



The Real Inspector Hound

By Tom Stoppard

– A Playgoer's Companion –

About the play



The Real Inspector Hound opened at the Criterion Theatre in London on June 17, 1968. Its opening began the new custom of “Previews.” Originally the dress rehearsal would happen directly before first performance, but Stoppard felt that it was frightening going straight from dress rehearsal to opening night. The producer, Michael Codron, had the idea of having an audience see the show before it opened. So an audience started watching dress rehearsals as well. This helped the actors get used to the audience and allowed Stoppard to make changes before the play was opened. The previews helped build public interest and limited the access of critics until the play was ready.

The Real Inspector Hound is presented as a play-within-a-play. The two main characters, Moon and Birdboot, are introduced as theatre critics, which was not Stoppard's original intention: “I originally conceived a play, exactly the same play, with simply two members of an audience getting involved in the play-within-the play. But when it comes actually to writing something down which has integral entertainment value ... it very quickly occurred to me that it would be a lot easier to do it with critics, because you've got something known and defined to parody.” Some reviewers have stated that the play is a reply or a challenge to critics, suggesting that they criticize plays, but lack what it takes to perform in one without failing.

Stoppard has stated that the main focus of all his plays is to entertain. Many of Stoppard's plays include the convention of the play-within-the-play. The convention of the crime in the country house is present, too. Stoppard may have been drawing on Agatha Christie's long-running detective play *The Mousetrap* when writing this play (similarities include the fact that the

inspector in *The Mousetrap* arrives on skis, and on pontoons in *Hound*).

The Real Inspector Hound follows two plot lines: the world of the two critics, Birdboot and Moon, or Reality, and the world of the play-within-the-play, or Illusion. However, as the play goes on, lines between reality and illusion are blurred, and the roles of characters, actors, and critics are questioned. The audience is forced to re-evaluate their own role in the theatre and what is the line between the play and the real world surrounding it.

“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.” – *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

The Playwright

Tom Stoppard was born July 3, 1937 in Czechoslovakia. To escape the Nazis, his family moved to Singapore in 1939, shortly before the Japanese invasion in 1941; he then moved to Darjeeling, India with his mother and brother. His father remained behind and was killed during the invasion. In 1946, the family immigrated to England after Tom's mother married Kenneth Stoppard, a major in the British army.

At the age of 17, Stoppard dropped out of school to become a journalist, working as a dramatic critic for *Scene*, writing under his own name and also a pseudonym, William Boot. Stoppard's first television play was *A Walk on Water* (1963). It was later adapted for the stage and renamed *Enter a Free Man* in 1968. His major triumph came with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967), which



is one his most well-known works. He has since written a number of successful plays, the most popular including *Travesties*, *Arcadia*, and *Rock and Roll*. In addition to his stage works, Stoppard has created a number of screen plays, including one for Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*, which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1985. In 1999, he won an Oscar for Best Screenplay for *Shakespeare in Love*.

Additional awards include The John Whiting Award (1967), the *Evening Standard* Award (1967, 1973, 1975, 1979, 1983), the Italia Prize for radio plays (1968), three Tony Awards (1968, 1976, 1984), the Shakespeare Prize (1979), an Outer Circle Award (1984), and a Drama Desk Award (1984).

““We cross our bridges when we come to them and burn them behind us, with nothing to show for our progress except a memory of the smell of smoke, and a presumption that once our eyes watered.” – *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

This document was researched by

The members of the *Inspector Hound* Task Force

Adam Washburn, Amber Carroll, Erica Betts

and Vanessa Whittaker

and assembled and edited by the editorial team:

Nigel Bone, Alex Brown, Emily Cochrane,

Lucas Martin, and Russ Hunt

English 2223: The Page and the Stage

St. Thomas University

visit our Web site, at

<http://people.stu.ca/~hunt/22231011>