

Tom Stoppard: Reader's Reports on His Early Work

William Baker

Abstract: Presentation, study, discussion, and examination of readers' reports to publishers who employ them have been neglected. The reasons for this may have something to do with the fact that they are in publishing firms' archives or in research libraries where authors' actual manuscripts may well take priority. These reports provide insight into what publishers were looking for at the time, contemporary publishing estimations of the market, of what was sellable or not. They can also shed light on a writer's earliest attempts at publication and what a publisher's reader feels are strengths and weaknesses. This paper will present and discuss six reader's reports on Stoppard's early work authored by different hands employed by the London publishing firm of Faber and Faber. Frank Pike, who worked for Faber for more than forty years, is the reader for two of Stoppard's plays: the play that made Stoppard name *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* and *Travesties*; Nicola Croke comments on radio and television scripts, as do a report by an Australian Broadcasting Commission reader; a reissue of Stoppard's one novel to date, *Lord Malquist and Mr Moon* is the subject of a report, by "JH" for Faber. The recommendations made by the readers following Pike's awareness of Stoppard's value as a writer and to Faber, reinforce Stoppard's publishing status as a Faber commodity. The article also discusses the in-house reports in the light of subsequent critical reactions and concludes with reflections on the importance of publisher's readers' reports.

Keywords: publisher's reports; publisher's readers; subsequent critical reaction; stage scripts; published ones; Tom Stoppard

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标题: 汤姆·斯托帕德: 对其早期作品试读本读者报告的一份考察

内容摘要: 学界尚未对出版商雇佣的试读本读者所提交的报告进行发掘、研究、讨论和考察。这可能是因为虽然它们和作家的原始手稿一同存放在出版

公司档案库或研究图书馆中，而后者往往更受关注。试读本读者报告有助于了解当时出版商在寻找何种读者、其对当时出版市场的评估以及对产品可售性的判断。它们还可以揭示作家早期尝试出版的情况以及试读本读者对作品优缺点的评判。本文将呈现并讨论由伦敦出版公司费伯与费伯出版社雇佣的不同人员撰写的六份关于汤姆·斯托帕德早期作品的读者报告。在费伯出版社工作了四十多年的弗兰克·派克是斯托帕德的两部成名戏剧《罗森克兰兹和吉尔登斯特恩》和《变装》的读者；尼古拉·克鲁克评论了广播和电视剧本，澳大利亚广播委员会的一位读者也呈现了一份报告；一位姓名首字母缩写为“JH”的员工为斯托帕德迄今唯一的小说《迈尔奎斯特勋爵和穆恩先生》撰写了一份报告。派克将斯托帕德看作从属于费伯出版社的作家，紧随其后的读者们提出的建议也强化了斯托帕德作为费伯出版社商品的地位。本文还对比考察了上述内部报告和后来的批评反应，并对试读本读者的报告作出了反思性总结。

关键词：出版商报告；出版商读者；后续批评反应；舞台剧本；已出版的作品；汤姆·斯托帕德

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Tom Stoppard is an obsessive reviser, a reflection of Stoppard's view that a play "is an event rather than a text that one is trying to convey. Text is merely an attempt to describe an event" (qtd. in Gaskell, "Night and Day" 175). This paper is not concerned with a narrative of Stoppard's continual obsessive tinkering with the texts of his work but with the reactions of the very first professional publisher's readers to a Stoppard text submitted for consideration for publication. Of course, it is assumed that Stoppard shared drafts with friends and other trusted readers prior to sending his manuscript to a publisher. Their reactions are unavailable probably until an edition of Stoppard's correspondence appears. The reports discussed in this paper are aimed at an in-house readership of a very small number of people, consisting of the senior echelons of a publishing house, in this case, Faber and Faber. These reports are also rarely available and difficult to access in a publisher's archives. So, it is not inappropriate, to begin with the very first responses to Stoppard's text as submitted to his publishers before he had established a reputation or had been published by Faber. While working on *Tom Stoppard: A Bibliographical History*,¹ it emerged that

1 See William Baker and Gerald N. Wachs, *Tom Stoppard: A Bibliographical History*. Further references to items in this work are described by categories used: for instance, "A10a, pp.65-67" refers to *Travesties* (A10) and to its "First British edition" (A10a).

the in-house Faber correspondence had been preserved in their archives and was accessible. What follows is a description and analysis of these although a lacuna is details of Stoppard's specific responses to them. The reports anticipate subsequent critical reactions to Stoppard and demonstrate the perspicuity of Faber's readers.

Stoppard's initial contacts with Faber appear to have been through his friend from his days as a working journalist in Bristol, Anthony Smith. Smith had been at Cambridge with Frank Pike and it was Pike, at Faber and Faber who was responsible for the inclusion of three of Stoppard's short stories in *Introduction 2: Stories by New Writers* published by Faber in 1964.¹ Faber and Frank Pyke naturally then were the publisher's Stoppard approached with his dramatic work.

Frank Pike,² Stoppard's editor at Faber for nigh on forty years, and one of the first professional readers of Stoppard's drama on looking at the script of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* comments that "This turns out to be quite as good as it was supposed to be – thank God. He amusingly and tellingly combines aspects of *Waiting for Godot* with some of 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?'. For Pike "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern become the central characters of Hamlet desperately in search of their identities." According to Pike "All they know about themselves is what they can gleam from the scenes in Shakespeare's play in which they appear, and these scenes are part of the present play. Hamlet, Ophelia, Polonius etc. sweep on and off as if they were the enigmatic minor characters R & G normally are." Pike adds, "It's a brilliant idea brilliantly carried out, and often very funny and most readable." For Pike "One particularly good bit comes over better on page than stage: a stage direction where Hamlet 'with his doublet all [two indecipherable words] no hat upon his head' [...] a sigh so piteous and profound that it does seem to shatter all his [talk] and end his being?" Pike then requests that a copy of his report "be sent to Production today [to M.E.]" and also to the New York-based publishers Grove. Pike types his name following his handwritten undated report. Many of Pike's observations anticipate those of the late Irving Wardle (1929-2023) the long-serving theatre critic of the *London Times*.

1 Baker and Ross D1: henceforth placed in the text.

2 For Frank Pike, see Hermoine Lee, *Tom Stoppard: A Life*, London: Faber and Faber, 2020, 97-98. According to the online history of Faber and Faber, Frank Pike "had joined the firm in 1959 and would remain with it for the next 41 years" (<https://www.faber.co.uk/history/1960s/> accessed 17 July 2023). The passage from his undated report on *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is published with the permission of Faber and Faber. William Baker is very much indebted to Nicci Cloke, Steve King, Stephen Page, Chief Executive, Dinah Wood and the archivists at Stoppard's publishers Faber and Faber who granted permission to use their archival materials and provided valuable and indispensable information. Thanks are due to Professors Sandro Jung and James Decker for their insightful observations. Every effort has been made to track down copyright holders however this has not always been possible.

Reviewing the first London production, which opened at the National Theatre on 11 April 1967, Wardle writes that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern “for most of [...] [the] play [...] are shown in private - abandoned in an ante-chamber of the palace waiting for the next call, spinning coins and playing word games, desperately latching onto the First Player as the only character who will speak for them” (*The Times*, 12 April 1967). Wardle adds that occasionally “the court sweeps on to conduct its incomprehensible business and sweeps out again leaving the interchangeable modern entities stranded like driftwood on the beach” (ibid.).

A typed undated letter from Stoppard informs Pike that he “will let you[Pike] have the cast list of the first production, this week. Tomorrow in fact” (Faber Archive). The text was published by Faber and Faber on 4 May 1967. In his letter to Pike Stoppard refers to two scripts for Pike to consider. Stoppard is concerned that there may be “confusion” caused “by referring to CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE as ‘King and Queen’ throughout” the text. The reason for such a “confusion arising from the fact that the Tragedians’ mime also has a King and Queen, indeed two or three different Kings – one poisoned, one usurper and one English.” Stoppard has “for publication purposes [...] ‘corrected’” what he refers to as “script No 1.” He has used “‘Claudius’ and ‘Gertrude’ wherever appropriate” and corrected typing errors. He has also “left you [Pike] a second script which incorporates all corrections except the substitutions of Claudius and Gertrude.” Also included with his letter is an additional typed list referred to as “Amendments.” These include words, phrases, and cuts, for example, after the play Stoppard cut a speech by Fortinbras and other material substituting “But during the above speech [by the Ambassador] the play fades, overtaken by dark and music” (Faber Archive).

None of this is mentioned in Pike’s report or other publisher readers’ reports. When considering these it is important to keep in mind Stoppard’s observations in a note to Frank Pike dated 15 February 1971 during the rehearsals for *Jumpers* “I keep changing the script to make it work better so he tells Pike ‘I hope you are prepared for some very messy galley proofs’” (Baker and Wachs 50). Further “In preparing plays [...] for publication [he has] tried with some difficulty to arrive at something called a ‘definitive text’” (ibid.). However, Stoppard “now believes that in the case of plays, there is no such animal. Each production will fill up its own problems and very often the solution will lie in some minor changes to the text, either in a dialogue or in the author’s directions or both” (ibid.).

Another reader’s report is by Nicola Croke.¹ It is a typed and undated report

1 Nicola Croke worked for many years at Faber: one of her responsibilities was the assessment of Television and Radio script submissions (Faber Archive).

on *Four Plays for Television and Radio* that is not entirely favourable. According to Croke “These four plays by Tom Stoppard—one written for television and three for sound radio—are a bit of a mixed bag. They are of serious lengths, but none very long. And their collective quality is a bit patchy.” Croke admits that “under normal circumstances they would be a doubtful proposition, but in view of Tom Stoppard’s present success with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* they are obviously worth considering.” The positives are that “on the whole they are funny and inventive with nice characterization and well-constructed plots (in three out of the four anyway), and all are slightly surrealist.” Croke finds *Teeth* and *The Dissolution of Dominic Boot* by far the most satisfactory. “They succeed because [Stoppard] has taken identifiable, everyday situations and has developed the comedy out of them, instead of taking a deliberately fantastic situation as a starting point.” For Croke “*The Dissolution of Dominic Boot* is especially nice—from the early to familiar embarrassment of taking a taxi and then finding one hasn’t got enough money.” Furthermore, Stoppard’s “hero travels towards ruin with pathetic inevitability until he lost his job, fiancé and self-respect, until he is sold everything he owns to the taxi driver!”

Croke then turns to the other plays. “*Teeth* takes place predictably enough in a Dentist’s surgery, where the Dentist systematically ruins the perfect features of his wife’s lover by removing a front tooth.” Croke writes “Both these plays have pace, weight and well-maintain suspense. There are reservations concerning the other plays. But *Albert’s Bridge* and *If You’re Glad I’ll Be Frank* lack the economy of writing of the other two plays and are much too whimsical. *Albert’s Bridge* is a longish radio play.” Such observations in the case of *Albert’s Bridge* have been tested and found somewhat wanting. In 1968 for instance “the play won two international awards [...] a Czech International Radio plays prize and the Prix Italia” (Lee 121).

Croke’s caveats didn’t prevent Faber from publishing *The Dissolution of Dominic Boot* as the first play in *The Plays for Radio 1964 – 1983* published in 1990 (Baker and Wachs G7a, and Fleming 19-20). The “BBC inaugurated their 15-minute play series in January 1964” and *Dominic Boot* became Stoppard’s “fifteen-minute radio play” (Fleming 19): “the first of Stoppard’s radio plays to be broadcast. The play had been submitted on 28 November 1963 by Stoppard’s agent Kenneth Ewing¹” (Baker and Wachs L4, 358).

1 Kenneth Ewing (1927-2008): See “Kenneth Ewing Influential literary agent who nurtured the talents and careers of novelists and scriptwriters from Osborne to Stoppard” *Times* (London) 23 April 2008. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/kenneth-ewing-plnqzgvxc98>. Accessed 24 July 2023.

Albert's Bridge initially was published in *Plays and Players* 15.1 (October 1967): 21-30 and was, according to Stoppard his "first more-or-less full-scale radio play" ("Introduction" to *Plays* 2 vii). It was published as a Samuel French acting edition in 1969 and subsequently by Faber a year later (Baker and Wachs A4, a,-c: 35-36). *Teeth*, a thirty-minute television play, was transmitted on 8 February 1967 as part of the BBC "Thirty-Minute Theatre" series (Baker and Wachs, G9, Note four, 253-254). *If You're Glad I'll Be Frank* was first published separately on 18 October 1976 (Baker and Wachs, A5a, 40). "Stoppard's meditation on the nature of time and how modern society is imprisoned by it" (Fleming 39) was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 8 February 1966 (Baker and Wachs, L8, 358). Whether Stoppard saw Croke's report is difficult to assess. He did have difficulties with the original radio play "got stuck with it, rewrote it endlessly [...] and delivered it to the BBC a year later than promised" (Lee 121).

In a report dated 11 July 1967 Nicola Croke comments on Stoppard's "latest play for television," *Another Moon Called Earth* that became "the seed for *Jumpers*" (Fleming 82). It was produced on BBC TV as a "30 Minute Theatre on 28 June 1967" (Baker and Wachs, G4a, 246). Croke watched it on TV being "a little dubious about it then because the production itself left a lot to be desired!" After reading the script she writes "I should say that it comes somewhere between 'Albert's Bridge' (his longer radio play) and 'Teeth,' the earlier (and better) Thirty Minute Theatre." Croke then gives an account of the play. According to Croke "the situation is very forced-one could have the same play between woman, husband and doctor/lover without the very artificial reason of her new mystical awareness of life caused by a moon landing." Croke adds that this "doesn't really go with her character - Penelope is obviously wilful, but rather stupid." Despite such caveats "It's a nicely constructed play [...] very funny in parts and his rather intellectual jokes and word-play, come across very well." Croke adds that "As a play it is quite easy to read, the characters come across well, and Penelope is a little easier to believe in when one can put Diana Cilento's interpretation out of one's mind. The doctor and Bone, the husband, are both particularly good." Cilento (1932-2011) played the role of Penelope in the "30-Minute Theatre" showing of 28 June 1967 repeated on 28 August 1967 (Baker and Wachs, G4.a. Note four, 246). Croke concludes that she thinks "this play should be included in any collection of Tom Stoppard's work, together with 'Teeth' and 'Albert's Bridge'." Fleming has rightly written that "many of the ideas, much of the situation, and some of the dialogue" found in this television play "were used for *Jumpers*" (272).

A Moon Called Earth A Play for Television was included in *The Dog It Was*

That Died and Other Plays published by Faber in 1983 (91-108: Baker and Wachs, G4.a. 245-246). The collection also included *Teeth* (71-88), *The Dog It Was That Died A Play for Radio* (11-45), *The Dissolution of Dominic Boot A Play for Radio* (49-58), *"M" is for Moon Among Other Things A Play for Radio* (61-67), *Neutral Ground A Screenplay* (111-164) and *A Separate Peace A Play for Television* (167-183).

Stoppard's radio play, *Artist Descending A Staircase*, was published, in the first place as an informally published radio script and secondly as a Faber text. It was the successful BBC Drama Entry for the 1973 Italia Prize and produced by John Tydeman (1936-2020) who "would spend many years working with Stoppard" (Lee 102). The copy of this radio script, initially broadcast on 14 November 1972 contains many blue ink and pencilled erasures and additions (Baker and Wachs 59). The first Faber edition was published on 29 October 1973 accompanied by *Where Are They Now?* (ibid., A9, 59-60).

Two reports are available for *Artist Descending A Staircase*. There is one by "rwwilliams" in typed format for the "Australian Broadcasting Commission Feature Report." According to Williams, this is "A First Class piece of radio-drama, sophisticated in structure and in its demand that the audience become almost part of the action in order [to] understand events and their causes" (qtd. in Baker and Wachs, A9a., Note three, 60). Williams expresses scepticism concerning the "claim that the ambiguities of the play call in doubt the nature of fact and reality" (ibid.). For Williams "the characters, though differentiated, are not deeply observed - their philosophies are hackneyed and flimsy, their roles and opinions stereotypes" (ibid.). Furthermore, there are "some possible difficulties. The flashbacks are adequately prepared for in the preceding dialogue and sound effects - the flashforwards, because of the structure, are not. An audience would need to adjust itself pretty quickly from one scene to another" (ibid.). Williams concludes that: "as a play about people I thought it ultimately nugatory - but as a piece of sophisticated radio it is structurally superb" (ibid.). Williams's strictures are echoed subsequently in the description of *Artist Descending A Staircase* as a "masterpiece" (Jesson 244) and "as a play about knowledge offered and withheld, about people recognized and unrecognizable, about art conceived and misconceived." It is most appropriate to radio "where the blindness of the medium compliments, and even complicates, the blindness that the drama portrays" (Guralnick 76).

Although the handwriting is very similar to Frank Pike's, an undated handwritten unsigned report for Faber is similarly detailed. It opens with the information that the "play was commissioned by the European Broadcasting Union

and is thus guaranteed transmission in all the countries of the continent—when they've successfully translated it" (Baker and Wachs, A9a., 60).¹ The report's author (Pike?) observes, "It's a characteristic piece of Stoppard, beautifully written and constructed, witty and ingenious. As it hinges on differing interpretations of the sequence of sound effects and exploits the conventions of radio drama (especially the flash-back) it wouldn't work in another medium, as *Albert's Bridge* did." There is then an account of the play. "To summarize is to caricature, but it's concerned with three artists, Martello, Beauchamp and Donner, who've been living together for more than half a century in the uneasy companionship of any shared household." At the opening of the play "it seems from the sound effects that Martello has pushed Donner downstairs, thereafter flashbacks within flashbacks take us back in the lives of the trio until 1914, when the time sequence is reversed to bring us back again to the present and the sound-effects sequence with which the play began and which now has a quite different interpretation." The reader adds that "although this obviously won't make as successful a publication as a stage play, I'm quite sure we should publish it." The reader suggests that "If the length makes it difficult to price, another radio play (*Where Are They Now?* about an old boys' dinner) could be combined" (unsigned readers report Faber Archive).

A relatively limited print run for the cased edition of 656 copies, published on 29 October 1973, reflects that Faber took the advice of their reader. *Artist Descending A Staircase and Where Are They Now Two Plays for Radio* appeared together (Baker and Wachs 61). No doubt Stoppard made his usual obsessive changes to the texts prior to their publication.

Very little criticism of the radio plays has appeared and what there is tends to focus upon specific aspects that are not textual. For instance, Purse in *Tom Stoppard's Plays Patterns of Plenitude and Parsimony* in a section on "Stoppard's Time Shifts" (560-565) concentrates on the way in which Stoppard "employs time shift in *Artists Descending a Staircase* [...] emphasizing how it enables him to address the emotional side of the characters" (561). On the other hand, Elissa S. Guralnick in "Stoppard's radio and television plays" comes closer to the comprehensive nature of Pike's in-house publisher's observations and Williams's on the quality of the dialogue and character interaction in Stoppard's radio drama.

Stoppard's only novel *Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon* was initially published by Anthony Blond on 22 August 1966 of which 688 copies were sold by the end of 1966 (Nadel 168). The Faber edition was published 17 June 1974 in a run of

¹ Amongst Stoppard's papers at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin, is an Icelandic translation typed by Gudjon Olafsson, box folder 73.8 (Baker and Wachs 60).

1743 copies (Baker and Wachs 217). The typed Faber's reader's report by "JH" is dated 3 November 1972. The first of three paragraphs consists of an account of the plot, the second concentrates on the novel's qualities, and the single-sentence third paragraph contains a publishing recommendation. This report opens: "In the fantasy world Stoppard creates here an extraordinary assortment of unlikely characters become involved in a number of dream-like, at times surrealistic encounters." The reader "JH" then becomes more specific focusing on individual characters and the narrative: "Lord Malquist is an impeccably dressed, sententious aristocrat who hires Mr. Moon to compile his memoirs." The reader "JH" then turns to "Mr. Moon [...] something of a schizophrenic Prufrock who treads an unheroic path mildly surprised at both the inner and outer fantasy worlds in which he exists." According to this reading, Moon is "motivated by a vague feeling that something is wrong with the world he awaits an opportunity - which he finally gets during the last strains of the National Anthem - to explode a home-made bomb which he carries about with him. His attempt is, needless to say, abortive." At this point in his report "JH" turns to Moon's relationships or non-relationships with other characters and to the narrative. "The many strange, rather picaresque encounters between a Risen Christ figure, two cowboys, Jane - Moon's provocative and almost permanently nude wife, the shoeless, whisky-loving Lady Malquist and the Negro Irish coachman are enlivened by shootings, lion hunts, reckless drives and bubble-bath rendezvous."

In the second paragraph of the report "JH" admits that *Lord Malquist and Mr Moon* "is the sort of book it's hard to write about" (JH: Faber Archive)-a sentiment also expressed by a subsequent critic Neil Sammells who comments that the novel "has attracted scant critical comment [...] However, *Lord Malquist* deserves better" (230).¹ "JH" confesses to enjoying "reading it -though perhaps only moderately. I found it less contrived than I might otherwise have done because the author himself seems to enter so fully into the spirit of his creations and to believe in them completely." For "JH" "the zest and rollicking pace with which he [Stoppard] develops the fantasy is infectious. Occasional rumblings of 'deeper things' are heard every now and then but both the satire and the fantasy are kept on a very light-hearted level, and the disturbing quality of the book depends on one's own reaction -half delighted and half alarmed -to the topsy-turvy vision of the established ordered world." According to this report "the writing is easy, vivacious and witty, though the book as a whole has a slightly first draft feeling about it. The first chapter, in which the dramatis personae are introduced in isolation from one another I didn't

1 For a detailed account, see Neil Sammells, "Stoppard's Novel," *Tom Stoppard in Context*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, 230-237.

find entirely satisfactory. The brief central chapter in which Moon's alter persona recounts events from a different viewpoint, however, I thought worked quite well." In short, "JH" concludes in the third paragraph: "By and large I would've thought this would go down pretty well with the Stoppard fans, though it lacks the scope of his more recent work" (JH: Faber Archive). By 2006 the novel had appeared in several editions however there is little or no evidence available that Stoppard spent too much time if any making textual changes and they are not mentioned in his various new introductions to the novel. In this sense, it must be unusual in his writing practices (cf. Baker and Wachs: 214-224).

As previously indicated many of these in-house reports anticipate points made by subsequent criticism and analysis of Stoppard's work. In the instance of the Faber reader's responses to Stoppard's novel, the implications of important elements are left undeveloped. This is especially so in the all too brief mention of the significance of the "damp-squib of a bomb, which ticks away in" Moon's "pocket during the second half of the novel" (Sammells 231). Franc Smith in his review "Mardi Gras on the Eve of Death" "saw more in the novel's serious levity: an engagement with contemporary political realities, rather than an escape into an airless, ahistorical surrealism." For Smith "the decline of world power (England) is best comprehended not in epic form [...] but in broad comic strokes" (Smith: cited Sammells: 231). Sammells acutely observes that Stoppard's summary of his novel as "24 hours in the day of Churchill's funeral and a quartet of characters who do crazy quadrille from London and an Irish Risen Christ [...] say no more (cited in Nadel: 167) [...] neatly captures the counterpoint of chaos and elaborate patterning which defines the narrative of Lord Marquist" (Sammells 231).

Seven days before Faber publicised Stoppard's novel, his stage play *Travesties* had its premiere at the Aldwych Theatre on 10 June 1974 in a production by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Stoppard's agent "Fraser and Dunlop Scripts"¹ sent a copy to Faber. Frank Pike in his highly favourable typed report, consisting of one lengthy paragraph, and a much shorter second one, dated 8 April 1974 writes that "The starting point of this wonderfully funny and clever extravaganza is the fact that James Joyce and Lenin were both in Zürich at important periods of their lives during 1917 and 18" (Faber Archive). According to Pike "It only takes a small amount of artistic license with the chronology to have both of them working in the same room of Zürich Public Library. When the play opens Joyce's dictating what must be bits of 'Anna Livia Plurabell' to a self-appointed English amanuensis called Gwendolen

1 Kenneth Ewin worked for the Fraser and Dunlop agency which became Peters Fraser and Dunlop. See Hermoine Lee, *Tom Stoppard: A Life*, London: Faber and Faber, 2020, 965.

and almost immediately Krupskaya rushes in to tell Lenin (in Russian) that the revolution has just broken out.” Pike explains that “All the action of the play, much of it deliciously funny, is ‘as remembered’ by Henry Carr (an historical figure?), the dim but nice British consul (Gwendolen is his sister), and the time scheme of the play flits between the period where he was inveigled by Joyce into taking part in a production of *THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST* and later when as his older self he is garrulously and not always accurately composing his memoirs.” For Pike “The result is a characteristic piece of Stoppard surrealism which is at the same time a shrewd and comic distillation of two important aspects of European political and literary culture – at least two!”¹ Pike adds that “this may or may not be the best Stoppard yet, but for sheer skill and entertainment value, this play must surely see all other current offerings - and they’re not inconsiderable -right. out of sight” (Faber Archive)².

Pike is concerned about publication dating practicalities. He points out that “The RSC [Royal Shakespeare Company] start rehearsing immediately, and the first preview is on May 30th and the critics’ opening is on June 10th.” Pike adds that “Obviously we can’t publish before the autumn, but we must try and do so as early as possible in that season.” Furthermore “the play is a tricky one to stage, and I’ve no doubt they’ll be the usual changes in rehearsal³ but I think that it would nevertheless be worthwhile roughing out a schedule on the assumption that setting cannot start before, say, June 15th.” Pike adds in ink “Text available for estimating” This is followed by a “P.S. There will be 35 perf[ormances] between June 10 and Aug 17. Thereafter will either return in repertory after an interval or may transfer subject to RSC approval.” Pike then provides a list of the cast, who is performing what. This includes the note “Cicely – Mia Farrow Getting cold feet) etc” (Faber Archive). Pike was right and the role of Cicely was performed by Beth Morris. As stated earlier, Faber published *Travesties*, on 18 February 1975, in a run of 1500 copies of the hardback and 8000 of the paperback.⁴

As Gaskell in his *From Writer to Reader* has shown the reading texts of *Travesties* are replete with differences by an “author” who “continued to encourage

1 The exclamation mark “!” is in ink.

2 “out of sight” written in black ink. Pike may be referring to plays running in the West End at the time or Pike to plays offered to Faber for publication.

3 For an account of these see Philip Gaskell, *From Writer to Reader: Studies in Editorial Method*, Winchester: St Paul’s Bibliographies, 1984, 103-107, 275-278.

4 Baker and Wachs, n.1 A 10a Note one and see pp.65-72 for *Travesties* subsequent print runs. For its reception and after-life see Lee, p.975; Mia Farrow (1945-) was married at the time to André Previn (1929-2019), a close friend of Stoppard’s: see Lee, pp. 956, 966.

textual flexibility" (247) although "the textual variation [...] is mostly of a sort that affects the detailed texture of the play rather than its larger structure" and importantly according to Gaskell "most of them serve the purpose of making the play more effective in the theatre" (247). There were "also changes on a larger scale, one of which [...] altered the whole balance of the work. This was the deletion of practically the whole of Cecily's political lecture at the beginning of the second act, which had been a disastrous longueur in the first production" (247). In spite of this "the lecture still encumbers the reading text, and it is likely that it will be used, in whole or in part, in future productions of the play" (247). Although such words are almost half a century old they are still valid and pinpoint "the central importance of the performance text in the development of the work": these performance texts disappear however a later text may include "elements of an early performance text" (247). Further the reading text -the text commented on by Faber's publisher's readers-"may have artistic value, but it is not the whole play" (Gaskell 260).

To conclude, the six reader's reports by employees of one publishing house, Faber and Faber, are revealing as they are probably the first professional readers to comment on Stoppard's scripts in print as opposed to watching them in the theatre: one of the reports is of Stoppard's novel. None of them displays evidence of the reader recommending title changes or radical cutting, as in the case of the practice of an outstanding literary editor of the second half of the 20th century. Robert Gottlieb (1931-2023) "suggested to Joseph Heller he change the title of 'Catch-18' to 'Catch-22,' which he thought was funnier, and which he knew would not conflict with Leon Uris' upcoming novel 'Mila 18' on booksellers' shelves." Also "Gottlieb [...] famously worked with Robert Caro to cut 350,000 words from his million-word study of the New York City administrator Robert Moses" (Carlson, "Robert Gottlieb obituary").

The first report considered here, that of Frank Pike on *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, although relatively short, deals with a play by an unknown, so a case has to be made out for publication, although Pike believes in its author's talent and is aware that there are differences between what is performed and what appears on the page. The second report by Pike, dated 8 April 1974, concerns *Travesties*, the work of a no longer unknown dramatist. There is no question whatsoever that the play be published or of the quality of a play. Pike writes "This may or may not be the best Stoppard yet, but for sheer skill and entertainment value, this play must surely" surpass "all other current offerings." The two reports from Nicola Croke relate to television and radio offerings for publication. Croke expresses in some instances reservations. There are two reports on another Stoppard radio play *Artist*

Descending A Staircase, one for Australian radio and the other from an unidentified Faber reader who, similar to the Australian reader highlights Stoppard's technical adroitness with radio sound. "JH"'s assessment of Stoppard's, to date only novel, originally published by Anthony Blond in 1966 and two years later as a Panther paperback (Baker and Wachs 213-217), contains plot summary, and discussion of some characterization. It concludes "I would've thought this would go down pretty well with the Stoppard fans, though it lacks the scope of his more recent work" (Faber Archive).

Frank Swinnerton (1884-1982), novelist, essayist, distinguished literary figure and publisher's reader from the early years of the past century in his *Background with Chorus* [...] (1956) laid out some of the criteria that he looked for as a reader. "Now the professional reader of any quality takes no heed of the commercial vogue." Swinnerton writes: "His eyes are upon posterity, or at least upon the fashions of five or ten years ahead. He must be ready to see good in all styles, but he must never be deceived by the bad or what is called the *faux bon*." The publisher's reader "has a duty to his employer, and a duty to literature; according to his fulfillment of those duties he will gain reputation [sic] as a critic or drop to the position of a hack" (Swinnerton 110). Stoppard's readers had to keep in mind that Faber's was a private company dependent upon profits yet mindful of its reputation as a publisher of quality. In the case of Stoppard, following the success of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* and their commitment to him, the publication of his work was guaranteed. However, their readers, in common with subsequent reviewers of Stoppard's work, are not afraid to isolate weaknesses or limitations as well as strengths.

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