stoppard’s use of dialectics. In his 1979 interview with Mel Gussow Stoppard said,

> I don’t write plays with heroes who express my point of view. I write argument plays. . . . When I start writing, I find it difficult, except on simple questions, to know where I stand—even in *Travesties* in the argument on art between James Joyce and Tristan Tzara. Temperamentally and intellectually, I’m very much on Joyce’s side, but I found it persuasive to write Tzara’s speech. . . . In general terms, I’m not a playwright who is interested in character with a capital K and psychology with a capital S. I’m a playwright interested in ideas and forced to invent characters who express those ideas. (35)

Through a dialectical synthesis, one character takes a firm philosophical stance while another character provides an antithesis by attempting to pick his/her ideas apart: Carr and Tzara debate causality and aesthetics, Tzara and Joyce debate aesthetics, and Lenin (via Cecily) and Carr debate the social/political purpose of art. Stoppard’s interest is in challenging the viewpoints that
he sympathizes with instead of presenting his audience with a play that depicts a singled minded argument.

b. Criticism from Other Scholars

Does Stoppard present a questioning of the efficacy of biography in Travesties? Some scholars assert that because the play is mostly driven by Carr’s recollections, introduced as an attempt to create his memoires of famous people, that Travesties is also a criticism of biography. Carol Billman, in her article titled “The Art of History in Tom Stoppard’s Travesties,” states that “Through his characterization of Carr, Stoppard yokes the roles of artist and historian: he goes beyond the travesty of existing histories, affirming through Carr the importance of history and the individual ‘making’ it” (51). According to this theory, the display of Carr putting together his memoires calls attention to the way any representation of history is subject to the personality and capabilities of the historian.

Südkamp takes this position a step further saying,

Travesties is a metabiographical drama, because it broaches the issue of how biography is constructed. With its two time levels [Carr and Old Carr], it reflects upon subjectivity, (in)coherence, and the construction processes behind biography. The historical parody emphasizes the process of historical construction and the relationship between art and history (140).

The nature of autobiographical authorship appears to be illustrated by Carr and his senile reminiscences. The two most compelling facts that support Billman and Südkamp’s positions would be Old Carr’s grandiloquent attempts to imitate what he believes to be the style of autobiographical writing, and the function of Stoppard’s time slips, both reminding the audience that what they are watching is autobiographical revisionism.
Despite these arguments, in Stoppard’s writing and interviews about the play, Old Carr’s character is not described as a device to demonstrate these ideas. In an interview with Mel Gussow Stoppard related how both Carr, and the role of Old Carr as a senile biographer was included in the play for more utilitarian purposes: 1), to provide a suitable character for John Wood (one of his favorite actors) to play; and 2), because his premise of Joyce, Lenin, and Tzara interacting in Zurich was completely unfounded, he had to “percolate the whole thing” through a character with a fallible memory (29). Carr is not a biographer and he admits that his recollections are compromised by his senility. If Stoppard wanted to make a point about the indeterminate nature of history or biography he chose a poor vessel to demonstrate this notion. For example, if a facile character like Cecily (young Cecily) was shown to be misinterpreting or manipulating biographical information, then Billman and Südkamp’s point about Stoppard’s portrayal of history/biography would be sounder. If Stoppard is commenting about the nature of biographical representation, he appears to be doing so at a further remove, demonstrated in the attitude with which he dramatizes his historical subjects in *Travesties* with complete freedom.

The most direct statement Stoppard makes about representing history in *Travesties* is when Tzara says to Carr,

> It means, my dear Henry, that the causes we know everything about depend on causes we know absolutely nothing about. And it is the duty of the artist to jeer and howl and belch at the delusion that infinite generations of real effects can be inferred from the gross expression of apparent cause. (37)

Through this philosophical line of Tzara’s, Nadel’s concept of Stoppard’s “uncertainty” principle is supported, as the author presents an argument that cautions against the role of cause and effect in historical interpretation.
c. Conclusions

If taken to be a biographical examination of these historical persons, the form of Travesties implies that Stoppard was interested in manipulating history to examine his subjects, trading great distortions in historical accuracy for a chance to compare these men. The most striking of these distortions in Travesties’ form are manifest in the use of pastiche based on The Importance of Being Earnest and his arrangement of chronology and memory via time slips.

However, there is a fairly conservative streak in other aspects of the play’s form. The use of dialectics could hardly be considered a revolutionary tactic in historical representation. Whether the subject is the history of a nation or the history of Lenin, historical identities are often defined when authors describe them in relation to the forces that opposed them. In addition, Stoppard’s documentary-esque second act briefly reverses the course of the play by contrasting the gross inaccuracies of the first act with what appears to be a legitimate presentation of facts. This relatively conservative streak even extended to the play’s postscript where Stoppard attempted to give Carr a fair representation after the play had been written, briefly detailing Henry Carr’s life with facts that only became known to him when he became acquainted with Carr’s widow during the play’s first run (Travesties 11-13).

The form and stylizations in Travesties suggest that Stoppard questioned the efficacy of traditional biographical approaches at the time he wrote the play. However, the degree to which Old Carr’s autobiographical revisionism reflects an overt questioning of the nature of biography or, instead, is the result of his desire to facilitate debates in the play is difficult to discern. When viewed in the context of The Invention of Love and The Coast of Utopia, Stoppard’s mix of liberal and conservative attitudes toward the use of biography appears to have continued, with the focus on biographical efficacy becoming more pronounced in the latter part of his career.
III. The Invention of Love: Impressionist Biography and the Fictional Biographer

“To do it is nothing, to be said to have done it is everything.”

—Oscar Wilde in The Invention of Love (93)

The Invention of Love examines the adult life of Alfred Edward Housman (1859-1936). A. E. Housman is known primarily for his book of poems titled A Shropshire Lad (1896), though he was also a renowned scholar, having created a definitive edition of Marcus Manilius’ Astronomicon (Latin, 1st century). The period of A. E. Housman’s life that is examined in The Invention of Love spans from his time as a student at Oxford to late adulthood. The key features of A. E. Housman’s life that Stoppard dramatizes are his unrequited love for his friend Moses Jackson, his devotion to scholarship, his view of art as a poet, and the sociopolitical conditions that shaped both his education and the way he chose to live his life as a homosexual.

All of The Invention of Love takes place in A. E. Housman’s mind, presumably on his deathbed. This context establishes a caveat that enables Stoppard to examine his biographical subject somewhat realistically while also taking advantage of the poetic license afforded by a surreal dreamscape. Stoppard uses ahistorical events, gross manipulations of time, and a variety of styles while also achieving a psychological depth that makes the characters accessible. The play’s stylizations are generated from the self-reflexive quality of A. E. Housman’s dream-world, creating an ironic distancing. In these stylizations and through meta-biographical statements in the characters’ dialogue, The Invention of Love conveys ideas about biographical indeterminacy, negotiating the differences between fact-based truth and poetic truth by suggesting that fiction may be used to represent history in a truthful manner.
a. Form

In an interview with Peter Lewis for *The Sunday Times* following the 1993 revival of *Travesties*, Stoppard related the following:

When I began [writing plays], it seemed fun to put on a firework display without really worrying if the overall architecture was more or less improvised. So long as the wheels were turning I could concentrate on the paintwork of the coaches. Nowadays I'm more concerned with storytelling and the audience's desire to know what's coming next than in transmuting what I have read up into monologues.

(screen 1)

History is more brought to life in *The Invention of Love* than put on display, as it was in *Travesties*, with Stoppard focusing more on “what is coming next” rather than “the paintwork of the coaches.” Most of the play is unconventional, but the characters are somewhat psychologically detailed and progress through a series of experiences that demonstrate personal development, making them appear realistic at times.

By setting *The Invention of Love* inside the mind of a man in advanced years, Stoppard uses a similar pretense to the one found in *Travesties*. This time the condition of sleep, rather than senility, frees Stoppard to liberally use biographical information. As Stoppard said, the advantage of the play’s context is that “. . . all kinds of confusions, inaccuracies and cheating can be attributed to the character rather than to the author” (qtd. in *Tom Stoppard: A Life* 507). Examples of this “cheating” include when A. E. Housman reviews events from his past by watching, and sometimes even interacting with, his younger self. The older A. E Housman is referred to in the text as “AEH” while the younger A. E. Housman is called “Housman.”
AEH’s condition is more complicated than simply experiencing a dream. The audience never sees him sleeping but from statements that his dream persona makes he appears to be near death, and at times semi-conscious. In an address to the audience at the end of the play he states that he is “Neither dead nor dreaming, then, but in between...” (101). This statement implies that he has been somewhat conscious as he took his journey. He observes that he is “…wide awake to all the risks—archaism, anachronism, the wayward consequence that only hindsight can acquit” (100). Some portion of his mind is rational and able to appreciate his dream-like reminiscences with hindsight, even as he approaches death.

The action of the play is not immediate to AEH in the same way that it is to Housman. AEH is on a journey that leads him to gain perspective on his life as a whole. He is not entirely passive in this state of retrospection, but he is not exactly active either, because the events of his life have passed and cannot be changed. In contrast, Housman has no knowledge of his future and his life is immediate to him. He becomes a second protagonist, going though life with common motivations: seeking love, enjoying friendship, and working to satisfy professional aspirations. What will end up happening to Housman might be known to the audience but, as Stoppard implies, the process of getting there is what captures their attention.

The play’s dreamscape allows for extreme manipulation of time and chronology, such as when depictions of Housman’s experiences at Oxford in Act One all take place in a single scene and generalized stage space. The play is anachronistic, compressing years of events into a fluid stream of consciousness and distilling interactions such as his formative encounters with professors into a matter of minutes. Act Two follows a similar pattern through several different settings that are used to examine Housman’s friendship with Jackson, the development of his career, and his later years as a Benjamin Hall Kennedy Professor of Latin at Trinity.
Similar to *Travesties*, Stoppard uses historical writings as dialogue in *The Invention of Love*. An example of this occurs in Act Two, following the scene in which the journalists have been seen rowing together and discussing Wilde’s trial and imprisonment, AEH appears and recites one of his poems (86-87). This poem, the sixth in A. E. Housman’s posthumously published *More Poems* (1936), is used by Stoppard to reflect AEH’s feelings about Wilde’s imprisonment and his self-protective stance toward the scrutiny of other people. Other examples include the insertion of topics or phrases from A. E. Housman’s scholarly writings. At one point in *The Invention of Love* AEH refers to another scholar’s “morbid alertness” (80); this same insult is delivered in A. E. Housman’s classical papers (*The Classical Papers* 42). Stoppard borrows a word or two and the context of these articles but these passages are not translated verbatim into the play.

The characters in *The Invention of Love* contain aspects of psychological realism yet are broad enough to assimilate into the more fantastical elements of AEH’s dreams. In Act Two Housman and Jackson find themselves discussing how their lives have developed since leaving Oxford (54-57). During this scene Jackson’s concern for his friend is expressed, demonstrating that he has spent some time worrying about Housman prior to this conversation. Housman’s defense of his life, juxtaposed with what the audience has seen of his enthusiasm for classics in Act One, conveys how much he has given up in order to have the opportunity to spend as much time with Jackson as possible, suggesting that Housman failed his exams on purpose.

Stoppard contrasts moments like these with surreal ones, such as AEH meeting Charon on the Styx, characters playing croquet with invisible balls, AEH meeting himself (via Housman), and the iterations of the Housman, Jackson, and Pollard boat scene. Poetry spoken by Housman or AEH is often interwoven with dialogue from ongoing scenes or is used to serve as a
bridge between scenes, providing commentary. There are also poetic images that supplement the dialogue, such as an idealized, youthful Jackson runs in place while another character (Pater) describes a “pagan” appreciation of beauty in art (19).

The Invention of Love puts forth fairly conventional interpretations of the characters’ experiences. AEH and Housman have their own dramatic outcomes: the former is ironic while the latter is tragic. AEH’s final assessment of his life occurs near the end of the play when he suggests to Wilde that he should have lived in another era such as ancient Greece or Rome where he would have been renowned for his genius and not persecuted for his sexuality. Wilde counters saying,

What would I have done in Megara!—think what I would have missed! I awoke the imagination of the century. I banged Ruskin’s and Pater’s heads together, and from the moral severity of one and the aesthetic soul of the other I made art a philosophy that can look the twentieth century in the eye. . . I lived at the turning point of the world where everything was waking up new—the New Drama, the New Novel, New Journalism, New Hedonism, New Paganism, even the New Woman. Where were you when all this was happening? (96-97).

AEH replies that he was “At home,” indicating that the repression of his sexuality was an extension of his entire life as he failed to appreciate the age in which he lived while focusing on ancient culture. This casts the fate of AEH in an ironic mode, his fear of ostracism and his fascination with the classics contributing to his inability to live his life fully.

There is also a dialectic that is achieved in the comparison between AEH and Wilde’s lives. Stoppard spoke of his comparison of the two men saying, “When Housman died he got the memorial service at Trinity and a leading editorial in The Times, yet he was the one who failed
life emotionally, if not intellectually. Though Wilde crashed in flames and ended as a disgraced, pathetic, maladjusted, poverty-stricken wreck, he had the successful life” (Conrad, screen 1).

John Fleming, in his book Stoppard's Theatre: Finding Order Amid Chaos (2001), observes that “In part, their lives reflect the divide between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Wilde lived the sensual, Dionysian life, while Housman opted for the critical-rational mode of the Apollonian. Each man’s tragedy resulted from not balancing the two impulses” (241). Though the two men never met, Stoppard chooses to compare them in a way that also serves to reflect upon A. E. Housman’s dualities, with the passionate, poetic side of his personality largely subverted to his more analytical side.

Housman is, instead, set on a tragic course because he is “alive” in the play and has much to lose. His struggles and his fate appear to be immediate. Act One establishes both his love for scholarship and his love for Jackson yet, while his love for Jackson is communicated in a few brief exchanges, the majority of this act is dedicated to explaining his love of classical poetry and his intense interest in editing ancient texts. In Act Two, the audience sees that he has given up a successful career by “ploughing” himself so that he could live a life that was more involved with Jackson. Housman’s feelings are eventually revealed and when Jackson is not able to return his affections he realizes that they can no longer live together. Housman sacrifices his love of scholarship for his love of Jackson, only to have this sacrifice fail to bring him long term happiness.

b. *Stylization*

Many of the dramatic devices Stoppard uses in *The Invention of Love* would function as stylization if they were transferred to more realistic plays. As a dream play, a large component of *The Invention of Love* is surrealistic and, as such, there is a use of symbolism that comments on
the more realistic aspects of the play without being stylization. The moments of stylization in *The Invention of Love* operate at one further remove, standing apart from both the realistic and surrealist devices in the play in order to call attention to the act of historical representation. *The Invention of Love* presents stylization in four primary ways: 1) through depictions of AEH in the underworld with Charon; 2) through meta-biographical asides; 3) through interactions between AEH and Housman; and 4), through incongruous events.

The way that AEH’s experiences with Charon in the underworld are characterized provides some of the more comedic examples of stylization in *The Invention of Love*. Despite Charon being a mythological character, he and AEH converse in a fairly conventional style, this kind of dialogue plays against the formal quality that is commonly applied to mythological characters, providing humor through a reversal of expectations. For example, after a long digression from AEH, the following exchange occurs:

CHARON. Could you keep quiet for a bit?

AEH. Yes, I expect so. My life was marked by long silences.

Who is usually first choice?

CHARON. Helen of Troy. You’ll see a three-headed dog when we’ve crossed over. If you don’t take any notice of him he won’t take any notice of you. (4)

There is a significant difference between Stoppard’s Charon and a statelier Charon that might, for example, take on the characteristics of the Ghost of Christmas Past in Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*. The latter, through gravity, lends an authority to the images of the past even though they are fictional; the former, places a figurative asterisk in front of the scenes from the past, with everyday speech calling attention to their contrived encounter.
Through AEH and Charon’s dialogue, Stoppard also reinforces the audience’s awareness of the dramatic contrivances behind the context of the play. Charon says they have arrived in Elysium and AEH responds saying, “Elysium! Where else? . . . The Oxford of my dreams, re-dreamt. The desire to urinate combined with a sense that it would not be a good idea, usually means we are asleep” (26-27). Moments later, Charon mentions that he enjoyed watching Aeschylus’ Myrmidones and AEH begs him to remember a line from the play. The line Charon remembers is the only one that is extant, causing AEH to further recognize his condition saying, “Quite so. All is plain. I may as well wet the bed, the night nurse will change the sheets and tuck me up without reproach. They are very kind to me here in the Evelyn Nursing Home” (28-29). AEH’s observations and the surprising characterization of Charon form a self-reflexive frame through which the rest of the play’s action is viewed.

In all of Stoppard’s biographical history plays the author maintains running jokes and quips like these that create ironic distancing in themselves. These moments often occur with characters appearing to be oblivious to the colloquialisms they are expressing, such as Charon’s conventional wisdom about ignoring the scary dog, Cerberus. They also occur when the characters drolly comment on their current situation in a way that is so self-aware that they are sharing their perspective with the audience. Stoppard’s ironic sense of humor supports his stylizations by peppering the play with reminders that more than one rhetorical level is on the playing field.

The use of meta-biographical asides is another contributing factor to the role dialogue plays in creating stylization, with characters describing themselves and others using concepts related to biography. In Act Two AEH’s sister sets him up for an ironic assessment of his condition when she exclaims, “Oh, you! Same old Alfred” before exiting. In reply, AEH says to
himself, “But I intend to change. The day nurse will get the benefit of my transformation into ‘a character’, the wag of the Evelyn” (90). Here he is implying that the day nurse will be relieved of caring for him once he has died and become a biographical “character” via recollection.

A moment with a similar dramatic effect takes place toward the end of the second act when AEH and Chamberlin are standing on a hill together watching the bonfires for Queen Victoria’s diamond jubilee. Chamberlin is an anachronism, still the younger version of himself from his previous scenes with Housman. He asks AEH, “What happened to me, by the way?” and AEH responds saying, “How should I know? I suppose you became a sort of footnote” (91). Südkamp observes that in this moment “Stoppard here discloses his biography play as an artistic construct poised between fact and fiction, just as the biographee is poised between scholar and poet” (229). This effect is heightened because Chamberlin’s anachronistic appearance makes him stand out as a “creation” in both AEH’s memory and Stoppard’s imagination.

The play’s most direct meta-biographical aside comes in a direct address to the audience at the end of Act Two after AEH and Housman have had a final moment together. Referring to the two acts that the audience has just watched AEH says,

Seventy-seven [years] go quick enough. Which is not to say I have remembered it right, messing about in a boat with Moses and dear old young Pollard on a summer’s day in ’79 or ’80 or ’81; but not impossible, not so out of court as to count as an untruth in the dream-warp of the ultimate room, though the dog is still in question. And yet not dreaming either, wide awake to all the risks—archaism, anachronism, the wayward inconsequence that only hindsight can acquit. . . . and the unities out the window without so much as a window to be out of. . . . Neither dead nor dreaming then, but in between, not short on fact or fiction, and suitably
attired for leather boots, the very ones I was too clever for, which—here comes
the fact—I left in my will to my college servant. (100-101)

Here, stylization contributes a near direct expression of the play’s rhetorical overlays about
biographical representation as AEH speaks to the audience directly, qualifying accuracy of what
they have witnessed. Südkamp contends that Stoppard uses AEH in the moment to assert that the
presentation of history in The Invention of Love is “a biographical and dramatic construct,
almost like a ventriloquist speaking through his puppet” (207). This final act of confidence is not
unlike the one delivered by Carr at the end of Travesties. This passage, along with statements
made by the character of Oscar Wilde, will be referred to in a subsequent section that examines
the attitudes that Stoppard expresses about biographical representation in The Invention of Love.

Stoppard’s convention of having A. E. Housman converse with himself provides another
point of stylization. At the end of Act One Charon ferries AEH to the shore of “Elysium,” which
turns out to be the idealized Oxford of AEH’s youth. There, on the banks, is his younger self.
During the course of this scene they discuss education at Oxford, editing ancient texts, Theseus
and Pirithous, and homosexuality in ancient Greek and Roman cultures. What contributes to
making this meeting between AEH and Housman a moment of stylization is the way that AEH
has been confined to the boat with Charon until this point. He has been an unseen observer,
looking through a two way mirror with the scenes of the past at Oxford contained in their own
continuity. Unexpectedly, for the both the audience and AEH, when Charon poles the boat to the
river bank at Oxford, AEH is able to step out of the Stygian gloom of the underworld into the
past and begin speaking with himself.

Despite the initial novelty of their exchange, the stylizing effect this moment has on the
play is not permanent. When AEH speaks with Housman the scene fulfills a common desire to
go back in time to advise a younger self and this meeting has a way of almost becoming realistic, appearing less artificial because their conversation is derived from a natural impulse. Stoppard resists this effect by setting the terms early for reminding the audience of the unusual event they are witnessing. Shortly after AEH realizes that he is talking to himself/Housman, he says, “Well, this is an unexpected development. Where can we sit down before philosophy finds us out? I’m not as young as I was. Whereas you, of course, are” (30). Housman does not question the latter part of AEH’s statement. He is on the outside with AEH and the audience on the inside, understanding the joke.

These reminders also occur through physical expressions such as when AEH touches Housman’s notebook and the laurel that Housman made for Jackson. These actions highlight the fact that he is not merely an apparition in these scenes. AEH is a dreamer visiting his past, not a ghost. By interacting with objects that used to belong to him in his youth he is portrayed as a dreamer who may interact with the past in ways that are permitted by his subconscious and, as the audience likely perceives, permitted by Stoppard. The second meeting between AEH and Housman takes place at the end of Act Two, and shares similar conventions.

The final major device that contributes to the role of stylization in The Invention of Love is the dramatization of incongruous events that disrupt established continuities. Admittedly, the term incongruous events is awkward and ambiguous, but for the purposes of examining this play it refers to events which are not congruous with the general conventions Stoppard has established for the play. Some of these conventions include the use of realistic dialogue, the insertion of poetry during and between scenes, AEH’s omnipresence, spectral appearances such when Jackson is seen running in place, and the reiteration of moments from key scenes such as Housman, Jackson, and Pollard’s boat outing. With these moments as a given, events which are
not congruous with the “rules” Stoppard establishes for AEH’s dream-world are resistant to the dramatic continuity of the play.

The first incongruous event follows the opening scene with AEH and Charon on the Styx. In the scene that is located at an Oxford garden near the river Isis, Stoppard describes the action saying that “An invisible ‘croquet ball’ rolls on, followed by Pattison with a croquet mallet,” part a game of croquet being played by the professors (8). Why the invisible croquet balls? Their absence may simply have been part of a practical staging device, eliminating potential embarrassments such as an errant strike finding its way into an audience member’s lap or avoiding other technical problems such as the sound and speed of a ball rolling on a floor. However, because Stoppard has included the game of invisible croquet in the text without a note on such practical matters, an assumption may be made that he was partial to the dramatic effect. Unlike missing elements of scenery (e.g. walls, water, trees, etcetera.) the invisible croquet balls are “props” for the actors to be specifically dealt with during the course of their conversations. The invisible balls call attention to themselves through their absence because all of the other hand properties are real (e.g. books, a laurel, croquet mallets, and notebooks).

Perhaps the most comedic incongruous event occurs during a conversation between Housman and Jowett, an Oxford professor who is introducing him to how ancient texts become corrupted. When Jowett begins to make derogatory comments to Housman about how Robinson Ellis, another Latin scholar, erred in creating his edition of Catullus by ignoring the Oxford Codex, “Ellis enters as a child with a lollipop, on a scooter; but not dressed as a child” (25). They have the following exchange:

JOWETT. Awfully hard cheese, Ellis! Ignoring your Oxoniensis!

ELLIS. Didn’t ignore it.
JOWETT. Did.

ELLIS. Didn’t.

JOWETT. Did.

ELLIS. Didn’t!

JOWETT. (leaving) Did, did, did!

Ellis then joins the conversation and begins to act more realistically. AEH and Charon have come into view during this moment and AEH reflects saying, “That’s Bobby Ellis! He’s somewhat altered in demeanor, but the intellect is unmistakable” (26). This characterization of Jowett and Ellis having a discussion is the most pronounced break from the more realistic, psychological portrayals of characters that Housman encounters, offering a rhetorical step back from the kind of realism that has emerged during the course of the play. This moment is also creates an ironic distancing by calling attention to the nature of characterizing, or dramatizing someone’s personality based on personal biases, such as those expressed by AEH.

The appearance of Oscar Wilde beginning in the final ten pages of the text is the final major incongruous event in The Invention of Love (92). While Wilde has been referred to continually since the beginning of Act One, his first appearance occurs so late in the play that his sudden presence defies the assumption that the audience has been introduced to all of the play’s characters. This fact is further emphasized by how often he is mentioned in both acts without appearing. In his review of the play for The New York Times, Ben Brantley described Wilde’s appearance as “a sharp burst of color in a sepia toned photograph” (screen 1). Only now, ninety-two pages later, does the audience end up seeing him and, as he and A. E. Housman were not acquainted (they never met), his appearance is even more unexpected. The “bursts of color” in
all of these incongruous events directs attention towards the provisionality in Stoppard’s depictions.

In a brief note on the role of iteration in *The Invention of Love*: as with many of his other works, Stoppard uses iteration throughout this play but determining when repeated iterations of words, phrases, or events are meant to create the ironic distancing found in stylization is not always clear. In *The Invention of Love* the characters reference and repeat phrases related to topics such as Hades, Theseus and Pirithous, “spooniness,” and locusts and honey. Stoppard is a master of creating an inside joke with his audiences, reminding them of previous ideas while making them feel as if they are in-the-know at the same time. The argument could be made that this use of iteration would call to mind Stoppard’s construction of the play and hence, resemble stylization. Conversely, the repeated lines might simply call to mind how the audience felt at the beginning of the play when they were not as familiar with these characters, making them feel that they have grown to understand AEH. Or, third, the audience might also have a reaction that combines the previous two points.

c. How the Play Represents History

The previously cited audience address by AEH at the end of the play could be considered what Südkamp describes as a “metabiographical and metadramatic comment on Stoppard’s biography play” (206). Essentially, in this passage AEH states that he may not have “remembered it right” but that what the audience has seen is “not so out of court as to count as an untruth” (100). These sentiments about biography are expressed more completely by Wilde in their encounter when he says,

Art cannot be subordinate to its subject, otherwise it is not art but biography, and biography is the mesh through which our real life escapes. I was said to have
walked down Piccadilly with a lily in my hand. There was no need. To do it is nothing, to be said to have done it is everything. It is the truth about me. (93)

In this passage Wilde appears to be summarizing Stoppard’s philosophy, justifying the way he has represented AEH’s life. Wilde contends that a biography should not strive to be strictly accurate via historical fact but instead be truthful by way of resonating with the life of the person as a whole, even if fiction must be used to achieve this goal.

Stoppard’s Wilde argues that there is a difference between facts and the truth saying that “. . . the truth is the work of the imagination” (93). To illustrate this point he describes Bosie saying,

He is spoiled, vindictive, utterly selfish, and not very talented, but these are merely facts. The truth is he was Hyacinth when Apollo loved him, he is ivory and gold, from his red rose-leaf lips come music that fills me with joy, he is the only one who understands me. . . . We would never love anybody if we could see past our invention. Bosie is my creation, my poem. In the mirror of invention, love discovered itself. (95)

Wilde presents two sides of Bosie, “fact” and “truth,” opting for the latter in order to express why Bosie, as his “creation,” was able to selfishly exert his will upon him.

Though Wilde’s statements about biography are not technically asides, the argument could be made that AEH’s meta-biographical statements condition Wilde’s to stand out as stylization. Since Wilde’s description of biography is the most comprehensive in the play, his comments provide an ironic distancing by appearing to articulate Stoppard’s philosophies while being one of Stoppard’s biographical representations at the same time.
Wilde’s attitude is a direct contradiction to the orthodox view of truth presented by AEH as an exceptionally scrupulous editor of ancient texts. Yet, AEH appears to have been swayed by Wilde’s philosophy when he says,

> Classics apart, my life was not short enough for me to not do the things I wanted to not do, but they were few and the jackals will find it hard scavenging. I moved house four times, once, it was said, because a stranger spoke to me on my train to work. It wasn’t so, but it was the truth about me. (95)

What makes his affirmation poignant is that throughout the play AEH has been portrayed primarily as a reserved scholar whose interest in editing ancient texts is to discover truths that have been obscured by centuries of copy errors and censorship. AEH explains to Chamberlin that with scholarship,

> It’s where we’re nearest to our humanness. Useless knowledge for its own sake. Useful knowledge is good, too, but it’s for the fainthearted, an elaboration of the real thing, which is only to shine some light, it doesn’t matter where on what, it’s the light itself, against the darkness, it’s what’s left to God’s purpose when you take away God. (71)

With this statement as a given, AEH’s conversion to Wilde’s philosophy is significant because his change of mind is portrayed as a function of his intellectual growth, with the prevailing image being of a scholar who has come to appreciate the role of invention in representing the truth.

\[ d. \textit{Stoppard’s Statements on the Use of History in The Invention of Love}\]

The attitude Wilde expresses toward biography in the play was echoed by Stoppard in a lecture at the London Library: “. . . the fictional biographer as I conceive him is a biographer
who tells the truth without being enthralled to the facts . . . in biography, though not in classical scholarship, there is no special virtue in accuracy if it is not the right kind of accuracy” (qtd. In Tom Stoppard: A Life 508). He later described his wishes for hypothetical biography of his own saying that “. . . maximum inaccuracy [is] the only possibility of a silver lining to an appalling cloud” (qtd. In Tom Stoppard: A Life 514). The “fictional biographer” that Stoppard refers to is the biographer who goes beyond facts to present “the right kind of accuracy” about their subject that historical documents alone cannot reveal. In contrast, a biographer who only represents someone’s life according to facts risks a different kind of untruth.

In an interview with Domenic Cavendish of the Telegraph in 2002 Stoppard described his process for writing plays saying,

I overload. . . . I end up living for three years with a hundred books and, as I get older, I find I have to read them two or three times for anything to stay in my head. . . . if I’d known what the essential six books were, these plays could have been on and off a couple of years ago. But I couldn’t stop shuffling my pieces around and torturing myself. (screen 1)

While the above statement confirms Nadel’s view of the role of pastiche in Stoppard’s works, this description of his work process also suggests that although he takes a great deal of dramatic license with his portrayal of history in The Invention of Love the end result is not a reckless representation. Instead, Stoppard’s biographical representation of A. E. Housman has been the result of a great deal of deliberation, taking numerous documented resources into account.

A respect for research appears to have left room for doubt in Stoppard’s mind, as the author retains an attitude of skepticism about how close The Invention of Love comes to being a truthful representation. In his March 2001 interview with PBS talk show host Charlie Rose,
Stoppard spoke about the difficulty of understanding someone based on historical documentation:

One thinks that one can find out what someone was like by reading everything but I don’t think one can. Because what was, and could, be published that was contemporary with them, before 1900, wouldn’t tell the whole truth by any means, even in their private letters. There was a great deal of reticence which was simply good manners and so on. And I suspect that we got the whole thing wrong, perhaps with Housman especially, where one has got a sense of a rather cold, dry, person. Of course, he did have a congenial side and a convivial side. In the case of Wilde, perhaps the reported Wilde is closer to the Wilde that was.

Here he describes opaqueness of historical fact saying, “I suspect we got the whole thing wrong” and then appears to countermand his representation of A. E. Housman’s personality. He has also described the play saying, “It's not biographical. Things happen that never happened. The whole thing never happened—it all goes on in Housman's head” (Hill, screen 1). Like the divided versions of Housman, Stoppard is perhaps divided between being a skeptic who is fanatical about research and a dramatist who finds truth in manipulating recorded facts. The use of biography in The Invention of Love occurs in a state of paradox: fact and fiction are both necessary in biographical representation yet they both can be misleading.

e. Criticism from Other Scholars

Perhaps the best description of the combination of real and surreal, factual and fictional, and biographical and meta-biographical components that are assembled in Stoppard’s portrayal of A. E. Housman’s life comes from Fleming when he describes the play as an “impressionistic biography,” saying, “While it is not strictly speaking a biography, some of the main character’s
lines of dialogue are pulled from the writings of the historical Housman. . . . Stoppard’s presentation of Housman may deviate from factual biography, but it always conveys as sense of truth” (227). Stoppard abandons the pursuit of objective representation for one that is more poetic, giving the play its impressionistic feel. Stoppard’s use of stylizations also contributes to the impressionistic attitude toward biography by continually reminding his audiences that his biographical depiction is deliberately out of focus, emphasized by a context-based caveat that is referenced throughout the play.

f. Conclusions

Despite the liberal use of history in The Invention of Love, Stoppard grounds his biographical representation by traditional means, using documented materials such as A. E. Housman’s poetry, references derived from his scholarly writings, traditional narrative forms such as tragedy and irony, dialectical approaches, and providing enough detail to establish a fairly realistic psychology for his characters. Further, the portrait of A. E. Housman created by Stoppard is derived from extensive research that serves to inform his life, though what is presented is largely fictional.

While Stoppard described this play saying “It’s not biographical,” he appears to have been referring to the term biography in a conservative sense. The play more resembles the work of what Stoppard describes as the “fictional biographer” who might abandon fact in order to seek something truthful about his/her subject. Nadel points out that “This is the characteristic Stoppard dilemma: facts alone are deadly and need to be enlivened by the imagination, yet they resonate with interpretative possibilities. . . .” (Tom Stoppard: A Life 507).

Based on the rhetorical overlays presented in The Invention of Love, Stoppard appears to freely embrace the problematic nature of biographical representation. Stylizations present two
different caveats, one contextual and the other philosophical, as Stoppard contrives A. E. Housman’s near death state in order to poetically examine the poet/scholar’s life, constantly reminding the audience of the subjective nature of his work in the process. The end product is an impressionistic vision of not just his subject, but of the blurred lines between fact and fiction, where the Romantic and classicist contradictions in the same person echo an approach that might be considered to be poetically objective.

IV. Voyage: History as Unforeseen Design and Perspective

“People don’t storm the Bastille because history proceeds by zigzags. History zigzags because when people have had enough, they storm the Bastille.”

—Alexander Herzen in Voyage (The Coast of Utopia 108)

The Coast of Utopia trilogy could be considered a single work because the plays are linked contextually through a central set of protagonists and present a relatively consistent through-line and style of characterization. Despite these similarities, each of the plays has unique aspects to their forms, uses of stylization, and caveats for understanding historical subjects. Due to these conditions, the examination of The Coast of Utopia trilogy will be organized differently than the other play analyses in this study in order to acknowledge their differences while efficiently describing the qualities that the plays share. The analysis of the first play, Voyage, will also include a general description of the entire trilogy’s form while the final play, Salvage, will include additional sections that address Stoppard’s attitude toward the representation of history in the trilogy, criticism from other scholars, and concluding observations about The Coast of Utopia as a whole.
The Coast of Utopia trilogy is an epic spanning thirty-five years, taking place in six different countries, and requires more than seventy characters to complete the drama. All of the action in the trilogy takes place on the domestic front while political revolutions happen offstage. Revolutions of a different kind play out in The Coast of Utopia among siblings, spouses, and friends. In these domestic revolutions, philosophical and political ideologies fail to account for human nature in basic relationships, making ideologies appear absurd when their inability to bring happiness to personal lives is compared with the complexity of bringing happiness to entire nations.

Stylization plays a major role in putting Stoppard’s characters’ experiences into perspective, though they do not operate as a caveat with the same degree of directness that they do in The Invention of Love. Instead of maintaining a caveat that is contextually based—such as senility or dreaming—in The Coast of Utopia the stylizations target the nature of historical interpretation in general, placing a caveat on any historical or biographical representation. The rhetorical overlays in The Coast of Utopia present a view that while large scale trends in history might be readily identifiable, the more specific the causes for those trends or the personal experience of the individual that the artist or scholar attempts to understand, the more obscure and irretrievable the past appears. Stoppard’s characters attempt to foresee the sociopolitical progression of history, but history is shown to be based on chance and, therefore, is impossible to forecast. Accordingly, the same principle applies to looking back on history and determining from the chaos of facts and perspectives of a single event, or the whole of someone’s life, what really happened. Stoppard’s solution to mitigating this indeterminacy is to make the characters true in the sense that they represent the “argument” that was put forth by the way they lived,
leaving room for imaginative interpretation and the manipulation of historical fact for dramatic purposes.

\[ a. \textit{The General Form of the Coast of Utopia Trilogy}\]

All references to \textit{The Coast of Utopia} trilogy will be to the version published in 2008. This is the version based on the Lincoln Center production in New York City. In an interview with Charlie Rose for \textit{PBS} in 2007, Stoppard indicated that this is the version he hopes will be performed in the future because the “New York text” benefited from revisions that were made possible by a longer rehearsal period. The plays were first produced at the National Theatre in London, 2002.

The central protagonists in the trilogy are Vissarion Belinsky, Michael Bakunin, and Alexander Herzen, with Ivan Turgenev playing a strong but secondary role. Though they had different temperaments, philosophies, and political beliefs, these men knew each other and were friends (at least some of the time). Stoppard’s audiences might most likely recognize Turgenev as a famous Russian writer, one of his most well known novels being \textit{Fathers and Sons} (1862). Bakunin, the son of a wealthy landowner, became a political anarchist who roamed Europe looking to spark revolutions that would eventually spread to Russia (he is famous for describing destruction as “a creative passion”). Belinsky was a literary critic who sought to shape Russia’s cultural and political landscape by encouraging authors to produce original Russian works that did not copy European forms (he often wavered as to how directly literature should carry political messages). Herzen was a Russian revolutionary who spent most of his years as an émigré. He experienced his greatest period of political influence while living in England, writing an underground political newspaper called \textit{The Bell}. Keith Gessen, in his article for \textit{The New
Yorke contends that during this time Herzen and Tsar Nicolas were the two most prominent forces in Russia, though Herzen’s name “couldn’t even be mentioned in print” (94).

Each of these men embodied important factors that were shaping the sociopolitical landscape during this time. In the arts, Turgenev was a creator while Belinsky was a commentator, each taking part in the complicated process of the development of an independent Russian culture. Meanwhile, Herzen factors as a political philosopher and strategist who acts with deliberation while Bakunin seeks power through a kind of impulsive “act first and fail to ask questions later” mentality.

The characters in The Coast of Utopia are the most realistic of Stoppard’s biographical history plays, with the author relying more on psychological conflicts and motivations than he did in Travesties or The Invention of Love. The intellectual engine, which is Stoppard’s ability to deliver complicated ideas in a concise, dramatic flourish is still present in some of the longer speeches and, because of this, Stoppard’s “voice” becomes more apparent at times.

The trend toward being more realistic may be derived in part from Stoppard’s interest in emulating some of the features found in Anton Chekhov’s plays. In an interview with Arkady Ostrovsky for The Financial Times Stoppard expressed his interest in the way Chekhov revealed a larger historical perspective through the domestic lives of his characters saying, “Chekhov did it to perfection. There is a micro-narrative in his plays that engages the audience in order for the macro-narrative to operate. One has an acute feeling that a story and history is running through something where nothing much happens” (screen 1). By borrowing Chekhovian conventions, Stoppard illustrates the macro-narratives driven by the revolutionary philosophies that were shaping history from 1833-1868 through their implementation in the domestic sphere.
Much of this Chekhovian spirit is introduced in Act One of *Voyage* which takes place at the Bakunin home. Michael Bakunin’s father, Alexander, is the landowner of a Russian estate called Premukhino with over five hundred serfs. The estate is portrayed as an idyllic country paradise (Stoppard’s Belinsky describes living there as “like being in a dream” (40)) in the years precipitating the decline of the family wealth. Similar to plays like *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) and *Three Sisters* (1901), new philosophies and changing values bring disharmony to the provincial way of life for both the characters who embrace them and for those who fail to adopt new strategies. In similar fashion, *Voyage* ends with a tragic scene at Premukhino. Alexander’s chief desire was to see his daughters married well and have his son successfully take over the estate, but instead only one of his four daughters is married, another has died of consumption, and Michael has been sentenced in absentia to Siberia. *Shipwreck*, the second play in the trilogy, also begins and ends on a country estate in Russia with wealthy characters enjoying idle time, continuing the resonance of the Chekhovian aesthetic on the trilogy.

Due to the sweeping arc of history presented in *The Coast of Utopia*, there is not enough continuity or stage time to develop these characters fully. The characters contain enough psychological detail to lend a sincere gravity to the disappointments and failures that they experience, but they are not thoroughly realistic. They are somewhat similar to the level of realism in Chekhov’s characters because they are developed enough to suggest a complex inner life, yet they are postured or “typed” in a ways that enable Stoppard to access a macro-narrative that is larger than their experiences.

Another similarity to Chekhov’s characterizations is the inclusion of comedic moments in *The Coast of Utopia*. Chekhov believed he had included a sense of comedy in his plays, though these comedic possibilities were often overlooked by directors like Stanislavski. In her article
“Chekhov’s Comedy” (2000), Vera Gottlieb notes that this is the result of Chekhov’s view “that the objectivity and detachment which laughter may produce could inoculate us against such human diseases such as pomposity. . .” and that, “Chekhov’s comedy is therefore not only a stylistic feature in his works, but is also a vital part of his philosophy” (228). The Coast of Utopia is Chekhovian in spirit because, though the plays are remembered more for their intellectual bantering and tragic outcomes, Stoppard consistently maintains a thread of comedy throughout the trilogy that creates a detachment toward his characters’ experiences. In Voyage, for example, Michael Bakunin explains how he learned about one of Stankevich’s embarrassing experiences saying, “We were discussing transcendental idealism over oysters, and one thing led to another” (82). Just as comedy contributes to the stylizations in The Invention of Love, these kinds of moments are ironic devices that provide resistance to the potential “pomposity” of the more literal representations in the plays.

The Chekhovian influence in The Coast of Utopia is contrasted with a visual theatricality that resonates with theatrical devices from some of Stoppard’s other works. These moments are sometimes achieved through relatively simple effects such as when Stoppard transposes a concluding stage image from the end of one scene into the beginning of another. One of these instances occurs in Voyage when Alexander hugs Liubov at the end of 1.iii, “Autumn 1835,” to console her. When the lights come up on the next scene, “Spring1836,” we find them in the same position, only this time Alexander is scratching her head and she is happy (28). Stoppard also uses more startling events such as the appearance of a giant ginger cat in Voyage (110) or a tableau vivant based on a Manet painting in Shipwreck (190). These items are incorporated into the context of the play yet, like the scene transition between Alexander and Liubov, they also provide a brief theatricalized departure from the more realistic continuities.
While Stoppard’s use of pastiche has gradually waned throughout his career, he still relies heavily in *The Coast of Utopia* on other works to provide both the guiding framework of the plays as well as some of the dialogue. Nadel notes that “Stoppard’s mastery of Russian history” is derived from three primary texts: Isaiah Berlin’s *Russian Thinkers* (1978) and E. H. Carr’s *The Romantic Exiles* (1933) and Michael Bakunin (1937) (“Tom Stoppard in the Russian Court” 506). Nadel states that *Russian Thinkers* provided the foundation for the philosophical and political arguments in the play, *The Romantic Exiles* provided information on political friendships and domestic troubles in a “dramatic survey of the principal players and conflicts between 1847 and 1870,” and from *Michael Bakunin* Stoppard borrowed ideas for the relationships between Bakunin, his father, and his sisters (“Tom Stoppard: In the Russian Court” 507). Stoppard also borrowed from these historical texts in order to set up some of the plays’ dialectics. For example, in his article for *Raritan* Herbert F. Tucker notes that “Stoppard follows Berlin in sharply contrasting Belinsky’s restless repudiations with the endless sophomorics of Bakunin, who during a lifetime of ideological conversions never changes his mind, just enlarges it” (163).

The influence of the historical texts continues into the plays’ dialogues. Tucker notes that many of the central arguments in the plays, such as Herzen’s “History knocks at a thousand gates” speech (335), are taken directly (if slightly modified) from original sources such as Alexander Herzen’s *From the Other Shore* (157). Stoppard also made use of personal writings to characterize the more intimate details of his characters’ lives. In a question-answer session held for the public at Lincoln Center he stated,

> . . . the most wonderful sentence or two in the entire trilogy is just something Herzen wrote after his seven year old boy was drowned in an accident at sea. “We
think because children grow up, a child’s purpose is to grow up. But, a child’s purpose is to be a child. Nature doesn’t disdain what lives only for a day” . . .

(Cattaneo 7)

With all of these intertextual components in mind, the general characterization of history in The Coast of Utopia could be said to be derived from a kind of “collage” of primary and secondary historical materials that establishes a central organizing force, or a pastiche of information, that loosely structures the action of the plays.

While there is a lot of humor throughout the trilogy, the general direction of The Coast of Utopia follows a tragic course, with irony holding a central position. Voyage ends with Michael’s father lamenting the ruin of his hopes for his family and estate. At the end of Shipwreck Herzen’s mother, wife, and son (Kolya) are dead, his loss thrown into relief by an ironic flashback that revisits his optimism for the future. Salvage ends with Herzen greatly disappointed by the demise of his newspaper (The Bell), being disregarded by Russia’s new generation of revolutionaries, the loss of two more children, and his surviving children’s alienation from the Russian heritage he wanted them to value.

b. Voyage: Form

Voyage is primarily devoted to depicting Russian revolutionary Michael Bakunin and his initial transformation from a philosophical philistine to a political anarchist. The other central protagonists of the trilogy, Alexander Herzen and Vissarion Belinsky, are also introduced in this play while Turgenev makes a few brief appearances. Michael is a part of what Stoppard describes as the “philosophical circle” while Herzen is a part of the “political circle.” Stoppard notes that “The philosophical took refuge from unpleasant reality in the ‘inner liberation’ of German idealism. . . . Meanwhile, the political studied the French Revolution and the utopian
socialists” (The Coast of Utopia x). Both of these movements were harshly repressed by Tsarist tyranny. The second act of the play features Herzen as a prominent, but relatively minor, character shortly before he is sent to Siberia for “loose talk at a supper party” that he did not attend (Voyage 73). He later becomes the main protagonist of Shipwreck and Salvage. Belinsky figures as a cautious amalgamation of the two men, he is fascinated by philosophy—Hegel in particular—while his criticism of Russian culture has significant political ramifications.

All of Act One takes place in the years 1833 to 1841 on the Bakunin estate named Premukhino, dramatizing how Michael’s fanatical devotion to European philosophy results in several domestic problems for his family. The first act consists of nine scenes (and one flashback scene). In these scenes Michael visits home from either artillery school or from Moscow, bringing with him new philosophical ideas. He alternately invites Stankevich, Belinsky, and Turgenev to join him on these visits, each having their own philosophical influence on Michael and his sisters. With each of Michael’s visits a progression of philosophical inquiry is illustrated as he becomes alternately devoted to Schelling, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. Michael is determined to “liberate” his four sisters by instructing them according to these philosophical teachings and his influence on them becomes ruinous when his advice fails to account for the complexities of life. As a result of his efforts, there is a domestic struggle between Michael and his pragmatic father for the future of the family. By the end of the first act Michael has left Russia to study philosophy in Germany.

Act Two spans the years from 1834 to 1844 and takes place in several locations, moving from the Moscow Zoo Gardens, the Beyer home, the office of the Telescope, Belinsky’s room, a concert hall, a river dock, a street in St. Petersburg, a soiree at a undisclosed location, and the Premukhino estate. The second act’s gloomy and politically despotic atmosphere is emphasized
by Belinsky’s through-line as he transitions from working for the Telescope to editing the Moscow Observer, interacting with both the philosophical and political circles in the process. Intermittently, the audience is introduced to Herzen and other members of the political circle shortly before they have been sent to prison or exile (74). At the end of the play Michael’s father, having had to sell Premukhino’s forest, receives disheartening news when he learns that Michael has been sentenced in absentia to Siberia and has had all of his property rights revoked by the Tsar due to his radical associations.

The scenes in Act One and Act Two roughly alternate chronologically, each scene having a counterpart that either predates or follows corresponding action from the other act. As a metaphor, this arrangement of events could be compared to a numerically ordered deck of cards that has been shuffled and then “cut,” with the suits and numbers of the cards in one half are related to the cards in the other half but not necessarily evenly divided. Stoppard usually lists the dates by season (e.g. Summer, Autumn, Winter, and Spring) but he also occasionally specifies the month and sometimes a particular date. The specification of these months clarifies the order of events between the acts, such as when Belinsky leaves Premukhino in Act One, Autumn 1835 accompanied by Michael, and when the two men meet again (chronologically speaking) in Act Two, December 1835. Stoppard does not call for these dates to be projected to the audience, though their presentation would assumedly be beneficial.

Stoppard shows the effect of actions in Act One before revealing their cause in Act Two, reversing the common practice of constructing an historical account in which facts build upon each other to create an interpretation. By arranging the chronology in this way, Stoppard plays one act off the other, making the audience guess what has caused incidents in Act One to happen and then refuting or confirming their assumptions in ways that are unexpectedly complex.
Südkamp describes this process as a “reversal of the Aristotelian cause and effect chain” saying, “. . . the chronological interlocking of the scenes of both acts is more than a delay of explanations or a redefinition of events” (246). Through this arrangement of scenes Stoppard resists creating a portrait of history that is authoritative or deterministic.

The challenges to the audience’s assumptions range in scope from brief moments that have a single counterpart in the other act, to plot threads that weave throughout most of the play. In Act One Michael appears to be the one who introduced Stankevich to his sisters but the audience discovers in Act Two that the reverse is true (76). Smaller moments like these are joined by a larger plot threads such as the one that follows Belinsky and the fate of his penknife. Belinsky visits the Bakunin estate in Act One and discovers a penknife that he “lost last year in Moscow” (37). This is same penknife that Liubov had been cherishing because she thought it belonged to Stankevich. When Stankevich denied the penknife was his, she presumably threw it into pond because she was either embarrassed or frustrated (Stankevich seemed to want to take the penknife from her as a token of remembrance but the moment was not realized because Michael interrupted them (26)). In Act Two the audience sees how Liubov found the penknife and why she believed it was Stankevich’s. Yet unexpectedly, the audience also learns that Belinsky knew that Liubov found the penknife and took it, putting a new perspective on his amazement that he found his treasured item in the belly of a carp in Premukhino.

How is this arrangement of time perceived by the audience? Even if the dates are projected as a point of reference, with nine scenes and one flashback in the first act and fourteen scenes (including two “inter-scenes”) in the second, the audience is not likely to completely reconstruct the chronology for themselves (e.g. Was it autumn or spring when Michael’s sisters received Natalie Beyer’s letter?). Perhaps to aid the perception of chronology, Stoppard provides
what might be described as dramatic “signposts” for the audience to follow. These signposts augment the major dramatic action through a series of comical subplots that are easily recognizable. The two most significant of these are Stankevich and Liubov’s laughably ineffectual (yet tragic) romance and the unexpected way that Belinsky losess and reclaims his penknife. These minor storylines thread through the major ones, helping to contextualize the action in both acts for the audience.

c. **Voyage: Stylization**

The manipulation of chronology contributes substantially to the role stylizations in *Voyage*. These stylizations are relatively subtle when compared with Stoppard’s other biographical history plays. In *Travesties* and *The Invention of Love* stylization actively illustrated the author’s inaccurate and manipulative uses of history while in *Voyage* and *The Coast of Utopia* as a whole, the stylizations are presented in a way that expands character and plot development instead of simply brokering a caveat between the audience and playwright. If driving a car were used as a metaphor, in *The Invention of Love* stylizations “hit the break” on the more realistic continuities while in *The Coast of Utopia* trilogy they “hit the gas,” accelerating (or layering) a figurative meaning onto the more realistic moments. Stylizations enhance both the micro-narratives and the macro-narratives in *The Coast of Utopia* while maintaining rhetorical overlays that comment on the process of interpreting history.

Most of the stylizations in *Voyage* are established when Stoppard shuffles the chronology of the scenes with a dramatic flourish, just as someone might shuffle a deck of cards in a theatrical manner in order to call attention to his or her technique as a dealer. The interpolated arrangement of chronology in *Voyage* is a point of stylization because the disruption of cause and effect ironically distances the presentation of the historical material from the means of
presentation. Through this disruption, a rhetorical overlay is established that emphasizes both the role perspective and how chance contributes to historical indeterminacy. Every time an audience member’s assumptions are refuted, the indeterminate nature of understanding history and the selective process by which Stoppard is representing history are called into question.

These stylizations are augmented by two other conventions related to the arrangement of the play’s scenes: “transposition” and “crossover.” Transposition is a dramatic device that transposes the context of a scene ending tableau into a new context in the following scene. Examples of this include the previously described moment where Alexander is seen hugging Liubov while bridging two scenes in Act One. Transpositions serve as stylization because the juxtaposed meaning of the tableaus literally calls attention to the act of staging history while also figuratively pointing out how the same gestures/actions may be reinterpreted. This type transposing also occurs once in Act Two, when Belinsky puts his head on his desk after experiencing an embarrassing moment with Caadaev (88). In the scene that immediately follows, the audience finds him still with his head on his desk, only this time he is sleeping while Michael enters and wakes him up.

Crossovers have a similar effect as transpositions but differ in that the character/s are in motion, moving from the contextual snapshot of one scene into the scene that follows. For example, in Act One Michael and Belinsky’s departure coincides with a gunshot that “disturbs the crows in the wintry garden” as they leave; this sound bridges to the next scene when Michael’s sisters learn that Pushkin has been killed in a duel (46). The first act also ends with a similar device, as Turgenev emerges in the garden at the close of the 1838 bonfire to have his conversation in 1841 with Tatiana. The same device is also used twice in Act Two when Belinsky appears at the end of the first scene “now wearing a better coat” on his way to “the
soiree” (68) and when the giant ginger cat Herzen has been using as a metaphor appears onstage on a street in St. Petersburg before crossing over into the next scene which is set at a “fancy dress” costume party (110).

The presence of the character named “Ginger Cat” also creates a point of stylization simply through his appearance in the play. Stoppard calls for this character’s costume to conceal the wearer’s identity, making the person appear as “a huge, upright, disreputable cat” (110). Ginger Cat’s appearance is set up when Herzen is seen talking to Belinsky, telling him about how he met Bakunin at “fancy-dress” party saying, “Until I’d seen a six-foot ginger cat raise its glass to the Transcendental, the full meaning of exile hadn’t come home to me” (108). He then criticizes Hegel, using the unpredictable mind of a cat as a metaphor for the progression of history. The giant cat first appears at the end of their scene when Belinsky, having learned about Stankevich’s death cries out, “Who is this Moloch that eats his children?” Herzen replies, “No. It’s the Ginger Cat” (110). Herzen and Belinsky are unaware of the cat’s presence but Belinsky eventually has an encounter with him during the soirée in the next scene. Belinsky introduces himself from across the room saying, “Belinsky,” and the Ginger Cat replies, “Of course” (114).

The appearance of Ginger Cat stands out from the continuity of the rest of the play for a moment and then is integrated into the plot. At first glance he is Herzen’s metaphor come to life. At second glance he is the same thing, only motivated by the context of the fancy-dress party. Then finally, he stands out again, surprising the audience when he speaks for the first time and closes the scene (this giant cat might be in reference to a delightfully mischievous giant cat named Behemoth in Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita* (1941)). Being a metaphor for an historical process that is brought to life, the giant cat presents an ironically self-referential
treatment of the rhetorical processes such as the metaphors that Stoppard is using to apply interpretations to his version of history.

*d. How Voyage Presents History*

Stoppard’s Ginger Cat is at the center of the philosophy expressed in *Voyage* about how history is interpreted. In the pointed argument between Herzen and Belinsky, Herzen says,

You’ve got Hegel’s Dialectical Spirit of History upside down and so does he. People don’t storm the Bastille because history proceeds by zigzags. History zigzags because when people have had enough, they storm the Bastille. . . . The lives of nations unfold in obedience to Hegel’s law; but one at a time we’re too insignificant to be noticed by such a grand law. One at a time, we’re just sport for cats’ paws, for something as lawless as a gigantic ginger cat. . . . We’re not at the mercy of an imaginative cosmic force, but of a Romanov with no imagination whatsoever. . . . the Cat has no plan, no favorites or resentments, no memory, no mind, no rhyme or reason. It kills without purpose, and spares without purpose, too. So, when it catches your eye, what happens next is not up to the Cat, it’s up to you. (108-109)

Herzen believes that individuals are self-determinant, not pawns in a game played by cosmic forces or subject to abstract laws that attempt to account for an orderly march toward liberty. His statement carries implications for historical interpretation because historical narratives sometimes present history with cause and effect analyses that portray a kind of “evolution” toward a more equitable sociopolitical state. Those types of processes are then applied to individual behaviors as they might be the product of their historical moment. Stoppard implies
that while economic forces like the Industrial Revolution might bring sweeping changes, the lives of individuals are also guided by chance and personal decisions.

The role of chance is illustrated by the plot thread that depicts the fate of Belinsky’s penknife, which may at first appear trivial, but the complex structure reveals an attitude about the role of perspective in interpreting history. All parties, including the audience, misunderstand the event, resulting in what Maurice Yacowar, in his article for *Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, describes as “re-enforcing the theme of limited comprehension,” in which the author “continually upsets our plot expectations” (83). Liubov picks up the penknife in Act Two for the first time, wanting to believe it is Stankevich’s and, while ignoring Belinsky’s stuttering confusion, tucks it in her neckline. Belinsky does not understand why Liubov cherishes his penknife (though he takes it as an unexpected compliment), nor that it was almost given to his friend Stankevich before ending up in the pond. The history of the penknife remains unknown to the same people who controlled its fate, as neither Liubov nor Belinsky admit to their knowledge of previous events.

The penknife story is not as simple as Varenka suggests: “Somebody threw it in the fishpond and the carp saw it and just gobbled it up” (40). Yet, at the same time her concise assessment is also true, demonstrating a paradox about how historical facts fail to reveal the whole truth. Tucker describes these moments in *Voyage* as “fortuitous recurrences,” saying that, “. . . in the context of reflection on what history may and may not mean, the sort of unforeseen design that they stage constitutes an enactment of unpredictability itself” (160). Through these processes the audience is presented with a relatively simple situation such as the story of the penknife in which the “unforeseen design”—the surprisingly logical arrangement of events that constitute its fate—provides a reflection on the presentation of history in general.
The unforeseen design of the fate of Belinsky’s penknife is joined by another dramatic device with a similar purpose. In the two scenes that end Act One, Stoppard presents the audience with a version of the past in 1838 and then visits that moment again from the memory of one of his characters in 1841. The first depicts a bonfire at the Bakunin estate. Liubov, severely weakened by tuberculosis, is offstage waiting to be carted to the fire but the audience never sees her. Instead, they witness Alexander taking his son on a tour of his failings and the misery he has brought to his sisters because of his philosophical meddling (51-52). In the proceeding scene that occurs more than three years later, Tatiana tells Turgenev about the last time her family was together and “somehow happy.” Her memory is suddenly conjured on stage when Stoppard introduces (by way of Tatiana’s mind’s eye) a revisiting of the bonfire scene from a different perspective: this time from where Liubov is waiting (55-56). Tatiana is shown to remember this moment from a point of view that is new to the audience when she steps into the memory to participate. She literally disappears into her viewpoint as the memory proceeds from an idealized perspective that does not take into account Alexander’s severe reprimanding of Michael. In this moment of recollection, emotion and experience contribute to Stoppard’s examination of the limitations of historical comprehension.

e. **Voyage Conclusions**

When the form and stylizations in *Voyage* are considered together, the final vision of history and biography that is presented in this play is guided by a cautious skepticism. This skepticism is translated into rhetorical overlays that question the cause and effect based understanding of the past along with emphasizing how unforeseen design and limited perspectives create indeterminacy. Stoppard appears to agree with Herzen’s statement that while historical forces might have general laws, the forces that shape the individual in history are
lawless. Herzen’s comment about Hegel’s law speaks directly to the nature of biography: historical trends might be identifiable in hindsight, but how they actually shape history and the biographical experience of individuals is elusive and indeterminate. This notion also parallels with the micro/macro narrative function of the plot because, in using this Chekhovian device, Stoppard illustrates the macroscopic historical development of his characters’ philosophical and political beliefs while the microscopic nature of their experiences is represented in a way that openly appears speculative or manipulated.

V. Shipwreck: The Chaos of History Framed in Limited Comprehension

“History is more like the weather: you never know what it’s going to do.”

—George Herwegh in Shipwreck (The Coast of Utopia 181)

In Shipwreck, the scale of both the political and domestic crises is larger. The Herzen household is moved several times and provides the central axis for the play’s action. They are joined by other revolutionaries and friends, including George Herwegh and his wife, both of whom play a significant role in Act Two when Natalie has an affair with Herwegh that produces a child. The philosophies used to justify this domestic “revolution” are paralleled with the disastrous French Revolution of 1848 and the vision of egoless human nature behind Marxist thinking. Shipwreck examines the folly of utopian thought, using the relatively microscopic complexities of domestic life as a way to illustrate the inability of these theories to order the macroscopic fate of nations.

The form and stylizations in Shipwreck combine to call attention to the ways that history is “framed” by perspective, creating the core of the play’s caveat for historical representation.
This attention to “framing” history is generated through devices that effectively re-contextualize the previous action of the play and provide new perspectives that expand, rather than reduce, interpretive possibilities. Through these processes, Stoppard’s stylizations in Shipwreck produce rhetorical overlays that emphasize how the act of describing historical events is an art limited by the necessary selection of facts for the purpose of comprehension.

a. Form

Shipwreck takes place in several different locations. Act One begins at Sokolovo (a country estate in Russia) and a spa in Salzburg Germany before moving to Paris where characters visit the Place de la Concord, the streets of Paris, and two different Herzen residences. As Herzen wryly notes, he has left the intelligentsia and become bourgeois (149). The series of ten scenes in this act span a period time from summer 1846 to June 1848, including one reprisal in the last scene. The characters are seen discussing major historical events but they are not shown participating in them. Mostly they sit around, relax, argue, borrow money, and lend money. During the Revolution of 1848 there are horrible acts of violence and, though these scenes are not represented on stage, the audience learns about them through Herzen and his friends’ discussions. This act also introduces Herzen’s friend, Ogarev, in greater detail as well as Ogarev’s future wife, Natasha, both of whom figure prominently in Salvage.

Act Two takes place at Herzen’s second apartment in Paris, an artist’s studio, a prison room in Saxony, the Herzen residence in the Paris suburb of Montmorency, the Herzen residence in Nice, a cross-Channel steamer, and Sokolovo. The time spanned in the ten scenes that make up this act range from January 1849 to November 1850, with one scene that returns to Sokolovo in the summer 1846. When Herzen decides to move to Nice, he unwittingly takes with him his wife’s new lover, George Herwegh (George’s wife Emma also joins them). In addition to the
domestic drama that has already been described, this act includes an attempt by Natalie to
cconvince Ogarev’s first wife to grant him a divorce, a discussion between Bakunin and his
lawyer in Saxony, and a waking-dream sequence between Herzen and Bakunin on a boat. The
play ends where it began, with a continuation of the Act One scene in Sokolovo after Ogarev has
found the missing Kolya.

The chronology of events in Shipwreck is mostly linear, only diverted by two flashbacks
at the end of each act: one a reprisal and the other a continuance. Stoppard labels scenes with the
general season or month with the exception of three specific dates from the days surrounding the
French Revolution of 1848. While the chronology is linear, there are large leaps in time, giving
the impression that each scene is presenting these historical characters’ experiences in snapshots
rather than a continuous, or seemingly complete, dramatization. Even though Stoppard does not
manipulate cause and effect the same way he did in Voyage, there is still a relatively high
demand on the audience to orient themselves based on the exposition delivered in each scene.
This method creates a kind of “thirst” for the historical exposition that the characters deliver
while at the same time other questions remain unanswered.

While an argument could be made that this choice is simply the result of the epic nature
of the plays—not enough stage time to cover all of the details—the things that are left
unexplained are often significant for the characters, creating a feeling of deliberate ambiguity
about the facts. One striking example of this is Herzen’s wealth. Throughout the trilogy he is
seen lending or giving his friends money while living a lavish lifestyle. Other than Natalie’s
description in Shipwreck of his inheritance from his father (123), the audience does not know
how his money is managed or the likelihood of him becoming bankrupt.
The same general description could be applied to Bakunin, who breezes in and out of *Shipwreck* only giving the audience glimpses of where he has been and what he has been doing. Every detail he gives raises more questions: “Forget about the French. Polish independence is the only revolutionary spark in Europe. I’ve been here six years and I know what I’m talking about. I’m in the market for a hundred rifles, by the way, payment in cash” (154). Stoppard neatly avoids Bakunin having to give more details under the guise that he is on a clandestine mission while the audience is left to ponder what exactly the rifles are for, what he plans to do with them, whom he is involved with, and what other militant activities he has been engaging in during the previous six years. The authoritative presence of a linear chronology is continually undermined in the process.

**b. Stylization**

In *Shipwreck*, the stylizations are derived primarily from dramatic devices that disrupt the play’s linear continuity or create a moment that is so overtly theatrical that an ironic distancing is achieved. Both contribute to rhetorical overlays that relate how history is the product of perspective and revision. Herzen at one point even describes this kind of complex attitude saying, “Ambivalence, the ability to hold two irreconcilable beliefs, both with ironic detachment—these are ancient European arts” (175). The stylizations in *Shipwreck* include: 1), the way the reprise and continuation disrupt continuity; 2), crossover moments similar to those that occur in *Voyage*; 3), a buffoonish depiction of Karl Marx; and 4), a scene staging based on Manet’s *Le déjeuner sur l’herbe*.

The reprise and continuance expand the understanding of previous events but they do so without being introduced to the dramatic action as memory, as was the case in Tatiana’s recollection of the bonfire at the end of the first act of *Voyage*. Instead, they stand out from the
The reprise depicts the final events of 1.iv that had previously been relegated to the background. In the original scene Stoppard pulls focus away from the adult conversations and focuses the scene on Herzen’s deaf son, Kolya, who is playing with a top. The adult conversations around him are simultaneous, creating a “word noise” that eventually gives way to the sounds of thunder, rifle fire, and revolutionaries celebrating (158-160). The reprise of this scene goes back and takes the word noise out so that the audience is able to hear the conversation that occurred between Belinsky and Turgenev (175).

The continuation begins where the first scene of the play ended: a Policeman had just arrived to give Herzen the good news that Count Orlov gave him permission to travel abroad in order to get expert medical advice on Kolya’s deafness. During this time Kolya has gone missing but Ogarev is seen entering with Sasha, calling back to Kolya. The scene ends with Sasha telling Ogarev “He can’t hear you” (142). At the end of the play, the continuation displays the action that occurs just after Kolya has been found, focusing at first on a conversation between Sasha and Ogarev (221). Herzen arrives and happily announces that Count Orlov has given him permission to travel to Paris, reminding the audience of the optimistic feelings expressed at the beginning of the play. Rhetorically, the continuation functions as an epilogue, putting into perspective all that has transpired and setting up the relationship between Herzen and Ogarev that will feature prominently in *Salvage*. The scene closes ironically, with a jubilant Herzen
exclaiming “We’re going to Paris, Natalie!” (221), but this is the most direct commentary on what has preceded, leaving the audience to interpret the rest.

The reprise and continuance are a source of stylization because, while they expand the knowledge of previous events in the play, they also indicate an incompleteness that resonates not just with the play’s action, but with Stoppard’s treatment of history. Tucker lends evidence to this idea when he states,

. . . in a play the dead indeed revive in the actor’s body, repossessing all the representational force that the theatrical medium can bestow on the living. . . . The historical past comes to this encounter fraught with a great unrealized promise, even as the spectatorial present stoops beneath an unforgiving knowledge of how little and how much, for good and for ill, this great promise is actually effected. (165)

In a written historical narrative there is the promise of completeness, or totality while, in contrast, the theatre audience, in their “spectatorial present,” is confronted with a vivid sense of revisionism. The return to previous events both illuminates what audiences already witnessed while also confronting them with the ironic implication that the historical “promise” of the narrative has still not revealed the secrets of the past despite repeated incarnations.

Moments of crossover and transposition further demonstrate revisionism by helping to stylize a general acknowledgment of dramatic contrivance in the play. Shipwreck has four crossover moments that resemble the kind in Voyage where Belinsky is seen at the end of the scene in the Moscow Zoo Gardens before crossing over to the soiree in the next scene. These crossovers include: Natalie and Natasha exclaiming “Vive la Re-pub-lique” on the streets of Paris March 1848, transitioning to the Herzen apartment in May, 15th 1848 in 1.v-1.vi (164-165);
the continued presence of a beggar in three scenes from 1.vii-1.ix (170-173); Natalie posing for a portrait in a white dress and then displaying the completed portrait to Herzen while wearing the same dress in 2.vi-2.vii (204); and when Rocca (Herzen’s house servant) is singing and setting a table to bridge the scene where Natalie admits to Herzen the details of her affair before crossing over into the next scene where he is setting up for a welcoming party for Kolya that never is allowed to occur in 2.vii-2.viii (209). Like the other crossover scenes of this kind in Voyage, because they are a minority among the other scene transitions which happen in clean breaks, they stand out and separate the historical matter from the manner in which it is presented.

The single moment of transposition in Shipwreck is directly connected with the reprise. Stoppard describes this transposition saying, “Herzen, Natalie, Turgenev and Kolya remain, their positions corresponding to the reprised scene which now reassembles itself at the point of Natalie’s re-entrance [which happened the first time Kolya’s top spinning scene from September 1847 was presented]” (175). In this moment of stylization, Stoppard takes the freezing of physical positions a step further by using multiple characters. He overtly re-contextualizes them in a way that also references the way that history is continually re-contextualized by the addition or subtraction of historical perspectives. Not only are their physical postures from the preceding scene given a new meaning in the context of the reprise, but their actions—Herzen and Turgenev’s intellectual conversation—is given a new meaning in relation to Belinsky’s death.

Though, not exactly transposition, a similar use of tableau occurs at the beginning of Act Two when the audience finds George reading to Natalie while Herzen lies on the couch so that “The arrangement mimics the opening of Act One” (178). Act One opened with characters in nearly the same posture with Ogarev reading to Natalie and Turgenev sleeping.
The next point of stylization occurs with a surprising characterization of Karl Marx, who might arguably be the most famous character to appear in the play. The effect of this sudden celebratory appearance is not unlike that of Oscar Wilde in *The Invention of Love*, yet the surprising inclusion of Marx in the play is taken a step further because he, Bakunin, and George are depicted as ineffectual buffoons. Marx and Bakunin have the following exchange:

**BAKUNIN.** I’ve been living in the barracks with the Republican Guard. You won’t believe this, but it’s the first time I’ve actually met anyone from the proletariat.

**MARX.** Really? What are they like?

**BAKUNIN.** I’ve never come across such nobility. (161)

This portrayal of Karl Marx appears to draw upon the comedic style of the Marx Brothers, contrasting the ominous sounds of thunder and revolution in the preceding scene that features a deaf Kolya playing with a top amidst the sounds of weather and warfare. Stoppard undermines the traditional triumphant view of revolution with a parody of those who wanted to participate in the action, breaking from any heroic vision of history which might have been established at the end of Kolya’s scene.

During this scene with Marx, Stoppard employs a meta-narrative device that reflects ironically on recorded history. Marx asks Turgenev’s advice saying, “You’re a writer. Do you think there’s something funny about ‘the spectre of Communism’? I don’t want it to sound as if Communism is dead” (162). Turgenev “thoughtfully” goes through a list of alternatives until he exuberantly arrives at “the hobgoblin of Communism!” (164). This moment takes one of Marx’s most historically recognized phrases and turns both the man and his writings into a moment of absurd revisionism. Tucker describes the effect of this device saying, “By staging numerous acts
of literal revision, Stoppard strengthens by exercise the mind’s grasp of alternatives to the misleadingly solid appearance of whatever may have happened to blow in with the first draft” (163). Further, “Stoppard wants to make us, too, the revisionary editors of our intellectual heritage rather than its passive reciters; to take us back and back again, to the mutable passing moment where history gets made” (164).

Shipwreck’s most theatrical point of stylization occurs in 2.iv. Stoppard begins the scene with some direct quotes from Herzen’s essays and then calls for a tableau vivant of Manet’s Le déjeuner sur l’herbe (The Lunch on the Grass, 1862-1863):

There is a tableau which anticipates—by fourteen years—the painting by Manet. Natalie is the undressed woman, sitting on the grass in the company of two fully clothed men, George and Herzen. Emma, stopping to pick a flower, is the woman in the background. The broader composition includes Turgenev, who is at first glance sketching Natalie but in fact sketching Emma. The tableau, however, is an overlapping of two locations, Natalie and George being in one, while Herzen, Emma and Turgenev are together elsewhere. Emma is heavily pregnant. There is a small basket near Natalie. (190-191)

Similar to the conventions found in Stoppard’s After Magritte, the author uses a composition to create a dramatic context in a way that defies expectations. Stoppard also arranges much of the language of this divided scene so that the dialogue overlaps. For example, when the scene begins Natalie tells George to close his eyes so that she can surprise him. In turn, Herzen asks Turgenev if he can see his sketch of Emma. The following dialogue appears to go together though they are in separate locations:

NATALIE. Are you peeping?
GEORGE. No—tight shut. What are you doing?

HERZEN. Can I look?

TURGENEV. If you want.

NATALIE. All right, then—you can open now. (191)

Through linking these separate scenes into a single composition there is an overt playfulness that is contrasted with the more serious, and ultimately tragic, decisions that Natalie and George are making.

Südkamp, in his analysis of the role of the painting in Shipwreck states that at first glance the painting appears to resemble a realist painting but that “Manet breaks the rules of realism for a reason. He violates the rules of perspective to show the recipients that they are looking at a mere picture, an ‘artificial’ depiction, and that studio perspective actually undermines realism” (311). Stoppard’s use of the composition reflects this ironic detachment, pointing out the role of perspective in historical representation while performing those functions at the same time. The effect of stylization is present in this scene whether the audience is acutely aware of this intertextual layering or, having never seen the painting before, is simply surprised by the complex staging. The effect of this scene along with the reprise and continuance, crossovers and transpositions, and the comedic Marx scene, all contribute to a rhetorical overlay that demonstrates how history is framed by perspective and the inevitable process of revisionism.

c. How Shipwreck Presents History

Near the end of Shipwreck, when Herzen is seen speaking with Bakunin in a kind of dream sequence, Stoppard includes what is perhaps the most direct statement about history in the play. Herzen observes,
We note the haphazard chaos of history by the day, by the hour, but we think there is something wrong with this picture. Where is the unity, the meaning, of nature’s highest creation? Surely those millions of little streams of accident and willfulness have their correction in the vast underground river which, without a doubt, is carrying us to the place where we’re expected. (216)

Herzen says this in connection with the tragic death of his son Kolya in a shipwreck. In his view, the random, chaotic courses of personal fate are evidenced daily but people want to find nonexistent order in these events, just as they want to find order in the course history.

Stoppard’s understanding of the chaotic nature of history is presented more succinctly using the weather as a metaphor. In one of George’s most insightful moments in the play he says, “We’ve had a terrible shock. We discovered that history isn’t impressed by intellectuals. History is more like the weather: you never know what it’s going to do” (181). None of the characters in the play are able to predict the revolutions, not even the French Revolution of 1848 that surrounded them, much less comprehend the seemingly endless complexity driving those circumstances.

George’s statement is made about 21 pages after one of the most poignant moments in Shipwreck has occurred. This is the “top spinning scene” with Kolya in 1.iv where Stoppard states that all the political banter between Herzen and his friends is “cut off into silence simultaneously but ‘continue[s]’” (160). He then leaves Kolya on stage by himself after “a general break-up and exodus” of the other characters and describes the final moment saying, “There is distant thunder, which Kolya doesn’t hear. Then there is a roll of thunder nearer. Kolya looks around, aware of something. There is the growing sound of a roaring multitude of rifle fire, shouting, singing, drumming...” (160). Kolya is seen spinning his toy top during this moment,
an activity that layers a metaphorical meaning onto the attempts of the adults to comprehend their sociopolitical present.

Stoppard uses thunder to cap four scenes in Act One, at times making these effects coincide with the sounds of rifle fire, giving the events of this act an ominous feeling. The author then uses stormy weather in the continuance that concludes Act Two, with the thunder also referencing all the preceding disappointments in the play. The attitude expressed by this metaphorical use of the weather persistently alludes to history as a chaotic collection of events, perspectives, and opinions that continues to occlude historical understanding even while Stoppard and his characters attempt to “frame” the past with their interpretations.

d. Shipwreck Conclusions

In Shipwreck, the overall attitude toward the representation of history is similar to that of Voyage. This time, however, Stoppard presents a caveat that emphasizes chaos, rather than cause and effect. The stylizations serve to present how the chaos of history is framed through perspectives that are inevitably limited in comprehension. History then, is like the weather that George references when he describes why the revolution failed to turn out the way they predicted, and can only be framed from different perspectives in an attempt to create an interpretation. Understanding history and biography is like understanding the weather because the innumerable factors that make predicting the future impossible are the same factors that prevent a complete understanding of the past. An omnipotent perspective is necessary, but impossible.
VI. Salvage: Dream and Historic Impressions

“History knocks at a thousand gates at every moment, and the gatekeeper is Chance. It takes wit and courage to make our way while our way is making us. . . .”

—Alexander Herzen in Salvage (The Coast of Utopia 335)

Salvage, the third play in the trilogy, continues to center on Herzen’s domestic life while also focusing more specifically on his political activities. His friend Ogarev, who has been seen intermittently throughout the trilogy, comes to stay with him in London and the two men start an underground Russian newspaper called The Bell, the success of which makes Herzen a prominent political force in Russia. Meanwhile, Herzen takes Ogarev’s wife Natasha (who was Natalie Herzen’s best friend) as a lover and they have three children together while Ogarev and his mistress, Mary live with them (Mary is described by Stoppard to be “not on the bottom most rung of society or of prostitution” (293)). The play’s major conflicts take place on three fronts: Herzen’s political life as editor of The Bell, Herzen’s unusual domestic arrangement with the Ogarevs, and the rearing of his children whose charge is shifted among a Maria (a German nanny), Malwida (a German tutor), and Natasha. While Shipwreck depicts the disappointing failure of dogmatic idealism, Salvage depicts the results of political and domestic compromise, yielding both tragic and fortunate results. Salvage is also peppered with appearances from Herzen’s friends Turgenev and Bakunin, exiles from various nations, and revolutionary figures such as Karl Marx.

The play’s form is similar to the other two plays in The Coast of Utopia in regard to characterization and the way that the scenes leap forward through large gaps in time. The bulk of stylizations in the play happen through the presentation of Herzen’s dreams and waking-dreams.
As Tucker says, in *Salvage*, “...imagery of sleep foreshadows the nightmare of history into which the world will be cast by cadres of younger extremists” (166). Yet, dreams do more than contribute to the foreshadowing in the play. The way that Stoppard integrates the dreams and waking-dreams into the “reality” of the play also illustrates the subjectivity in human experience that is at the root of a paradox: that historical interpretation can be both right and wrong at the same time because history is filled with complex contradictions and missing information. Similar to the story of Belinsky’s penknife in *Voyage*, someone might correctly comprehend one part of an historical event and yet they also might be potentially wrong about the forces that made that event possible.

*a. Form*

The general context of Act One and Act Two are similar in that most of the scenes occur in the Herzen home, though once again he moves several times. Act One begins in February 1853 and ends in January 1857, spanning these years in twelve scenes. Near the beginning of the play Herzen is seen telling his Polish friend Worcell how much he has enjoyed the “silence” of the obscurity he experiences in England (241). However, by the end of the act he has started publication of *The Bell*, begun an affair with his best friend’s wife, and had three different women in charge of his children’s upbringing. Throughout these events exiles and revolutionaries are constant visitors to his home. The only deviations from the relatively realistic portrayal of these events occurs at the beginning of the play when Herzen is attended by a host of émigrés in a dream and then when he speaks with Bakunin in a waking-dream that is similar to that of the cross-Channel steamer scene in *Shipwreck*.

Act Two takes place in London and Geneva over the course of twelve scenes from May 1859 to August 1868. In the opening of the second act the Herzen family has moved again and is
about to be relocated once more to Switzerland. Turgenev notes that Herzen “changes houses as if the law was after [him]” (286). When Act Two begins, Herzen and Natasha have had their first child and Ogarev, who probably was already an alcoholic, is strangely resigned to the situation. He finds consolation in a companion named Mary Sutherland who eventually comes to live in the Herzen home with her son Henry. Malwida, who had been deposed by Natasha returns to live with the Herzen’s and the rearing of the children becomes fractured due to the attachment Olga (Herzen’s youngest daughter sired by George Herwegh) has for Malwida.

In the political front, Turgenev is seen meeting a nihilist who ends up as a character in his Fathers and Sons. Nihilism is depicted as a reaction within the new generation of revolutionaries against the idealism of their predecessors. Bakunin, Ogarev, and other political radicals entreat Herzen to permit The Bell to openly support a violent revolution because of pressures from these kinds of movements.

Eventually Herzen acquiesces to the forces that are pulling against his domestic and political life and, instead of trying to control them he lets them run their course. His children end up disenfranchised from the Russian heritage he sought to protect and a failed revolution brings about the demise of The Bell. However, at the end of the play he does have some solace in that his children appear happy and his overall posture toward nonviolent reforms are validated by the failures of his rivals. He is visited in a final dream where the skeptical, noncommittal Turgenev is contrasted with Marx’s dogmatism (335-336). The resulting synthesis of these opposing ideas is presented when Herzen wakes up and says, “Our meaning is in how we live in an imperfect world, in our time. We have no other” (336).

Unlike Voyage, and Shipwreck, the chronology of events in Salvage is completely linear. Yet, the portrayal of time in Salvage is similar to these plays as events of the passing years are
depicted in “snapshots” of selected moments such as when, at the end of Act Two when Herzen and Natasha kiss after he has finished attending Worcell’s funeral, the audience is not given enough information to know specifically how long they have been intimate. With the exception of Herzen’s dream at the beginning of the play, his imaginary conversation with Bakunin in 1.vii, and his dream at the end of Act Two, Salvage proceeds in a straightforward manner without any other disruptions in the play’s temporality.

b. Stylization

Stylizations are present in this play through two primary elements: 1), crossovers and transpositions similar to those in Voyage and Shipwreck; and 2), the conventions whereby Herzen’s dreams and waking-dreams are integrated into the action of the rest of the play, including the way “artifacts” from these dreams are referenced. These stylizations contribute to rhetorical overlays that emphasize not just how Stoppard blends fact and fiction, as in a dream, but how the subjective interior of the mind is interconnected with the exterior world.

There is one crossover in Salvage, occurring as Bakunin moves from the scene of his “triumphant” return in 2.vii (he had escaped from his confinement in exile) to another in which he gives orders to “gesticulating smokers” who are fellow revolutionaries (313). Unlike the crossovers in Voyage and Shipwreck, this crossover is completely fluid as “The scene reconstitutes itself as a social gathering in which the Slav conspirators continue much as before, with Herzen at the table. . .” (313). Instead of one scene terminating and another beginning, this crossover integrates the two together so that the change of time and context is reconstituted.

Salvage contains two moments of transposition. In the first act Worcell falls asleep at a party celebrating the Tsar’s death in 1.viii and wakes up in 1.ix (264). Herzen is at his desk (he had also moved there in the previous scene) and the dialogue intimates that the two men have
been working together into the night. When Worcell wakes, Herzen remarks “...we moved house while you were asleep, we’re in Finchley” (264). Later in 2.viii, Natasha unseats Herzen’s emotions by mocking his grief for Natalie, bringing up Natalie’s affair with George, and lamenting her poor relationship with Olga. Herzen reacts to this by covering his ears while he “cries out” and then he is transposed into 2.ix while exclaiming “No! ... No!” while Ogarev informs him of the failed revolution that The Bell had supported (323). Unlike the transpositions in Voyage and Shipwreck where the final position was changed to mean something different, in Salvage the transpositions have the character doing the same thing, only for a different reason.

In Salvage dreams serve a similar purpose to the way the shuffling of context and chronology in Voyage and the way reprise and continuation in Shipwreck demonstrate the role of perspective in historical interpretation. Tucker notes the presence of dreams and sleeping in Salvage saying, “Throughout Salvage children slumber, the middle-aged nap, the aged nod off; and the whole is framed by the staging of Herzen’s dreams near the start of act 1 and the end of act 2” (167). Dreams frame the beginning and end of Salvage and, though dreams on stage do not necessarily equate to stylization, they are constructed in a surprising way that ironically distances Stoppard’s subject from his methods of representation.

In the first scene of Salvage Herzen is seen outdoors “asleep in an armchair, attended by dreams” (229). In the first of his two dreams his children are governed by Maria: Olga is in a pram while Tata watches Sasha fly a kite. Maria mentions that Olga has lost a glove and Herzen tells her it is in her pocket (more will be mentioned about the glove later). This moment with Maria and the children fades to a second dream where “a number of people are taking the air on Parliament Hill. They are émigrés, political refugees, from Germany, France, Poland, Italy and
Hungary” (230). Malwida, who eventually wakes Herzen up with her “real” entrance, is also present in this dream.

The first dream of this sequence contains little of the surrealism that is frequently used by authors to indicate that the stage action is not really happening. In the second dream the context is much more abstract with characters’ conversations overlapping each other while they issue insults that the injured parties cannot hear. The most surreal moments involve an absurd unveiling of Gottfried Kinkel’s waistcoat to Malwida that is characterized with bawdy humor and pistol shot fired by Kinkel’s wife that ends up being the “real” sound of a slammed door. Herzen awakes to find Malwida has entered the house (Herzen is revealed to have been indoors). The rest of the émigrés (except Marx and Mazzini) “are next door chatting socially. . .” (234). Herzen recognizes Malwida and hires her as Tata’s tutor before escorting her to the door. During this time she notices a glove on the floor and Herzen puts it in his pocket. In Malwida’s protracted exit, the audience discovers that the majority of the people in Herzen’s Parliament Hill dream were actually in the next room of his house socializing.

Stoppard does not give any instruction for the staging of these events other than to say that “The room is (at this first appearance) without boundaries. The space under the Herzen roof will remain loosely defined, serving for different rooms and changes of address, and sometimes, as now exteriors” (229). Much of the perception of the dreams—in particular, the first which is more realistic—is dependent on the choices of the director and designers. The part of this sequence of events that could be considered evidence for stylization is the materialization of his second dream into Herzen’s “reality.” The sight of Herzen dreaming about a group of émigrés and then having most of them turn out to have been present in the next room while he was sleeping is an unexpected arrangement. Further, there is the kind of quality similar to Tucker’s
notion of “unforeseen design” for him to be woken in the way that Malwida makes her “real’ entrance. By manipulating the context of the émigrés appearances, Stoppard creates a rhetorical overlay that calls attention to the artificial process of conjuring the other historical figures in the real world of the play.

At the end of Salvage, Herzen has rented a chateau near a lake where he is reunited with Sasha, Tata, and Olga—who are now adults—and Bakunin. “Herzen resumes his chair” and, as the family becomes reacquainted and Bakunin blathers on about secret alliances within Marx’s organization, he falls asleep. Soon after, “Turgenev and Marx, who have strolled into view like mismatched friends. . .” become his dream (334). They begin a brief dialogue that Herzen continues when he wakes up. The last line spoken before he fell asleep was Malwida’s “I’m a firm believer in flannel,” a line that gained early significance because she spoke this phrase in Herzen’s Parliament Hill dream at the beginning of the play—this is the line that began the strange sexual allusions to Kinkel showing her his “waistcoat.” Herzen doesn’t just fall asleep at the end of Act Two, between sitting in the chair and the utterance of Malwida’s line, he is accompanied by the context from his first set of dreams from Act One.

Herzen’s Act One dream is also referenced at the beginning of Act Two with the opening placement of characters and location arranged “So we are reminded of Herzen’s dream at the beginning of the play” (281). This use of a tableau is nearly identical to the way the opening arrangement of characters in the second act of Shipwreck mimics the beginning of the first act. However, they differ in that the one in Salvage resembles a vision from a dream instead of a previous reality. In this way, the recreation of the opening tableau not only recalls the construction of the play but serves as a reminder of the stylization achieved though the contextual “trick” within Herzen’s first dream.
One of the most significant points of stylization in *Salvage* is a waking dream that Herzen has in 1.vii during a New Year’s celebration (254-262). At Herzen’s suggestion his family and friends join him in going to Richmond Park to greet the New Year. While he is there, Herzen has a kind of disembodied conversation with Bakunin similar to the one they have on the cross-Channel steamer in *Shipwreck*. However, unlike his appearance in *Shipwreck*, here Bakunin is summoned mid-scene as opposed to being in a self-contained scene, in doing so he breaks continuity with the realistic aspects of the play. Bakunin is the product of Herzen’s imagination but, despite this, they embrace at the end of this scene when Herzen says, “Who knows if I’ll ever see you again?” (262). By making the context and the limitations of this waking dream vague, Stoppard refuses to completely motivate this moment within the script or give the scene any limitations in regard to what is possible. This disruption in the overall temporality of the play (where dreaming is separate from being awake) openly draws attention to the fact that Stoppard must manipulate fact in order to facilitate his dramatic action.

Bakunin’s appearance is part of a recurring dramatic device that selectively blurs the distinction between dream and reality in *Salvage*. Stylization occurs throughout *Salvage* when “artifacts” from dreams manifest in the “real world” of the play. Stoppard sets precedence for this convention at the beginning of *Salvage* when Herzen dreams of a missing glove, Sasha flying a kite, a group of émigrés, and Malwida’s odd sexual scandal with the Kinkels (229-234). When Herzen awakes he makes several discoveries: Malwida has entered his house and she finds Kolya’s glove lying on the floor; they go and meet the rest of émigrés, most of whom turn out to actually be in Herzen’s home; Malwida is friends with the Kinkels; and Joanna, Kinkel’s wife, buttons up the open coat that was the cause of the scandal in Herzen’s dream (234-242).
Later, in the first scene of Act Two when the opening tableau should remind the audience of Herzen’s first dreams, Turgenev arrives at the Herzen home hoping to acquire a shotgun that he purchased. He exits to use the restroom and then returns shortly after a gunshot has been heard, laughing about how Sasha let him shoot his kite to test the gun (292). Moments later Sasha backs into view flying the kite just as he did in the opening of Act One. Herzen sees this and says “It’s some kind of dream” (293).

From this initial dream there are objects that carry over from Herzen’s subconscious into the conscious reality of the play, acting as a kind of connective thread between the two worlds. The missing glove that is Olga’s in Herzen’s dream becomes Kolya’s when he awakes. The audience is reminded of this later in the act when Worcell announces, “I seem to be a glove short” (266) and at the end of the first act when Natasha (and the audience) learn how Herzen came to be in possession of Kolya’s glove (280). The second prominent item is the armchair in which Herzen is seen sleeping; the play begins with a vision of Herzen falling asleep in an armchair and ends with the same vision (334). This thread is also reinforced by the transposition that occurs in 1.ix with Worcell falling asleep in the armchair in one scene and waking up in the next (264).

With Herzen’s first dream setting the precedence for this convention, there are two incidences of waking-dreams forecasting reality in Salvage. In scene 1.vii when Herzen imagines Bakunin is talking to him, Bakunin’s last line of their dialogue is “. . . the Tsar might die tomorrow” (262). The following scene occurs three months later in March 1855 and depicts Herzen and his friends celebrating the death of the Tsar (262-264). In Act Two there is what Stoppard calls an “inter-scene” in which “In a ‘soundscape’ of waves crashing against rocks, with seabirds shrill in the blasts of wind noise . . . a windswept figure (the Nihilist) stands
dramatized by the surrounding dark” (303). Immediately following this scene, Turgenev is seen looking out on the beach of the Isle of Wight when he meets a man named Bazarov who describes himself as a nihilist. Turgenev later gives a character in Fathers and Sons this name. He tells Bazarov of a waking-dream he had when visiting the roaring seaside cliffs of the Blackgang Chine saying, “And there was a man in my mind suddenly, a dark nameless figure, strong, with no history, as though he’d grown from the earth, his ill intention complete. I thought—I’ve never read about him. Why has nobody written about him?” (308). Bazarov, who describes himself as a nihilist, is a manifestation of Turgenev’s vision. Südkamp notes that this meeting is historically based and that Stoppard also gives their meeting a biographical validity when he has Turgenev tell another character “I called him Bazarov because Bazarov was his name” in the proceeding scene (245).

In Herzen’s last dream in the play, he is subjected to Marx’s description of a “great wheel of progress” shaping human destiny. This vision gives him a reason to present the equivalent of an epilogue in the way of a counter argument. He talks in his sleep as he argues with Marx and then continues a similar line of thinking when he wakes. Herzen says, “What we let fall will be picked up by those behind. I can hear their childish voices on the hill” (335). Ogarev then assists this transfer of thought so that Herzen’s words are reassigned to the wakeful world of the play saying, “‘Avenge the Decemberists!’ What shall we say to them now?” (335). Herzen then fashions his reply to his friend, the real world having echoed the line of inquiry in his dream. In this way the reality of the dream is given as much significance as the real world.

c. How Salvage Presents History

The strongest statement about the nature of historical representation in Salvage is spoken by Herzen when he provides a counter point to Marx’s view of history. Marx claims that,
. . . until Capital and Labour stand revealed in fatal contradiction. Then will come
the final titanic struggle, the last turn of the great wheel of progress beneath which
generations of toiling masses must perish for the ultimate victory. Now at last
history’s purpose will be clear to the last Sandwich Islander and to the last
muzhik. (335)

Herzen replies to this saying,

There is something wrong with this picture. Who is this Moloch who promises
that everything will be beautiful after we’re dead? [Herzen is referring to the
progress of history, not the afterlife] History has no purpose! History knocks at a
thousand gates at every moment, and the gatekeeper is Chance. It takes wit and
courage to make our way while our way is making us. . . .” (335)

Herzen’s statement is an echo of the one he made using a giant ginger cat as a metaphor in
Voyage. Here he emphasizes the role of chance in the development of history and the role of free
will in determining the outcomes of the events that chance presents.

Yet, as the events in the play suggest, this self-determinism in what could be said to be
“making history while history makes us” is mitigated by complex situations. In particular, this is
evidenced in the scene in which Herzen decides whether or not to have The Bell support a
violent revolution while also deciding the fate of his children—whether or not Tata and Olga
should go to Italy with Malwida. In both cases he must choose between change or stasis, but the
outcomes are not foreseeable. The Bell risks losing all if the revolution fails; the publication also
risks becoming irrelevant if a decisive political stance is not taken. Herzen’s relationship with his
daughters will suffer from distance if they go with Malwida; Herzen’s relationship with his
daughters will suffer if they stay under Natasha’s emotionally unstable charge.
In key with these notions, throughout the second act the idea that someone can be both right and wrong at the same time is posited in several instances: while debating the reason for Ogarev’s alcoholism Natasha complains to Herzen “You’re so right all the time. Even when you’re in the wrong” (291); when discussing the rift between Russian revolutionaries with Chernyshevsky, Herzen defends his position saying, “But I’m right. Even where I’m wrong, I’m right” (302); and, finally, when Ogarev and Herzen are debating whether or not to have The Bell support Land and Liberty’s ill-fated attempt at revolution Natasha breaks in saying, “Nick’s right. You’re not wrong, but Nick’s right” (319). While these statements do not address history directly, they are all related to either understanding their current historical situation or to predicting the potential outcomes their decisions will have for the future. Just as Stoppard frames the action Shipwreck in a way that highlights indeterminacy, the author also undermines the notion of objective historical knowledge by depicting his characters in complex circumstances where someone can simultaneously be right and wrong. Herzen is seen deliberating on conflicting facts that prevent him from making a clear choice in the same way that Stoppard, as a playwright, must also select from facts without having known his characters or witnessed these events. Stoppard appears to accept that while he may present some truths about his characters, he also inevitably presents some falsehoods in the process of making those choices.

d. *Salvage: Conclusions*

When the statements about being right and wrong at the same time are viewed together with the dream-based stylizations in Salvage, a caveat for the understanding of history and biography is created that emphasizes the problematic nature of subjective experience. First, just as in The Invention of Love, dreaming and waking are blended together and function as a gateway for poetic truth with Herzen’s dreaming intelligence providing a view into the real
world of the play. Like the poetic view of truth expressed by Wilde, Herzen’s dreams indirectly reflect the truth about the real world, though also containing errors because his experience is more impressionistic than realistic.

Second, used as stylization, the dream indicates a view into the subconscious that will always be unknown to the historian, biographer, or playwright. Dreams, just like historical events and persons, are filled with discontinuity, irreconcilable facts, contradictions, conflicting objectives, and are chaotic and unpredictable. The way dreams are bridged into the realities of the characters in Salvage presents a view of history that is both driven by chance and filled with uncertainty, defying exact interpretation. They are true and untrue, right and wrong, logical and illogical. By using dreams as a method of stylization, Stoppard is able to examine his character’s lives in ways that acknowledge poetic truths while also creating rhetorical overlays that draw attention to some of the limitations to understanding history from a personal, or biographical, perspective.

e. *Stoppard’s Statements on the Use of History in The Coast of Utopia*

Stoppard rarely gives away his secrets in interviews. He often begins with what appears to be a direct answer only to suddenly disengage through some distracting anecdote or by turning another question back on his interviewer. This trait is a bit frustrating; particularly when Stoppard’s quotes are used in a research paper and they give the appearance that the writer has abruptly cut the most telling part of the statement. When viewed from another perspective, this habit of Stoppard’s makes both pragmatic and philosophical sense: in the case of the former, over-explanation has a reductive effect on the scope of the work; in the case of the latter, Stoppard appears to avoid explaining too much because he knows there are no definitive answers, even when his plays are based on facts.
Stoppard’s statements on the representation of history in The Coast of Utopia mirror this dynamic. Stoppard views the dramatization of history through both pragmatic and philosophical perspectives. As a matter of pragmatism, facts must be manipulated in order to adapt them to the representational limits of the stage while they are also manipulated in order to hold the audience’s attention. As a matter of philosophy, Stoppard wants to achieve more than a literalist recreation of history, not just because he has doubts that this is possible, but because he wants to go beyond objective data in order to reveal something truthful about his characters’ lives.

Stoppard appears to solve these pragmatic and philosophical problems through dramatic strategies that work in concert: 1), he allows himself the dramatic license necessary to hold his audiences’ attention by manipulating facts and defying their expectations; 2), he finds a way to utilize these pragmatic adjustments as devices that also reveal a subjective truth about his characters and/or human experience; and 3), the final philosophical resolution is to combine the previous two solutions so that his representations of historical figures are truthful in the way that they reveal the “argument” presented by the way they lived their lives.

In his interview with Arkady Ostrovsky, part of which occurred on a trip to the remains of the Bakunin estate, Stoppard alluded to the distinction between history and staged history saying, “I had no need to come here while I was writing the plays. What I needed was the books, not the places. In a way I had to protect myself from reality. Going to Premukhino would have probably been very moving but not very necessary or even helpful” (screen 1). Stoppard’s pragmatism extends to even the most basic circumstances in his plays. When describing his depiction of the Bakunin family Stoppard stated, “. . . Bakunin had five younger brothers in addition to the four sisters who are admitted in the play; seven Bakunins were as much as I could cope with in the first scene” (The Coast of Utopia xiii). The deletion of five siblings from the
play could be considered a significant departure from historical record, yet Stoppard needed to do this in order to create a manageable text.

Stoppard told Adam Thirlwell in an interview for The Believer that “. . . the trick is to undermine the audience’s security about what it thinks it knows at any moment. . . . This thing of undermining the audience’s sense of what’s going on—I think it is drama, a lot of drama in that” (60). Both the form and the stylizations in The Coast of Utopia are geared toward undermining the audience’s expectations through chronological arrangements of events and theatrical devices such as crossovers, tableaus, dreams, and unforeseen design. Stoppard described the Belinsky penknife subplot saying, “That odd bit of artifice, odd bit of shimmer in the silk, I think saves the situation for the writer. . . . it becomes the nicest thing in Voyage for me. It’s not premeditated, but it’s very knowing when you do it” (58). This entertaining subplot allows Stoppard to keep his audiences guessing about what will happen next while also demonstrating some of his general philosophies about human experience.

These dramatic devices also give Stoppard ways to express something true about his characters’ lives. For example, of Bakunin’s anachronistic meetings with Herzen in the trilogy, Stoppard says his representation of their conversation is not hard to justify because “Bakunin and Herzen, even down to today, are figures in a conversation, in an argument if you like, as are Marx and Turgenev. All these people are still, in a sense, continuing a conversation, or you’re continuing it for them” (Interview with Cattaneo 8). Historical figures continue to live in textbooks and memories in a way that has them perpetually compared with an opposing viewpoint, similar to the way Stoppard provides a continuation of his characters’ conversations in these plays.
Stoppard appears to view the fairness of characterizing historical persons as the effort to accurately portray the arguments they created while living their lives. In addition to documented statements, these “arguments” could be said to be found in the private and public choices that historical persons made during their lifetimes. The broader appreciation of these types of arguments can be a framework for inventing dialogue and events that are fictional but create an efficient drama, potentially leading to a more effective representation when staging a play. In this sense, fictional scenes like the one between Herzen and Bakunin could be said to be more truthful than an attempt at recreation, even in the case of docudrama, because while this event never happened the philosophies that the two characters exchange might be accurate.

f. The Coast of Utopia: Criticism from Other Scholars

Scholars have readily identified how the trilogy demonstrates a measured account of indeterminism related to both historical events and historical representation. In her article for The Boston Globe Louise Kennedy notes that,

*The Coast of Utopia* builds powerfully into a complex and engaging exploration of—to oversimplify absurdly—the human longing for life to make more sense than it does. . . . It’s Stoppard’s great achievement to remind us, by telling a story steeped in historical fact but transmuted into fiction, that no life, past or present, is ever as simple as our histories can make it sound. (screen 1)

This comment is appropriate approximation of the trilogy, not just because Stoppard defies expectations by interpolating events and revising them, but because he uses stylization to consistently hint at the reductive nature of his plays even while he is using his imagination to expand his use of history at the same time.
Tucker notes the presence of this attitude in the trilogy saying, “The revisionist motion that makes to leave, but turns back, that exchanges for early dreams of salvation the livable and forging realities of salvage, is one that The Coast of Utopia cherishes many dozen times over” and these revisited moments are “its principle callisthenic in those practices of historical recovery and reassessment that Stoppard means to encourage” (163). Throughout the trilogy, Stoppard routinely draws attention to the role of perspective in evaluating history and then frequently demonstrates this position by actively revising his own presentation.

Nadel relates this revisionism more closely to language when he says that “Language competes with history as the core theme of the trilogy,” citing examples such as the confusions and ironies made possible by the characters’ use of multiple languages and direct thematic statements such as Belinsky’s expression that “literature can become Russia” and Herzen’s view that “Words are become deeds. Thoughts are deeds” (“Tom Stoppard: In the Russian Court” 515). The “competition” between these themes is appropriate for a play that is dominated by meta-historical rhetorical overlays. Just as words and physical actions have equal effect on the future of history, they also have an equal value in retrospection: history becomes the words that are necessary for description and the words become the impression on reality. The apprehension of human experience is mutable in regard to the subjective nature of words and deeds, whether driven by foresight or hindsight, with literature being the mitigating, or casting factor.

**g. The Coast of Utopia: Conclusions**

The epic, yet domestic, scale of The Coast of Utopia trilogy reflects Stoppard’s desire to emulate the way Chekhov’s micro narratives access a macro narrative, using the experiences of daily life to reflect upon larger sociopolitical realities. In keeping with this Chekhovian dimension, Stoppard uses similar functions throughout the trilogy to express philosophies related
to the understanding and representation of history by using the experiences of individuals to illustrate a more universal skepticism. Herzen’s belief that historical trends are identifiable but that individual experience is not ordained by these same trends is emphasized in the chronological disruption of cause and effect in *Voyage*. In *Shipwreck*, Stoppard further emphasizes the role of individual perspective in applying selective, and therefore limited, interpretations from the chaos of factors that contribute to an understanding of both the past and the future. *Salvage* presents vision of history in which right and wrong are not always divisible, with the subjectivity of human experience interrupting what is commonly understood as the objective reality of the individual.

Through these micro and macroscopic examinations, Stoppard demonstrates the limitations of historical comprehension. The act of perceiving or creating an interpretive perspective for someone else is continually and self-consciously dramatized in *The Coast of Utopia* with the audience members routinely being put in a position where they are likely to make the wrong assumptions or serve as witnesses to the characters’ failures to understand their historical situations. What can be deduced about any historical person or event is limited by chance and an infinite number of facts. Chaos lurks behind every corner. Historical understanding is not shown to be impossible, only limited by the mechanisms used to interpret events and intentions. The result is a caveat for understanding history that is mitigated by embracing paradox: a portrayal based on fact may be both right and wrong; as such, poetic renderings may be more accurate than literal ones. The greatest certainties appear to be those presented at a safe distance, creating a portrait from the philosophical arguments derived from the way the characters lived their lives.
Stylizations play a significant role in presenting these ideas throughout *The Coast of Utopia*. The ironic distancing created by stylizations not only calls attention to the method of representation, but also maintains a consistent sense of indeterminacy. Despite how compelling much of the dramatic action is, Stoppard never lets his audience forget the theatrical medium through which his impressions of history filter, with the presence of these reminders becoming a rhetorical overlay. These rhetorical overlays demonstrate how language and interpretive lenses contribute, and necessitate, the historical revisionism that becomes the historical “reality” after the events have passed.

VII. Stoppard Chapter Conclusions: Caveats and Impressionism

“One has seen quite a few good documentary drama plays where you’re just shown what happened and what people said as near as one can endeavor that way. And what I remember thinking and feeling and I still feel the same way now, is that there’s something disappointing, something missing, if that’s all you manage to do.”

—Tom Stoppard (Interview with Adam Thirlwell, 59)

All of Stoppard’s biographical history plays are similar in that the author uses a variety of linguistic, visual, contextual, and comedic devices to stylize their action, maintaining an ironic distance from any totalizing believability that might develop. The caveats in Stoppard’s biographical history plays manifest through increasingly complex conventions. From *Travesties* to *The Coast of Utopia* Stoppard’s caveats are gradually less situational, favoring stylizations that are demonstrated through the dramatic action instead of being conditioned by the protagonist’s mental state. Accompanying this trend is Stoppard’s gradual move away from
pastiche into more realistic depictions of his characters. While the psychological interiors of his characters became more sophisticated, so did the ways that stylization and form create rhetorical overlays that address the subjective nature of historical and biographical representations.

The statements made by Stoppard and the characters in these plays reflect some of the criticism found in new historicism and the study of historiography. These attitudes are also present in both the self-awareness that is demonstrated through the plays’ stylizations and the multi-perspectival approach in the plays’ forms. When Stoppard’s statements about the representation of biography in his plays are considered with their form and stylizations in mind, the resulting image is one of indeterminism. The subjective nature of human perspective, the infinite number of facts that accompany events, and the limiting act of description all contribute to obscure history and biography within what Stoppard might call an “appalling cloud.”

Stoppard’s recent biographical history plays are impressionistic, depicting the general essence of his characters. Instead of worrying about factually representing people’s lives, Stoppard opts for making his biographical characters accurate by way of the “arguments” made in the way they lived, while they are also seen making their way through the larger sociopolitical forces that characterized their age. In the process, Stoppard figuratively leaves his brush strokes visible, keeps his subject deliberately out of focus, and highlights perspective. His biographical history plays are openly rhetorical and conditioned with caveats, asking as many questions as he provides answers.

Inherent to this chapter is an ironic baggage derived from the fact that this analysis of Stoppard’s presentation of historical indeterminism began with a miniature biography of his life, correlating his biographical data with the attitudes toward biography that is presented in his work. Kerner, in Stoppard’s Hapgood asserts that “You get what you interrogate for” (Tom
Stoppard: Collected Plays 5 501) and perhaps this study is guilty of that charge. However, given the evidence presented, there seems to be at least some likelihood of truth. As the years pass and Stoppard moves further away from those childhood years that appear to have been so formative, he may increasingly appreciate how little he knows about his family history. At the same time, with more life experience, what he knows of the facts from those years, or what he believes could be the facts, might begin to resonate with increased meaning.

Stoppard routinely expresses doubts about memory but also alludes to its power. In describing the portion of his childhood spent in India, Stoppard said what meant most to him was “the physical India—chapatis cooking over a camel-dung fire. I haven't ever stopped dreaming about it” (Jaggi, screen 1). Biography and history are marked by epistemological problems, created in large part by the selective process of memory and perspective, which make knowledge about other people’s actions elusive. These problems figure as the metaphysical “missing rung” that Hapgood’s Kerner was quoted in the introduction to this chapter, stating that, “all the mystery in life turns out to be this same mystery, the join between things which are distinct and yet continuous, body and mind, free will and causality. . . .” (545). While this “missing rung” is a source of mystery, and the truth about other people’s lives may be lost, some essence might be recovered through empathy and imagination. When weighing objectivity against potential subjective corruptions, the danger of inaccuracy appears to be less of a concern to Stoppard than the loss involved in not attempting to comprehend the hidden aspects of the past.
Chapter 3
Michael Frayn’s Biographical History Plays

I. Michael Frayn: Epistemology, Ontology, Perspective, and Biography

“If fiction is make-believe, as has been claimed, or if we entertain it by suspending disbelief in it, this seems to imply that our understanding of factual statements involves belief.”

—Michael Frayn (The Human Touch 254)

In the introduction to the 2009 reissue of his novel Constructions, originally published in 1974, Frayn commented on the process of looking back on his work saying, “As I re-read it for the first time in all these years I seemed to be coming face to face with a lost child who was at once familiar and a stranger. Not even a child—myself. Myself as I once was, and both am still and am no longer” (v). Frayn’s admission could be said to reflect the central theme of Constructions which is, as Merritt Moseley describes, “the human urge to make patterns, to make meanings” (37). Though Frayn rarely commented directly on the nature of written history and biography in the works leading up to Copenhagen (1998), Democracy (2003), and Afterlife (2008), throughout his career he has demonstrated an interest in epistemology, sometimes blended with ontology, examining how perspective shapes knowledge and how people interpret the world inside and outside their minds. Frayn’s career long pursuit of these topics will be illustrated in this introduction in order to put into perspective the intellectual and philosophical positions that could be present in Frayn’s biographical history plays.

The role of epistemology and ontology in Frayn’s works could easily be the subject of an entire dissertation. However, in the interest of balancing the introduction of this chapter with
Stoppard’s introductory chapter, this initial analysis will be limited to briefly illustrating the core ideas behind his two philosophical novels, the general treatment of history and biography in his later novels, and the role of perspective in some of his plays. Frayn’s latter works are given precedence here since they more closely represent the intellectual “moment” wherein his recent biographical history plays were written.

Ontology is an area of philosophy that questions the meaning of being, what is said to exist, or how something is understood to exist. A common example is the consideration of a particular chair. Does a chair still exist if no one is looking at it? Is “chairness” only a construct of the mind? Does sitting on a chair count as an encounter with its existence? Or is the chair an arbitrary and ever-shifting assembly of energy fields and subatomic particles? When this study refers to the ontological topics in Frayn’s works it primarily indicates his questioning of what constitutes a person as a being. Copenhagen depicts Werner Heisenberg as a fluctuating personality with irreconcilable loyalties, Democracy portrays Günter Guillaume and Willy Brandt as “democracies” of competing interests, and Afterlife shows Max Reinhardt in the creative process of making an art of his life. These portrayals ultimately support a pursuit of epistemological questions related to historical knowledge because the elusive nature of being, or being a self, obscures knowledge of the past. For example, in regard to Copenhagen, Frayn states that “The epistemology of intention is what the play is about” (“Copenhagen Revisited,” screen 1). The ontological examination of the inconsistencies in Heisenberg’s personality contribute to the larger epistemological problems presented in the play about how the indeterminate nature of intentions makes obtaining knowledge about the causes of historical events problematic.

Like Stoppard, Frayn demonstrated early, intellectual suspicions about how the exterior world is interpreted. In Constructions, Frayn states that “We read the world in the way that we
read a notation—we make sense of it, we place constructions upon it” (5). However, these constructions fail to completely represent the original object or experience. Throughout Constructions he gives several examples of the failure of description:

Hold up your hand in front of you. Now give me a complete description of it. And you can’t. Nothing that you can ever say will wholly describe the one thing that now lies in front of your eyes. You could describe away until the crack of doom . . . And I should still not have available to me as much information as your first casual glance made available to you. (178)

Here he prizes the initial experience of an object or event over its description, even though description might reveal facts otherwise incomprehensible in this first glance such as the number of hairs on the hand or the volume of blood pumping through it.

The subject of history is rarely mentioned specifically in Constructions but Frayn briefly links his philosophical perspective to history saying, “If there could be such a thing as pure history it would be the limiting case of the story, where all otherness had been removed. The pure history of the Hundred Years War would be the Hundred Years War” (208). This appears to be connected to the subjective nature of the mind because, “Memories are like legends, private legends. They take particular form when they are told—and when they are told again they are made incarnate in a different body” (260). From this view historical moments can never be “pure,” only visited through the “otherness” of memory or documented accounts. Words inevitably fail at description while at the same time potential errors in interpretation happen when memories “take a particular form” in the course of being recounted.

Frayn connects his vision of epistemology and ontology in 1974 with the vision presented in 2006 in The Human Touch: Our Part in the Creation of a Universe (2006) saying,
The picture that I am beginning to suggest in Constructions, and developing in The Human Touch, is closer to a much older philosophical model—nominalism, the view that classes of things are identified not by the possession of some common essence, or by their approximation to some ineffable model, but simply by the names that we give the classes; in other words through the uses we make of them. (Constructions xvi)

The version of nominalism that he has developed over the past thirty-two years negotiates between skepticism and a validation of the examination of the world through human consciousness:

I do understand that all our laws and principles are constrained by an external reality against which they have to be tested. . . . It doesn’t seem to me to belittle the achievements of science to see them not simply as revelation but as invention—the creation of a set of instruments that give the world graspable form. (Constructions xvii)

Frayn appears to believe in an external reality that has an objective or “pure” existence at its core while this reality is always interpreted through invented systems of classification, and thus inclined to some form of subjectivity.

The Human Touch contains observations that more closely characterize history and biography through a nominalist perspective:

If I try to portray to you someone you don’t know (in a biography or a novel, for example) I can’t rely on a proper noun, a name, to do the job. I have to resort to a series of common nouns. And once again I find myself assembling something from stock parts. I try to get beyond the baldly iconic outlines, of course—the two
eyes, the nose and the mouth that differentiate my subject from a frozen pizza but not from anyone else on earth—by specifying particular sub-classes of feature. I order up not just a face from the face drawer, but a brooding, shrewd face, from the brooding, shrewd section of the drawer. (37)

Beyond the limitations imposed by language in describing someone’s physical presence, there is also the difficulty of appreciating someone else’s psychological interior:

. . . there is this fatal indeterminacy at the source of our actions. None of the explanations that we offer for our behavior seems to have much objective reality. . . . We are weaving a story, not writing a report. Yet it would be absurd if we talked ourselves into feeling that we couldn’t offer any explanation at all for what we and others did. . . . And these stories that we tell ourselves in the case of our motives and intentions are important ones, about historical events and historical characters.

Now we turn to the history in serious history books, and it seems more sewn-up and grown-up—much more historical—than the halting and muddled accounts we’ve given ourselves of the things in our own experience. The writers have made scrupulous use of evidence—of written records and contracts, of depositions and eye-witness accounts, of wills and letters, of trade and tax returns. The same indeterminacy remains, though, only here it has entered the system at an earlier stage—in the formulation of evidence. Those letters and eye-witness accounts are plainly on par with our own amateur efforts. (192)
Frayn contends that the indeterminacy that is inherent in historical or biographical description is rooted in the limited ability of language to describe people and in the inability to penetrate and discover a fixed self or consciousness.

Frayn’s view of indeterminacy includes doubts about cause and effect reasoning, citing the innumerable amount of facts for any given event and the impossibility of perceiving all of them. This the concept of causality involves “. . . not a chain but an inverted cone, in which any single event can be traced back to ever wider circles of causes.” From this perspective “. . . even your small triumph against the reigning champion of the North Balham Sporting and Social Club, was set in motion by the structure of that first dense object [referring to Big Bang theory]” (75-76). Frayn’s description of a discernable pattern of effects that are adrift in an infinite chain of causes appears to echo the sentiment expressed by Stoppard’s Carr in Travesties “. . . the causes we know everything about depend on causes we know absolutely nothing about” as Stoppard rejects “the delusion that infinite generations of real effects can be inferred from the gross expression of apparent cause” (37).

For Frayn, the difficulty in understanding history or biography lies in four fundamental problems: 1), words are an artificial set of instruments that only convey generalized meanings; 2), historical accounts are subject to the failure of both perspective and language to relate them; 3) the interpretation of other people’s actions is as problematic as understanding one’s own because they are “weaved” into a story; and 4), there are an infinite number of causes creating historical effects, reverberating from the source in an infinite continuum.

Despite the theoretical nature of these beliefs, Frayn retains a pragmatic outlook on interpreting human events. He states that “it would be absurd if we talked ourselves into feeling that we couldn’t offer any explanation at all for what we and others did” (The Human Touch
192). This act of offering explanations for one’s own and other people’s actions became a repeated theme when he returned to writing fictional novels in 1989, establishing a similar kind of inquiry by developing the plots from his characters’ perspectives. Some of these novels present nearly direct commentary on historical and/or biographical interpretation.

Moseley notes that *The Trick of It* (1989), aside from being Frayn’s first novel in sixteen years, is significant because the author began writing for the first time in a first person, or homodiegetic, form of narration (65). Frayn could be said to “play” a character in *The Trick of It* because he writes the story from his main character’s perspective. He wrote several novels using this technique, indicating an affinity toward a kind of self-revelation that is derived from the way his imagination and authorial voice mingles with the invented circumstances of the characters. The use of homodiegetic narration might also reflect an attitude similar to that found in new historicism, because one effect of first person narration is to actively remind the reader of the process of telling a story. Frayn appears to prefer this process as opposed to presenting a seemingly detached, or authoritative, view of his characters through a heterodiegetic narrative.

In *The Trick of It*, Frayn uses an epistolary form, writing a series of letters from his main character’s perspective. Richard Dunnett is a scholar who finds himself in a surprising situation when he marries the woman whose work is his specialty. He writes a series of letters to a colleague describing their marriage and the resulting intimate knowledge of her creative process that he has gained. At one point Dunnett regrets the letters, making a request to his friend saying, “. . . I want those letters destroyed. To protect *her* [Frayn’s emphasis]. To stop her from being seen at moments when she was unseen by anyone but me, when she was undefended” (159). He further states that this is “To protect me, too, though. I don’t want people thinking I’ve used her
just to write myself into the record, to give myself some foothold in existence by becoming part of her history.”

Dunnett’s plea to have himself and his wife freed from the characterizations in his letters appears to be derived from a personal reaction to her work, after he has discovered that his wife is “Writing about my family, without any reference to me. But they’re changing . . . . They’re growing stories [Frayn’s emphasis]. . . . She’s finding explanations for the way they are and the things they did. She’s giving them pasts she never knew, inner lives she could never observe” (160). Here Frayn, writing from a homodiegetic perspective, offers criticism of the heterodiegetic perspective frequently used in biographies. Dunnett’s words express an anxiety about the way his private letters to his friend might have a sustained, and perhaps unflattering, effect on the way she is remembered historically. He then rejects the fictionalized interior given to his family members by his wife as she attempts to create a novel about his mother’s experience with cancer. While his letters are a function of his subjective perspective as a witness to his wife’s actions, her biographical novel is a function of both fact and speculation. In the end, Dunnett rejects both his letters and her biography due to the totalizing effect they may have on their subjects. (There may be a slightly autobiographical component to this novel; Frayn is married to a biographer named Claire Tomalin).

A Landing On the Sun (1991) features a first person voice that is greatly differentiated from Dunnett, in what Moseley describes as “the detached, almost mechanical tone” of the main character, Brian Jessel (72). Given a biographical-like task, Jessel is a government employee assigned to investigate the death of another government employee, Summerchild, fifteen years earlier. Summerchild had fallen to his death but the circumstance behind his demise has never been resolved. Summerchild had apparently been having an extramarital affair with another
government employee and the two had been meeting to enjoy leisure time on a rooftop that was accessible from his office window. Through the course of investigating Summerchild’s death, Jessel begins to develop a complicated vision of the man he knew when he was younger (he had, at one time, dated Summerchild’s daughter):

I believe he has had some revelation, as he lay on the airbed up there in the broiling sun, which seems to explain to him how he can be simultaneously the same man who lives quietly tucked away in the secret depths of Hyde Hill Lane and the one who lives wildly concealed in the secret depths of the Cabinet Office roof. The answer is going to be, I think, that he is not [Frayn’s emphasis] the same man. He is infinitely many men, each of whom dwells independently in each moment of time, without reference to or responsibility to the others. (209)

As this quote suggests, Jessel discovers a much more complicated situation through the course of his investigation than he expected to find. In the end he understands why Summerchild would have been in a position for his fall but cannot discern the exact circumstances that precipitated it.

Frayn’s next novel, Now You Know (1992), is narrated through the voices of several different characters. Of this strategy, Moseley observes,

The alternation of the first-person accounts makes the story perspectival, a collection of ‘versions’; there is no normative version, as there would be in a novel with a single narrator or, in a different way, in a play where shared stage and audience make one set of events the ‘real’ version. (79)

Frayn would later write a play based on this novel, using this same approach. Now You Know begins with the investigation of a government watch group into the death of a man who was beaten by the police. The obscured details of this event correspond to the obscured details of an
interoffice romance that is viewed in different ways by all of the characters. As Moseley notes, “Everybody in the novel has secrets from each other” (80). The indeterminacy of one event (the police beating) is then placed in relief by the indeterminacy demonstrated through multiple perspectives on the “secrets” of the people conducting the independent investigation.

The act of investigating other people’s actions in *Now You Know* is similar to the way Dunnett seeks the “trick” behind his wife’s writing in *The Trick of It* and the way Jessel pursues the reasons for Summerfield’s death in *A Landing on the Sun*. Frayn’s characters in these novels begin by looking for a way to discover the hidden truth behind someone else’s actions only to discover a more variable portrait of reality within themselves. This trend would continue with Frayn’s two most recent novels, *Headlong* (1999) and *Spies* (2002). In these two fictional works he delivers more direct accounts of historical and biographical inquiry.

*Headlong* depicts the efforts of an academic named Martin Clay to purchase a painting he suspects to be by Pieter Bruegel from Tony Churt, a man who owns an estate near Clay’s country house, without disclosing to him the true value of the painting. Frayn uses the voice of Clay as the narrator through “retrospection, but told as current action” (Moseley 84). Clay makes several philosophical observations similar to those made by Frayn in *The Human Touch*, and in the process of narrating the story he makes observations about himself:

. . . I love holding her [his daughter, Tilda] and looking at her sleeping face.

Particularly now. But the look and feel of her there in my arms, so real and solid, so present, undermines my faith instead of reinforcing it. My picture isn’t in my arms, warm and breathing. My picture’s absent. One glimpse is all I had of it, and even the memory of that glimpse has become indistinct. (112)
Later in the novel Clay asks himself, “Who is this self [Frayn’s emphasis], this phantom internal partner, with whom I’m entering into all these armaments? I ask myself” (127).

The story is centered on two fronts: Clay’s attempt to “steal” the painting at a low price and his efforts to prove to himself that the painting really is a work of Bruegel’s. Frayn demonstrates an approach to history through Clay’s investigation of art history. After listing a series of conflicting perspectives on Bruegel’s works from other scholars Clay concludes:

> Bruegel, in other words, is an absence, a ghost, which scholars characterize more or less however they choose. So instead of trying to relate his iconography to Bruegel himself, perhaps I could relate it to what was going on around him at the time. If I can’t see Bruegel perhaps I can try to put myself into the space he occupied at the center of his world, and see what he saw. (126)

In his effort to do this, Clay attempts to distance himself from his own perspectives such as when he begins to suspect he is viewing Bruegel through the way he thinks “of the artists and entertainers of Occupied Europe” (134). Frayn makes an observation that new historicists would appreciate when Clays says, “You can’t project modern sensibilities back onto the Renaissance. . .” (134). Ironically, while he is attempting to understand Bruegel’s 16th century motivations, the motivations of Tony Churt and his wife elude him in the present, creating unexpected plot twists.

Frayn’s Spies depicts the story of a man who returns to the provincial English neighborhood in which he lived as a child in order to gain an adult perspective on events that he experienced during World War II. Steven Wheatley, the main protagonist, and his friend Keith Hayward misinterpret Keith’s mother’s secretive behavior and decide to spy on her, thinking she is a German spy. Their decision results in tragic consequences for Stephen’s mother when her secret is discovered. Similar to Headlong, the narrator is presumed to be in the present,
describing experiences of the past: “I understand now, of course, that she and Auntie Dee and Mrs. Berrill and the McAfees all lived in dread of policemen and telegraph boys. . .” (35). Yet, through his description of the previous events, the narrative position changes so that the past at times seems like the present: “As soon as I get back from school I run straight to the lookout and start keeping watch on the Hayward’s house” (65).

In this pseudo-autobiographical mode, Frayn once again notes the difficulties of understanding the past, what the elder Stephen refers to as “a collection of vivid particulars” instead of memory (34). He also draws an example of the divided self of the past from the self of a present when the narrator refers to himself in the third person: “Did Stephen still think that she was a German spy” (157). The past is also revealed to be surprisingly complicated and partially obscured as Stephen gains an adult understanding of Keith’s mother’s situation, yet even in the end he still questions just what exactly he has come to know. Finally, there are a few surprising truths revealed, as when the elder Stephen states that later in life he learned that his parents were Jewish refugees who concealed their past; his father worked in Britain’s “economic intelligence” office and, hence, was a German spy, albeit working for the Allies (257).

Many of Frayn’s plays have demonstrated epistemological, ontological, and/or nominalist themes that are similar to those presented in his novels. Alphabetical Order (1976) is set in a library in which the librarian has decided to rearrange the contents into alphabetical order. Donkey’s Years (1977) features a group of men who, during a college reunion, find that the perceptions of each other that they formed while they were in school together have challenged with the passage of time. Clouds (1977) presents a group of writers touring Cuba in the present, attempting to ascertain the reality of the situation there and how they should represent it. Here
(1994) depicts the effort of a couple to define their relationship and themselves as they rearrange
the contents of their flat.

Sometimes Frayn addresses the limitations of perspective through the setting of his plays. 
Noises Off (1982), perhaps his most well known play, is a farce about farce. The play is divided
into three acts: Act One takes place during a dress rehearsal for a sex-farce titled **Nothing On**;
Act Two depicts the backstage action of **Nothing On** one month into the run of the play; and Act
Three takes place two months later with the set facing the audience once again as they witness
how the production has degenerated as a result of alcoholism, love affairs, and general infighting
within the cast. This “meta-farce” is a perspectival depiction, with each view contributing to a
farcical examination of backstage life in a theatre company.

Frayn’s **Look Look** (1990) is, as the title suggests, a play centered on the act of
observation. Frayn dramatizes the act of being an audience member by calling for the “ticket
paying audience” to find themselves looking through the proscenium at another auditorium, with
actors playing audience members on the other side. This “fake” audience reacts to a play that
cannot be heard while the play’s author, a character named Keith, makes comments about this
audience. The “fake” audience lives out dramas of their own, such as when some audience
members catch other audience members in an extramarital affair. In Act Two this perspective
becomes more complicated when a playing space for the play within a play is added in front of
the “fake” audience. These “fake” audience characters are doubled in this act by actors who look
similar to each other, one set returns to the seats while the other set enacts the drama of Keith’s
play. Intrigues such as those created by the “fake” audience’s adulterers become the dramatic
action that occurs on the “staged” stage while the play within a play reflects the lives of the
“fake” audience that watches the action.
While the quotes and examples listed above do not present a comprehensive account of Frayn’s philosophical interests, they strongly point to an author with a career long interest in human consciousness as it relates to the experience, interpretation, and description of both the self and the world outside the self in epistemological and ontological terms. Frayn presents a universe where history and biography are the products of observable and discernable facts but the causes of these facts ultimately retain degrees of indeterminacy. Further, from a nominalist point of view there are representational limits to the accuracy with which language can describe events. Though Frayn’s arguments reveal his skepticism, he also negotiates uncertainties through approaches that utilize multiple perspectives, or theatricalized and self-aware perspectives, that endeavor to find as much truth behind an event as possible.

Of his recent works Frayn states “. . . as my novels have moved into the present so my plays have turned toward the past. Several of them have been framed in a narrative making clear that the action belonged to a world which had already closed, and whose end was settled before the curtain rose” (The Human Touch 254). In Copenhagen, Democracy, and Afterlife, this kind of contextual arrangement is facilitated by the plays’ commanding form and stylizations. Frayn’s interest in epistemology and ontology is demonstrated through characters that are as much developed around their historically documented actions as they are around internal contradictions that defy strict interpretation. Like the historical persons they are based on, his characters both are and are no longer.
I. **Balmoral: Barely Biographical**

“I see now, with hindsight, that it couldn’t possibly work, because it’s based upon an entirely abstract notion, a pure counterfactual—a past that never happened, that never could happen.”

—Michael Frayn (Plays: 2 x)

*Balmoral*, first produced in 1978, is technically a predecessor to Frayn’s recent biographical history plays. A brief examination of *Balmoral* will be made in order to contextualize the representation of historical persons in Frayn’s later works. *Balmoral* also provides a counterpoint to Stoppard’s *Travesties* because both plays were written in the mid to late 1970’s. Unlike *Copenhagen*, *Democracy*, and *Afterlife*, *Balmoral* does not include stylizations or present themes related to historical indeterminacy.

In *Balmoral*, Frayn implements an antithesis of historical record, seeking a comedic premise by depicting a world in which the Bolshevik revolution occurred in England instead of Russia. The historical characters in *Balmoral* are all authors: Enid Blyton, a children’s writer; George Warrick “Warry” Deeping, a novelist; Hugh Walpole, a novelist; Godfrey Winn, a journalist; and Dornford Yates, alias for novelist William Mercer. In accordance with the ahistorical premise of the play, Frayn’s representation of his characters’ lives in *Balmoral* is deliberately inaccurate, attempting to exploit a comedic antithesis of the “real” world. Enid Blyton, for example, is portrayed as an author of erotic verse, though in the end she reveals that writing children’s novels is her dream.

*Balmoral* was not published until 1987 after the play had been revised through three different productions, none of which was a commercial success. The second production was under the title *Liberty Hall* in 1980, and then Frayn returned to the original title in 1987 for a
further revised production at the Bristol Old Vic. The descriptions of plot and the characterization of biography in Balmoral in this analysis refer to the first edition that was published in 1987. Frayn describes the development of this play as a long term work in progress, though the basic elements of the play were consistent throughout the revisionary process (Plays: 2 viii-x).

Balmoral’s storyline follows a linear path, beginning on a cold winter morning in 1937 and ending later that day, with all of the action taking place in a large dining room. Balmoral is a writers’ commune with the artists coexisting in relative harmony. In the opening moments, the principle controversy among them is that Hugh Walpole has the distinction of dwelling in the castle’s warmest room (a well placed cousin the government helped him acquire living quarters that share a wall with the kitchen flue). Aside from the writers, there are four other characters that are fictional: Skinner, McNab, Kochetov, and Trisha. Skinner, the house warden, presides over the decaying royal estate assisted by the overworked and humorously abused, McNab. The inhabitants of Balmoral are given a surprise visit by Kochetov, a Russian writer, and his English escort, Trisha. They have come to interview Walpole but Walpole dies unexpectedly before they meet. Skinner, fearing embarrassment in the capitalist Russian press and a bad report from Trisha to his superiors, panics and attempts to deceive the visitors by hastily placing Walpole’s body in a trunk, making McNab pretend to be Walpole for the interview (Walpole and McNab are played by the same actor). Skinner and the writers become complicit in a desperate effort to conceal the truth while Walpole’s spasmodic body insists on popping open the trunk lid. McNab, suddenly placed in a position of power, drinks heavily and nearly divulges the truth at every turn while enjoying the opportunity to complain about the way he is treated.
The second act of *Balmoral* is entirely focused on the concealment of Walpole’s death while the first act includes minor farcical misunderstandings but is also heavily dependent on jokes related to the play’s ahistorical context. In a humorous statement that also serves as exposition, Winn states,

Marx and Engels were German. The Revolution didn’t happen in Germany. It didn’t happen in France or Italy or Russia. It happened in England. This is an English classless society. I mean, be reasonable, Warry! Look at us. Living in luxury. Waited on hand and foot. That’s why Balmoral has been made over to the people—so that the people can live like kings. (Plays: 2 78-79)

While this statement mocks the attempts by the real Soviets to create a classless society, it also uses antitheses to point out how English society is obsessed with class. Frayn could have written this play in a Soviet setting using either fictive or real writers, but he may have shied away from this context for the same humanitarian considerations that originally prevented Stoppard from integrating Lenin into the more laughable *Earnest*-based plot in *Travesties*.

With the philosophy presented by Frayn in *Constructions* in 1974 taken into consideration, the absence of some type of self-aware treatment of history, either in the dialogue or through some other form of stylization, that would emphasize the role of perspective in interpreting events, is surprising. *Balmoral* does not present even the most rudimentary examination of history, a reason Frayn attributes to the play’s failures when he says, “Farce, I now realize, has to be rooted in immediately believable reality” (Plays: 2 x). Perhaps if he had negotiated his representation of history in the play a little closer to reality he may have felt the need to include a caveat, or rhetorical overlay that integrated some of the themes he presented four years earlier in *Constructions*. Given his obvious interest in epistemology, ontology, and
historical subjects, it is interesting that the author never merged the three until Copenhagen in 1998.

I. Copenhagen: Biographical Polyphony

“The truly mystical thing, in the sense of being unexaminable, is our consciousness, and the standing of the world in relation to it; and that is indissolubly a part of how things are in fact disposed”

—Michael Frayn (The Human Touch 420)

Copenhagen depicts an encounter between Niels Bohr, his wife Margrethe, and Werner Heisenberg in the afterlife. Bohr and Heisenberg were among the most influential physicists of the 20th century, known for their contributions to the loosely agreed upon, yet widely influential, “Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics.” Heisenberg was sixteen years Bohr’s junior, making a Bohr both a mentor and kind of father figure in relationship that began in the 1920’s. Heisenberg eventually left Copenhagen to teach in Germany where he was offered a chair at Leipzig and remained through World War II, eventually working for the Nazis as a physicist. Whether or not he was deliberately working on a bomb using a practical application of theoretical physics is one of the principle questions of the play. Bohr was half Jewish, making Heisenberg’s cooperation with the German government even more of a strain on their relationship.

In the opening lines of the play, Margrethe asks the question which drives the dramatic action: “Why did he come to Copenhagen?” (3). Heisenberg returned to Copenhagen in 1941 to consult with Bohr. He visited Bohr’s home and they went for a walk to ensure that their
conversation would be secreted from German intelligence operations. The answer to Margrethe’s question is assumed to be found in what was said during Bohr and Heisenberg’s famous walk, but the truth is obscured by human complexities, not just in regard to motivations and personalities, but through the variability of memory. After their meeting, Bohr and Heisenberg contradicted each other’s version of their discussion while also eventually contradicting themselves as the years passed through the variability of their accounts. These points are examined in *Copenhagen* as Bohr, Margrethe, and Heisenberg attempt to answer the play’s central question by revisiting events from the past and the science that brought them together.

Frayn describes *Copenhagen* saying, “The epistemology of intention is what the play is about” (“*Copenhagen* Revisited,” screen 1). *Copenhagen* begins with a clear statement of the play’s line of inquiry through Margrethe’s first line and an unmistakable caveat for what occurs in the play’s two acts: that his characters are located in an imagined afterlife and what the audience will see is not an attempt to recreate history. This contextual caveat is integrated with a second caveat that is created through the play’s stylizations. Using stylizations, Frayn creates rhetorical overlays that dramatize the act of historical interpretation in a meta-interpretation, presenting an active depiction of the processes of interpreting history alongside his interpretation of his characters. These stylizations are largely facilitated through the way Frayn arranges different styles of dialogue, narrative positions, and metaphors as the author reveals a carefully crafted, though indeterminate, examination of Heisenberg’s intentions. The play’s caveats also enable Frayn to take dramatic license with his characters’ personalities while resisting the totalizing effect some of his speculative departures from biographical record might create.

Frayn’s approach to representing these historical persons is justified, in part, by his interpretation
of principles borrowed from Thucydides and Friedrich Hebbel, with his characters expressing thoughts that they might have been reluctant to divulge during their lifetimes.

a. Form

*Copenhagen*’s form calls for continuous dramatic action, arranged in two acts. The events of the play occur in the “real time” of the characters’ interactions and the location is fixed in the afterlife, altered only psychologically by occasional attempts to reenact the past. With this context as a given, Bohr, Margrethe, and Heisenberg are said to be more likely to come to an understanding because, as Heisenberg says, “Now we’re all dead and gone. Now no one can be hurt, now no one can be betrayed” (*Copenhagen* 6).

Yet, though they are “dead and gone” *Copenhagen*’s characters are not emotionally dead. While at times these characters seem to be ghostly shadows of their former selves, these moments are rare. The examination of the past they shared is often a contentious exercise and in the process revisiting these moments they experience a wide range of emotions. Bohr, Margrethe, and Heisenberg collaborate but they also compete with each other while pursuing the truth. The notion that “no one can be hurt” seems to be quickly forgotten and the pain of the perceived betrayals and numerous misunderstandings drives them to discover a central point on which they can agree. With these psychological processes in mind, Frayn’s representation of these characters could be considered somewhat realistic despite being set in the afterlife.

At different points Frayn integrates documented historical materials into *Copenhagen*’s dialogue, though he does not disclose which parts are taken from quotations. In an interview with Duncan Wu, Frayn cited one quotation of Bohr’s which is mentioned by Heisenberg in the play’s dialogue: “. . . the whole appearance of Elsinore, you said, was changed by our knowing that Hamlet had lived there. Every dark corner there reminds us of the darkness inside the human
soul” (26). Bohr and Heisenberg had gone to Elsinore on one of their many hiking trips together and the mention of Bohr’s quote injects both a historical validity and a poetic meaning into Copenhagen’s dramatic action. Given Frayn’s interest in introducing facts into the play (which will be discussed later in greater detail) his inclusion of primary documents into the dialogue is not surprising.

While Copenhagen’s context might be relatively simple, the devices Frayn uses to dramatize the action of the play are complex. The characters speak from three different narrative positions that are established through different styles of dialogue. The first narrative position is a kind of ghost-speak, meaning that the characters speak in a way that is emotionally detached, using phrases that are poetic and/or broadly theatrical to describe their condition in an abstracted mode. Ghost-speak generally provides exposition or reveals psychological experiences in a way that refers back to the central question of the play, directly or indirectly, in a style that Ben Brantley characterized as “grand theatrical hokum” in his review for The New York Times (screen 1). For example, at the beginning of the play Margrethe and Bohr have the following exchange:

MARGRETHE. Why did he come to Copenhagen?

BOHR. Does it matter, my love, now we’re all three of us dead and gone?

MARGRETHE. Some questions remain long after their owners have died.

Lingering like ghosts. Looking for the answers they never found in life. (5)

The characters are able to communicate with each other when speaking this style of dialogue but the intentions are directed more toward influencing the audience than other characters.
The next type of narrative position occurs in the contemporary experience of the characters as opposed to the more static style of ghost-speak (which is technically also happening contemporaneously, but does not have the same dramatic immediacy):

BOHR. You believed the reaction would be self-limiting.

HEISENBERG. That’s what I originally believed.

BOHR. Heisenberg, the reaction would not have been self-limiting.

HEISENBERG. By 1945 I understood that. (42)

This conventional style of dialogue is the first of two distinct styles of dialogue that are used in the contemporary narrative position.

The second style of dialogue in the contemporary narrative position is more complicated and occurs when the characters narrate their actions in the past by referring to their past selves almost as a separate person. Bohr sets up this convention when he says, “All right, so here we are, walking along the street once more. And this time I’m absolutely calm, I’m listening intently. What is it you want to say?” (32). Bohr and Heisenberg continue to refer to an abstract version of themselves while discussing this hypothetical situation:

HEISENBERG: I simply want to know if there is one [an Allied bomb project].

Some hint. Some clue. I’ve just betrayed my country and risked my life to warn you of the German program …

BOHR. And now I’m to return the compliment?

HEISENBERG. Bohr, I have to know! I’m the one who has to decide! If the Allies are building a bomb, what am I choosing for my country? . . . I have to know what I am deciding for them! Is it another defeat? Another nightmare like the nightmare I grew up with? (35).
This style of dialogue is reminiscent of how the narrator in *Spies* looks back on his childhood from the recollected perspective of his former self.

The final narrative position occurs when Bohr, Margrethe, and Heisenberg collaborate to reenact the past. Just as in the play’s contemporary narrative position, there are two different styles of dialogue in this category. The first is a conventional style of dialogue that attempts to recreate their original conversations in 1941 before and shortly after Bohr and Heisenberg’s walk. In doing so, the characters go about their objectives without a sense that they are feigning their actions and without indicating that they have the perspective of hindsight on these moments:

HEISENBERG. I’m so touched that you asked me [to visit].

BOHR. We must try to go on behaving like human beings.

HEISENBERG. I realize how awkward it is.

BOHR. We scarcely had a chance to do more than shake hands at lunch the other day. (13)

The characters are present in a moment has become psychologically real for them.

The second style of past narration occurs in the form of an internal monologue, when the characters evaluate each other in a kind of aside to the audience and/or provide supplemental narration for the ongoing reenactment. This style of dialogue is for the audience only and cannot be heard by the other characters. For example, in the first reenactment of their meeting in 1941 Margrethe often breaks from the conversation to make observations:

MARGRETHE. Silence again. Those first brief sparks have disappeared, and the ashes have become very cold indeed. So now of course I’m starting to feel sorry for him. Sitting here all on his own in the midst of people who hate him,
all on his own against the two of us. He looks younger again, like the boy who first came here in 1924. (15)

Comments like these illustrate the unspoken tensions and the complicated relationship between the three characters. There is a free interplay within *Copenhagen*’s three narrative positions—or, five styles of dialogue—and they may occur exclusively or simultaneously. Their use is one of the key factors contributing to the role stylization in the play.

**b. Stylization/How *Copenhagen* Presents History**

*Copenhagen* is unique among the biographical history plays in this study because the dramatic action is directly focused on interpreting an historical event. In turn, the stylizations of the dramatic action are inseparable from the way the play presents history. Due to this condition, this portion of the analysis of *Copenhagen* will combine the categories of “Stylization” and “How the Play Presents History” in order to present a more efficient analysis.

The points of stylization in *Copenhagen* emerge in three primary ways: 1), the use of multiple narrative positions creates a meta-biographical function while also presenting a perspectival approach (using multiple perspectives to emphasize the nature of perspective) to history; 2) the use of metaphor plays an overt role in organizing and interpreting the characters’ experiences; and 3), the persistent contradiction of memory in *Copenhagen* actively reflects upon the difficulty of arranging historical information into a definitive account. All of these elements serve to both further the dramatic action while commenting on the nature of historical representation at the same time, maintaining pronounced rhetorical overlays that ironically call into question Frayn’s examination of history while his characters also explicate caveats and participate in historical revisionism.
Frayn’s use of multiple narrative positions is more frequent in Act One then in Act Two, with the second act focused more on developing complex metaphors from physics and facilitating the debates related to why Heisenberg did not do the equation for the critical mass of U-235. Act One begins with the characters engaging in ghost-speak and Heisenberg giving the audience an indirect caution against discovering definitive answers when he says, “The more I’ve explained the deeper the uncertainty has become” (6). He then says, “Well, I shall be happy to make one more attempt” signaling that he has entered into a compact with Bohr and Margrethe to seek the answer one more time. During the sections of ghost-speak, Bohr and Margrethe mostly communicate with each other while Heisenberg, on his own, supports their dialogue through parallel statements.

The three characters continue delivering exposition in ghost-speak until they set the context for the first of Copenhagen’s three reenactments of the past. Frayn clearly signals this transition:

BOHR. A curious sort of diary memory is.

HEISENBERG. You open the pages, and all the neat headings and tiny jottings dissolve around you.

BOHR. You step through the pages into the months and days themselves.

MARGRETHE. The past becomes the present inside your head. (7-8)

The following lines begin an attempt to recreate the past with the Bohr’s at home, speaking about Heisenberg’s impending visit and Heisenberg, on his own, describing his mixed feelings about his return. In this moment of stylization, Frayn’s characters describe the function of memory as the source for historical perspective, even as they prepare to revisit the same events they once experienced.
While Bohr, Heisenberg, and Margrethe become reacquainted, Margrethe makes independent observations: “Me he scarcely notices. I watch him discretely from behind my expression of polite interest as he struggles on” (14). Margrethe serves as a kind of outside observer (though clearly not objective), occupying both styles of past narrative positions. She reports her inner experiences to the audience while also attempting to prevent her feelings from being outwardly revealed to Heisenberg.

After avoiding some difficult conversation related to the war, Bohr and Heisenberg reminisce about their early years together. Suddenly there is a break in the conversation when all three characters return to ghost-speak, making philosophical observations:

MARGRETHE. Silence. What’s he [Heisenberg] thinking about now? His life?

Or ours?

BOHR. So many things we think about at the same time. Our lives and our physics.

MARGRETHE. All the things that come into our heads out of nowhere. (25)

When they cease ghost-speak and return to the past narrative position Bohr and Heisenberg leave for their walk but their discussion is never dramatized; only their abrupt return from the outdoors followed by Heisenberg’s departure is seen. Bohr and Margrethe continue in the past while Heisenberg comments from a narrative position that is contemporary.

Shortly afterward, dialogue from a contemporary narrative position begins for the first time among all three characters as they attempt to piece together the missing information from the walk. At this point, the audience has been given a lot of information to judge Heisenberg and the nature of his visit, but the importance of these facts is put into relief when Margrethe begins the contemporary dialogue saying, “But what exactly had Heisenberg said? That’s what
everyone wanted to know, then and forever after” (29), reemphasizing the central question of the play.

From this contemporary perspective Bohr, Margrethe, and Heisenberg discuss the past. Bohr and Heisenberg find disparities in what they remember about both the basic details of their walk, the complex facts behind what they knew about fission, and what Bohr assumed Heisenberg intended to achieve when they spoke. Eventually they agree to revisit the past again, this time invoking the second style of dialogue in the contemporary narrative position in which they remain psychologically in the present yet speak for a hypothetical self in the past. However, Bohr and Heisenberg do not remain in this narrative position exclusively, shifting back to contemporary dialogue where Margrethe also makes observations.

Act One ends in ghost-speak. Margrethe provides the transition to this narrative position in her “He’s like a lost child” line. This breaks the dramatic continuity that had been established during the contemporary dialogue and allows Bohr to ask Heisenberg once more why he came to Copenhagen, suggesting “Another draft of the paper. This time we shall get it right. This time we shall understand” (44). Heisenberg agrees and they reiterate some of the lines spoken during the first reenactment. This dialogue is written almost as an incantation, as if the characters are engaging in a ritual to invoke the past. The effect of the play’s meta-biographical structure is prominent in this moment as they promise to tell yet another version of why Heisenberg came to Copenhagen in the second act.

In Act Two the narrative positions are less variable. Approximately seventy five percent of this act is delivered as contemporary dialogue, with the characters discussing the past without any attempt to narrate or reenact previous events. Near the end of the play the narrative positions begin to alter when Bohr suggests “One more draft, yes? One final draft!” (71). Over the next
three pages of dialogue the four styles of dialogue that occupy the contemporary and past narrative positions are combined, creating a kind of poly-narrative state.

The play ends with the characters in ghost-speak. Heisenberg reiterates the central theme of uncertainty in *Copenhagen* when he states, “Before we can glimpse who or what we are, we’re gone and laid to dust” (77). There are no conclusions in *Copenhagen*, only an examination of some of the innumerable factors behind Heisenberg’s visit in an attempt to gain a better understanding of his actions. Bohr perhaps summarizes Frayn’s epistemological perspective when he says that when there are no more people left living “there’s no more uncertainty, because there is no more knowledge” (77).

The continually changing narrative positions create rhetorical overlays through meta-biographical processes, emphasizing the theatrical and subjective nature of biographical representation while calling attention to how different sources of indeterminacy affect the interpretation of events. The use of multiple narrative positions also emphasizes a perspectival approach to history. When the characters are in ghost-speak or in the contemporary narrative position they lack the immediate perspective available to them when they are speaking from the past narrative position. Conversely, from the past narrative position, these characters do not have the benefit of hindsight that they do when they are in ghost-speak or the contemporary narrative position. Even for the participants, the act of describing the past is seen to vary greatly.

The limitations of perspective are also demonstrated directly in the text, such as when Bohr, Margrethe, and Heisenberg all narrate their internal observations at the end of the play (in the past narrative position):

> HEISENBERG. . . . I can feel a third smile in the room, very close to me. Could it be the one I suddenly see for a moment in the mirror there? And is the
awkward stranger wearing it in any way connected with this presence that I

I can feel in the room? This all-enveloping unobserved presence?

MARGRETHE. I watch the two smiles in the room, one awkward and

ingratiating, the other rapidly fading from incautious warmth to bare

politeness. There’s also a third smile in the room, I know, unchangingly
courteous, I hope, and unchangingly guarded.

[Text omitted]

BOHR. I glance at Margrethe, and for a moment, I see what she can see and I
can’t—myself, and the smile vanishing from my face as poor Heisenberg
blunders on.

[Text omitted]

HEISENBERG. Two thousand million people in the world, and the one who has
to decide their fate is the only one that is always hidden from me. (72)

Aside from reinforcing the play’s metaphors about observation, the dramatization of self-
conscious perceptions also ironically calls attention to the act of the biographer who writes the
life of his subject but cannot see the filter (the mind) that determines how that life is written.

The personality types of Frayn’s characters further emphasize this perspectival approach
to history. Margrethe is portrayed as having “a tendency to make everything personal” (61),
viewing other people’s actions based on interpersonal motivations. Bohr is portrayed as
humanistic, insisting that they make issues less complicated by using “plain language” (32) and
expressing how physics “put man back at the center of the universe” (59). Heisenberg contrasts
the two with his hyper-rationalist perspective, insisting that “What something means is what it
means in mathematics” (54) and that philosophy is tangential to finding explanations because “If
something works, it works” (22), there is no need to question an answer further if the answer is workable. Each of their personalities emphasize how history may be interpreted, using sound arguments, in different ways and with equally valid outcomes.

The next major point of stylization in Copenhagen is the one the play is most known for, the overt way that Frayn dramatizes an analogy between human experience and quantum mechanics. Frayn sets up this analogy as a rhetorical overlay at the outset, integrating this device in Heisenberg’s first line of dialogue:

. . . there are only two things the world remembers about me. One is the uncertainty principle, and the other is my mysterious visit to Niels Bohr in Copenhagen in 1941. Everyone understands uncertainty. Or thinks he does. No one understands my trip to Copenhagen. Time and time again I’ve explained it. To Bohr himself, and Margrethe. To interrogators and intelligence officers, to journalists and historians. The more I’ve explained, the deeper the uncertainty has become. (6)

Written in ghost-speak, Heisenberg’s first speech sets the conditions for the play’s science-based analogies to be self-conscious, creating an ironic distance from the dramatic action by drawing attention to the manner in which the historical matter is interpreted.

Frayn gradually builds this analogy through the play, increasing the complexity of the descriptions. Bohr, who at one point describes himself as Heisenberg’s “own walking lump of cadmium” (43), creates a simplified example of the uncertainty principle when he says that the speed at which Heisenberg used to ski put him “up against the uncertainty relationship.” He tells him “If you knew where you were when you were down you didn’t know how fast you’d got there. If you knew how fast you’d been going you didn’t know you were down” (22). Soon after
they go for their walk and Margrethe observes that they are now different with each other when
she is not around saying, “And if they are walking they’re talking. Talking in a rather different
way, no doubt—I’ve typed out so much in my time about how differently particles behave when
they’re unobserved” (26).

Frayn does not leave the examination of history to this simple analogous use of the
uncertainty principle, nor does he allow Heisenberg’s actions to remain completely
indeterminate. In the second act the analogy becomes more complex as Bohr’s theory of
complementarity is introduced. Heisenberg begins this sequence when he observes that if Bohr is
a hypothetical neutron wandering around Copenhagen at night and if he, as a photon, is sent to
find him, once they “collide” Bohr is “no longer doing what he was so maddeningly doing when
I walked into him!” (58). Bohr counters saying that “If people can see what’s happened to you,
to their piece of light, then they can work out what must have happened to me! The trouble is
knowing what’s happened to you! Because to understand how people see you we have to treat
you not just as a particle, but as a wave” (58). Bohr’s statements describe how Heisenberg must
be judged using both his actions and intentions as functions.

Frayn is simplifying these scientific theories but, as they are analogously applied to
people, Heisenberg’s uncertainly principle generally states that there is no “absolutely
determinate situation in the world” (57) while Bohr’s theory of complementarity states that
effects can be measured from different perspectives, none of which is totalizing, but each
contributes to a greater understanding. Heisenberg applies these ideas directly to his own
situation when he says,

Complementarity, once again. I’m your enemy; I’m also your friend. I’m a danger
to mankind; I’m also your guest. I’m a particle; I’m also a wave. We have one set
of obligations to the world in general, and we have other sets, never to be reconciled, to our fellow-countrymen, to our neighbors, to our friends, to our family, to our children. We have to go through not two slits [as in a two slit particle experiment] at the same time but twenty-two. (65)

After approximately fifty-nine pages of dialogue, Heisenberg’s statement clearly voices the complex vision of history Frayn has been illustrating, envisioning historical indeterminacy that is mitigated by the use of multiple perspectives in an attempt to make accurate judgments.

There are two other guiding metaphors that put the characters’ actions into perspective through overtly theatrical analogies. By themselves, they might not be received as stylization, but when used in context with Copenhagen’s scientific metaphors they appear to have a self-reflexive quality because they further direct attention to the structural use of metaphors in the play. The first involves the death of Bohr’s oldest son, Christian, who died in a boating accident. Bohr let Christian take the helm in a heavy sea and Christian was thrown overboard, leaving Bohr to decide whether to dive in after him (risking certain death) or captain the boat and attempt to circle around (a likely futile action). This impossible situation casts meaning onto the play in two ways. First, by calling attention to Heisenberg as another lost “son” and second, serving as a more compressed and easily understandable analogy to the impossible/irreversible situation Heisenberg was in, having stayed in Germany when Hitler came to power and then finding himself confined to that situation thereafter (if he wanted to live). Christian’s death at sea is mentioned in four key places in the script: 1), near the beginning of the play when Bohr and Heisenberg’s relationship is first being described (25); 2) at the end of Act One, shortly after Heisenberg’s efforts to get his teams reactor going during the war are described (44); 3), in direct relation between joining the plot against Hitler and Bohr jumping into the water after Christian
(63); and 4), at the end of the play, after the complex nature of Heisenberg’s actions have been described using complementarity (77).

Copenhagen’s third major metaphor is drawn from Elsinore, a meaning which comes about from Bohr’s statement that “Every dark corner there reminds us of the darkness inside the human soul” (26). What is this darkness? In the play it appears to refer to an unchecked desire to satisfy near compulsory curiosities even though the outcomes of that pursuit are seemingly irrational and potentially destructive. After the concept has been introduced in Act One, Elsinore is mentioned again in the first lines of dialogue in Act Two (47) and then becomes more prominent. “Elsinore” is offered as an explanation for why Bohr risked his life to throw a rock at a mine that had washed up on beach and for why Heisenberg risked his life to climb and stand atop a Japanese pagoda (49). Later, when Bohr and Heisenberg discuss with often fervent desire the solutions to creating an atomic bomb, “Elsinore” is mentioned as an explanation for Heisenberg’s actions (64). “Elsinore” is brought up one last time after Bohr, Margrethe, and Heisenberg have each described being in the room but not able to observe themselves: Heisenberg says, “You remember Elsinore? The darkness inside the human soul?” as the two men exit in order to engage in one last reenactment (72). This implies that people are not always able to see within the “darkness” they may have in their own thoughts, another source of historical indeterminacy.

The contraction of memory provides the final layer of stylization in Copenhagen, occurring in moments where one character contradicts what another character remembers. In Copenhagen these contradictions are combined with the multiple narrative positions to exemplify the central analogies Frayn draws between human behavior and quantum mechanics and to
highlight the potential errors in his arrangement of biographical material. This is achieved by
demonstrating the discrepancies in the primary evidence on which the drama is based.

The contradictions of memory are introduced early in Copenhagen, during the ghost-
speak, and then continue throughout the play. The contradictions in Act One begin during the
initial exposition and the first reenactment of the past and then increase in frequency through Act
Two: In the first page of dialogue Margrethe says to Bohr, “I’ve never seen you so angry with
anyone as you were with Heisenberg that night,” while Bohr responds, “Not to disagree, but I
believe I remained remarkably calm” (5); Bohr refutes Margrethe’s statement that she never
really liked Heisenberg (7); Heisenberg has trouble remembering who was present at his lunch at
the Institute for Theoretical Physics in 1941 (8); Bohr and Heisenberg disagree about who Bohr
“shot” in a theoretical exercise (23); Margrethe brings up Bohr and Heisenberg’s inconsistent
accounts of their walk (30); Heisenberg lists the contradictory accounts Bohr gave other people
about what was said on their walk (32); Heisenberg contradicts himself about wanting absolution
(33); Heisenberg fails to give a logical account of his actions while trying to get the reactor going
in Germany (40-43); Bohr and Heisenberg have difficulty remembering what language they used
to speak in when discussing physics together (48); Bohr forgets how old his first child was when
he left to hike with Heisenberg in 1924 (49); Bohr is corrected by Margrethe and Heisenberg
about the way he behaved while arguing with Schrödinger about his theory of wave function
(52); Margrethe successfully contradicts the strong characterization of “father and son” (7)
teamwork put forth by Bohr and Heisenberg at the beginning of the play (52-55); and, Bohr finds
contradictions in what Heisenberg claims to have known, and not known, about producing
enough U-235 to create a serviceable bomb (66-71).
The total effect of these contradictions combines with *Copenhagen*’s scientific metaphors to provide a rhetorical overlay that undermines any sense of determinism for Heisenberg’s actions by illustrating, from the basic details of whether the leaves were falling during their famous walk to the more complicated question of why Heisenberg did not do the diffusion equation for creating plutonium, the discrepancies in the recorded “facts” of his visit. Through the ironic distancing these devices create, they also actively point out that, depending on which facts are selected, many different interpretations of Heisenberg’s visit are possible, including the one Frayn presents in the play.

c. Frayn’s Statements on the Use of History in *Copenhagen*

Not surprisingly, the author of two novels that deal with human consciousness, perception, and knowledge, gives a fairly thorough account of his guiding philosophy for the representation of history in *Copenhagen*. He does this in the play’s postscript and in an article for *The New York Review of Books* titled “*Copenhagen Revisited*” in 2002. Of the play’s portrayal of recorded facts he observes that “it’s reasonable to want to know how much of it is fiction and how much of it is history” (*Copenhagen* 79). Frayn states that the facts introduced in the play’s dialogue are all documented, though at times “over-simplified,” with the hypothetical meeting of the characters in the afterlife being the most significant departure.

Frayn justifies the validity of his characters’ dialogue by quoting the 5th century AD historian and philosopher Thucydides’ preface to *The History of the Peloponnesian War* (c. 411-404 BC): “‘I have found impossible to remember their exact wording. Hence I have made each orator speak as, in my opinion, he would have done in the circumstances, but keeping as close as I could to the train of thought that guided his actual speech’” (80). Frayn qualifies his own dialogue when he states, “Some of the dialogue in my play represents speeches that must have
been made in one form or another; some of it speeches that were never made at all. I hope, though that in some sense it respects the Thucydidean principle. . . follow[ing] in so far as possible the original protagonists’ train of thought” (80-81).

This method is as reliant on the imagination as it is on the arrangement of historical fact. Frayn believes this is necessary, not just for his play, but in regard to any historical representation saying,

The great challenge facing the storyteller and the historian alike is to get inside people’s heads, to stand where they stood and see the world as they saw it, to make some informed estimate of their motives and intentions—and this is the precisely where recorded and recordable history cannot reach. Even when all the external evidence has been mastered, the only way into the protagonists’ heads is through the imagination. This indeed is the substance of the play. (81)

The indeterminacy of human consciousness serves as a pretext for Frayn’s imaginative depiction of his historical characters.

Frayn has a second borrowed philosophical approach to the way he represents these characters. In an interview with Larissa MacFarquhar for The New Yorker, Frayn explained his perspective saying,

The German playwright Friedrich Hebbel [a 19th century “post-romantic” writer whose Maria Magdalena (1844) is credited as a precursor to realism] said that in a good play everyone is right. I don’t suppose he meant that you had to morally approve everyone, but I take it he meant that drama is people presenting themselves with the same force as they do in life, and feeling as justified about themselves as they do in life. If the playwright is taking sides, it’s not very
interesting, because in life it’s not like that—there’s no directorial figure, no
writer, no God figure saying this guy’s right and this guy’s wrong. I have always
tried to respect Hebbel’s dictum. (screen 1)
The structure of Copenhagen and the way each of the characters thoroughly express themselves
reflects Frayn’s adoption of Hebbel’s strategy.

Frayn’s strategy for representing history unnerved scholars such as Paul Lawrence Rose,
who accused him of using a “chic postmodernism” to achieve a “subtle revisionism” of history
(Copenhagen in Debate 84). Chief among his complaints about the representation history in
Copenhagen was the perceived mitigation of Heisenberg’s guilt, departures from the historical
persons’ personalities, and the use of physics as a metaphor for understanding human experience.
However, Frayn has made statements that indicate that a revising of history was not his aim,
rather, the author wished to create an accurate portrayal of history based on the historical
materials available to him. In both his postscript and article for The New York Review of Books,
he gives an account of the primary evidence that supports his portrayal of history in Copenhagen,
situates his interpretation within the work of other biographers, and then defends the central
tenant of his thesis: that Heisenberg’s intentions for his 1941 meeting with Bohr must be
interpreted based on how his failure to do the calculation for the critical mass for a bomb is
understood. Frayn suggests that Heisenberg was not exactly innocent but that one way or another
he demonstrated a “fatal lack of zeal” that ended up killing the atomic bomb project for the Nazis
(“Copenhagen Revisited,” screen 1), and this is what makes the nature of his guilt problematic.

Countering criticism about his more liberal portrayal of his characters’ personalities,
Frayn states that in dramatizing historical characters some departures are necessary in order to
“make explicit the ideas and feelings that never quite get expressed in the confusing onrush of
life, and to bring out the underlying structure of events” (Copenhagen Revisited”). As such, he says that the process of examining history is not corrupted by these departures:

I don’t see why Marianne shouldn’t be allowed to express her suspicions of Heisenberg much more sharply and woundingly than the real Margrethe’s habitual courtesy would never have permitted, and I don’t see why my Heisenberg shouldn’t be free to express the deeper feelings that the real Heisenberg remained silent about.

Frayn proposes to go beyond historical appearance in order to present a characterization of these people that reflects logical assumptions about their inner lives.

Frayn qualifies the analogies drawn from quantum mechanics in the play saying, “None of this, plainly, applies directly to our observations of thought and intention. Thoughts are not locatable by pairs of conjugate variables, so there can be no question of a ratio of precision” (82).

“What the uncertainty of thoughts,” he later states,

. . . does have in common with the uncertainty of particles is that the difficulty is not just a practical one, but a systematic limitation which cannot even in theory be circumvented. . . . the whole possibility of saying or thinking anything about the world, even the most apparently objective, abstract aspects of it studied by the natural science, depends upon human observation, and is subject to the limitations which the human mind imposes. . . (83)

These statements are consistent with those he makes in Constructions and The Human Touch.

This is not to say that Frayn’s final vision of history is reduced to the kind of ambiguity found in “chic postmodernism.” Frayn leaves his version of Heisenberg culpable for his actions, but just how culpable he is left to be determined by the audience. The contradictory facts in the
case point out the indeterminacy of knowing someone’s intentions in complex circumstances, while at the same time intentions are central to judging people’s actions. Heisenberg points this out when he illustrates the faulty thinking behind a “quantum ethics” in which people are evaluated by their actions only. He does not believe in an ethical reasoning that would make him the more innocent man, having never contributed to anyone’s death, compared with Bohr, even though Bohr played a role in creating the atomic bombs that were dropped on Japan (76). Frayn demonstrates how the nature of understanding history is made difficult by this paradox, that the facts do not always reveal the basic premise on which someone should be judged. An evaluation of intentions is elusive but necessary.

d. Criticism from Other Scholars

Frayn’s representation of history in Copenhagen was the subject of many critical debates, even inspiring a compilation of essays titled Copenhagen in Debate (2005). In addition to weighing Heisenberg’s guilt, scholars debated the merits of Frayn’s strategy for examining history. The arguments were generally defined by those who believed in the possibility of certainty in historical interpretation and those who found the historical indeterminacy presented in the play to be appropriate (to varying degrees). Rose, author of Heisenberg and the Nazi Atomic Bomb Project (1998) and Frayn’s most vocal critic, equates Frayn’s indeterminate portrayal of Heisenberg’s intentions with David Irving’s Holocaust denial, saying that Copenhagen was “more destructive of the integrity of art, of science, and of history” (Copenhagen in Debate 84). Rose expresses a great deal of certainty on the subject. In the same essay he cites the “sickening compromises with the Nazi regime that Heisenberg made without conscience” and the “abysmal depth of his inability to understand the evil nature of the regime” (87). Rose’s objections to Frayn’s method of representing history are not surprising given the
way *Copenhagen* naturally questions the type of reductive portrayal of Heisenberg’s humanity that Rose embraces.

Cathryn Carson, author of *Heisenberg in the Atomic Age* (2009), appreciated the “multiplicity of possibilities” presented in *Copenhagen*, but she objected to the play’s characterization of Heisenberg asking, “How it is that we get at some ‘truth’ out of the encounter’ if the individual participants are hard to recognize?” (*Copenhagen in Debate* 15). Carson felt there was a strong disconnection between the historical information presented in the play and the characters who do not reflect the personalities she has come to know through her research. She states that while she can appreciate how the dramatized Heisenberg reveals emotions that would have been concealed by “postwar reserve,” that Frayn’s Heisenberg seems incompatible with what she knows of the historical Heisenberg’s philosophies, particularly in regard to the limits of what can be communicated through language. With these contradictions in mind, this may be why she says that “Frayn manages to convey something essential about the Copenhagen visit,” though that essential thing is “very hard to designate” (15).

Klaus Hentschel in his article titled “Finally, Some Historical Polyphony!” describes *Copenhagen* as presenting the audience with a view of history that emphasizes probability, rather than a certainty. Hentschel contends that in *Copenhagen* Frayn used “the degrees of freedom remaining after such a conscientious check against the facts, and perceptively identified the different historically possible actions within this zone, delimited by the sources” (*Copenhagen in Debate* 32). In doing so, Frayn’s work reflects upon the nature of historical representation in general because *Copenhagen* “invites analogous treatments of other polyphonic cases: a composition of conflicting voices about, say, Robert Oppenheimer’s motivations to build the atomic bomb. . .” (34). Hentschel’s comments demonstrate how Frayn embraces contradicting
“voices” from documented sources in *Copenhagen*, not as a way to render all history indeterminate, but to suggest a version of history that remains documented by facts but not totalized by those same facts.

e. **Conclusions**

Though Frayn’s approach to history in *Copenhagen* is guided by two central caveats, one referring to the depiction of his characters and the other to the nature of representing history in general, the author clearly sought, if not a defense of Heisenberg, a version of history indeterminate enough that Heisenberg could be defended, leaving his audiences to decide for themselves. This vision of history is achieved by placing the characters in the afterlife and then creating a perspectival approach using multiple narrative positions. The use of these meta-biographical devices along with *Copenhagen*’s overt metaphors create stylizations that condition Frayn’s depiction of Heisenberg while simultaneously calling attention to the subjective act of representation.

*Copenhagen* invites audiences to put themselves in each of the characters’ places, especially Heisenberg who figures as the most prominent protagonist of the three—and he is certainly a protagonist. Heisenberg’s conundrum (if he is not portrayed as having horns and breathing fire) is fascinating, and judging him becomes more difficult the more he speaks of the love he has for his country and for physics, though his attachments to both have a strong sense of “Elsinore” about them. The more audiences identify with him, the more they begin to understand how a series of compromises, such as those made through a desire to remain in his homeland, could quickly become a situation in which loyalties are impossible to reconcile. At the heart of this depiction is a sense of indeterminacy that is qualified in the imagination of the individual
spectator who might possibly, at the same time, be aware of how their judgments possibly differ from the other people sitting around them.

The complex experience of history this creates may be the strongest case for Frayn’s reliance on principles borrowed from Thucydides and Hebbel. A factual, yet imaginative, variation of biography is created that exchanges judgment for a more sympathetic understanding—even if the character is less desirable. As Frayn said about the prospect of representing Hitler on stage “Why should we be asked to endure a representation of his presence if he doesn't offer us some understanding of what was going on inside his head from his own point of view? The audience can surely be trusted to draw its own moral conclusions” (“Copenhagen Revisited,” screen 1).

II. Democracy: Intra-Personal Multitudes as Biography

“You must learn English, Günter, and read Walt Whitman. ‘Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes’”

—Willy Brandt in Democracy (71)

Democracy, like Copenhagen, puts forward a caveat for understanding history via stylizations that are produced through the structure of the majority of the play’s dramatic action. This time Frayn turns from examining the epistemology of intention toward blending epistemological questions with an increased focus on ontology, as Democracy dramatizes a historical subject in a way that also comments on the nature of “being.” Frayn describes Democracy saying, “Complexity is what the play is about: the complexity of human arrangements and of human beings themselves, and the difficulties that this creates in both
shaping and understanding our actions” (Democracy 98). Frayn articulates these themes through the use of multiple narrative positions, a staging of character dualities, and meta-biographical devices. In the process, Democracy asserts a perspectival approach to history and biography, creating rhetorical overlays that illustrate how people’s personalities elude definitive descriptions.

a. Form

Democracy depicts some of the major political infighting and acts of espionage that took place in West Germany in the first half of the 1970’s. In 1969 Willy Brandt became West Germany’s first socialist chancellor in almost 40 years. Shortly after being elected, his government was infiltrated by Günter Guillaume, an East German spy who is the main protagonist of the play. Guillaume rose from a position as a union liaison to become one of Brandt’s highest placed assistants and, in turn, East Germany’s highest placed operative. When Guillaume was finally discovered, the scandal contributed to a series of other mitigating factors to create a situation in which Brandt was compelled to resign in 1974. Frayn favors the theory that Brandt’s political rivals within his own party used the scandal to their advantage, leveraging the potential for blackmail against him.

Brandt’s ouster was not Guillaume and the Stasi’s objective. The policies Brandt initiated toward countries in the Eastern Block led to opportunities to improve diplomatic relations and encourage economic development. Guillaume was spying on Brandt and his government, but he did so while working for Brandt’s political success. Meanwhile, the inside information Guillaume provided East Germany helped them to evaluate Brandt’s intentions for signing a treaty, easing tension between the two countries. Democracy presents a vision of Guillaume’s
actions that are both ironic and tragic, as Guillaume eventually destroys the career of a man he revered along with setting back relations between the two Germanies.

**Democracy**’s form presents an episodic depiction of Guillaume’s operations within Brandt’s government. The play is divided into two acts that portray the rise of Guillaume into Brandt’s confidence in Act One and the proceeding discovery of his identity as a double agent and the dissolution of Brant’s political power in Act Two. In the course of developing this tragic arc, Frayn also dramatizes the difficulty Brandt had in holding together a large enough coalition of political parties to remain in power and implement his policies. Guillaume is seen to be reporting on this and the infighting between other party members such as Hebert Wehner, Helmut Schmidt, and Horst Ehmke to his immediate East German controller, Arno Kretschmann. The professional and somewhat personal relationship between Guillaume and Brandt is developed through depictions of their time together, traveling by train during political campaigns and on a holiday spent with their families in Norway.

The context of the play is loosely defined in comparison with the one set forth in **Copenhagen**. Though the play begins with Guillaume and Kretschmann reminiscing about the day Brandt was elected, the audience is not told where these characters are or the purpose for their reminiscence. Frayn states that the characters are “alive” in his postscript but does not account for these abstracted circumstances (105). Following Guillaume and Kretschmann’s brief exchange, the enactment of history occupies the bulk of the play until the end when the characters begin to reminisce about themselves and the fate of Germany. In the process, this vague, post-historical reminisce frames the dramatic action.

Perhaps the best example of this reminiscence takes place at the end of **Democracy** when Guillaume and Kretschmann begin speaking together as if Guillaume has just been released from
prison. Soon after their conversation begins, Frayn calls for “The faint thudding of a pickaxe” with the scene expanding to a retrospective of history “with everyone” (91). From this point, Brandt, Ehmke, Genscher, Guillaume, Kretschmann, and Schmidt all recall the fall of the Berlin Wall, seeing Brandt on his visit to what was once East Germany, and some details about their personal fates. There is a contemporary aspect about their dialogue despite the spectral quality that these kinds of historical summarizations conjure. In the last lines of the play Brandt, Guillaume, and Kretschmann have the following exchange:

GUILLAUME. And where are you, Arno? Vanished again before they arrest you. Melted into the crowd, like so many others.

KRETSCHMANN. —I stand among them and cheer with all the rest as Willy passes. Cheer with all my heart. A great man!

BRANDT. We’re healed and whole. For a little while, at any rate. And for a little while everyone’s glad.

GUILLAUME. And wherever he goes, my shadow goes with him. Together still.

(92)

By having his characters discuss the past with hindsight, yet not disclosing the context in which they speak about these memories, Frayn appears to purposefully blur the context. Instead of ghosts in the afterlife, these characters are timeless renderings, commenting on themselves in the sort of recurrent way that historical figures continue to live as characters in history books and biographies as “shadows” of people that are destined to be linked together.

The example of dialogue above also exemplifies the more unconventional aspects of Democracy’s form. From the beginning to the end of each act, the play’s action is continuous, displaying a progression of 92 different “scenes” that are demarcated by the start of new threads.
of conversation, not by a scene change or a pronounced break in the action. These transitions between scenes are usually indicated with a written stage direction in parentheses that indicates who is starting the conversation and to whom that character is speaking, beginning with the word with. The example below is from a single line of dialogue, demonstrating how the with in parenthesis denotes the beginning of a new scene and the names of the other characters who will be included in the conversation.

EHMKE. (with BRANDT and GUILLAUME) Come on, Willy. You’re the chancellor. Remember? So up you get and chancel. (41)

Sometimes these conversational-scenes last for several pages (45-52) while sometimes there may be several scenes on one page (27).

When describing his vision for the staging of the play, Frayn calls for “A complex of levels and spaces; of desks and chairs; of files and papers; also of characters, who mostly remain around the periphery of the action when not actually involved in it, listening or unobtrusively involved in their work” (5). Efficiency is important in the staging of this play because the 92 different conversations also occur in several different locations: the Palais Schaumburg, train compartments, public meeting places with Kretschmann, a guest house in Norway, prison, and a vague, post-historical setting.

The fluidity of the staging also helps facilitate the most complex structural component in Democracy, Guillaume’s asides to Kretschmann. While Guillaume and Kretschmann have scenes where they meet to discuss Brandt’s government, they also have discussions that serve as conversational-asides, with Guillaume speaking to Kretschmann while he is also in a scene with Brandt or other party members. When these moments occur, the rest of the characters are not aware that this is happening.
The conversational-asides are indicated through the use of a dash that is placed at the beginning of a sentence. For example, in a scene with Reinhard Wilke, Guillaume’s immediate supervisor in Brant’s office, the two men have the following exchange while Guillaume also makes comments to Kretschmann,

GUILLAUME. Extra pair of hands always available if you need them. No job too big or too small.

WILKE. I’m sure you have plenty to do upstairs.

GUILLAUME. –He’s a little resistant to my charms. I’m not a prof or a doctor of anything, like all the others. –Just popping down to Party Headquarters.

Anything you want me to take? Files? Papers?

WILKE. We have messengers, Herr Guillaume.

GUILLAUME. –I’ll wear him down in the end.

KRETSCHMANN. –Take your time. Don’t rush it. We’ve waited thirteen years.

We can wait a few more weeks. (12)

In Guillaume’s second line above, the dash is used a second time to indicate his return to speaking with Wilke (a device that can be distracting in the reading of the play because Frayn also frequently uses dashes for the simple purpose of punctuation). Conversational-asides occur in 27, or almost one third, of the play’s scenes. How these conversational-asides take place is open to interpretation; they could take place in Guillaume’s head or represent a sudden transition to a physically and temporally displaced moment. The staging of these conversational-asides determines whether they are perceived as imagined, an ongoing conversation, a recollection of a previous conversation, and/or a variation or combination of any of these conditions.
Democracy, like Copenhagen, contains a complex use of narrative positions. Of the play’s three narrative positions, two are introduced simultaneously at the beginning of the play when the audience sees Brandt make an acceptance speech for an election in 1969 while Guillaume and Kretschmann reflect on this historical moment in a separate temporality. The dramatic arc of Democracy occurs almost entirely in the enactment of the past, effectively making the past a contemporary experience. The narrative positions described above then both function in the immediate/contemporary experience of the play, the former being “historical-enactment” and the latter being “contemporary-reminiscence.” The third type of narrative position functions as a form of “historical-witness,” as characters describe the historical moment in which they are taking part. This style of dialogue occurs intermittently throughout the play.

The scenes that make up the historical-enactment sections of the play depict fairly realistic dialogue and character psychology, blended occasionally with moments in which characters speak in an expository manner. Guillaume’s asides to Kretschmann often serve to augment these scenes by setting up the context in which they take place and the personalities involved in them. Dates are rarely disclosed, with the dramatic action appearing more as a collage of important moments whose finer details are obscured as the scenes stream together.

The only switch in narrative position that occurs during historical-enactment is when the characters speak as historical-witnesses, a style of dialogue that functions as either an inner monologue or a joint narration with other characters. In contrast to contemporary-reminiscence, historical-witness takes place in the real time of the play’s historical-enactment. Similar to the conversational-asides between Guillaume and Brandt, the extra-contextual placement of these comments is indicated with the use of a dash. These moments of historical-witness occur during Brandt’s diplomatic visit to East Germany (19-20), when Guillaume travels with Brandt on a
political campaign (45-48), during Brandt’s visit to the monument to the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto (53), and toward the end of the play when the characters are summarizing their experiences after Guillaume has been caught (85-90). For example, Ehmke, Guillaume, and Schmidt describe a gesture made by Brandt at the Warsaw monument saying,

EHMKE. —Another of his unspoken speeches, and the greatest of them all.

GUILLAUME. —He lays his official wreath at the monument to the murdered Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto. He steps back. And then . . .

SCHMIDT. —Something else. He’s going to do something else . . .

GUILLAUME. —For a moment once again time seems to hold its breath. Once again the world is about to change in front of our eyes. And out of nowhere . . .

. [Brandt kneels]. (53)

In these moments Guillaume and other characters give asides that are similar in style to the inner monologue version of past narration in Copenhagen, commenting on what they see and feel in a context that is concurrent but not convergent with the historical-enactment.

When the characters are in contemporary-reminiscence their style of speech is not as theatrical as the ghost-speak used in Copenhagen, yet they are similar in that there is not a dramatic immediacy to what they are saying; the emotion is derived from inner experience, not an active situation that the characters are attempting to control. As mentioned before, contemporary-reminiscence occurs twice in the play: with Guillaume and Kretschmann’s dialogue at the start of Act One (7-8); and at the end of the play when they are joined by the other characters (91-92).

Frayn states that most of the dialogue in Democracy is fictional with the exception of excerpts from Brandt’s historical speeches and jokes from a collection that Brandt had assembled
Brandt’s speeches were not taken verbatim, but rather assembled in a “collage of his actual words” (Frayn interview with Gussow, screen 1). Otherwise, Frayn says that “Very few of the words that these characters speak . . . were ever spoken by their real counterparts” and that “What the feelings and ideas of those counterparts were, and whether the feelings and ideas expressed by my characters have anything in common with them, is a matter of interpretation and conjecture” (Democracy 105).

b. Stylization

The stylizations in Democracy are derived from two primary sources: 1) the staging of Guillame’s dualities; and 2), the way spying and the narrative positions create a meta-biographical function. Concerning the former, Guillame’s dualities, as staged, provide an overt theatricalization of Frayn’s themes through a disruption of context while this effect is reinforced by dialogue concerning how people have different sides to their personalities. In the latter, spying and the use of multiple narrative positions creates meta-biographical rhetorical overlays, making Democracy a biographical history play that examines the nature of documenting and interpreting someone else’s actions. Similar to Copenhagen, the resulting effect signals a perspectival approach to the limitations of historical comprehension.

Guillaume’s divided loyalty between the East German government and Willy Brandt forms the core of the representation of character dualities. In addition to the 27 different scenes where Guillaume has conversational-asides to Kretschmann, the two characters also meet together to discuss their work in 19 other scenes. Guillaume is then seen in dialogue with his East German control for a total of 46, or half, of the scenes in Democracy. These interactions all occur in the historical-enactment narrative position of the play as Guillaume’s reports to
Kretschmann serve as the primary impetus through which history is visited, as their discussions catalogue the historical events that shaped Brandt’s tenure.

Due to the prevalence of the Guillaume-Kretschmann interactions, their presence in the play serves as a rhetorical overlay, ironically signaling the contrivance through which the dramatic action functions as well as staging a physical reminder of the complex duality of Guillaume’s loyalties. There is an understanding about Guillaume’s duality that is shared directly with the audience because they, like Kretschmann, posses a knowledge of his actions that the other characters do not have for themselves. Guillaume authors a version of Brandt’s history while the audience is made acutely aware of the dramatic style in which Frayn is authoring Guillaume’s perspective.

This point of stylization is actively reinforced by dialogue. Just as Heisenberg’s reference to uncertainty at the beginning of *Copenhagen* makes Frayn’s line of inquiry salient, Guillaume openly references his own theatricalized condition in a conversational-aside with Kretschmann:

EHMKE. [. . . ] So what do you think Günter? Can we trust these new friends of ours [the East Germans]?

GUILLAUME. —Yes? No? What do I say? Which one of me’s going to answer?

KRETSCHMANN. —I leave it to you Günter.

GUILLAUME. —Leave it to which one of me?

BRANDT. A difficult decision, evidentially.

GUILLAUME. Half of me wants to say one thing. Half of me wants to say another. (18)
In this exchange Ehmke asks Guillaume a question, Guillaume confers with Kretschmann, Brandt misinterprets Guillaume’s brief “silence” for a simpler type of indecision, and Guillaume finally answers in a way that serves a dual purpose.

Further, in this same scene Guillaume learns that East Germany has been selling political prisoners to West Germany. Even while he verbally recognizes his duality, he is also transitioning as a person, becoming someone else when he learns of his home country’s despicable actions. Guillaume’s loyalties are not just depicted as being divided in this scene; they are being divided anew by the dramatic action.

Frayn references dualities or having multiple sides to personalities throughout Democracy: East and West Germany are alluded to as two sides to the same entity (17, 34); Brandt notes that Wehner used to be a Communist and “now he’s a religious maniac” while Kretschmann, in turn, notes of Brandt that Wehner is “not the only one with another side to him” (24); Schmidt observes that since Brandt was not really from Berlin that “. . . he has to be more Berlinish than all the rest of them” (27); Guillaume describes himself as a “hat stand in the corner” (29); Guillaume describes himself as “the perfect servant of two masters” and that he is “half man and half wolf” when he is with Brandt (40); Wehner suggests that Brandt becomes someone else when he “speaks Norwegian with his wife and children at home” (43); Guillaume’s coveted quality time with his son at the airport is revealed to also be a cover for a letter drop (44); Guillaume describes himself returning to visit East Germany “Like a returning ghost . . . eavesdropping on my own absence” (44); Guillaume looks out a train window and thinks of all the different kinds of people he could possibly have been (47); Brandt notes “all the different people you can be” with the women he has affairs with on the train (48); Brandt talks about being Herbert Frahm (his birth name) before changing his name and taking on a different life
while fleeing the Nazis (49); Brandt’s public persona is contrasted with the private one that emerges on the train ride with Guillaume (46-52); Guillaume makes an earnest tribute to Brandt: “May I say, Chief, that working with you has been the best thing that’s ever happened to me, or ever will?” (54); Brandt quotes Walt Whitman’s statement about the self containing “multitudes” (71); Brandt has a conversation with Guillaume about playing different roles when he was briefly a spy, noting that he considers himself to be “Just a suitcase with a series of false bottoms” (72-73); Brandt describes his inner life saying, “Shed my skins, one after another, like a snake” and says that he makes his personal confessions to Guillaume as “Pastor Nobody” (78); when describing the West German public Brandt notes that there is “. . . inside each of us so many more people still, struggling to be heard” (86).

As these statements suggest, while the structure of the play highlights Guillaume’s duality, Brand is also portrayed as a counterpoint to Guillaume’s deception, figuring as a “legitimate” example of contradiction and “multitudes” within any personality because he does not have the same kind of overt division of loyalty between employers. The total effect of these numerous comments is to maintain an inside joke with the audience, establishing an ironic distancing from the dramatic action of the play when used in conjunction with the staging of Guillaume’s duality.

The meta-biographical function of the play is often derived from the observations characters make about themselves and others, with Guillaume playing the primary role as the play’s spy/biographer. In the first few pages of Act One, Kretschmann says to Guillaume, “So there you are in the Palais Schaumburg! What’s it like? I’m blind, I’m deaf. You’re my eyes, you’re my ears. I’ve got to paint the picture for Mischa [Kretschmann’s superior]! You’ve got to paint it for me” (11). When used as a metaphor, painting references Guillaume’s work as a work
of approximation, a work limited to the artist’s perception and abilities, and a work that is ultimately a creative act of depiction, though based on fact.

Later in the play Kretschmann clarifies what he would like Guillaume to provide him when he says, “What Mischa really wants from you, though, is all the things that politicians don’t write down. The gossip. The background. The smell of things. The way they think” (15). In the process of following these orders, Guillaume creates a biographical narrative for Kretschmann while participating in the action of the play at the same time. He is both passive and active in this mode, historical object portrayed by Frayn and the purported narrator of his own experience, creating a meta-biographical, or even meta-autobiographical, layering within the play.

A similar effect is achieved when characters speak from the narrative position of historical-witness. Early in Act One Ehmke and Wilke provide a West German perspective on Brandt’s diplomatic visit to East Germany, describing one of his famous addresses to the public, while Kretschmann provides an East German perspective to his visit (19-20). Later, when Guillaume is traveling with Brandt on a political campaign, he details both the public and private aspects of Brandt’s life on the road as well as his own (45-48). In the last scene of historical-witness in Act One, Ehmke, Guillaume, and Schmidt describe Brandt laying a wreath and kneeling at the monument to the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto (53).

In Act Two, during the last 10 pages of *Democracy*, the narrative position of historical-witness begins to be more of a direct aside to the audience. When Guillaume is arrested, the audience looses Kretschmann as a proxy for the play’s asides, leaving him to speak his thoughts out loud to Kretschmann and Brandt as an imagined audience. Guillaume sets this convention up when he says, “[. . . ] You can guess what I’m doing, too. Reporting to you still! Inside my head.
Telling you everything‖ (82). Soon after, Brandt gives an aside that accounts for his suicidal thoughts in the last days of his tenure, “—If you’re going to fall, where’s the better place to land? In the soft swamp of disgrace, to flounder helplessly on? Or on the hard ground, with all your struggles over? One long moment of terror, and then such . . . such simplicity‖ (82). Similar to the intermixing of narrative positions at the end of Copenhagen, in Democracy these displaced interjections of historical-witness disrupt the dramatic continuity that has been established in the course of the play and, through this disruption, call attention to the proceeding structure of the play as an act of creation.

The narrative position of historical-reminiscence introduces and then concludes the meta-biographical function in Democracy. Guillaume and Kretschmann begin the play in a story telling format, describing the past. At the end of the play they are joined by all of the other characters in the same style of dialogue, presenting an epilogue in which they, like the audience, are aware of the conclusion of the dramatic arc and their role in summarizing their fates.

When combined, the points of stylization in Democracy emphasize a perspectival approach to history. The ambiguity and multiplicity of people’s personalities is overtly examined through contextual arrangements and narrative positions that also create an ironic distancing, while the subjective act of description is highlighted by meta-biographical devices that frame the dramatic action. Both of these factors are constantly portrayed as the product of individual perspective, as the characters appear to have an individualized influence on how history is presented to the audience, stylizing a caveat for biographical understanding.

c. **How Democracy Presents History**

In perhaps the most direct statement on biography in the play, Ehmke laments to Wilke, “Life’s such a tangle Reinhard! Everyone looking at everyone else. Everyone seeing something
different. Everyone trying to guess what everyone else is seeing. It’s such an endless shifting unreliable indecipherable unanalyzable mess!” (75-76). His observation is reminiscent of some of the ideas expressed in Copenhagen, and the two plays share more than just an attitude toward history in common, they also share a similar process by which that attitude toward history is developed.

In both Democracy and Copenhagen, Frayn introduces into the dramatic action what appears to be a simple analogy for understanding history, only to build upon this idea in order to demonstrate a more sophisticated vision of how people’s actions might be interpreted. In Copenhagen, an ironic metaphor is developed between Heisenberg’s intentions for visiting Bohr in Copenhagen and the uncertainty principle for quantum mechanics. Once established, Frayn adds Bohr’s theory of complementarity to expand the seemingly limited view of what can be understood about people’s actions into a mitigation of historical ambiguities through the synthesis of multiple perspectives. Democracy operates in similar fashion: the audience is quickly introduced to a view of Guillaume’s duality through the staging of his conversations with Kretschmann, Brandt’s description of the two Germanies, and the overt description of his situation when he asks aloud “Yes? No? What do I say? Which one of me’s going to answer?” (18). Once this initial conceptualization is established, Frayn uses Guillaume’s counterpart, Brandt, to illustrate how people’s personalities contain multiple sides or selves.

Frayn builds this paradigm through the course of the play with each mention of the characters having more than one side, identity, or personality. In an interview with Albert-Reiner Glaap, Frayn described the themes of the play saying,

... it’s true that each person is a kind of democracy within himself. Just as there are many different possible ways in which any collective of people, society, the
country, the world, the city, the parish might go, so there are many different ways in which an individual human being might go—there are many possibilities inside each of us. Somehow we have to find a way forward, we have to find a way of reconciling our different interests just within ourselves, reconciling our different understandings of the world so that we can act and survive. So each person, in a sense, is a parliamentary democracy, and the same problems arise. That’s really what the play was about. (Frayn in Germany 10).

In Democracy, Brandt attempts to deliver a succinct version of Frayn’s statement when he describes the difficulties with democracy saying, “So many people, with so many different views and so many different voices. And inside each of us so many more people still, struggling to be heard” (86).

The view of human personalities presented in Copenhagen and Democracy appears at first to present a pessimistic view of how people’s intentions and interactions will always have some degree of indeterminacy or concealment. However, when presented in conjunction with the more sophisticated understandings created by theories like complementarity and the idea of multiplicity, Frayn puts forth a method for understanding people’s actions that first asserts, and then seeks complex ways for reducing, indeterminacy. His approach could be said to be optimistic because he is willing to identify the full extent of the problem before seeking out an appropriate solution. Frayn is opposed to limiting the portrayal of other people to the side of their personality that fits a particular theory, allowing instead contradictory aspects to create a more comprehensive, though less definitive, understanding.

Accordingly, the final version of history presented in Democracy puts forth a complex portrayal of the role Guillaume’s discovery played in Brandt’s resignation. Frayn created a
version of these events that emphasizes how Wehner and Schmidt may have used the information about Brandt’s extramarital affairs to pressure him to resign, saying that Guillaume may have compiled a list of the women while also suggesting the possibility of photographs that might be used to blackmail him. However, this spy scandal is not represented with the same kind of causality that is commonly applied to events such as Nixon’s resignation over the Watergate scandal. Frayn emphasizes the spy scandal as a fulcrum of leverage within multiple factors that were making Brandt’s tenure difficult. Throughout Democracy Frayn presents Brandt’s struggles with a declining West German economy, disintegrating coalitions, and his physical and mental health. Brandt even threatens to resign toward the end of Act One, long before Guillaume is discovered.

Frayn asserts a theory for how Guillaume’s discovery led to his resignation when Guillaume describes himself as having been “picked up by Wehner, like a handy lump of wood by a murderer, and used to club Willy down” (90). Yet, Frayn also mitigates the effect of this line with other lines of equal weight. For example, eight pages before Guillaume’s line, Brandt makes his suicidal observation about making a “hard landing” versus a “soft one,” that creates a serious impression of his emotional state. Two pages later, amidst the intense speculation of what Brandt will do, Wehner observes that Brandt is in “two minds about it” (89), indicating that not even Brandt is able to find a clear path through the forces acting upon him. By the end of the play Frayn has presented several competing reasons, both inside and outside the man, defying any strict cause and effect conclusions.

d. Frayn’s Statements on the use of History in Democracy

As in Copenhagen, Frayn includes a thorough postscript in Democracy, not only outlining the intellectual focus of the play’s themes but also presenting an account of how his
play fits within the historical record. Once again, Frayn found himself doing exhaustive research, eventually hiring a dramaturge to assist him in processing the “oceanic” volumes of information related to Brandt and Guillaume (129). He characterizes his use of history in familiar terms, stating that “Any librarian should unhesitatingly file the play under fiction” while at the same time asserting that “this fiction does take its rise from historical record” and that “All the political events referred to are real ones . . .” (105). Further, Frayn claims that “The personalities of the protagonists are very much those attributed to their real counterparts by observers and historians,” a degree of historical accuracy that was not pursued to the same extent in Copenhagen (105).

In an interesting admission, Frayn says that some of the play’s more striking elements were taken from Guillaume’s memoires which he prescribes treating “with a great deal of reserve” (110). This is because they were ghost written by the East German intelligence office for the purpose of propaganda. Some of the details Frayn selected were the ticking of a deathwatch beetle in the rafters that could be heard in Guillaume’s office in the Palais Schaumburg and the story about Guillaume duping one of Brandt’s security agents into transporting copies of classified documents for him (110-111). In the process of disclosing details like these, Frayn makes an effort to set the record straight in his postscript, dividing the events derived from dubious records or an exaggeration of fact from the parts of the play that reflect more verifiable historical documentation. He also discloses important factors he left out, such as Guillaume having more than one controller before Kretschmann (118) and Brandt’s “closest confidant,” Egon Bahr (115).

In an interview with Neal Ascherson for The Observer, Frayn cites Hebbel’s argument for giving each character a legitimate chance to argue their position: “I have tried to allow
Helmut Schmidt his rights, for example” (screen 1). This is the same justification Frayn gave for allowing Heisenberg to appear sympathetic in Copenhagen, and in Democracy he similarly frees Wehner and Schmidt to criticize Brandt in ways that appear to be justified, despite the underhanded way in which they plot behind his back. Like Frayn says of Hitler, “Why should we be asked to endure a representation of his presence if he doesn't offer us some understanding of what was going on inside his head from his own point of view?”

In a line that also echoes Frayn’s justification for his characters in Copenhagen being more forthright than they normally would, Frayn explained to Ascherson,

> . . . in a novel you have access to all the thoughts and feelings of your character. It’s entirely natural that you know what a character is thinking, even when he or she is not speaking. But in a play, all you know about the characters is what they say. I think this reflects our experience of the world. Most of the time you don’t have access to the feelings and thoughts of others, and you have to work them out on the basis of what people do or say. (screen 1)

Given the brief duration between the writing of Copenhagen and Democracy, and the similar complex view and themes about historical interpretation, there is little surprise that Frayn’s statements about taking dramatic license with history are consistent. Further, answering criticism from other scholars regarding his portrayal of history in Copenhagen may have made the author more grounded in his approach.

*e. Criticism from Other Scholars*

Perhaps because Democracy was not as successful on Broadway as it was in London and/or because of the obscure and relatively uncontroversial subject matter of German politics in the 1970’s, the play received hardly any attention from scholars and those that did write about
the play merely commented on the play’s structure and how it developed Frayn’s theme of intra-
personal democracy. The most insightful analysis of how Democracy reflects Frayn’s attitude
toward biographical representation comes from Larissa MacFarquhar’s profile article for The
New Yorker. MacFarquhar characterizes Frayn’s approach to dramatizing historical figures as a
form of courtesy saying, “Speculation about what drives other people and what is wrong with
them is always possible, of course, but it is courteous to assume that such speculation is bound to
be limited and inaccurate” (screen 1). She says that this approach to representing history is
perhaps more “decent” and perhaps “more interesting.”

Though she does not use the term stylization, MacFarquhar later lends evidence to how
Frayn’s sense of courtesy and decency translates into dramatic devices that contribute to a
“polite” ambiguity in his recent history plays. She notes that the context for Copenhagen and
Democracy is deliberately obscured using a “no-time and no-place of narrative description”
(screen 1). She states that in Copenhagen the characters “step out of the action” to narrate to the
audience while in Democracy Frayn takes the process a step further by making dialogue and
narrative “nearly indistinguishable” and with “little sense of conventional scenes—discrete
temporal, geographical, and emotional units.”

Given MacFarquhar’s statements, Frayn’s dramatization of history in Democracy could be
said to be similar to the way that Stoppard avoids presenting a complete historical context in The
Coast of Utopia. The blur of incomplete contexts raises at least as many questions as are
answered, creating points of stylization by maintaining a touch of historical vertigo while the
play races onward, only admitting a few fixed points of reference.
f. Conclusions

Moseley describes Democracy saying, “Ironies and ambiguities exist in history; it is Frayn’s strength to have noticed them, cherished them, and made a play of them” (178). Those ironies and ambiguities form the core of the play’s rhetorical overlays. As a matter of process, Frayn cherishes history’s ironies and ambiguities through a method of stylization that acknowledges them while actively integrating them with the play’s themes. Ironies and ambiguities are also cherished as Frayn expresses their full complexities, refusing to use oversimplified analogies to portray them. He gradually articulates these problems in a way that is appropriately sophisticated: uncertainty is mitigated by complementarity; duality is mitigated by multiplicity. Frayn presents his representations of history while shouldering the limits of representation at the same time, resulting in what might be a described as a polite portrayal of biography because he concedes potential errors or incompleteness.

When viewed as a whole, there is a democratic spirit to Democracy wherein Frayn lets his characters argue their positions while he reveals the multiple sides to their personalities. He not only lets them speak for themselves but also attempts to represent their conflicting sides instead of smoothing them over into something less contradictory. In the process, the author generously arranges his own interpretation while couching his view within a polyphony of factors that speak for themselves. Frayn’s presentation of history might be considered an “open election” because the meta-biographical devices, and staging of character dualities, call attention to the process of selection and interpretation he engages in as an author. This effect is further reinforced by the contextual vertigo created by a blur of non-specific contexts that imply that his story is not complete, that there are other contexts that might have been taken into consideration or were left out for the purpose of dramatic efficiency. Frayn’s audiences are led down a
suggested path of evidence, but still given the opportunity to develop their own interpretations and “vote” accordingly, a situation not unlike the “mess” of democracy described by Brandt in the play.

III. Afterlife: Art and Life as Biographical Artifice

“It seems to me that the theatre’s just a very clear example of what we all do all the time in life—we’re both performing and being in the audience.”

—Michael Frayn (Interview with Edemariam, screen 1)

Frayn’s Afterlife loosely depicts the life of Max Reinhardt by integrating parts of Reinhardt’s personal history with selections from Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s adaptation of The Summoning of Everyman (1911). Reinhardt first presented Hofmannsthal’s Everyman in Salzburg in 1920, returning yearly to direct the play with only a few interruptions until 1938 when the Nazis forced him to flee Europe. Frayn, noticing the ironic connection between Hofmannsthal’s Everyman, a wealthy man who is summoned by Death while in his prime, and Reinhardt, an incredibly successful man who lost nearly all his worldly possessions at the hands of the Nazis (a literal form of death), chose to parallel the loss each suffers—home, friends, and wealth—as they journey toward the end of their lives.

There are some similarities between Frayn’s Afterlife and Stoppard’s Travesties. Both authors borrowed from a dramatic work that their historical characters had been a part of themselves, and made a pastiche of texts and styles from those works in the process of dramatizing their characters’ lives. While Stoppard’s pastiche largely draws attention to the inaccuracy of memory, the stylizations in Afterlife illustrate a caveat for biographical
representations by examining how the play’s historical characters make an “art” of their lives through theatrical means. Through these rhetorical overlays, Frayn establishes an ironic distancing from his subject that highlights a complex paradox: that people can only be recognized and judged by the roles that they, and others, chose for themselves while at the same time these roles do not necessarily reveal a true, unalloyed, biographical self.

a. Form

Afterlife portrays Reinhardt’s life from roughly 1920, at the start of the Salzburg festival, to his death in 1943. Born in 1873 as Max Goldmann, he adopted Reinhardt as a stage name. In the course of his active career he made significant contributions toward establishing the role of the director as the central conceptual force in theatrical production. He is known for introducing controversial plays such as Wedekind’s *Spring Awakening* (1906) while also playing to the masses by creating productions with incredible resources, including a staging of Vollmöller’s *The Miracle* (1911) in Vienna that had a cast of 1,500. Reinhardt purchased the Deutsches Theater in Berlin which soon became a prominent center of European culture under his care. He was also exceptionally wealthy—thanks to the help of his brother who managed his finances—owning residences in some of the world’s most exclusive locals: a wing of the Bellevue Palace where the former German Crown Prince lived, an apartment in the Hofburg residence of the former Austrian Emperor, and the Schloss Leopoldskron, where a majority of Afterlife takes place (and portions of *The Sound of Music* (1965) were filmed). The combination of his financial position and Jewish heritage made him a prominent target for the Nazis and he was forced to flee Germany during World War II, spending the rest of his life as a (relatively) impoverished exile.
Afterlife’s form is organized into a two act structure while the episodic dramatic action and the loosely defined temporality are continuous in a way similar to a medieval morality play. The chronological period of events spans roughly from The Prince Archbishop’s agreement to host Reinhardt’s production of Everyman on the cathedral grounds in 1920 to Reinhardt’s death in 1943. No dates are given to indicate when the events take place and the play freely transitions between night, day, months, years, and different locations. The context of Afterlife, like Everyman, is dedicated toward putting Reinhardt on display, rather than dramatizing conflicts.

Act One begins with Reinhardt proposing his production of Everyman to The Prince Archbishop in front of the cathedral while all of the other characters in the cast witness or participate in some capacity. Throughout this act Reinhardt is seen tending to the production of Everyman, ignoring Kommer’s financial advice, and furnishing Leopoldskron, with the end of the act occurring just before a banquet is held for potential investors. Announcing intermission, Reinhardt bids the audience to take a “well-earned twenty-minute break” (50).

Act Two begins with a continuation of the end of Act One when Reinhardt and his staff are joined by his guests. During this act the end of Reinhardt’s good fortune is foreshadowed by conversations related to the political climate in Germany and Austria while at the same time the whirlwind of Reinhardt’s professional life and the idiosyncrasies of his personal life are depicted. Meanwhile, the cycle of the seasons and the yearly productions of Everyman continue: through the years Reinhardt is finally granted a divorce from his first wife, Leopoldskron is bombed in a terror attack, he quarrels with his assistant Kommer, and several acquaintances die as Death whispers offstage. Afterlife ends with Reinhardt’s death in the United States and concludes with an epilogue that sums the dramatic action and themes of the play.
Frayn’s pastiche of *Everyman* is layered over Reinhardt’s life in *Afterlife* with the characters often speaking selections of Frayn’s translation of Hofmannsthal’s *Everyman* or speaking in an “*Everyman*-like” verse. These lines are based on what Frayn describes as a “fairly free” translation of Hofmannsthal’s text (113). Characters perform parts of *Everyman* for each other, interject quotations into prose conversations, and make up rhyming verse to speak when using the themes and/or the style of *Everyman* to make a point.

The characters in *Afterlife* are more psychologically nuanced in comparison with the characters in *Everyman*. This nuance is not derived from psychological realism but rather developed through the less constrained, and more detail oriented, use of prose dialogue. Just as *Everyman* is largely expository, dramatizing Everyman’s life in a kind of perpetual exposition, the majority of the dialogue in *Afterlife* is dedicated to creating a theatricalized portrait of Reinhardt. The most extensive dramatic conflict occurs between Reinhardt and two other characters: Kommer and Müller. Reinhardt has multiple arguments with Kommer about money, but these interactions mainly serve as a means of depicting the extent of, and the absurd way he managed, his wealth. Müller is a disgruntled citizen of Salzburg who, though he does not have much direct conflict with Reinhardt, offers stern and sometimes justified criticism of the director. Unlike Kommer, Müller is a contemptible figure because of his expressed anti-Semitism.

The cast of characters complements Frayn’s use of pastiche, blending historical characters with pseudo-historical, pseudo-fictional, and fictional characters. The historical characters include: Reinhardt; Reinhardt’s personal assistant, Gusti Adler; The Prince Archbishop of Salzburg; Reinhardt’s executive assistant, Rudolf Kommer; and Reinhardt’s mistress/wife, Helene Thimig. The broader scope of the historical persons’ personalities is drawn mostly from memoirs and autobiographical writings (*Afterlife* 107-111).
There is one pseudo-historical character that is historically based but has been altered for dramatic effect. The character Franz has what Frayn calls “a slightly more oblique relationship to reality,” because the real Franz died in the 1930’s. Reinhardt hired another valet named Paul who was with him when he went to the United States (working for practically nothing) but in order to make the situation less complicated Frayn explains that he let Franz continue on as Reinhardt’s valet through the end of the play (*Afterlife* 111-112).

*Afterlife*’s pseudo-fictional character, Friedrich Müller—Reinhardt’s poor Salzburg neighbor turned Nazi—is a character that has some similarities to a historical person. He is loosely based on Friedrich Rainer, a man who shared the political and anti-Semitic views that Müller expresses, eventually becoming a Nazi. Frayn changed the name because of the similarity to Reinhardt’s and the fact that Rainer was not from Salzburg, nor was he the person who extended the offer of Aryanization to Reinhart on behalf of Hitler, though he did occupy Leopoldskron after the Nazis expropriated it, as Müller does in the play (112). (Frayn states that both Adler and Thimig asserted in their memoirs that one of the actors who played Death in *Everyman* was the one to extend this offer (112)).

The play’s fictional characters are Thomas, Joseph, Gretl, and Liesl. These characters play several different “roles” in *Afterlife* including actors, servants, Nazis, and exiles. Frayn also borrows Death as a character from *Everyman*, serving the same allegorical function (this will be described later in more detail).

The characters and plot are integrated with the mixed styles of dialogue in a way that highlights the parallels between Reinhardt and Everyman’s lives. Frayn notes that Reinhardt and Everyman are both wealthy and obvious choices as “targets of retribution” (*Afterlife* 104). He compares his “Everyman” in *Afterlife* with Hofmannsthal’s saying,
He lives in a grand house, and receives his unexpected summons during the course of a sumptuous banquet he is giving for his mistress and troops of friends. (He even seems to have some of Reinhardt’s social inhibitions—his mistress has to urge him to join his guests.) (104)

Reinhart is, in fact, “summoned” by Death in *Afterlife* (19-22), though unlike *Everyman* the summoning occurs more than two decades before the protagonist’s death. Yet, the effect of Death’s summons is not diluted by the perceived passage of time because Reinhardt is shown returning yearly to produce *Everyman* in the spring, reinforcing the strength of his ironic connection to the play while the seasonal nature of these returns contributes to the poetic analogy Frayn draws between Reinhardt’s life, Everyman, and inevitability life and death.

This is not to imply that Frayn strictly follows Hofmannsthal’s adaptation. Instead Frayn admits that he was “pretty cavalier” with the plot points he chose to emulate, “taking only what suits my purposes, occasionally slightly changing the order of events, and skipping completely the sections dealing with Everyman’s redemption” (*Afterlife* 113). The general similarity is that both characters die after journeying through a retrospective of their lives, losing the wealth and friendships that had given their lives comfort and meaning. They differ in that for Everyman the dramatic interest lies in whether or not he will be redeemed while for Reinhardt any sense of drama lies in the depiction of his lavish lifestyle in connection with his failure to recognize the forces leading to his downfall.

The Reinhardt/Everyman parallel is not the only one Frayn dramatizes in *Afterlife*. At one point or another most of the characters in *Afterlife*, including The Prince Archbishop, are seen performing text from *Everyman*. Some of them are also made to function as parallel
characters and/or allegorical characters, further emphasizing the similarities Frayn sees between Everyman and Reinhardt’s lives. These characters are Müller, Kommer, Thimig, and Adler.

In the first scene at Leopoldskron Reinhardt is seen reciting *Everyman* again for The Prince Archbishop and when he asks someone to help him by playing Poor Neighbor, Müller volunteers. Müller is, in fact, a poor citizen of Salzburg and in playing the scene with Reinhardt he is playing a character asking for money while also asking for money from Reinhardt at the same time. When Reinhardt, as Everyman, starts to give Müller a coin he abruptly changes his mind, choosing instead to put the money toward his “pleasure garden”/the garden a Leopoldskron. The rebuttal of Poor Neighbor’s request by Everyman and the rebuttal of Müller by Reinhardt are given for the exact same purpose and reasoning.

Kommer, who becomes Reinhardt’s chief financial manager after Reinhardt’s brother dies, takes on a more allegorical characterization toward the end of play as Mammon. After returning to Salzburg sometime after he and Thimig have wed, Reinhardt prepares to direct *Everyman*, asking to rehearse a scene between Everyman and Mammon. Kommer is asked to fill in for the missing actor who was scheduled to play Mammon by stepping into a trunk (62-63). When the trunk closes, Kommer is not seen again in *Afterlife* until the time arrives for the expropriation of Reinhardt’s estate and the dissolution of his relationship with Kommer. Reinhardt is seen preparing to escape Austria when “the trunk springs open” and “Kommer, as Mammon rises from it.” With Reinhardt speaking Everyman’s lines and Kommer speaking Mammon’s, the two men part ways while simultaneously dramatizing Mammon’s abandonment of Everyman, an event that also signifies the impending loss of Leopoldskron (71-72).

Frayn’s Thimig plays two different roles from *Everyman*, one parallel and the other allegorical. Thimig is introduced early in *Afterlife* as the actress who will be playing Everyman’s
Mistress, a role she also played in her relationship with Reinhardt. Her dual purpose as "mistress" is demonstrated when the nature of her relationship with Reinhardt is revealed immediately after he is seen telling Müller, as Poor Neighbor, that he cannot give him money because he has to use it for a pleasure garden for his mistress (13). This connection is further emphasized five pages later when she and Reinhardt perform a scene between Everyman and Everyman’s Mistress at one of Reinhardt’s banquets (18).

Later, Thimig and Adler are portrayed as parallel embodiments of two of Everyman’s allegorical characters. In the middle of Act One Thimig is seen backstage watching the inaugural performance of Everyman, mouthing the words spoken by an offstage actress who is playing Faith. Meanwhile, Alder is seen doing the same for Works while Reinhardt mouths the words of Everyman (31-32). This is a pointed moment where Frayn calls for only these three characters to remain lit while the rest of the stage is dark. At the end of the play, during Reinhardt’s death, these three characters are seen together again in a similar mode, this time speaking the same words for themselves (84-85). Though the depiction of Reinhardt in Afterlife is not one of redemption (nor of condemnation), Thimig as Faith, and Alder as Works, appear to at least be a source of comfort because they are Reinhardt’s longest standing, and perhaps most intimate, personal relationships at the time of his passing.

The last, but perhaps most dramatically striking form of character borrowing from Everyman is Death, who speaks translated lines of Hofmannsthal’s text. Death is first introduced as a character while Reinhardt and Thimig are performing a scene between Everyman and Everyman’s Mistress, joining them mid-scene (20-22). Death “vanishes” leaving everyone curious as to who was playing him. Franz is left alone on stage, saying pointedly, “I saw his eyes, 'Twas Death himself” (23). Death’s next appearance is at the end of Act One, joining in the
“full-scale minuet” that Reinhardt is directing (50). Throughout Afterlife, most of Death’s “appearances” are offstage with Death whispering “Everyman, Everyman” just before someone dies: Reinhardt’s brother (37); The Prince Archbishop (64-65); and Kommer (82). Death, as an independent character, appears onstage twice at the end of the play, exchanging dialogue from Everyman with Reinhardt as he dies (83) and then reemerging in the epilogue “alive and well” (88).

In each of the examples above, Frayn at one point uses dialogue from Everyman as dialogue that furthers the plot of Afterlife. He borrows sections that portray Everyman’s interactions with Poor Neighbor, Everyman’s Mistress, Mammon, Death, Faith, and Works in a way that tells Everyman’s story as well as Reinhardt’s. The two contexts are maintained in a parallel structure and the effects of the character dualities are furthered by less pointed events, such as when The Prince Archbishop reads God’s lines from Everyman shortly before he is described as “playing God” because he has the power to decide whether or not to permit Reinhardt to present Everyman on the cathedral grounds (7-8). This momentary comparison helps to supplement the more emphatic ones that Frayn makes throughout the play.

Like Copenhagen and Democracy, Frayn uses more than one narrative position in Afterlife, though the majority of the dialogue occurs in the contemporary experience of the play. The other two narrative positions are a version of historical-witness similar to that used in Democracy and a basic direct address to the audience. Historical-witness is used in four different scenes featuring a combination of Alder, Kommer, Reinhardt, and/or Thimig as they describe the changing seasons and Reinhardt’s activities between the yearly festivals in Salzburg:

ADLER. The season’s over. They’ve broken up the stage.

THIMIG. Just you and me, creeping around an empty house.
ADLER. The leaves are falling.

THIMIG. Autumn . . . Winter . . .

ADLER. Snow on the mountains . . . Snow hiding the garden . . .

THIMIG. […] Where’s it all gone Gusti? All the rush, all the long days and late nights? All the exhaustion?

ADLER. It’s moving around the world with Reinhardt.


ADLER. Plays . . . Operas . . . All over the world they want him, Helene! You never see him! (33)

Adler and Thimig are engaged in dialogue, but only loosely, as they present a poetic and efficient description of the passage of time. Eventually these scenes of historical-witness begin to describe the passing of years and the deterioration of Reinhardt’s finances (57) along with other details such as his exorbitant traveling preparations and events in his personal life such as his divorce (61).

Frayn uses direct addresses to the audience twice in Afterlife. At the end of Act One Reinhardt finishes rehearsing his “cast” of servants for a banquet and then announces intermission directly to the audience while appearing to comment on an audience member’s appearance: “The lady there . . . Your wig’s not straight” (50). Act Two ends with a verse epilogue that Kommer begins by saying, “Our play is ended, as plays must, and Everyman is turned to dust” (85). The play’s action and the themes are revisited in this epilogue along with an abbreviated admonition of dramatic license taken with the historical characters.
b. **Stylization**

As the description of *Afterlife*’s form implies, the majority of the play is dominated by an overt theatricality that ironically calls attention to Frayn’s analogous treatment of Reinhardt’s life with the text of *Everyman*. The stylizations in *Afterlife* also present rhetorical overlays that illustrate an ontological understanding of human nature by demonstrating how people are “theatricalized” in the course of living their lives through sociopolitical contexts and the choices that they make. Frayn uses stylization to facilitate this process by first establishing a meta-theatrical context and then, through that context, depicting the interrelation between art and life.

Frayn sets two stages at once at the beginning of *Afterlife* in order to immediately draw attention to his themes. The first lines of *Afterlife* are the first lines of *Everyman*, delivered by Reinhardt as he recites the prologue: “Draw near, good people all, I pray!” (3). Reinhardt is speaking these lines while presenting his concept for the Salzburg festival to The Prince Archbishop and as he continues his presentation he delivers exposition for both *Afterlife* and *Everyman* in the process, setting up each as he introduces the characters in, and context of, both plays.

Yet, Reinhardt is more than a vehicle for prologue; he also appears to be in full command of the design elements of both plays. In his review of *Afterlife*, Ben Brantley states that the designers “made it seem as if Mr. Allam [the actor playing Reinhardt] himself summons into being the grand flight of cathedral stairs he descends” (screen 1). Reinhardt begins to demonstrate his vision for how *Everyman* will be staged saying, “. . . we shall do it as simply and naturally as children do in their games. No sound effects. Only the cathedral bells. Only the distant sound of traffic in the streets. Only the whirr of pigeon wings . . .” (6). With these cues, Frayn calls for the appropriate sound to follow as if they are manifesting at Reinhardt’s
command. When Reinhardt speaks of “afternoon sunlight” Frayn indicates that “The sunlight comes and goes” (7). Frayn’s intertextual and meta-theatrical setup is completed when Reinhardt describes Everyman’s house using the text from Everyman while Liesl and Gretl begin to “set a few costly furnishings” (9). The Prince Archbishop is so impressed by the change of scenery that he exclaims to Reinhardt, “This house you have conjured up, Herr Reinhardt . . . It looks remarkably like your own house!” (9). Reinhardt’s setting of Everyman’s home becomes Frayn’s setting of Reinhardt’s home at Leopoldskron when Kommer replies, “It is [Frayn’s emphasis] his own house!” (10).

These devices are given a pronounced meaning in Afterlife because Frayn follows a similar rhetorical structure to the ones he uses in Copenhagen and Democracy: the central protagonist revealing an expression of the play’s themes early in the first act and in conjunction with the other methods of stylization. Once his proposed staging of Everyman has suddenly transitioned to Leopoldskron, Reinhardt describes his passion for living life as a theatrical production, telling The Prince Archbishop,

I have a passion for the baroque, Your Grace. The baroque is an extension of the theatre into the everyday world. And that is what I have devoted my career to—breaking down the barriers between the actual and the imagined. Between art and life, between theatre and audience. (11)

The baroque style echoes not just Reinhardt’s enjoyment of aesthetics, but a philosophy of integrating a heightened poetic vision into the world itself, unifying the two in a theatrical design. For baroque art this is a religious endeavor, endowing the physical world with the magnitude and intricacy of divine creation. Reinhardt adopts the theatrical nature of this aesthetic
because the baroque style is a particularly potent demonstration of the crossover between art and life.

Frayn continues to develop these themes throughout the play: Reinhardt describes his career saying, “It’s where I have spent my life. In the border lands between the hard light of day and the ghosts of the night. Smuggling whatever I could across the uncertain frontier between reality and dream” (14); Kommer tells The Prince Archbishop of his love of Catholicism saying that aspects of the religion are “pure theatre” and that the two men are “in the same line of business” (14); Reinhardt later expands his notions to a nearly theological position when he says, “God created the world. But man, whom He created in His image, has created a second world in His turn. The world of art” (17); Hitler is described by The Prince Archbishop as crossing “the uncertain frontier between reality and dream” when ignoring the boundaries between nations that are drawn on a map and, by implication, the general “script” of mores that condemn mass murder (64); and Reinhardt reiterates his life’s work just before dying when he speaks in verse saying, “I tried as long as I drew breath, to melt the frontiers between, the world we know, the world we dream, the things we are, the things we could be—” (84). These statements combine with the stylizations to depict how the world is often theatricalized, from the relatively trivial task of decorating a home, to the creation of a persona, to the development of sociopolitical movements, to the cosmic placement of human beings within the universe.

The worlds of art and life, dream and reality, are linked through two different plays-within-play in Afterlife. The first, of course, is Everyman which, as art, reflects life. The second production is a banquet held to raise money in which life reflects art. The end of Act One depicts Reinhardt and his servants in rehearsal while the beginning of Act Two resumes with the “performance” of the banquet in progress. In both of the productions the actual performances
occur offstage with Reinhardt and others looking on in the audience, aware—in the same way of Frayn’s audience—of both the artifice and the reality that each represents.

In the process of staging Reinhardt’s productions, Frayn’s characters are seen playing different roles themselves, a trend that continues through the rest of Afterlife. Reinhardt is seen playing Everyman and God, Kommer plays Mammon, Thimig plays Everyman’s Mistress and Faith, The Prince Archbishop plays God, Müller plays Poor Neighbor and Death, Alder plays Works, Thomas plays a young Reinhardt while Liesl plays Reinhardt’s mother, Joseph plays Everyman, and Liesl and Gretl are heard offstage performing as Faith and Works.

The characters are also seen playing different roles as people: Reinhardt plays the role of director, actor, and banquet host; Kommer plays the part of Reinhardt’s brother by managing Reinhardt’s finances after his unexpected death; Thimig plays the role of mistress and then wife to Reinhardt; The Prince Archbishop plays the roles of royalty and religious official; Müller plays the roles of impoverished citizen, political party member, and then Nazi; and Thomas, Joseph, Liesl, and Gretl each play the roles of actor, servant, Nazi, and exile.

The connection between theatre and life is frequently the subject of dialogue in Afterlife, with the characters either casting themselves or others into roles: The Prince Archbishop is offered a chance to forge an identity through a legacy derived from hosting the Salzburg production of Everyman (10); Müller notes that Franz once served a transvestite Archduke and now serves “Herr Goldmann” by dressing “a bankrupt corsetmaker’s son up as a gentleman” (15-16); Kommer says he cannot decide whether Reinhardt’s foolishness with money is due to him being truly “feeble-minded” or if it is feigned as an “imposter” (36); Kommer describes the wealthy guests at Reinhardt’s banquet as “a better class of extra than he has ever had on stage before” (51); Thimig tells Reinhardt he must join the banquet and “play his part” while
Reinhardt contends that he is playing his part as a member of the audience (53); Kommer declares that he is “directing” Reinhardt, while telling him what kind of “character” to play at the banquet (54-55); Reinhardt insists on maintaining his public image by changing into a suit to meet The Prince Archbishop shortly after a bomb is detonated in his home (63); The Prince Archbishop points out how Thimig’s role in Leopoldskron has changed from “whore” to “wife” (66); Reinhardt is offered a new part in society as an Aryan in Hitler’s Germany (68); Müller arrives to expropriate Leopoldskron saying in verse, “The old show ends, the new one starts, with different management and cast” and that, “One character, though, will remain. . . our new star, Death, awaits his cue” (73); and, Reinhardt, looking to “find what the [Los Angeles movie] studios want,” is seen attempting to cast himself in a new role in exile (74-79).

In what may be the most striking point of stylization in Afterlife, Frayn joins all the meta-theatrical elements mentioned above in a kind of biographical-play-within-a-biographical-play. At the beginning of Act Two Reinhardt recalls his first role in the theatre as an audience member, noting how he was transported to a different life while watching the fate of kings and queens on stage as a young man. He then narrates a flashback that describes his younger self crossing worlds by going from the exit of a theatre, through the city, and into the impoverished home in which he grew up (54-55). Reinhardt asks, “So where do I live? Down there, or the Palace of Elsinore? With a bankrupt corsetmaker and five hungry brothers and sisters in Vienna? Or with Agamemnon in Argos, with Tamburlaine in Persepolis?” (55). Reinhardt’s world is both the perception of poetry and the dearth of physical reality, both conspiring to define his inner life which, in turn, guides his actions as a person. If the banquet is considered a “play,” then this biography play that Reinhardt narrates compounds the play-within-a-play structure threefold. In this moment Frayn demonstrates not just the dual roles art and life play in creating realities, but
how life, or the self, is a kind of compound theatricalization with many “plays” and “roles” being played out simultaneously, some invented by their players and some prescribed by sociopolitical contexts.

c. How Afterlife Presents History

The ontological observations in Afterlife have implications for the epistemological processes related to biographical representation. If the outward expression of people’s lives is the result of a theatricalization of the self, then biography, as another form of theatrical creation, depicts the life of a historical person in a kind of compound play-within-a-play situation not unlike the flashback to Reinhardt’s youth in Afterlife, with the mind of biographer being the third compounding factor. Does biography break down the barrier between art and life? Or does it merely reflect a complex relationship between the two by combining them? Frayn appears to cast a vote in favor of the latter during Afterlife’s epilogue:

PRINCE ARCHBISHOP. Well, here we stand, one last faint trace.

THIMIG. We’re only matchstick men, you say . . .

ADLER. Mere scarecrows stuffed with musty hay . . .

KOMMER. A grinning turnip for a head . . .

PRINCE ARCHBISHOP. Tricked out with words we never said . . .

FRANZ. A tinsel touch of ragged rhyme . . .

REINHARDT. Bare shreds left by the winds of time . . .

THIMIG. Mere made up things, mere Everymen . . .

ADLER. Like Everyman himself.

KOMMER. But then, whate’er our faults, whate’er our merit, We are the world that you inherit. (88-89)
Frayn is certainly not equating his historical characters directly with biography, though as “bare shreds left by the winds of time,” this biographical history play and biographies have something in common in that what is rendered through historical fact and the imagination is “the world that [we] inherit.” Afterlife, like Everyman, asserts that a person is what remains after the theatrical/worldly trappings have been left behind: the accumulation of their works/actions. Yet the theatrical trappings still reverberate and affect the way those actions are defined. The act of characterizing anyone’s life is inevitably bound in the complimentary and contradictory ways that art and life reflect each other.

Frayn also presents a second complex perspective of biography through the conflict between Reinhardt and his primary antagonist, Müller. Reinhardt’s life, from his tailored suits, his banquets, and his palatial estates are all depicted as an extension of his effort to break down the barrier between art and life while Müller, an impoverished man who does not have the financial means to cast himself into the role he desires, is forced to seize opportunities to play out roles in sociopolitical scripts provided by other people.

While Müller is a hybrid of a historical person and a fictional character, in the course of the play, he is also a hybrid of the person he turned out to be and the person he might have become if circumstances had been different. When Müller is first introduced in Afterlife he is visiting Reinhardt’s house and asks to read the part of Poor Neighbor. Müller appears to be prejudiced against Reinhardt but his feelings are exacerbated when Reinhardt refuses to give him financial assistance. Later in this series of scenes, Müller has conversation with Franz in which he reveals his anti-Semitic and classist beliefs, pointing out how people in Salzburg are out of work and starving while Reinhardt lives in his resplendent palace (15-17). Though Reinhardt denied Müller money, he appears to have given him something else that he wanted: Reinhardt’s
refusal is confirmation of Müller’s negative feelings toward him and an excuse to define himself in opposition to the rich man.

Müller is next seen in dialogue at the beginning of Act Two during Reinhardt’s banquet. The Prince Archbishop remarks that Müller and his friends are now “prominent in local politics,” indicating that Müller has found an outlet for his discontent. Müller reiterates his anti-Semitic and “proletariat” views saying that if it were up to his political party members “We’d have you and Herr Goldmann out on the street as fast as God does Everyman” (52). Müller’s observations are more sophisticated in this conversation, as he points out the irony that only the rich, who do not relinquish their wealth, can afford to see the play—as if he is following a sociopolitical “text” when expressing these views.

In Müller’s next two appearances he has finally earned the enfranchised role he desired. Entering on behalf of Hitler, he is given the repulsive distinction of offering Reinhardt the opportunity to be “reborn” as an Aryan, essentially giving Reinhardt the chance to be recast into the sociopolitical system of which Müller is now apart (67). This moment of Müller’s continuing transformation is made particularly meta-theatrical because at the beginning of this scene he enters wearing the costume mask of Death and reciting Death’s lines. By entering as Death, Müller is signaled as having gone from playing powerless Poor Neighbor to becoming someone else with far greater potency. Reinhardt refuses Müller’s offer and then five pages later Müller appears again, this time wearing a Nazi uniform, declaring that Leopoldskron is being expropriated (72-74). In the process, Müller completes his theatrical metamorphosis, wearing the appropriate costume for the empowered role he sought.

Was Müller destined to be a Nazi? At first glance, Frayn does not appear to judge him with sympathy, having Reinhardt cue his hanging at the end of the play (87). (Frayn notes that
Müller’s historical counterpart, Rainer, was hung in 1947 (Afterlife 112)). However, in the process of this hanging Müller is only referred to by Reinhardt as “Death,” and because he is wearing a Nazi uniform and the Nazi party is alluded to earlier in the play as a manifestation of Death as a character (66-67), the hanging might instead be considered a condemnation of the Nazis as a whole, not Müller as the inevitable villain of the play.

The other significant argument for Müller’s potential mutability is that, in the process of representing this character, Frayn permits him to make valid arguments in the Hebbel-like tradition. Despite being an anti-Semite, Müller makes credible criticisms of Reinhardt’s spending habits, and without these judgments the parallel between Reinhardt and Everyman’s lives would lose poignancy. For example, at the end of his first scene Müller exits while grabbing a plate of food saying, “The children in town might like something to eat . . .” (17), contrasting hungry children with the decadence of Reinhardt’s baroque renovations at Leopoldskron. In these brief moments, whether Müller is demonstrating a capacity for empathy or simply leveling a politically charged insult, his accusations against Reinhardt present a substantial criticism.

When Müller shows up at the end of the play to confiscate Reinhardt’s home, his final presence in the house conjures the question: What if Reinhardt had given him and the starving children assistance? Would both men have turned out to be other people instead? When Müller was playing Poor Neighbor, Reinhardt seems to have missed an opportunity to provide him with another script, or role, making him a different kind of neighbor. Instead, Müller finds empowerment by finding a text of his own, casting himself in a new role and eventually adopting a highly theatrical expression of identity as a Nazi.

Through Müller, Frayn hints at more than just the possibility of another self, but at how those other selves are formed, via other texts (e.g. education, political dogma, and religion) and
theatrical dressings such as military uniforms, that conspired to create his “character.” If this point of view is taken as a given, then the converse of the Müller/Reinhardt relationship must also be true: Müller, in developing his interpretations of Reinhardt’s actions, is shown placing him into a “text” that bridges reality and dream. The paradigm in which Müller and everyone else views the world is also one of the imagination, derived from assumptions of motives, goals, and intentions. Some of Müller’s criticism about Reinhardt’s use of wealth might be valid, though his perception of his guilt is also guided by the irrationality of racism. Conversely, Reinhardt’s allies appreciate Reinhardt’s humanist achievements in the arts while their gaze overlooks the downside to his materialism.

Based on the way Frayn slants his depiction, the audience is likely to not condemn Reinhardt as Müller does, yet he does not escape without being tainted (the ungrateful way Reinhardt treats his assistant, Kommer, is another point of levied against him). Along these lines Frayn notes,

Reinhardt himself certainly didn’t change his lifestyle. Is that a criticism of the play? Of the production? Of Reinhardt? He may of course have felt if the Deutsches Theater and Everyman counted for anything, his record of Works was strong enough to counterbalance quite a lot of champagne and cigars.” (Afterlife 107)

Frayn’s final interpretation of Reinhardt’s life reflects the complex portrayal of how art and life blend to create reality. The theatricalization of art, life, and judgment are woven together to present a paradoxical view of biographical representation.
d. Frayn’s Statements on the Use of History in Afterlife

In keeping with Copenhagen and Democracy, Frayn includes a postscript in Afterlife that relates a more accurate history of his subject while also disclosing the departures he made from historical record, relating his reasoning behind the way he chose to dramatize the lives of his characters in the process. In comparing Afterlife with his other recent biographical history plays Frayn states,

My play, like two earlier ones of mine, Copenhagen and Democracy, is based on the historical record, but perhaps rather more freely than they were. . . . Most the ideas that he [Reinhardt] expresses in the play are drawn from what he wrote, but I have not even begun to do justice to the depth of his intelligence or the breadth of his culture. The external events of his life—his difficulties with local philistines and anti-Semitics, the attacks on his house (and on The Prince Archbishop), his expropriation and exile—are drawn from the record. (Afterlife 108)

Essentially, Afterlife is similar to Copenhagen and Democracy in that all three are fact based while Frayn takes liberties with the dramatization of personalities and private conversations. Afterlife, however, is more limited in scope, and less historically accurate due to Frayn’s dramatic pastiche of the Everyman/Reinhardt parallels.

Frayn’s philosophies about representing historical subjects in the theatre appear to have remained similar to those previously documented in this chapter. Indeterminacy is at the heart of all of his recent biographical dramatizations and in Afterlife Frayn presents the source of these indeterminacies through the interrelation between art and life. Indeterminacy also appears to serve as a justification for the use of dramatic license when representing Reinhardt’s life: “. . . it
is true that in any human being it is difficult to make a distinction between the man himself and his outward expression in deeds and way of being” (Afterlife 102). He says this is made even more complicated by Reinhardt’s personality because “In Reinhardt’s case, though, the inner source of all that energy, achievement and display seems particularly elusive” (102). Frayn bases this argument on statements made by people who knew Reinhardt, such as his long time associate Heinz Herald, the playwright Hermann Bahr, and Reinhardt’s son, Gottfried: all described of him as a remote person who did not feel comfortable with interpersonal interactions unless they were directed toward stage work. Based on these observations, Frayn chose to represent Reinhardt through an openly theatrical process that, while preserving the indeterminacy of his personality, perhaps indirectly represents some of the processes Reinhardt used to remain ambiguous during the course of his life.

e. Criticism from Other Scholars

In the introduction to his second volume of collected plays, Frayn states that plays fall into two “fundamental categories” saying, “they are all hits or flops” (vii). Afterlife happened to be the latter, with most critics saying that they were entertained by the meta-theatrical moments in the first third of the play but that there was not enough dramatic action to sustain interest throughout the performance. Frayn’s examination of the play’s themes is more complicated than the beginning of the play suggests, yet the impression of the play as a whole appears to remain oversimplified. This may be due to the fact that while Frayn compounds his representations of the intersection of art and life in increasingly sophisticated ways, the characters ultimately remain as presentational as the allegorical characters from Everyman. The lack of psychological depth belies the more intricate workings of the play, making the emotional arc appear to be a static rendering that subtracts from, rather than assists, the development of Frayn’s intellectual
perspectives. As Brantley observes, “. . . the concept is so dominant that you get the Mystery of Life, in big letters, but not the everyday mystery of life, that marvelous, specific sense of human ambiguity with which Copenhagen and Democracy were so invested” (screen 1).

Perhaps as a result of Afterlife’s poor reception, there are apparently no scholarly critiques of the play published in journals or books at the time of the writing of this dissertation. Sam Marlowe of The Times was one of the few critics who recommend the play, appreciating what Frayn was attempting to achieve saying that Afterlife “presents not merely a notion of art reflecting life, but multiple mirrors reflecting back and forth an infinity of possibilities” (screen 1). Paradoxically, other scholars have so far ignored the possibilities presented by Afterlife for critical discourse. Marlowe is one of a few theatre critics who identified the complexity of Frayn’s themes, though no one has gone so far as to explicate these ideas in greater detail.

f. Conclusions

Afterlife is easily the least historical of Frayn’s recent biographical history plays, with the author introducing a greater amount of dramatic license in order to exploit themes related to theatricality. Frayn uses a pastiche of Everyman to create rhetorical overlays that examine Reinhardt’s life on three fronts: 1), the ironic analogy between Reinhardt’s life and the life of Everyman; 2), the meta-theatrical intersection between art and life; and 3), the way the “theatre” of daily life introduces indeterminacy into the interpretation of other peoples actions. This is accomplished through stylizations that use parallel plot structures and characters with Everyman along with intertextual and meta-theatrical devices that exploit the style and text of Hofmannsthal’s translation to maintain an ironic distancing within the dramatic action.

Once again, Frayn demonstrates a perspectival approach to biographical representation, this time dramatizing the forces that alter perspectives rather than using multiple perspectives as
he does in *Copenhagen* and *Democracy*. Scenes like Reinhardt’s flashback to his youth both dramatize the past while the dialogue calls into question the nature of the past: Was Reinhardt’s imaginary life on stage more or less real than the impoverished life he led with his family? Frayn reinforces the dramatic demonstrations of these ideas throughout the play as his characters discuss the different kinds of personal and professional roles they play while playing them at the same time.

The final vision of history presented in *Afterlife* is one that highlights the necessity of acknowledging the role art/theatre plays in shaping how a life is lived and how a life is understood. Historical facts require the assistance of the imagination to characterize motivations, just as someone’s life requires some kind of art, even the most fundamental arrangements of language, to be described. The interrelation between art and life not only appears to be inevitable but also could be said to condition biographical representation because they are not completely distinguishable from each other. Biography is perhaps best served when the author embraces the indeterminacy created by someone’s theatrical nature rather than finding a way to eliminate contradictions and uncertainties, making the portrayal of the art within the person’s life a central element.

IV. Frayn Chapter Conclusions: Biography, Philosophy, Indeterminacy, and Perspective

“We come back once again to the unresolvable paradox at the heart of all philosophy—perhaps of all human thought. The universe plainly exists independently of human consciousness; but what can ever be said about it that has not been mediated through that consciousness? . . . We give it its existence and its form retrospectively, by projecting our thoughts back upon it, exactly as we project them back upon the vanished events of yesterday, or forward to the still
unsubstantiated events of tomorrow, or for that matter outwards to all the parts of the universe that are beyond our immediate purview, from the inside of the house next door to the remotest galaxies.”

—Michael Frayn  (The Human Touch 418-419)

Frayn views the human encounter with the universe as a construction of thought and language that gives all aspects of observable phenomena meaning. These constructions might be examined from an epistemological perspective, such as interrogating the process by which people come to know other peoples intentions, or from an ontological process, expressing how the self is a kind of constructed “democracy” of conflicting interests or even how the self is a kind of theatricalized construction presented to, and influenced by, the outside world. Frayn’s interest in nominalism intersects with his epistemological and ontological interests because language is the means by which these aspects of human experience are communicated. Language fails to express the immutable or universal essences, perpetually embedding indeterminacy into human experience. Historical persons and their biographies are ironically linked through these ambiguities, as either a construction from the mind of an author or, as themselves, a construction of a theatricalized “multitude.”

The indeterminacy Frayn examines in his recent biographical history plays is represented with increasing complexity: uncertainty is mitigated by complementarity in Copenhagen; personal dualities become personal multitudes, or democracies, in Democracy; and in Afterlife, the connection between art and life is not just analogous, but organic, as people both cast themselves and others into roles. In each of these plays Frayn begins with an ironic analogy between his characters and their actions, only to make these ironies more complex as his
characters carry out tasks that explicate his themes: using scientific theories of observation; spying on one another; and creating different kinds of theatre.

Through these techniques, stylization plays a vital role in demonstrating Frayn’s philosophical positions. In his review of *Democracy* for *The Financial Times*, Alistair Macauley described Frayn as “the most versatile but least innocent of our playwrights, the one to whom irony in its various tones is most natural, the artist who will never wholly conceal art” (screen 1). The stylizations in Frayn’s biographical history plays are mainly derived from physical staging (e.g. Guillaume’s dualities) and the use of multiple narrative positions. These primary dramatic devices are then enhanced by metaphors that are expressed in the plays’ dialogue, further articulating the rhetorical overlays that the stylizations create. Historical ambiguities and indeterminacy are consistently put on display as Frayn refuses to “wholly conceal” his art and, in this process, Frayn’s biographical history plays all present a caveat for biographical representation, a warning that manifests through different themes and their corresponding dramatic devices.

Frayn’s articulation of these ambiguities is neither pessimistic nor used as an excuse for an unrestrained portrayal of his characters’ lives. He uses a Thucydidean principle to guide the dramatic license in his plays while following a Hebbel-like ethos of letting his characters make their own arguments—based on historical facts—in ways that they might have been too reserved to do so in their lifetime. While he repeatedly asserts that there is no normative version of history or a historical person, he then embraces that complexity by presenting a polyphonic approach to historical representation, even acknowledging information in his plays that might contradict his theories, refusing definitive conclusions.
The extent of this philosophy is seen through the structure of his plays, as he shares this relationship to biography with his characters. In *Copenhagen*, *Democracy*, and *Afterlife*, his characters are seen either narrating their own history or a version of someone else’s, pointing to an interpretation of biographical experience that is both perspectival and perpetual. For Frayn, the most absolute biographical construction is one that infers how the multiple possibilities of an indeterminate past continue to exist simultaneously with an indeterminate present.
“Any similarity in our work is coincidental. There isn’t a dialogue about process. . . . [Frayn] does what he does and I do what I do; if some things appear to occasionally strike the same chord, so to speak, then perhaps there is something in the ether. Like Jagger and Hendrix, you know, doing their own thing with different instruments but with a similar attitude.

—Tom Stoppard (Artifice 1)

The preceding quote is entirely fictitious, yet it could also be said to have some value as a creative derivative of the hours of research and thought that has gone into this study. Would Stoppard and Frayn condone the inclusion of this quote in a scholarly analysis? They might, perhaps, depending on the manner of presentation and whether or not the invented phrases happened to reveal something about the historical subject.

In Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays the authors integrate documented facts with dramatic license, logical interpretations with imaginative intuition, and realistic characterization with figurative contexts. When the similarities of these techniques are combined with their use of stylizations, the ethos with which they represent historical persons, and their interest in examining epistemological related themes, some features of their recent biographical history plays could be said to resemble aspects of the deconstructionist and postmodernist British history plays that preceded them. Viewed in this context, Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays appear to present a continued questioning of the
efficacy of biographical representation while simultaneously asserting some biography-based interpretations, culminating in an epistemological examination of history that presents an interrelated affirmation and negation of the role of subjectivity in historical knowledge.

In this chapter, the characteristics of Stoppard and Frayn’s biographical history plays and their ethos for representing history will first be compared. Once this analysis is complete, their similarities will be contextualized within the general philosophies found in new historicism and the study of historiography along with the aesthetics of British deconstructionist and postmodernist theatre. From these comparisons a final analysis will be made at the conclusion of this chapter that examines how Stoppard and Frayn’s works present a continued questioning of the effectiveness of biographical representation.

I. Stoppard and Frayn’s Biographical History Plays

a. Form: Unconventionally Conventional

The forms of Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays contain what might be considered conventional dramatic strategies, though those strategies are often facilitated with unconventional devices. The conventional strategies appear to be those that are designed to maintain an empathic interest in the characters: using components of psychological realism; creating through-lines in which the characters are changed by their experiences; developing dialectical syntheses of character viewpoints; organizing the drama around historical facts; and interpreting the characters’ lives through literary tropes such as metaphor, irony, and tragedy. Meanwhile, the relatively unconventional aspects of the plays’ forms are primarily found in the manipulation of chronology, the arrangement of context, varying styles of characterization and dialogue, and shifting dramatic focus among multiple protagonists.
Stoppard’s *The Invention of Love* and *The Coast of Utopia* trilogy contain dramatic through-lines that depict protagonists seeking out a philosophy that will guide their lives. At the end of these plays they take stock of their experiences in a final assessment. Enough psychological realism is used to illustrate the idiosyncrasies of the characters’ personalities, making their private experiences as historical characters more readily identifiable. There is a dialectical approach in these works that compares the articulated beliefs of one character against those of another, chiefly Housman versus Wilde in *The Invention of Love* and Herzen versus Bakunin in *The Coast of Utopia*. In a way, Stoppard continued his interest in using pastiche to organize these dramas, by using historical accounts such as biographies to organize some of the events of the characters’ lives. Literary tropes are used to apply a layer of interpretation to the characters’ experiences: A. E. Housman’s life is depicted in tragic and ironic modes as a result of the repression of his sexuality, while Herzen—the most prominent figure in *The Coast of Utopia*—suffers a similar fate, having tragically lost his prized connection with Russia in addition to experiencing a lifetime of ironic domestic and political failures.

Despite these relatively conventional features, *The Invention of Love* and *The Coast of Utopia* trilogy are dominated by Stoppard’s unconventional style. Time and the chronology of events are manipulated throughout these plays. In *The Invention of Love* Stoppard blends two time levels while depicting AEH’s life in a dreamscape that compresses the events of years into single scenes, literally presenting the action as a stream of consciousness. *The Coast of Utopia* features several manipulations of chronology such as the shuffling of events in *Voyage* and use of reprisals and continuances in *Salvage*.

*The Invention of Love* and *The Coast of Utopia* are also unconventional because they divide focus among more than one protagonist. The *Invention of Love* contains a protagonist that
is represented with two characters, AEH and Housman. *The Coast of Utopia* features a shared focus on multiple personalities: Bakunin, Belinsky, Herzen, and Turgenev. The more realistic portions of these plays are juxtaposed with a mixing of styles, such as the characterization of Charon in *The Invention of Love* and the buffoonish representation of Marx in *The Coast of Utopia*’s Shipwreck. These aspects are also a part of the plays’ stylizations, which will be examined later in greater detail.

Frayn’s *Copenhagen*, *Democracy*, and *Afterlife* share conventional strategies that are similar to those in Stoppard’s plays. Aside from the psychological realism that was largely abandoned in *Afterlife*, each of these plays is geared toward a complex ontological depiction of the historical persons’ personalities. The protagonists are involved in dramatic through-lines that depict them journeying toward self-knowledge. Frayn casts their fates in metaphoric/ironic, and sometimes tragic, literary tropes: Heisenberg develops a theory that loosely accounts for his indeterminate actions in *Copenhagen*; Guillaume leads a double life that ends up sabotaging progressive relations between the Germanies in *Democracy*; and Reinhardt lives lavishly while directing yearly productions of *Everyman*, eventually losing nearly all of his possessions to the Nazis. There are dialectical aspects to these plays, developing and synthesizing different points of view. Heisenberg debates with Bohr and Margrethe, Guillaume plays a part in negotiating the political dichotomies of East and West Germany, and Reinhardt’s lifestyle receives valid criticism from Müller and Kommer. Each of these biographical portrayals fictionalizes historical facts derived from Frayn’s research, providing the basis for the experiences of the characters.

The majority of the unconventional aspects of Frayn’s biographical history plays are derived from his use of narrative positions—which also contribute to stylizations. His use of narrative positions dictates not just the passage of time, but the shifting circumstances in which
the characters find themselves. In Copenhagen the characters routinely shift from the past to the present, often providing external commentary to the audience. Democracy combines over 90 leaps in time, in as many scenes, frequently depicting moments where Guillaume is seen reporting to Kretschmann while simultaneously gathering intelligence on the people in Brandt’s office. Afterlife draws a comparison between Reinhardt and the character of Everyman by blending their experiences into a single timeline that chronologically resembles the conventions of time and location found in a morality play.

Psychologically, the characters in Copenhagen and Democracy are relatively consistent, though they are also unconventional because this consistency is disrupted by the use of ghost-speak and contemporary-reminiscence. Afterlife depicts Reinhardt and other characters shifting back and forth between the broad psychological portrayal that Frayn uses to sketch the play’s historical persons and the abstracted psychology of the verse speaking characters in Everyman.

Aside from stylizations, the chronological arrangement of events and the characterization of historical persons are the features of the forms of Stoppard and Frayn’s biographical history plays that could be said to be the primary elements that reveal their attitudes toward biographical representation. This is because the passage of time conveys the sweeping arch of the characters’ lives while dramatic characterization generates a judgment of their intentions.

For both Stoppard and Frayn, history appears to be multidimensional, emanating from multiple perspectives and continually influencing the present. Each of the contexts of their recent biographical history plays are arranged such that time is almost circular, with characters constantly revisiting, or being affected by, the past through their own viewpoints. Correspondingly, the experience of time appears to be indefinite because the authors collapse years of events together, view it from the vantage of memory or dream, and/or leap from moment
to moment in a way that is highly episodic. While the manipulation of time and chronology is
often necessary in historical plays, for Stoppard and Frayn the arrangement of time appears to be
equally dedicated to a demonstration of how the past is elusive, yet greatly affects personal
experience. When viewed as a whole Stoppard and Frayn’s biographical history plays portray
time and chronology not as a literal representation, but as a function of consciousness that is
loosely defined in the memory of the individual as well as the receiver of the historical
information.

Stoppard and Frayn’s characterizations of historical persons could be said to reflect their
treatment of time and chronology. With the exception of Afterlife, each of the authors makes
their characters detailed enough that they can develop complex motivations and psychological
conflicts. At the same time, they retain some broadness to their characterizations that, through
dialogue and/or the staging of the play, enable them to transition into a more figurative style of
representation that accommodates the poetic and metaphoric meanings that are assigned to their
experiences. Whether echoing aspects of ancient Latin poetry, quantum mechanics, revolutionary
philosophy, espionage, or a highly theatricalized life, there is an interrelation between the
figurative components of these plays and the more literal levels of psychological realism that
combine to present complex intellectual inquiries. Stoppard and Frayn emphasize the complexity
of the individual in history through these processes, distancing themselves from totalizing
depictions.

b. Stylization: Structure and Spectacle, Narration and Staging

Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays contain self-revealing disclosures
of contrivance as processes that condition the depiction of their characters’ lives. The creative act
of arrangement, revision, and interpretation is ironically commented upon while the authors
simultaneously represent and comment upon the lives of their characters. Stoppard and Frayn use stylizations to place a caveat on their biographical representations, but they do so in different ways, with Stoppard relying on techniques that are largely based on pastiche and theatrical spectacle while Frayn mainly relies on narrative positions and metaphorical staging devices.

Pastiche features as the most commonly used technique Stoppard relies upon to create stylization. The use of pastiche as stylization in *The Invention of Love* and *The Coast of Utopia* trilogy is primarily derived from intertextual references and a mixing of styles. Examples of intertextual stylization include his use of Greek mythology in *The Invention of Love* and Manet’s *Le déjeuner sur l’herbe* in *Shipwreck*. Stylization was also created by combining incongruous styles of representation, such as when Charon speaks in ways that are surprisingly contemporary in *The Invention of Love* and when appearance of a giant ginger cat occurs at the end of Herzen and Belinsky’s conversation in *Voyage*.

The examples of AEH’s interactions with Charon on the Styx and *Voyage*’s giant ginger cat also illustrate Stoppard’s reliance on theatrical spectacle to create stylizations. Throughout *The Invention of Love* and *The Coast of Utopia*, Stoppard fills the dramatic action with self-reflexive theatricality. The spectacle might be relatively simple, such as when AEH and Housman meet for the first time in *The Invention of Love*, or complex, as in the use of crossovers and transpositions in *The Coast of Utopia*. These effects differ from those that simply facilitate the dramatic action, or comment on the experiences of the characters (such as Kolya’s top spinning scene in *Shipwreck*). This is because they offer either a sudden break in continuity or a direct revelation of the story telling process in which Stoppard is engaged.

Frayn’s stylizations tend to be more subtle and are used in greater frequency, playing in integral part in the dramatic action as opposed to some of the more disruptive techniques used by
Stoppard. The primary example of this is Frayn’s use of multiple narrative positions in *Copenhagen*, *Democracy*, and *Afterlife*. Through the use of these narrative positions the characters are seen reporting on, analyzing, and/or enacting the historical moments in which they are, or have been, participants. The self-referential demonstration of these activities ironically comments on Frayn’s own perspectives and interpretations, preventing the kind of authoritative representation that is found in more conventional forms of historical representation.

Metaphors that are derived from the major achievements of his characters support the stylizations created by the use of multiple narrative positions. Frayn takes his historical characters’ work as physicists, spies, and dramatists and then incorporates the types of perspectives and analyses his characters used in these positions into the staging of the plays: physicists conduct thought experiments that depict a reenactment of the past, a spy is seen expressing his duality by routinely participating in two separate conversations at once, and a director designs and choreographs his life as a theatrical presentation. The use of metaphors in this way provides a hyper-contextual depiction of the factors that make an interpretation of the characters’ actions difficult while also openly demonstrating the intellectual processes Frayn is using to interpret their lives.

In addition to these strategies, Stoppard and Frayn both use meta-biographical statements in their plays to create stylization. Through the use of these statements the characters appear to acknowledge the ironic conditions in which they have been rendered. In *The Invention of Love* and *The Coast of Utopia* meta-biographical statements are made while the characters are reviewing their lives, attempting to comprehend their current situation, or predicting their future course. In Frayn’s biographical history plays, the meta-biographical statements are made while the characters are seen reconstructing, interpreting, or inventing the biographical features of
their, or other peoples,’ lives. By using these types of statements, the stylizations in Stoppard and Frayn’s biographical history plays are linked directly to the authors’ presentation of biographical material, not just epistemological themes, augmenting the rhetorical overlays that depict the role of perspective and revisionism in biographical representation.

c. Caveats and Indeterminacy

Stoppard and Frayn’s stylizations generate caveats that ironically layer a sense of indeterminacy back onto their biographical representations. Each author examines the nature of historical indeterminacy using different approaches to epistemology. Stoppard tends to present caveats that emphasize the general conditions of chance and chaos as limiting factors for historical comprehension while Frayn appears to take a more ontological approach, emphasizing how the self is a construct of fluctuating characteristics and conflicting interests.

Stoppard’s The Coast of Utopia trilogy clearly resonates with the career long interest he has demonstrated in examining the role of chance and chaos in historical indeterminacy. These ideas are strikingly displayed through devices such as the shuffling of chronology in Voyage and the role the weather plays in characterizing history in Shipwreck. This is not to say that Stoppard avoids the use of ontological processes. In The Invention of Love and Salvage, Stoppard depicts the difficulty in understanding other people as the inevitable result of their inner lives being obscured, even while self-knowledge eludes these characters. These ideas are illustrated in AEH’s conversation with Wilde in The Invention of Love when Wilde describes biography as “the mesh through which our real life escapes.” Wilde proceeds to describe “the truth” about Bosie as being the figurative result of his desire, not a literal description of character that an outside observer might believe to be accurate. Through Herzen’s dreams and Turgenev’s waking dream of the nihilist, Salvage presents the subconscious dream world of the individual that
reflects and perhaps influences the outside world but remains hidden. Despite the presence of these representations, *The Invention of Love* and *Salvage* do not examine ontological processes in the same kind of detail that is found in Frayn’s plays, rather they are presented in broader terms that illustrate but do not explicate the interior world of the individual.

Frayn’s caveats are developed through a metaphorical expression of the work of the historical persons he represents. Heisenberg and Bohr’s quantum theory is retargeted toward understanding Heisenberg himself; Guillaume’s acts of espionage and Brandt’s politicking reveal how people are divided within a “democracy” of differing sides to their personalities, and Reinhardt is seen creating his exterior image while other people are not able to see inside his psyche to understand the man underneath his theatrical trappings. The epistemological questions that arise from these depictions are derived from an examination of contradictory behaviors, illogical decisions, and the artificial personas these people create in order to achieve their goals. The indeterminacy within the personality is the source of any seemingly chaotic occurrences.

While Stoppard tends to create caveats by illustrating how biographical/historical truth eludes the individual, Frayn tends to portray how the individual eludes biographical/historical understanding. Both functions are a matter of perspective which is naturally limited by the personality, resources, and skill of the biographer as well as the personality of the biographee. The indeterminacy-based caveats in all of their recent biographical history plays are reinforced by the way the characters seek historical and/or biographical understanding but are prevented from gaining a complete knowledge, even about themselves.

d. *Ethos: Courtesy and Arguments*

Stoppard and Frayn appear to be divided between being skeptics who are fanatical about research and dramatists who believe in the necessity of manipulating recorded facts
imaginatively. This paradox might be justified through a similar ethos: the stylizations in their biographical history plays could be described as establishing a polite ambiguity that routinely acknowledges the artifice behind their biographical renderings while also encouraging audiences to question what they have seen. The justification for their dramatic inventions and manipulations of facts appear to be rooted in the way these authors attempt to accurately represent their historical characters according to the arguments that they make, giving the characters an opportunity to justify their beliefs. As a result, their historical characters could be said to be given a considerate depiction because, while significant departures might be made from historical record, they are represented in a way that is a continuation of the dialogues that were important to them during their lifetimes.

A great deal of Stoppard’s rationale for his inventive treatment of history is based on finding answers to the kind of metaphysical mysteries of life that Kerner describes in *Hapgood*, looking for the missing rung between the atom and the grain of sand. In Stoppard’s case this missing rung is between the facts that were recorded and the facts that escaped. In *The Invention of Love*, Wilde clearly outlines the potential for dramatic license to reveal a poetic truth about historical persons, illustrating this point with his story about walking down Piccadilly with a lily in his hand: “I was said to have walked down Piccadilly with a lily in my hand. There was no need. To do it is nothing, to be said to have done it is everything. It is the truth about me.” While Wilde’s statement presented a fairly liberal appreciation of how biographical truths might be represented, he also emphasizes the importance of saying something true about historical persons and how he appreciated that someone managed to capture something about his essence.

In his comments about his use of history in *The Coast of Utopia*, Stoppard emphasized that he tried to make his characters truthful by way of the arguments that they represented, giving
the example that he wanted to continue the dialogue between Bakunin and Herzen, but Bakunin was imprisoned at the time he wanted the scene to occur. Instead, he devised a way for Bakunin to appear to Herzen in a waking dream which, though ahistorical, allowed Stoppard to represent a continuing conversation between the two men that was geared toward an accurate expression of their philosophies. With Wilde’s statements about biography in mind, Stoppard appears to wish to examine his historical characters with a respect for the broader meanings found in the way they lived their lives, while inventing dramatic situations that expand upon both a play’s appeal to audiences as well as the interpretive possibilities for the facts that are missing to posterity.

Frayn’s ethos for representing his characters is similar to Stoppard’s. Frayn’s dramatic license is taken using philosophies derived from the writings of Thucydides and Friedrich Hebbel. The Thucydidean principle permits Frayn to let his characters articulate ideas that they may or may not have outwardly expressed during their lives. Combining this with Hebbel’s philosophy, Frayn gives each of his characters a chance to express their point of view and make strong arguments. While much of the expression of their inner lives might be invented, he attempts to reconcile this artifice with equally emphasized points of view, saying that even a representation of Hitler should contain these considerations.

Frayn’s recent biographical history plays contain what MacFarquhar called a “decent” or “polite” approach to history (screen 1). This is because Frayn presents theories about the intentions of the historical persons who are his characters while at the same time keeping his characterizations ambiguous enough for the audience to call them into question. This is a quality that both Stoppard and Frayn achieve through stylizing the action of their plays, illustrating epistemological concerns in concert with their characters’ lives.
II. Stoppard and Frayn’s Plays in a New Historical Context

“The Channel is a slipper bath of irony through which we pass these serious continentals in order not to be infected by their gloom.”

—Alan Bennett (Alan Bennett: Plays Two 3)

In the final chapter of The Contemporary British History Play, Palmer asks, “Do the plays reveal the influence of new historicism or merely show the influence of new trends in the theatre that have nothing to do with changing historiography?” (188). His question indicates the difficulty in determining the degree of influence between scholarly criticism and art. The scope of history places great demands on the limitations of the theatre, requiring innovative representational strategies that are often dictated by economic resources and solved through symbolic means. Further, new historicism emerged during a politically charged time in which challenges to the common perceptions of history might have inevitably been used to confront established sociopolitical powers.

This portion of this study will begin by briefly comparing Stoppard and Frayn’s philosophies about historical representation with the general trends from new historicism and the study of historiography that were identified in the introductory chapter. With this initial examination in mind, the focus will turn towards emphasizing aesthetics, examining how the representative strategies found in Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays might resemble those of other plays by British authors. Deconstructionist and postmodernist plays have been chosen for this analysis because, similar to the use of stylization, the means of representation alone in these plays comments on the possibility of historical knowledge, sharing to varying degrees, lines of inquiry related to epistemology.
New historicism and the study of historiography emphasize the limits of historical representation by rejecting the possibility of objective accounts. Within a historic account there are an infinite number of facts, most of which are obscured (no matter how consequential), and the act of selecting and assembling those facts leads to subjective interpretations. As alternative strategies to presenting seemingly objective and totalizing depictions of history, new historicists emphasize methods of data collection and documentation that are not normally included in grand narratives while scholars of historiography promote a subversion of narrative influence and the interpretations inherent in using literary tropes. Similar strategies to representing history might include manipulating context, chronology, and characterization in the form of historical works in order to examine history from different perspectives. The authors’ “positions” as creators/interpreters of historical works are disclosed, along with sociopolitical biases that might potentially have distorted their analyses.

Likewise, Stoppard and Frayn appear to share an interest in maintaining a protracted sense of indeterminacy about the validity of their historical depictions. Every assertive interpretation or characterization is self-reflectively called into question by a use of stylization that places a caveat on what audiences are watching. As dramatists, their historical representations might be too inventive for some new historicists and scholars of historiography, but they could be said to share similar values in that they attempt to maintain a level of validity by way of the arguments that their characters make and in promoting a resistance to totalizing depictions. In addition, there appears to be a shared focus on acknowledging the subjective position of the author as well as epistemological questions about the limits of historical knowledge. Perhaps the greatest similarity is a continued interest in demonstrating how
interpretations of the processes of historical representation are as important as the interpretation of historical material.

Deconstructionist and postmodernist British history plays also focus on historical indeterminacy by translating similar ideas into theatrical aesthetics. Peacock describes the period in which many of these plays emerged saying,

. . . by the late 1970’s the theatre’s struggle for people’s perception of the past did not merely relate to the previous twenty years but was concerned more fundamentally with the manner in which the nation conceived of history itself. By the mid-1970’s the public/private approach to historical drama, sometimes overtly political, sometimes not, had become all pervasive throughout the British theatre. . . ” (Radical Stages 17)

Viewed through critical stances such as those of Derrida and Foucault that were prominent in that era, history is an artificial construct, an intertextual arrangement of language and data, and contains subjective sociopolitical preconceptions that can be deconstructed or dissolved. Deconstructionist and postmodernist history plays present challenges to assumptions about historical objectivity and the totalizing of historical experience by suggesting to audiences that their impressions of the past are conditional.

Separating works of art into tidy genres is difficult, and with deconstructionist and postmodernist plays this task is particularly arduous because their styles are dedicated to defying conventional ideas and modes of expression—including genres. Deconstructionist and postmodernist plays are similar in that they incorporate theatrical devices that operate as a central means of demonstrating a questioning of hegemonic understandings of history. The strategies for achieving this end are limitless, including the parody of horror film style resurrections of famous
persons in Brenton’s deconstructionist *The Churchill Play* (1974) to Barker’s postmodern depiction of the overthrow of Islam by Poland and Austria in 1683 that is integrated with seemingly random subplots in *The Europeans* (1990). Deconstructionist and postmodernist plays might contain realistic dialogue but the comprehensibility of their experience is undercut by uses of the rhetorical effect made possible by devices such as symbolism, parody, pastiche, disparate styles, loose plot structures, and seemingly random events. These strategies are designed to create a discordant and self-reflexive experience of both history and the processes of representing it.

Though they defy definition, the factor that introduces the greatest point of differentiation between deconstruction and postmodernism might be derived from what Linda Hutcheon initially notes is “the paradoxical reliance [author’s emphasis] of deconstruction (like realism, of course) upon a historically determined concept of metaphysics that it wants to deny” (59). “Metaphysics” is a term that is equally as variable as those for deconstruction and postmodernism. In this case, Hutcheon refers to metaphysics as the Aristotelian examination of universal concepts (or properties) that can be applied to particulars, or individuals. To create an example, this type of recognition of universals ranges from natural science to human constructs: there are characteristics of both animal and plant in coral polyps that capture planktonic prey with nematocysts while also deriving energy through a symbiotic relationship with photosynthesizing bacteria; or, Robert McNamara is a quintessential political figure of the Cold War between the Soviet and Union and the United States because of his belief in the preventative nature of mutually-assured thermonuclear destruction.

Hutcheon describes the paradox that deconstruction and realism could be said to rely on this general type of metaphysics, even though deconstructionist thought wants to deny its
validity, because they both rely on universal concepts such as animal classifications or political strategies as a point of departure to examine a particular subject such as a wolf or a history book. In the process they also operate from universalized perspectives, an empirical/rational perspective in realism and a view of descriptive meaning as an arbitrary construct in deconstruction. To “deconstruct” is to participate in a universal critical stance through the recognition of a concept, such as a history book’s treatment of Cold War conflicts, and the guiding presumption that this identified target can be uprooted from conventional understanding, denied its habitual meaning, and be suspended as an unknown value. Deconstruction differs from realism because a realistic approach would be to reincorporate the deconstructed item into a new paradigm while deconstructionist philosophy insists on leaving the features of the concept open ended, once the artifice and transitory nature of the ideas within it have been exposed.

The previously mentioned distinguishing factor between deconstruction and postmodernism might be found in the way that they inhabit a paradoxical relationship with metaphysics. Hutcheon notes that postmodernist thought shares nearly the same ironically metaphysical contradiction: to say that there are no universals, or rely on them to thoroughly emphasize their contingency, is to put forth a universal concept (92). Returning to Art Berman’s quote from the introductory chapter to this study, he defines the processes of deconstruction saying, “Deconstruction, as literary critical practice, disassembles a text to reveal that what perhaps has appeared to be a consistent and unified work is a structure of rhetorical strategies and maneuvers.” In contrast, Linda Hutcheon describes an even more ruptured process in postmodernism saying, “... the formal and thematic contradictions of postmodern art and theory work to call attention to both what is being contested and what is being offered as a critical response to that, and to do so in a self-aware way that admits its own provisionality” (13).
In deconstruction, history appears to be a manipulation of data, yet there is somewhat of a presumption that something can be understood about that manipulation and its influence by dismantling the constructed meaning within it. Postmodernism takes this view a step further, observing that there is a past and that historical records influence the present, but the action of taking a critical stance in order to comprehend this interaction is futile because all systems of representation are entirely provisional. Deconstruction hints at its own provisionality while postmodernism thoroughly emphasizes it: the “system” of deconstruction interrogates established meanings while indirectly suggesting its own provisionality by refusing to reinterpret or reassign those meanings; the “system” in postmodernism is a reduction of all meaning, including the artist’s viewpoint, to an irreducible and emphatically emphasized contingency.

Caryl Churchill’s Top Girls (1982) presents an example of the differences between deconstructionist and postmodernist representation. This play is not a biographical history play, but a play that is focused on history. Top Girls takes place in two acts and features a fictional character named Marlene who has given her daughter to her sister so that she can more easily pursue her career. Act One, if isolated from the rest of the play, could serve as an example of postmodernist representation. Marlene is celebrating her promotion by hosting a dinner that is attended by both fictional and historical female characters such as the 9th century Pope Joan and Patient Griselda from The Canterbury Tales (1400). The context for this meeting of anachronistic and legendary characters is not fully explained or justified and, while parts of this act contain coherent exchanges between the women as they describe their experiences, a great deal of the action is deliberately lost in overlapping dialogue, creating an unintelligible word noise. The word noise implies that these women, even when they are in each other’s company, are somehow
unable to find fulfillment or a comprehension of each other’s experiences. Despite being together they are still isolated because they fail to communicate their historical experiences.

Act Two is realistic, depicting Marlene’s relentless careerism as a woman who has adopted, and even exceeded, male concepts of power in order to fulfill what she considers to be a feminist agenda. Aspects of the testimony from the oppressed characters in Act One begin to echo in this act as the audience sees the same actors who played the historical and fictional characters play modern day women who are still suffering in different ways from masculine oppression. Marlene is depicted as rejecting her natural role as a mother while taking advantage of her sister and other women for the purpose of career advancement. Churchill does not draw clear connections between the testimony in Act One and Act Two, nor does she offer clear solutions to the problems she presents. Further, the overlapping dialogue in Act Two resonates with the same in Act One, giving a strong impression that neither the historical nor the contemporary experiences of oppressed women can be fully comprehended.

Act One stands alone as what Terry Eagleton was previously quoted as saying of postmodernism, that it “rejects totalities, universal values, grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence.” Yet, when combined with Act Two, the purpose of these ruptured meanings and disorienting qualities become related to Marlene and the other women’s experiences. This relation is not explicitly drawn and does not provide a clear synthesis, only the suggestion that the historical experience of women under masculine oppression is revealed as a series of “rhetorical strategies and maneuvers.” With this final impression, the play resembles a deconstructionist approach because established meanings are interrogated and then applied to particular experiences, with the final message being irresolute. Despite these qualities, the play
does not resemble a postmodern perspective because author’s perspective is not portrayed as being entirely contingent.

The effort put forth in the example above might unintentionally create a stricter line between what appears to be the close relationship between deconstructionist and postmodernist techniques. Palmer describes postmodern aesthetics as containing:

. . . the juxtaposition of disparate styles, periods or genres; the use of fabulation and pastiche; the disruption of any clear narrative progression, even to the extent of disrupting causation (aleatory disconnection); the appearance of bricolage, an improvised assembly of found materials; and an emphasis on disconnected images, often drawn from television, commercials, or other forms of pop entertainment. (177)

These techniques might also be used in deconstruction—as evidenced by Top Girls—but this description is of strategies used to maintain a disruption of coherence. An example of this is Barker’s The Bite of the Night (1988) in which the author relies heavily on repetition, poetic dialogue, and metaphor in depicting the visit of a fictional classics professor and his student to eleven ancient cities of Troy. Contemporary and period references are mixed with historical characters such as Homer, famous characters such as Helen of Troy and Creusa, and other fictional characters. Virtually no plot or justification of context connects these visits and they are accompanied by parody-related humor, such as when Helen of Troy loses her arm and legs, or metaphor-based scenes such as “The Political Fuck” in which a marriage takes place on a bed to the sound of a crowd’s approval. This moment between Homer, a boy, Helen, and a daughter of Helen named Gay is typical of Barker’s poetic rendering and plot development (lines in bold are Barker’s emphasis):
HELEN. The author of *The Iliad*.

GAY. He is trying to make me insane . . .

HELEN. The author of *The Odyssey*.

GAY. **He is trying to make me insane!** *(She pulls away, runs off.)*

HOMER. The young . . . ! No charity! So cruel, which is their fascination . . .

BOY. She beats me with a twig!

HOMER. Lucky fellow . . .

BOY. Right around the face sometimes, whip! Because I don’t know ten reasons
for the fall of Paper Troy.

HOMER. There are not ten reasons.

BOY. That’s what I say! *(He hurries off.)*

HELEN. I hate your songs. Do you mind this? The ripping livers and the splash of brains. The prosody is marvelous but. I must say this and fuck the consequences. The torrents of intestine and the ravens picking skulls **I also am so violent,** were you always blind? When their attacks were beaten off we maimed the wounded. With kitchen knives, me and the Trojan women, hacked them in the ditch, trimming the features off their heads like turnips for the market and their cocks we cropped **Don’t say you never heard of this** were you born blind or was it horror spread some merciful film across your retina, and what’s pity, I do think pity is no substitute for truth— *(25)*

The possibility of any sustained meaning for what is dramatized is consistently rejected in this play through a self-conscious refusal to logically tie them together.
The preceding examples ignore perhaps the ultimate distinguishing factor between deconstruction and postmodernism: the variability of audience interpretations. Brenton’s *The Romans in Britain* (1980) deconstructs the different kinds of myths that enable imperialism, from philosophy and religion to less sophisticated types such as derogatory names and jokes. The play begins with scenes of the Ancient Roman occupation of the Celts and then transfers and comingles this era into a dramatization of the contemporary persecution of Northern Ireland by the British at the time the play was first produced. In doing so, the play draws a loosely articulated metaphor between the Ancient Roman occupation of the Celts and the British occupation of Northern Ireland. The myths that justify imperialism are impugned at every level: Julius Caesar is depicted as a shallow politician who employs historians to create his image and interpret omens that are favorable to his exploits; myths about the extra-human powers of the Roman soldiers are used as comic relief; Roman and British soldiers use racist terms to describe their victims and tell dirty jokes about them; an English undercover agent is rebuked when he sympathetically attempts to create a heroic “myth” for the people of Northern Ireland; and a lowly Celtic cook is seen creating the myth of King Arthur. Myth is seen as a provisional framework that is generated by people as they attempt to control the situations in which they find themselves. Through the repetition of scenes that involve mythological invention or reinvention there is a sense that myths cannot be fully interrogated or replaced with anything other than different kinds of myths.

Despite these relatively obvious attempts at deconstruction, Brenton also includes dramatic elements that might create a stronger sense of postmodernist confusion for some portions of his audiences. At the end of the first section of the play the two time levels begin to mix when Julius Caesar and his army suddenly appear in contemporary British military
uniforms. The second half of the play follows two plotlines between a 6th century Celtic family and a British assassin’s attempt to kill an Irish Republican Army leader. Several scenes end with grotesque moments of violence, sexual assault, and physical ailments, all of which are highly resistant to any romanticized or mythologized notions about these historical periods. There is a fairly clear chain of events driving the play, but the characters never seem grounded in this landscape of manipulative myths to establish any substantial through-lines. The play ends with two characters creating the myth of King Arthur, which has not been mentioned in the play before this point. While someone familiar with these ideas might feel they are seeing a deconstruction of imperialism applied in universal terms to ancient and modern day oppression, other audience members might find themselves confused at the intermixing of time, grotesque scenes, self-reflexive theatricality, and the heightened provisionality of the characters’ experiences, making their reception of the play more postmodern. Just as any definition of deconstructionist and postmodernist theatre is variable, so are the different ways that these plays might be received.

Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays resemble deconstructionist strategies more than those of postmodernism. They share a self-reflexive quality, but while Stoppard and Frayn focus on creating a picture of historical indeterminacy, they do so from a perspective that articulates their observations in ways that identify universal ideas and then apply them to their characters’ experiences without creating the sense that their positions on historical indeterminacy are also contingencies. Though perhaps more coherent than some deconstructionist plays, each of their recent biographical history plays depict the nature of historical truth and the truth of their own historical representations in ambiguous terms that remain unresolved.
Stoppard’s biographical history plays deconstruct history in several ways: by the way that chance and chaos are shown to play a hidden role in the development of history via the shuffling of chronology in *Voyage*; the role reprise and continuances and a metaphorical use of the weather plays in *Shipwreck*; and how subjectivity plays a role in interpreting the inner lives of historical persons in *The Invention of Love* and *Salvage*. Frayn presents a deconstruction of history through his metaphorical use of his characters’ occupations and demonstrating how the mysteries they encountered in their lives equate to sources of historical indeterminacy. The previously described type of metaphysics is applied in Stoppard and Frayn’s plays through critical stances that present a universalized emphasis of historical indeterminacy, though the possibility of meaning, or interpretation, is not entirely disrupted.

Their use of stylizations also resembles deconstruction because their inclusion in the dramatization of their characters’ lives creates a rhetorical overlay that presents a caveat that conditions their interpretations. Stoppard achieves this self-reflexive quality through his use of pastiche, intertextual references, mixing disparate styles, and the use of theatrical spectacle. Frayn achieves a similar effect through his use of narrative positions, and metaphors that emphasize the creation of, and variability within, multiple perspectives. Stoppard and Frayn also use meta-biographical statements in their plays that further enhance the effect of these processes.

Despite these similarities, Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays differ significantly from many British deconstructionist history plays in that their challenges to authoritative or totalizing interpretations of history represent intellectual pursuits, not sociopolitical statements. They do, of course, present arguments that some established historians might disagree with, but they do not engage in the same kind of anti-hegemonic criticism found in the works of authors like Brenton, Churchill, and Edward Bond. Perhaps this indicates how
some aspects of deconstructionist thought have become more common. In a different time, Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays, simply through presenting doubts about historical objectivity, might have been inherently political. Considering the critical acclaim and wide acceptance most of these plays received, there is evidence to suggest that some facets of deconstructionist criticism have become part of the cultural mainstream.

The similarities between Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays and postmodernism are less clear. If the observation that postmodernist works often utilize a blending of ahistorical and anachronistic representations is accepted as a core feature, Stoppard’s The Invention of Love appears to be the leading candidate because of the way the play freely blends the two time levels between AEH and his younger self. This is also achieved while utilizing a variety of styles and intertextual references. Palmer describes the play as having a “postmodern structure” (54). However, these similarities should be interpreted with caution because Stoppard clearly seeks to justify his liberal representations of history in this play with a caveat that the dramatic action all takes place in the mind of the protagonist. The play routinely evokes “a picture of dislocation” before these moments are reabsorbed into the psychological through-line of the play.

The themes and plot lines that are developed in Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays appear to be too coherent to fit into the aesthetics of postmodern history plays. The anxiety Stoppard and Frayn share with postmodernist thought about objectivity might be linked, but in Stoppard and Frayn’s works these anxieties are carefully articulated from a standpoint that that does not lead them to suggest that their perspectives completely provisional.

Perhaps the most significant dramatic feature that they share with postmodernism is in regard to the stylistic freedom with which they create these dramas. Stoppard’s use of pastiche
such as Manet’s *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, varying styles of characterization, and overt theatrical devices such as crossover and transposition, could all be said to reflect the exuberant representative energy of postmodern works. Frayn’s use of different narrative positions and complex staging might not maintain a sense of dislocation, but they continually dramatize the need for relocation, every time a character begins to examine his or her past from a different perspective.

Is stylization necessarily present in deconstruction and postmodernism? Sontag’s description of stylization as reflecting “an ambivalence (affection contradicted by contempt, obsession contradicted by irony) toward the subject-matter” appears to coincide with several features of deconstruction and postmodernism. Where is this ambivalence or irony located? Is it a necessary component of deconstructionist and postmodernist plays? Churchill’s *Top Girls* presents a deconstructionist view of history, but the argument could be made that her interest in themes related to feminism creates a commitment to her subject in which ironic distancing is not as prevalent. There is a self-reflective aspect to the use of the same actors who played historical and fictional characters in Act One as realistic characters in the rest of the play, but it is used more as a means of thematic development rather than ironically commenting on the manner of presentation. In contrast, Brenton’s depictions of Julius Caesar appearing in modern dress and attempting to generate myths about himself in *The Romans in Britain* could be said to create an ironic distancing from the dramatic action. Stylization appears to be a feature compatible with, but not vital to deconstruction while in postmodernism, as *The Bite of the Night* exemplifies, stylizations pervade as a way of demonstrating provisionality. Of course, the postmodern response to stylization might be to demonstrate its use as yet another rhetorical contingency. This is yet another example of the elusiveness of the postmodern stance.
Bertolt Brecht’s theory of Alienation is a natural extension of this discussion. Palmer states that Brecht’s influence on British theatre has been “hotly debated” and, with this in mind, he argues that Brecht’s Marxist vision, staging devices, concepts for historicizing dramatic action, and the use of play-within-a-play structures were all used frequently in British history plays (215-217). Are Brecht’s theatrical techniques a form of stylization? If the polemical aesthetic put forth in Brecht’s “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting” (1936) and “A Short Organum for the Theatre” (1949) are separated from his actual practice, which John Fuegi in The Essential Brecht (1972) contends encouraged audiences to emotionally identify with the characters in the performance of his plays, then his interest in demonstrating the social implications of people’s actions by using staging devices that alienate, or create emotional detachment, might be considered a version of stylization that pushes the strategy to its boundaries. If, in Brecht’s scenario, the fundamental processes for staging a play invert to become a demonstration of staging processes, or a theatre about theatricalization, then perhaps there is no room for stylization because there is nothing in the performance but ambivalence. A hypothetical use of stylization in a theoretical Brechtian staging might have to be presented at an even further remove, being the product of dramatic devices that illustrate the subjective nature of Brecht’s theatrical criticism as one of many possible approaches to staging the play. This stylization might comment on Brecht’s desire to use alienating effects in order to examine socioeconomic situations.

In the matter of placing Stoppard and Frayn’s work in the context of their British contemporaries, it should be noted that Alan Bennett is perhaps the author whose use of stylization and caveats in his biography-based plays appears to most resemble those found in Stoppard and Frayn’s works. Bennett has written seven plays in which historical persons are
represented: *Forty Years On* (1969), *Kafka’s Dick* (1987), *An Englishman Abroad* (1989), *A Question of Attribution* (1989), *The Madness of King George III* (1993), *The Lady in the Van* (2000), and *The Habit of Art* (2009). *Forty Years On* and *The Habit of Art* challenge the definition of the biographical history play used by this study since the historical persons they represent are held at a further distance from the dramatic action, their representational force being contained within a play-within-a-play structure. Historical revisionism is dramatized, not stylized in these plays. In *Kafka’s Dick* historical persons appear posthumously, frequently addressing the audience in asides that make light of their anachronistic presence. Stylizations also occur in the mode of ironic dialogue such as when a fictional character attempts to contrast her “life” with Kafka’s writings saying, “This is nonfiction” (*Bennett Plays: Two* 48). *The Lady in the Van* has a similar stylized self-consciousness because Bennett portrays himself in this autobiographical play through the use of two different characters. These versions of himself debate whether or not he is assisting an eccentric woman with charitable intentions or if he is helping her because he believes his encounters with her will give him something to publish. *An Englishman Abroad* and *The Madness of King George III*, contain overt theatrical devices such as audience asides that comment on, or contextualize, the dramatic action, but they do not produce rhetorical overlays that comment on the nature of historical representation.

*A Question of Attribution* (1989) is the Bennett play that most resembles the epistemological inquiry and use of stylization in Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays. This one act play centers on Anthony Blunt who was an art historian and Surveyor of the King’s Pictures in 1945. He also became the central figure in one of the 20th century’s most famous spy scandals. The majority of the dialogue in the play is addresses the difficulty of attributing with certainty a painting to a particular painter, part of which takes place during a
discussion with Queen Elizabeth II in Buckingham Palace. Stylizations emerge from two processes, Blunt discussing art history with a member of British intelligence in process of helping him identify other spies, and discussions with the Queen about how to tell a “fake” painting from a real one. Portraiture becomes a metaphor for biographical representation and central to the play’s stylizations is the knowledge of Blunt’s role as both discovered and undiscovered spy, an understanding which makes the scene between him and the Queen ironically charged.

When stylization is present in Bennett’s biographical history plays the rhetorical overlays tend to emphasize the creative acts of selection, interpretation, and arrangement as limiting factors in representing history. This could be described as communicating epistemological themes to his audiences because they are made aware of how these factors might limit historical knowledge. Despite this similarity, Bennett’s stylizations generally differ from those of Stoppard and Frayn because they do not illustrate epistemological concerns related to comprehension and perspective and do not present detailed examinations of how factors such as memory, chance, and ontological mysteries make historical understanding indeterminate. Bennett’s *A Question of Attribution* is the closest of Bennett’s works to reflect these types of epistemological inquiries, yet they remain comparatively undeveloped within this one act play.

**III. Conclusions: Questioning the Efficacy of Biographical Representation**

Do Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays indicate a continued questioning of the efficacy of biographical representation? In regard to some of their manipulations of character and chronology, many of the departures from literal representation
that dramatists make in order to adapt history to the restrictions of staging a play might
inadvertently reflect these theories. The familiar paradox that is the audiences’ desire to see
something familiar, shown in a new way, places demands on dramatists that inspire continued
changes in style. Biography-based drama is naturally burdened by the expectation of realism
because audiences wish to see something identifiably “human” in these depictions. Dramatists
are challenged to manage these expectations in concert with the manipulations of fact that are
often necessary in order to compress significant experiences and actions within a period of hours.
A self-referential acknowledgment of representative limitations is one way of managing
audience expectations. Through this doorway the expansive possibilities of figuration enter,
presenting more opportunities for symbolic meaning and complex themes.

The caveats, however, that are presented by Stoppard and Frayn through stylization in
their recent biographical history plays are features that might not necessarily be derived from the
practical considerations of staging a play. Rather than simply managing audience expectations,
the epistemological rhetorical overlays that their stylizations create appear to be a strategy that is
adopted to communicate specific attitudes toward historical and biographical representation. An
acknowledgment of contrivance might signal some indeterminacy, but the articulation of the
sources of indeterminacy through an ironically situated rhetorical layering makes their thematic
expression as important as the themes developed from evaluating the historical characters’ lives.

This presentation of articulated indeterminacy in their plays appears to reflect both the
theories found in new historicism and the study of historiography as well as demonstrate some
aesthetic similarities with deconstructionist and postmodernist plays. The politics of
deconstructionist theatre may not be present in Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history
plays, but the challenge to authoritative, or totalized, historical representation and the
demonstration of the limits of a causal interpretation of history, as well as an emphasis on revealing history as an artificial construct, are all thoroughly emphasized. These similarities suggest that their works reflect a continued questioning of how authors should approach biographical representation.

However, in this questioning they have not abandoned some of the characteristics of more traditional, or totalizing, biography-based plays. Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays still retain features of conventional drama. The psychological portrayals of Stoppard and Frayn’s characters are likely to be influential to an audience—even Frayn’s broad characterizations in Afterlife are directed toward achieving an emotional response. The influence of emotional commitment tends to have a totalizing effect when audiences accept character personalities as a means of identifying with them. Stoppard and Frayn’s use of psychological drama inserts a representational literalness into the depiction of historical persons that is not easily defeated because the character personalities are the primary force that guides interest in the play.

This duality of denial and assertion of biographical comprehension in their plays is reflected by new historical approaches because, though their character’s personalities might be received by audiences as an application of historical truth because of empathic involvement, the facts behind their circumstances, including the epistemology of their intentions, are given a chance to remain indeterminate through the plays’ stylizations. Through these opposing processes an accuracy regarding the philosophical arguments—literal or figurative—made by the characters during their lifetimes is featured as the strongest point of interpretation.

Stoppard and Frayn’s approach to biographical representation might be considered to borrow the “polite” possibilities offered by the emphasis on ambiguity presented in new
historical criticism. This type of complex negotiation has something to offer contemporary criticism as an alternative to the postmodernist rejection of the possibility of objective knowledge. The world plainly exists, events happen, and people have a need to interpret experiences, yet experiences are subjective and people can be easily misunderstood. Subjectivity appears to be both a problem and a solution for historical representation. Communication and interpretation is a subjective liability of language and perspective, while at the same time the primary tool for interpreting the vast grey areas of history that are lost to chance, chaos, and the variability of the human personality is a subjective, or intuitive, encounter with historical data. Perhaps the combination of convention and unconventionality in Stoppard and Frayn’s biographical history plays presents a vision of a continuing search for the solution to the problems of historical representation, striving for a depth of truthfulness while cautioning against epistemological limitations.
Chapter 5
Looking Backward and Forward:
Courses for Future Study, Time Travel, and Embracing Contrivance

The central point of departure for this study was derived from the timeliness of Tom Stoppard and Michael Frayn’s recent biographical history plays and their shared, career-long interest in examining epistemological questions. Before their recent biographical history plays were written, Stoppard and Frayn routinely dramatized epistemic ideas related to subjects such as physics and history, including inquiries related to the efficacy of historical and biographical representation. Their recent biographical history plays appear to present a continuation of this interest by emphasizing historical indeterminacy in concert with the depiction of their characters’ lives, using stylizations to create a caveat for their interpretations. Similar to some deconstructionist and postmodernist playwrights, Stoppard and Frayn’s recent works could be said to reflect aspects of criticism found in new historicism and the study of historiography because they communicate ideas about historical indeterminacy through the aesthetics of their plays, not just through dialogue.

The central question of this dissertation was: What are the primary strategies that Stoppard and Frayn use to represent history in their recent biographical history plays and how do these strategies present a caveat of biographical indeterminacy? The goal of this study was to answer this question by providing a detailed analysis of the dramatic strategies in these plays and the types of indeterminacy they communicate. The form of Stoppard and Frayn’s biographical history plays, along with their use of stylization and statements the authors made about their representations of history, were the primary sources for this study. This set of evidence was
augmented with an examination of the authors’ portrayal of epistemological questions and the
treatment of history-related subjects in their previous works. Criticism from other scholars as
well as reviews of Stoppard and Frayn’s plays expanded these points of analysis.

Stoppard and Frayn’s depiction of the presence of indeterminacy in biographical
representation presents a foundation for future courses of study. Investigations into contemporary
playwrights such as Alan Bennett, who also includes epistemological themes in his history plays,
could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how epistemological lines of inquiry
are integrated into biography-based plays. Further, an examination of epistemological themes in
any genre of fictional or non-fictional history plays, even if stylizations are not used, would also
offer an interesting way to evaluate contemporary attitudes toward history.

The use of stylization by authors of history plays also presents an opportunity for further
study because, in the process of making the distinction between subject matter and the manner
representation, attitudes about the nature of historical knowledge are likely to be revealed. These
studies might address the different methods by which stylizations are created as well as the types
of rhetorical overlays that they present.

As these examples of continued study suggest, this dissertation is one of many potential
perspectives on biographical history plays. The time frame for this study was limited to the
roughly 11 year period between when Stoppard’s The Invention of Love was first produced in
1997, to the first production of Frayn’s Afterlife in 2008. The expansion of this topic to studies
that focus on a larger group of authors, a larger time frame, and different types of history plays
from other nations would have the potential to present a broader perspective. This dissertation
might have been further expanded by researching in greater detail the historical persons and eras
that Stoppard and Frayn’s plays depict in order to evaluate how closely they adhered to their professed philosophies for biographical representation.

Looming behind the analyses in this study was a questioning of what constitutes a valuable representation of history. Stoppard and Frayn’s portrayals of history frequently drew divided reactions of either sharp criticism or philosophical support from scholars. In interviews related to their biographical history plays, interest in their treatment of history appeared to have nearly equal footing with the themes drawn from their characters’ lives. Evidence that this interest in questioning what constitutes a valuable historical representation is becoming more common may have been presented in a recent movie review in The New York Times. In his review of Hot Tub Time Machine (2010), A. O. Scott dared to hint that there was something of historical value in a seemingly trivial movie based on an irreverent pretence and loaded with vulgar comedy:

The cultural detritus piled up everywhere, to be recycled, cherished, mocked and travestied, provides small—but nonetheless real—compensation for the spiritual deficits of modern life. Is it crazy to write that sentence in a review of Hot Tub Time Machine? (screen 1)

Scott appears to be struggling with his reaction to this seemingly trivial movie, but writing that sentence is not crazy because questioning what is historically worthwhile is another way to appreciate the influence of history. His review suggests that even when an encounter with history is based in nostalgia, simplicity permits escapism while, at the same time, there is a complex interaction between references that hint at a more substantial comprehension of the past, or even an understanding of the potent influence that those references contain.
Beyond Scott’s reaction, time travel offers an interesting metaphor for describing both the process creating, and value of, historical representation. The visitation of history in any movie about time travel presents some form of historical retrospective, no matter how rudimentary, letting audiences gape backwards at an era that influenced who they (or other people) are today. Similar to time travel in the movies, historical representation is an act of contrivance. One historian might build a better “time machine” than another, given his/her gift for research and analysis, but the end result is ultimately an artificial endeavor: sodium can be repeatedly added to chloride but you cannot repeatedly add Gorbachev to Reagan or Rodgers to Hammerstein—at least not with the same precision. Once the leap back in time has been made by the author the interpretations of the past are guided by a collection of subjective cultural norms from his/her originating era, even if that person once lived in the time period they are now visiting. The author and the time traveler’s presence in the past always has implications for the future because their mere interaction with, or interpretation of, the historical moment cannot be achieved without some interference. The degree of these changes is based on the ethics of the “visitor” and might range from a highly scrupulous biographer that accidentally steps on a Bradbury-esque “butterfly,” misinterpreting a seemingly trivial detail, to an unscrupulous Nazi sympathizer who creates a radical historical revisionism that is the equivalent of someone going back in time to assassinate eminent scientists and important leaders, by writing a denial of the holocaust. Whatever their intentions might be, all of these “time-travelers” leave their mark and, through their readers, manipulate the experience of the future.

Stoppard and Frayn’s recent biographical history plays negotiate history in complicated ways, characterizing the lives of historical persons while acknowledging their creative and interpretive processes at the same time. Many of their stylizations are not unlike the self-
reflective contrivances depicted in movies about time travel—using devices such as short
circuited hot tubs and nuclear-charged Deloreans (Back to the Future 1985)—and these authors
appear to never forget the pretense behind their interaction with history. The epistemological
examinations in these plays do more than point out contrivance, they demonstrate its inevitability
by illuminating the factors that lead to an incomplete knowledge of the past.

Just as in any representation of history, this dissertation contains elements of contrivance.
There were undoubtedly cultural influences shaping the interpretation of information that were
not detected by the author. In an act of creation, every play analysis, selection of quotes, and
structuring of arguments was specifically designed to present a comprehensible interpretation of
the playwrights’ works along with discourses from other scholars. Perhaps the end result was too
totalizing. Hopefully there were enough qualifiers such as “appears” and “suggests” to maintain
a useful amount of indeterminism.

However, even as this is written, a bias toward the intellectual strategies presented by
Stoppard and Frayn is perhaps betrayed. For the moment, this potential bias will be further
demonstrated by concluding with a quote from one of their works (ellipses are native):

We spend our lives, not being and doing, but being on the verge of being, just
about to do. And what we are on the verge of is . . . being in the past. What we are
just about to change is . . . what’s already history. (Frayn, The Human Touch 137)

Frayn’s observations, like the analyses of Stoppard and Frayn’s works in this study, are on the
verge of being . . . even as they are read. The continued effort to comprehend this “verge” in
oneself and in others presents an opportunity to embrace the questions in life that are the most
vital, even as those questions also quickly become history. Life is a mixture of what appears to
be objective certainties and subjective interpretations, both of which are present in even the most
mundane experiences. Similar to the role of shadows in a photography, Stoppard and Frayn’s inclusion of ironic distancing, caveats, and indeterminism in their biographical works might represent one of the truest measures of “life writing,” because in these expressions is the elusive “verge” of action, intention, and comprehension that gives life definition. Or, as Stoppard’s Oscar Wilde might say, “that gives life definition where truth is the work of imagination.”
Bibliography


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