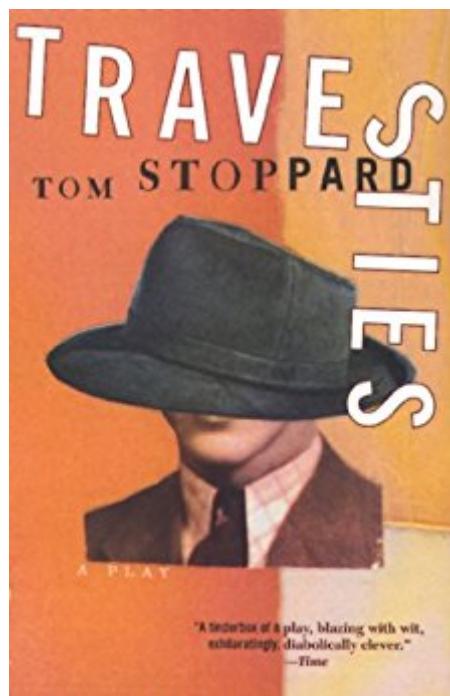


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# Travesties (Tom Stoppard)



## Synopsis

"Travesties" was born out of Stoppard's noting that in 1917 three of the twentieth century's most crucial revolutionaries -- James Joyce, the Dadaist founder Tristan Tzara, and Lenin &#150; were all living in Zurich. Also living in Zurich at this time was a British consular official called Henry Carr, a man acquainted with Joyce through the theater and later through a lawsuit concerning a pair of trousers. Taking Carr as his core, Stoppard spins this historical coincidence into a masterful and riotously funny play, a speculative portrait of what could have been the meeting of these profoundly influential men in a germinal Europe as seen through the lucid, lurid, faulty, and wholly riveting memory of an aging Henry Carr.

## Book Information

File Size: 376 KB

Print Length: 100 pages

Publisher: Grove Press (May 16, 2011)

Publication Date: May 16, 2011

Language: English

ASIN: B005CAQBEW

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Not Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #267,480 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #133 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > British > Drama & Plays #165 in Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts > Theater > Playwriting #800 in Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Dramas & Plays

## Customer Reviews

TRAVESTIES, by Tom Stoppard is witty, funny, moving, and thought provoking. Stoppard has taken an historical coincidence - in 1917 James Joyce, Tristan Tzara, Lenin, and several Brits were living in Zurich, while WW I raged around them - and has imagined an engaging collision, indeed intense explosion, of these characters and their vivid and opposing ideas of what art should be, while extrapolating and interweaving ideas and characters from Oscar Wilde's THE IMPORTANCE OF

BEING EARNEST, that Joyce in fact produced during that time in Zurich. The production I saw, directed enthrallingly by Sam Buntrock, delivered as intense and energetic a first act as I have ever seen. But merely reading the play is amusingly rich with the characters and ideas they voice, and reading it allows a review of those ideas that a production as alive and kinetic as Buntrock's is almost too fast and tightly packed to fully absorb. Although copyrighted in 1975, the play and its historically based characters feel as alive and relevant as any today; that is to say the themes are timeless.

not a stageable play except to a few intellectual elite groups, but some dialogues are eminently timeless of politics over centuries -especially between Lenin and Tzara ....

fabulous! already reviewed in on Theater Pizzazz

One of Stoppard's best

Stoppard is not for the casual reader or play-goer. He is complex but wonderful.

didn't bother reading, thought it was a novel

Tom Stoppard was clearly showing off when he wrote "Travesties". In his research he cleverly discovered that V.I. Lenin, James Joyce (then young and in the midst of writing Ulysses), and Tristan Tzara, one of the leaders of the dadaist movement, were living in Zurich simultaneously. Teamed up with Gwendolen and Cecily, two characters from Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Ernest", and Henry Carr, a former member of the British Consular Service, Stoppard wrote a theoretical account of their interactions in 1917. The result is "Travesties", a wildly intelligent and humorous play. The play is set in the faulty memory of Henry Carr as he reminices about his experiences in Zurich (yes, he was there too) during "The Great War". As it was, Henry Carr, a non-fictional historical figure, played the role of Algernon in "The Importance of Being Ernest" in a play company owned by James Joyce. When James Joyce refused to reimburse Carr for the few hundred pounds he spent on his trousers in his overzealous attempt to "become" Algernon, a lawsuit ensued, which Joyce ultimately won. Indeed, Joyce indeed attained total victory by writing Carr into Ulysses as a drunken soldier. So, as one might imagine, the play is full of small stabs at James Joyce, namely by the elder Carr (at present during the play it is 1972). The integration of

Lenin and his wife, as well as Cecily, Gwendolen and Tzara, is fantastic and extremely imaginative, and the experience would, no doubt, be enhanced by first reading all of the works alluded to in the play. Despite Tom Stoppard's obvious attempt to promote his own genius in "Travesties", the outcome is so fantastic, so interesting, and so, honestly, funny, that all is forgiven. Travesties is 71 pages long, and a reasonably quick read... spend one afternoon curled up with it, see it if you can, and muse over the connections (but not too loudly with the "aha!"s) you find... and I hate to end a review so blandly, but enjoy.

Stoppard's comedy for intellectuals featuring War Time Zurich to where heavy-weight intellectuals in Europe fled and incubated their respective ideals and beliefs. The play featured personal conflict between a minor figure, player Henry Carr and prominent writer and businessman James Joyce. With the Oscar Wilde's play "The importance of Being Ernest" played both on stage and in real life Zurich, thus involving the Bolshevik revolutionary Lenin and painter/artist Tzara. The former's manifesto was presented with rather lengthy soliloquy, a bit didactic at times, but not without its comic elements. The latter's anti-rationalist Dadaism was portrayed in a most funny way with mistaken identity directly from Wilde's play. It would be interesting to note that Wilde's Importance was actually inspired by Shakespeare's play the Comedy of Errors. Stoppard however has not exhausted most prominent intellectuals then in Zurich. In particular Carl Jung. Joyce was familiar with Jung who later treated, unsuccessful, the schizophrenia of Joyce's daughter (later institutionalized for life). Jung had earlier written a hostile analysis of Ulysses, and Joyce was left bitter at Jung's analysis of his daughter. He paid back in Finnegans Wake, joking with Jung's concepts of Animus and Anima. Incidentally Joyce wrote Carr as a drunken soldier in Ulysses, a warning for common folks who might be tempted to argue with great writers! A highly readable comedy of Stoppard.

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