



A Playgoer's Guide

"In Tom Stoppard's plays ideas can just as much be objects of aesthetic perception and delight as can sunsets or roses. Ideas can be elegant; they can seduce, tease, or strike comic poses; they can rhyme and be set ringing at selected overtones. From ideas thus at play we ask what we ask of any imaginative use of language: inevitability and surprise." - David Guaspari, *The Antioch Review* (Spring, 1996)



Tom Stoppard

"We do on stage things that are supposed to happen off. Which is a kind of integrity, if you look on every exit as being an entrance somewhere else." -- The Player, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

Sir Tom Stoppard was born on July 3rd 1937 in Zlín, Czechoslovakia. He grew up in Singapore and India during the Second World War and moved to England in 1946 with his mother and stepfather, his own father having been killed in Singapore. He was educated at Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire, he became a journalist, and from 1954 to 1963 he worked for various companies such as the *Western Daily Press*, the *Bristol Evening World*, and *Scene* magazine in London.

Stoppard completed his first play in 1960, and began writing plays for radio and television from 1963 to 1967/ From September 1962 until April 1963, Stoppard worked in London as a drama critic for *Scene* magazine, writing reviews and interviews both under his name and the pseudonym William Boot (which he took from Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop*).

The Real Inspector Hound was first staged in 1968, and has been followed by plays and honours too numerous to mention. In the past few years, his ambitious trilogy of plays set in 19th century Russia, *The Coast of Utopia* (2002), first staged at the National Theatre in 2002. Tom Stoppard was knighted in 1997. He lives in London. His latest plays are *Heroes* (2005) and *Rock 'n' Roll* (2006). Most recently, he wrote the screenplay for *The Bourne Ultimatum*. [Adapted from The British Council's *Contemporary Authors* Web site]

A critical perspective

"Tom Stoppard is a deceptive dramatist. He is always written about as if he were an intellectual acrobat and dazzling word-spinner delighted by ideas and deficient in emotion. And it is perfectly true that he is unafraid to deal with subjects that would deter many dramatists; from metaphysics and quantum mechanics to moral philosophy and moon landings. But behind the intellectual high jinx there lurks an often passionate humanist whose writing betrays an increasing concern both with the abuse of freedom and the nature of love. Whatever Stoppard is, he is certainly not a cold fish. The key to his work, both formally and intellectually, lies in the idea of collision: as he once told a *New York Times* interviewer, 'I write plays because writing dialogue is the only respectable way of contradicting myself'." – Michael Billington

the play

The plot follows two theatre critics named Moon and Birdboot who are watching a ludicrous setup of a country house murder mystery, in the style of a whodunit. The play is a parody of the stereotypical parlor mystery in the style of Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*, as well as of the critics watching the play, with their personal desires and obsessions interwoven into their bombastic and pompous reviews. Stoppard's play references *The Mousetrap* in its title and its "surprise ending." *The Real Inspector Hound*, much like Stoppard's earlier play *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, examines the ideas of fate and free will, as well as exploring the themes of the "play within a play." [adapted from wikipedia]

The Mousetrap

The Mousetrap is a play in the murder mystery genre by Agatha Christie. The play is known for having the longest initial run of any play in the world, with over 23,000 performances since beginning its run in the West End of London in 1952. It is known for its twist ending, which at the end of every performance the audience is asked not to reveal. The play has been running for so long that its twist is fairly common knowledge.

The whodunit

A whodunit (for "Who done it?") is a complex, plot-driven variety of the detective story in which the puzzle is the main feature of interest. The reader is provided with clues from which the identity of the perpetrator of the crime may be deduced before the solution is revealed in the final pages of the book. The investigation is usually conducted by an eccentric amateur or semi-professional detective. The "whodunit" flourished during the so-called "Golden Age" of detective fiction, during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, when it was the predominant mode of crime writing.

"Stoppard's work invariably demands much from its audiences -- head, heart, libido -- and credits them with the capacity to learn. They must come prepared to laugh and to ponder the gravest of thoughts. If they do, they will find themselves not just intrigued and enlightened, but also moved and enlivened, with all their switches flicked on and buzzing." -- Amy Reiter, *Salon*

"Maybe it's his gaiety that critics can't forgive. With the world in the state it's in, shouldn't he be mopier ? Why doesn't he hate things, like all the Good Writers do ?" -- Lloyd Rose, *The Washington Post*

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