J. King Saud Univ., Vol. **6**, *Arts* (2), pp. 33-52 Riyadh (A.H. 1414/1994).

'The Importance of Being Flora Crewe': The Artist's Way of Apprehending and Expressing Reality as Compared with the Critic's and the Scholar's in Tom Stoppard's *In The Native State*

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(Received 19/12/1412; accepted 7/10/1413)

Abstract. In this article, I propose to clarify Tom Stoppard's attitude to art, criticism, and academic scholarship in his last play, *In The Native State*, and to show that the meaning of the play is intimately related to the artistic process itself which is totally different from the nature and assumptions of criticism and scholarship.

This article is divided into three parts. The first part discusses Stoppard's attitude to critics. The second part deals with his attitude to scholars. The third and last part is devoted to the heroine, Flora Crewe, who embodies the creative process itself and conveys the play's meaning. This part also discusses the differences in personality between Flora and her sister Mrs. Swan, and between Flora and Adela Quested in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. These comparisons serve to highlight Flora's unique personality through which is conveyed Stoppard's vision of the nature of human relations and his attitude to artistic creation.

Introduction

Although, to my knowledge, very little criticism has, so far, been written on Stoppard's last play, *In The Native State*,(1) this play is undoubtedly his subtlest work and John Tydeman, BBC Radio's head of drama, who directed the play, is certainly right when he says: "I think it's the best thing he's ever written. It has flesh and blood. One is moved by it. So often in the past his cleverness has got in the way and he's hidden his feelings under the pyrotechnics. But he's really a soppy old thing."(2)

(1) *In The Native State* was first transmitted on BBC Radio 3 on 21 April 1991.
(2) Quoted in Paul Donovan's "Return of the Native," *The Sunday Times*, 21 April 1991, sec. 5, p. 1, col. 4.

The major theme of the play is the nature of the artist's apprehension of reality. This theme subsumes many of the themes that Stoppard dealt with in his previous work such as the artist's role in society (*Artist Descending a Staircase* and *Travesties*); intuition and feeling *versus* reason and intellectualism (*Professional Foul* and *Jumpers*); escape from whatever curtails the individual's freedom (*Enter a Free Man, Albert's Bridge, If You're Glad I'll Be Frank, A Separate Peace, Cahoot's Macbeth,* and *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*); the importance of caring (*The Real Thing* and *Hapgood*); the arbitrary nature of the relationship between "signified" and "signifier" and the confusion which results from shifting frames of definition (The *Dog* plays and *Dirty Linen*)); and the subjective, relative and elusive nature of truth (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Where Are They Now?, Jumpers, Travesties, Night and Day, The Dog It Was That Died* and *Hapgood*).

Stoppared subtly reintegrates all the above-mentioned themes in order to offer us in the character of Flora Crewe a concrete example of what he made James Joyce claim for the Artist in *Travesties:*

> An artist is the magician put among men to gratify — capriciously — their urge for immortality. The temples are built and brought down around him, continuously and contiguously, from Troy to the fields of Flanders. If there is any meaning in any of it, it is in what survives as art, yes even in the celebration of tyrants, yes even in the celebration of non-entities.(3)

In order to highlight the creativity of the artist, Stoppard sets it against the arrogance, nastiness and destructiveness of the critic and the dryness, absurdity and limitations of the scholar. Both the critic and the scholar are satirized.

There are, however, two kinds of artists in *In The Native State:* the Indian painter Nirad Das who painted two portraits of Flora Crewe in 1930; and the hidden artist, namely Stoppard himself whose play is an imaginative reconstruction of Flora's life. Thus while Das immortalizes Flora's body and looks Stoppard immortalizes her as a person by investing her story with pathos and treating her tragedy with such delicacy and sympathy as to impart to it a haunting quality that makes it difficult for readers and auditors to forget her.

It is the purpose of this article to discuss Stoppard's attitude to art, criticism and academic scholarhip in *In The Native State* in order to uncover the hidden meaning of the play, a meaning which is interrelated with the artistic process itself. Therefore, the main concern of the article will be with the character of Flora Crewe who is the product of the artist's vision of how the relations between the British and the Indians

(3) Tom Stoppard, *Travesties* (New York: Grove Press, 1975), p. 62.

should have been in the days of the British Empire in India. Flora, as portrayed in the play, embodies Stoppard's unique apprehension of the reality of the situation in India under the British and his perception of how it should have been handled. In view of the fact that this play is concerned with the relations between the British and the Indians, a concern which constitutes the backdrop of the action, this article will also draw a comparison between some aspects of this play and E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, which is the most famous literary work on this subject.

I have divided this article into three parts. The first part deals with Stoppard's attitude to critics; the second, with his attitude to scholars; and the third, which constitutes the main body of this study, focuses on Flora and the nature of the artistic apprehension of reality. In order to shed light on Flora's character and unique personality, the third part will also compare Flora with her sister Mrs. Eleanor Swan and with both Adela Quested and Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India*.

The Critic

In *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968) Stoppard satirized the two theatre critics, Birdboot and Moon, and parodied their jargon and pompous pronouncements which were studded with all kinds of rhetorical devices. He exposed their dishonesty, absurdity and pretentiousness. In *In The Native State* Stoppard attacks the Critic J.C. Squire not only for his pretentiousness but also for his cruelty.

Unlike Birdboost and Moon who play a major part in *Hound*, Squire never appears in *In The Native State* but is only referred to.

Flora calls him "The Enemy" because he once said she was only "posing as a poet." He also complained in an anonymous editorial in the London *Mercury* of "versifying flappers who should stop posing as poets and confine themselves to posing as railway stations" (p.28).[4] Squire was obviously punning on the surnames of Elizabeth Paddington, Lavinia Clapham, and Flora Crewe to whom he is also referring as "flappers." Squire's punning on the girls' surnames, however, is both absurd and insipid; for no laughter or amusement is generated by likening the three poets to railway stations. It is possible that by likening the girls to railway stations, Squire was suggesting they were promiscuous. Whatever his intentions were, his pun misfires. Toby Silverman Zinman has written that "punning" depends on "translation — on making a word function simultaneouly as itself and its own twin."[5] To be successful, however, the translation from the pun itself to its twin meaning must be instantane-

(4) All page references are to the Faber edition of the play (London: Faber and Faber, 1991).
(5) Toby Silverman Zinman, "Blizintsy/Dvojniki; Twins/Doubles: Hapgood/Hapgood," *Modern Drama*, 34 (June 1991), 314.

ous and witty and therefore able to lead us to a new perception about the object of the pun. Squire's pun therefore only reveals his dullness and nastiness.

Flora defended the Sitwells against Squire who seemed to antagonize all budding writers. True to her loyal nature, Flora "remained to become a loyal footsoldier in the Sitwells' war against 'The Enemy'" (p.33).

Thus the antagonism and hostility between artist or creator and critic is clearly indicated. The critic, moreover, can have a detrimental effect on the artist if the latter pays too much attention to what the critic says about him. Flora's advice to Das conveys this fact: "Are you at the mercy of every breeze that blows? Or fails to blow? Are you an artist at all?" (p. 37).

The artist must be sure of himself. His time is also limited. If he spends too much time listening to the critics and worrying about their adverse remarks, he will not have time to complete his mission in life, i.e., produce works worthy of his genius.(6) Thus Flora tells Das:

> I met my critic somewhere a few months later and poured his drink over his head and went home and wrote a poem. So that was all right. But he'd taken weeks away from me and I mind that now.
>
> (p. 44)

In spite of Stoppard's attack on critics, we should not jump to the conclusion that he is hostile to all critics indiscriminately, for he himself has been the subject of a great deal of adulation by the critics.(7) In both *Hound* and *In The Native State* he exposes those qualities which he finds most objectionable in some critics, namely, pretentiousness, cruelty, pedantry and dishonesty.

The Scholar

Stoppard distrusts intellectualism and barren scholarship. In *Jumpers* (1972) George Moore, Professor of Moral Philosophy, admits, in one of his rare moments of perceptiveness, that the irrational and intuitive are of fundamental importance in life. He tells his wife Dotty:

> The irrational, the emotional, the whimsical ... these are the stamp of humanity which make reason a civilizing force.(8)
>
> (p.40)

(6) This puts us in mind of the effect of J.G. Lockhart's and J.W. Crocker's vitriolic attacks on Keats.
(7) Stoppard himself worked as a second-string critic for the *Evening World* from 1958 to 1960.
(8) Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).

In *Professional Foul* (1977) Stoppard satirizes Professor Stone (notice the name), an American scholar, for his barren intellectualism and platitudinous conclusions. On the other hand, Professor Anderson of Cambridge University becomes humanized when he is exposed to suffering and injustice. He is no longer the proper, aloof and uncommitted professor of philosophy living in his ivory tower. He reassesses his philosophical theories and re-evaluates his intellectual attitudes bringing them in line with external reality and human experience.

In *In The Native State* Professor Eldon Cooper Pike, an American scholar, has become interested in Flora and established himself as an authority on her. He has edited *Selected Letters of Flora Crewe* with copious footnotes. He is also teaching her at a university in Maryland and has written seveal monographs on her.

Whenever Flora writes a letter to her sister, Mrs. Eleanor Swan, and refers in her letter to an incident or person unknown to the reader, Pike is quick to provide the information in a footnote. This is reminiscent of the technique Stoppard used in *Squaring the Circle* where he used a "narrator with acknowledged fallibility"(9) and a "Witness" who would expose the Narrator's fallibility and correct him. In *In The Native State* Pike's "fallibility" is corrected by Stoppard himself who is the creator and is possessed of the artist's insight into the situation which led Flora to write a particular letter to her sister.

If, however, Pike is tedious, pedantic and insensitive, he is, unlike the Narrator and the Witness in *Squaring the Circle,* castigated both by Stoppard who, in the words of Val Arnold-Forster, is "weaving in a wicked send up of one of those leaden American literary academics, footnotes to the fore,"(10) and by other characters in the play, such as Mrs. Swan who pokes fun at him, and, unwittingly, by Flora herself.

Pike is thus portrayed as having a southern drawl like Clark Gable's in *Gone With the Wind.* The incongruity between Gable's romantic "intimate and slightly hushed" voice (p. 28), and the dry impersonal facts he is delivering in his southern drawl makes the situation hilariously funny and draws immediate attention to the absurdity and pretentiousness of scholarship which tries in vain to evoke a situation or revive a character through a series of arid facts.

Mrs. Swan herself expresses her impatience with Pike's obtrusiveness, pedantry and irrelevant information: "Far too much of a good thing, the footnotes, in my opin-

(9) See Tom Stoppard, *Squaring the Circle* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 8, 15.
(10) Val Arnold-Forster, "Stoppart in the Name of Love," *Guardian,* 19 April 1991, p. 1, col. 2.

ion; to be constantly interrupted in a Southern drawl by someone telling you things you already know or don't need to know at that moment" (pp. 18-19).

Commenting on Stoppard's previous radio plays, Katherine E. Kelly has written that "radio taught him ... to involve the auditor in the fiction through the precise use of aural suggestion."(11) In *In The Native State,* however, we find Stoppard reversing this practice. He exploits radio as a non-visual medium and involves the auditor in laughing at Pike through an *imprecise* use of aural suggestion. In the following situation the auditor does not know whom Flora is yelling at:

> Pike: A tautology: all Sikhs are named Singh
> (however, not all people named Singh are Sikhs).
> Flora: Oh, shut up!
>
> (p. 63)

Since Flora's words come immediately after Pike's, the auditor may for a second believe that her words are addressed to Pike — though this is impossible because Flora has been dead for sixty years — and rejoices that this irritating busy-body has been asked to "shut up." Here Stoppard is making use of Flora in order to indicate his attitude to Pike's pedantry, something he could not do in *Squaring the Circle* in view of the seriousness of the situation in that play.

In spite of his indefatigable research, Pike is not even in possession of all the facts concerning Flora's life. Some of the information he misses is of vital importance in visualizing and understanding Flora's actions in the last months of her short life.

Thus Pike knows nothing about the identity of the Indian painter whose portrait of Flora he has used on the jacket and the frontispiece of his book *Selected Letters of Flora Crewe;* nor does he therefore know the important part this painter played in her life. He is not even aware that Nirad Das has also painted Flora in the nude. Moreover, Pike does not know that when Flora mentioned "the Sacha Fund" (p. 63), she was referring to her sister's baby which was to be born in October 1930 and which was to die a few months later. Lastly, he knows nothing about Flora's visit to Rome and what happened there because her sister does not tell him as she is fed up with his prying into Flora's private life (p. 75).

Pike's absurdity is further compounded by the titles he gives the monographs he has written on Flora. Thus he calls his monograph on the alleged animosity between

(11) Katherine E. Kelly, "Tom Stoppard Radioactive: A Sounding of the Radio Plays," *Modern Drama,* 32 (Sept, 1989), p. 451.

Flor. nd Gertrude Stein "Bunfight at 27 Rue de Fleurus" (p. 31). This title recalls a famous Western movie, *Gunfight at the OK Corral,* which has one of the most violent shoot-outs in movie history. In this way an insignificant incident, itself based on hearsay, is ridiculously raised through the exaggerations of scholarship to the heights of an epic fight.

Stoppard's scathing satire on academic insensitivity and presumptuousness is best illustrated in his juxtaposing Pike's activities with Mrs. Swan's feelings towards her sister. Pike "teaches Flora Crewe at a university in Maryland. It makes her sound like a subject, doesn't it? Like biology, or in her case botany. Flora is widely taught in America..." (p. 19). Here we can perceive the reduction of a human being to a mere subject to be studied, taught, and written about without any regard for his or her real feelings or respect for his or her private life or memory, as Wordsworth once wrote: "We murder to dissect." A human being is thus transformed to an object to be exploited for the sake of academic promotion, fame and even profit.

Against this picture of academic insensibility and objectivity we are shown genuine feelings expressed by Mrs. Swan who has always loved and admired her sister. To her, Flora is not just a memory:

> She has become quite a heroine. Which she always was to me. I was five when mother died, so it was Flora who ... oh dear, I'm going to need a hanky."
>
> (p. 19)

There is no doubt that Pike, like every other academic, provides useful information to the readers or, in this case, the auditors of the play. Moreover, we cannot expect him to feel as strongly about Flora's sad life as her sister does. What Stoppard is satirizing, however, is the total insensitivity and indifference to feelings and emotions displayed by some scholars — and Pike is an extreme case of this type — in their research. According to Stoppard, such complete insensitivity and indifference to feelings and emotions are not conducive to a deep understanding of actions and motives.

Flora Crewe

It was to be expected that, after creating the character of Hapgood in the play that bears her name, Stoppard would pursue his interest in female characters. Stoppard's greatest achievement in *In The Native State* is the creation of the two sisters, Flora and Mrs. Swan, through whom he conveys the meaning of the play.

Unlike the critic Squire and the scholar Pike, Stoppard the artist uses the material he has found in Pike's book in order to reconstruct the most important events in Flora's life and to evoke the relationship between the two sisters. In this task he is equipped with the artist's tools: imagination, sympathy, sensitivity and humility; and thus, like a magician, he succeeds in conjuring up the two sisters before our eyes and enables us to understand them in a way that no academic, however sedulous and unremitting in his efforts, can hope to achieve. Stoppard the artist, therefore, enhances reality or simply reproduces it, but he never distorts or reduces it.

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The action of the play alternates between India and England. With the exception of Scene Eighteen, all the scenes that take place in India are occupied by Flora. Counterpointing the Flora scenes in India are the scenes between Mrs. Swan and Das's son, Anish, in England. The Mrs. Swan-Anish scenes take place in 1990, i.e., sixty years after Flora's death and are intended to show how an Anglo-Indian and an Indian would react to each other.

This technique of shifting the action between present and past Stoppard has already used before. In his one-act radio play *Where Are They Now?* (1970) the main characters are the same both in the present and the past (though they are now twenty-four years older); whereas in *In The Native State* Flora figures only in the past since she died in 1930. Her sister, Mrs. Swan, on the other hand, occupies all the scenes that take place in the present, with the exception of Scene Eighteen which is supposed to have taken place sometime in 1931 when she visits her sister's grave in Jummapur, meets Francis Swan and gets married to him.

In *Where Are They Now?* the shifting of the action back and forth in time gives the auditors a right perspective from which to view the situation and enables them to correct Gale's embittered one-sided view of his school. In *In The Native State,* alternating the action between present and past gives the auditors a chance to realize what opportunities have been lost in the relationships between the British and the Indians; to gain new insights into Flora's character and actions; and to experience through her sister's loyalty and love the pathos that clings to her memory.

Before proceeding with Flora's character and attitude, we should get a brief picture of Mrs. Swan so that the difference between the two sisters may help us appreciate Flora's unique personality.

Although Mrs. Swan is hospitable to her Indian guest, Anish Das, treating him to cake, jam and tea, she finds communication with him rather difficult since both of them seem to be following a different mental track. Here Stoppard is making use of

what he learnt from Wittgenstein about language-games whereby language becomes subject to an almost endless multiplicity of forms and interpretations:

> Mrs. Swan: By the way, what *were* your father's beliefs?
> Anish: (*Surprised*) Why ... we are Hindu ...
> Mrs. Swan: You said he had suffered for his beliefs.
> Anish: Oh. I meant his opinions.
>
> (p. 4)

This failure to communicate or connect is accentuated by the clock which "chimes at random" and fails to "connect" with the right time.

Mrs. Swan had lived in India for many years as her husband worked in the ICS and finally became Head of a District near Nepal. Although she may have kept some of her anti-imperialistic tenets which she had embraced while working for a Communist newspaper (p. 35), her attitude to the Indians reveals that, unlike her sister Flora, she was not able to connect with them on a personal or individual basis, even after Indianization:

> Well, having a Hindu for Christmas can be tricky. Francis would invite his Assistant for Christmas lunch, and I always felt I should be apologizing for rubbing something in which left him out, if you follow me. It quite spoiled the business of the paper hats too. There's nothing like having an Indian at table for making one feel like a complete ass handing round the vegetables in a pink paper fez. That was after I-zation, of course.
>
> (p. 48)

She even expresses a smug satisfaction with British laws in India: "Oh, I'm not saying we wouldn't have boxed his ears and sent him packing if he forgot which side his bread was buttered, but facts are facts" (p. 17).

Her views are still those of many English people who think they brought law and order to an unruly and chaotic country and that when they left, India fell to pieces:

> Mrs. Swan: (*Angrily*) we made you a proper country!
> When we left you fell straight to pieces like Humpty Dumpty! Look at the map! You should feel nothing but shame!
>
> (p. 10)

Mrs. Swan, however, is not like a typical Anglo-Indian woman who, as the Indians complained in Forster's *A Passage to India,* needed only six months in India to turn into a monster of arrogance and racism.[12] Her strong love for and loyalty to

(12) "They all become exactly the same [i.e., arrogant and standoffish] not worse, not better. I give any Englishman two years, be he Turton or Burton, it is only the difference of a letter. And I give any =

her sister and her wit and sense of humor show that she could not have been like Mrs. Turton in Forster's novel. Moreover, she has retained a genuine love for India and has brought some objects from there to remind her of the country (p. 17). She is also hospitable to an Indian and even praises his loyalty to his nationalist father (pp. 8-9).

What Mrs.Swan lacks, however, are Flora's intuitive understanding and Krishna-like capacity to surrender to love and life without imposing any conditions on them.

If we compare Flora with Adela Quested, the heroine of Forster's *A Passage to India,* we will be better able to appreciate Stoppard's achievement in his play and understand his purposes in writing it.

Adela Quested is, as Gertrude M. White has written, "deficient in emotional response."(13) Although she wants to see the "real India,"(14) she wishes to see it with her head and not with her feelings as well, and the novel makes it clear that you cannot understand India and the Indians unless your heart and your feelings are also engaged. As Gertrude. M. White has also written, "The keynote of her character, from beginning, has been an honest but arid intellectualism."(15) She betrays what Forster himself has described in his "Notes on the British Character" as the shortcomings of the "undeveloped heart": "It is the undeveloped heart that is largely responsible for the difficulties of Englishmen abroad."(16)

Flora, on the other hand, responds to any relationship or situation with both her head and her heart. She has an instinctive delicacy and tact and a poet's ability to empathize other people's feelings and intuit their predicaments. She is also generous, sympathetic and sensitive.

Flora arrives in Jummapur, which is a native state (the "Native State" of the title of the play),(17) in 1930, i.e., after the reforms of 1919 and towards the end of the

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= Englishwoman six months. All are exactly alike." *A Passage to India* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 13. All subsequent textual references are to this edition.

(13) Certrude M. White, "*A Passage to India:* Analysis and Revaluation," in *A Passage to India: A Selection of Critical Essays,* Casebook series, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 137.

(14) Forster, p. 25.

(15) White, p. 140.

(16) Quoted in John Beer, "The Undying Worm," in *A Passage to India: A Selection of Critical Essays,* Case book Series, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (London: Macmillan, 1981).

(17) The "The" in the title makes it ambiguous since there were more than five hundred native states in India in the days of the British Empire. The title may thus also mean "in the native condition," i.e., like an Indian. This is borne out by Flora's saying to Das, "I want you to be with me as you would =

British Empire. The British still have a club from which the Indians, no matter how well educated, are excluded. Flora can neither understand nor accept this exclusion of the native Indian:

Durance: Yes, it's decent enough. There are not so many British here so we tend to mix more.
Flora: With the Indians?
Durance: No. In India proper, I mean *our India, there'd be two or three clubs.* ...
.....
Indianization. It's all over, you know. We have Indian officers in the Regiment now. My fellow Junior here is Indian, too, terribly nice chap — he's ICS, passed the exam, did his year at Cambridge, learned polo and knives-and-forks. ...
Flora: But he's not here.
Durance: At the Club? No, he can't come into the Club.
(p. 57)

Although Durance claims he likes India, Flora immediately sees through him. She intuitively understands the nature of his love: "That's what you love, then? What you created?" (p. 60).

Englishwomen in India were even worse than the men. They were insensitive, arrogant and racist. Instead of promoting understanding between the British and the Indians, they added fuel to the fire of resentment already inflaming the Indians against the British and thus hastened the dissolution of British India:

Durance: Absolutely. When you had to sail round the Cape this was a man's country and we mucked in with the natives. The memsahibs put a stop to that. The memsahib won't muck in, won't even be alone in a room with an Indian.
(p. 61)

Unlike the typical Englishwoman in India, Flora's sympathy can extend even to the moths:

Durance: I hope you don't mind the moths.
Flora: No, I like moths.
Durance: If they make a whining noise, kill them.
(p. 57)

Flora's attitude to the moths reminds us of the celebrated "wasp" incident in *A Passage to India* where Mrs. Moore finds a wasp asleep on the peg on which she is going

= be if *I* were Indian" (p. 6), which further accentuates Flora's difference from the typical Englishwoman in India.

to hang up her cloak and refrains from disturbing it.[18] Flora's inclusion of the moths among the objects of her sympathy connects her with Mrs. Moore and with Hinduism which, as Gertrude M. White has written: "makes no distinction between humanity and the rest of the creation; its creed teaches that each particular part is a member of all other parts, and that all is one in the Divine."[19]

Nirad Das who, on his request, is painting Flora's portrait, is a typical Hindu. He is hyper-sensitive and suspicious. Flora needs, therefore, to draw on all her resources of patience, tactfulness, understanding and sympathy in order to overcome his suspicion and gain his trust: "You are patient with me. I think your nature is very kind," he tells her" (p. 1).

She wants him to be natural with her and try to act himself instead of treating her with the excessive politeness which Indians resort to with strangers and which is a barrier to real communication: "I want you to be with me as you would be if *I* were Indian" (p. 6).

When she realizes that in the course of their conversation she has hurt his feelings, she is immediately contrite and apologetic:

Flora: (*Amused*) No, no, you cannot unwag your very best wag....
Das: (*Anguished*) You are cruel to me, Miss Crewe!
Flora: (Instantly repentant) Oh! I'm sorry. I didn't want to be. It's my nature. Please come out from behind your easel — look at me.
(p. 7)

She feels she has been unkind to him. Kindness is very important to an Indian, as Dr. Aziz tells Fielding in *A Passage to India:* "Mr. Fielding, no one can ever realize how much kindness we Indians need .... Kindness, more kindness, and even after that more kindness, I assure you it is the only hope."[25] Flora realizes instinctively the importance of kindness and compassion in human relationships.

When she invites Das to have tea, bread, butter and cake with her, she is both spontaneous and informal. She does not entertain any sense of superiority nor does she show any arrogance or condescension. Her on-the-spur-of-the-moment invitation to Das is prompted by feelings of kindness and a desire to communicate. She is thus different from the other British who, in *A Passage to India* sent the Indians invi-

(18) See Forster, p. 35
(19) White, p. 144.
(20) Forster, p. 144.

tations which sounded like orders. She is also different from her sister, Mrs. Swan, who, in spite of her hospitality, finds it very difficult to communicate with Anish.

Das confesses to Flora that it is the first time he has been alone in a room with an Englishwoman. Later on, when Durance tells Flora that an Englishwoman "won't even be alone in a room with an Indian" (p. 61), the dramatic irony emphasizes Flora's unconventionality; for Flora was not only alone in a room with an Indian, but that room was her bedroom. It is true that Flora is very ill and knows she is dying and therefore cannot afford to be prudish especially when attacked by a fit of breathlessness, yet she has always been unconventional and fiercely independent, as Stoppard makes us realize through the scattered footnotes provided by Pike, the comments made by her devoted sister and the remarks dropped by Flora herself.

Das tells Flora that for a work of art to be successful it has to possess "Rasa":

> *Rasa* is juice. Its taste. Its essence. A painting must have its *rasa* ... which is not in the painting exactly. *Rasa* is what you must feel when you see a painting, or hear music; it is the emotion which the artist must arouse in you.
>
> (p. 23)

Flora is not satisfied with the portrait Das is painting of her: she does not experience any *rasa*. She feels he has painted her as an Englishman would; whereas she wants him to follow his instincts and paint her as an Indian painter might paint her: "You're trying to paint me from my point of view instead of yours — what you think is my point of view" (p. 44).

Das follows Flora's advice and in the second portrait he paints of her, he is entirely successful. He has painted her as an Indian painter would and has therefore suffused it with *rasa* by establishing the proper relationship with the subject of his painting, a relationship based upon admiration and love for this unique woman. Das, under Flora's influence, has been able to reveal "the Noumenon within phenomenon" and "the soul within matter."(21) Mrs. Swan herself is impressed by the portrait and its *rasa* communicates itself to her: "He was certainly taken with her" (p. 51).

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(21) E.B. Havell, whose book *Ideals of Indian Art* had a great influence on Forster, explains what Das may mean about *rasa* when he writes that an Indian artist's primary objective is "not to extract beauty from nature, but to reveal the Life within life, the Noumenon within phenomenon, the Reality within unreality, the soul within matter. ... There is nothing common or unclean in what God has made, but we can only make life beautiful for ourselves by the power of the spirit that is within us," quoted in Wilfred Stone, *The Cave and the Mountain: A Study of E. M. Forster* (California: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 303.

If we piece together what Pike and Mrs. Swan say about Flora and what she herself says and does, we will be able to solve the jigsaw puzzle concerning her character and behavior and penetrate into the play's meaning.

As the play unfolds, we realize there are two principal preoccupations in Flora's life and the two are closely inter-related. The first is Death and the second is the quest for Romance.

Long before Flora became ill and understood she was not going to live long, she was exposed to death. Her mother was killed in the disaster of the *Titanic* when she was only sixteen years old (p. 54). Her second exposure to death came when she returned to France to pose for Modigliani, the famous Italian painter, but found that he was already dead (p. 80). Her third and last encounter with death occurred when she and her sister were supposed to meet the great choreographer and impresario, Diaghilev, but when they "crossed to the Lido to have dinner with him at the hotel" they found that "he was dead" (p. 25).

Flora's frequent exposures to death have made her realize that life is too precious and short to be subjected to the stifling taboos of conventions and prejudices. Hence her poems deal with sex in order both to challenge her society which looked on sex as sinful and therefore considered it a taboo and to explore the possibilities of life.

Her frequent encounter with death have also made her keen to find a way to overcome it. This accounts for her eagerness to have Modigliani paint her and for her letting Das paint her portrait and then asking him to paint her in the nude. This also explains her anger with her fiancé, the millionaire de Boucheron, and her breaking off her engagement to him, in spite of her straitened financial means, because she discovers that he has bought Modigliani's painting of her and burnt it. Although Pike reports the breaking off of the engagement and the ostensive reason for Flora's decision (pp. 66-7), he has no insight into the real motives behind Flora's breaking off the engagement.

Closely related to her preoccupation with death and immortality through art is her quest for romance, as Mrs. Swan says: "But Flora's weakness was always romance" (p. 76).

Flora's quest for romance is a means by which she can counter the finality of death. The multiplicity of experiences, the sense of the marvellous and the unknown, the headlong embarking upon new adventures and new relationships, the apotheosis

of feeling — all these characteristics of romance which Flora embraces are her way of warding off death or breaking away from a society that threatens to transform her brief existence on earth into a Death-in-Life ordeal.

Das tells her of Krishna, one of the greatest of romantic lovers, who had a great love affair with a married shepherdess called Radha. When Flora asks him whether Krishna and Radha were punished in the story, Das is astonished by her question and answers "What for?" (p. 47).

Krishna symbolizes the Hindu capacity of looking on every object — no matter how mean or insignificant — as worthy of affection and love. As Pratima Bowes has written:

> Krishna ... offered himself in whichever way he was approached. It would have been opposed to the idea of his plenitude of being if he were to restrict himself to some, or to certain relationships only.(22)

Flora realizes she has come to the land of romance. Unlike Adela Quested who had come to see the "real India" with her intellect but was incapable of love Flora, like Krishna himself, is always ready to yield to love. She is now in the land in which art transmutes life into a thing of beauty and can save a transgressor's life:

> Das: And long before Chaucer we had the Chaurapanchasika, from Kashmir, which is poems of love written by the poet of the court on his way to execution for falling in love with the king's daughter, and the king liked the poems so very much he pardoned the poet and allowed the lovers to marry.
>
> Flora: Oh ...
>
> (p. 46)

Flora realizes, to her chagrin, she has come to India too late: "I should have come here years ago" (p. 47).

The last scene of the play completes our understanding of Flora's character and of Stoppard's intention. In this scene, Emily Eden, a spinster who reminds Durance of Flora (p. 78) and whose letters are, like Flora's, addressed to her sister (also called Eleanor), is writing about a ball given by the British in a Simla valley in 1839, almost one hundred years before Flora's arrival in India. What is remarkable about Emily's account is that it shows that Emily, like Flora, has a keen sense of the incongruity of the situation: "Between the two tents there was a boarded platform for dancing ... and then in different parts of the valley, wherever the trees would allow of it, there

(22) Pratima Bowes, *The Hindu Religious Tradition: A Philosophical Approach* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 225.

was 'Victoria', 'God Save the Queen' and 'Candahar' in immense letters twelve feet high. There was a very old Hindu temple also prettily lit up. Vishnu, to whom I believe it really belonged, must have been affronted" (p. 85). The British are thus seen as trespassers who are violating the sanctity of the valley and its temple. Instead of trying to understand and respect Indian culture and customs, they are importing their cooks, fashions and fireworks and behaving as if the Indians did not exist. Emily then asks hereself why the Indians tolerate British arrogance and let them get away with it: "I sometimes wonder they do not cut all our heads off and say nothing more about it" (p. 85).

Flora has made a similar remark to Durance, a remark which establishes the spiritual kinship between the two women:

> Durance: ... There's about twelve hundred ICS and they run the continent. That's three for every million Indians.
> Flora: Why do the Indians let them?
>
> (pp. 59-60)

Contrary to Durance's complacent expectations, however, the Indians will not "let them" rule India for long. Just as the regiment which Emily is accompanying will be destroyed in Afghanistan, the British Empire in India will dissolve a few years after Flora's death.

Stoppard's viewpoint thus becomes clear. He is telling us that the British Empire came to a sudden end because the British were arrogant, racist and despotic. If they had shown feelings of sympathy, understanding and kindness for the Indians, they may have stayed longer, or, at least, India's future relations with England might have been different.

Instead of telling us this, however, in the form of a tediously long lecture as he did in the Lenin section in *Travesties*, Stoppard has given us the character of Flora Crewe, the most exquisite of his creations. He has imbued her with sensitivity, tenderness, tact and sympathy. He has endowed her with an ability to surrender to love and romance and has instilled in her a sense of equality and fairness. He has made her vulnerable but unsentimental, fiercely independent but willing to give of herself, and witty without being cruel. Although she is open to all kinds of experience, she is never promiscuous or vulgar. Stoppard has also invested her short life with so much pathos that she continues to haunt our memory long after we have heard or read the play.

Therefore, by creating this attractive character Stoppard is suggesting that had all or many Englishmen or Englishwomen been like her, the influence of England over India and the relations between the two countries would have been much different.

Conclusion

Thus Stoppard has shown us how the artist — painter or playwright — can magically transmute his material into a creation of eternal beauty and conjure up people and situations and make them live before our eyes. The Critic and the Academic perform useful and important work: the Critic can help us develop our taste and the Scholar can provide us with useful information. The Critic, however, can be destructive; for sometimes he may be too cruel or inconsiderate, or he may be more concerned with showing off his cleverness and expertise than with giving a truthful or objective opinion on the work he is evaluating. The Scholar, on his part, sometimes chooses to ignore the feelings behind certain actions: he may become concerned primarily with facts and with parading his erudition, and thus while he can see the body, the soul escapes him.

It is the artist who, with his penetrating sensitivity and unlimited sympathy, can gain insights into people's actions and is able with his imagination to evoke a character and a situation and make us see and understand them.

Accordingly, although Squire has made adverse remarks about Flora and her poetry and although Pike has provided us with copious information about her, it is only the artist who has enabled us to gain an intimate understanding of her character and personality.

The artist is not limited by a particular theory or theories nor does he subject life to a theory or philosophy. The Critic and the Academic are usually influenced by particular theories through which they view their material. The artist, on the other hand, surrenders to his material. He responds to it spontaneously, with love, intuition and sympathy, as Bernard Crick, commenting on Stoppard's message in *Travesties* aptly remarked:

> But don't think that the theory must explain everything — particularly art, which is the very badge of freedom and spontaneity among men and women; for if you think that it must, when it so plainly doesn't, then you end up coercing people to fit the facts.(23)

(23) Bernard Crick, "*Travesties,*" in *Times Higher Education Supplement,* 2 Aug. 1974, p. 13, quoted in *File on Stoppard,* ed. Malcolm Page (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 50.

Stoppard has created Flora and Mrs. Swan and through them conveyed his intuitive vision of the past and the present. He has not subjected them to any preconceived social, political or economic theory, but has treated them like real human beings. Flora embodies his vision of how the past should have been; how the British, instead of imposing their despotism, arrogance and racism on India, should have yielded to its romance and shown respect for its culture, traditions and customs. Had they done so, the relationships between the British and the Indians nowadays would have been different. Mrs. Swan, on her part, shows how difficult it is for the British and the Indians even now to communicate with each other.

The vision that Stoppard conveys to us through the two women is much more effective and memorable than what Squire and Pike have to tell us about them because both women are achieved through the creative process which is all-encompassing; whereas Squire's and Pike's approaches are restrictive and selective.

One last point I wish to make concerns Stoppard's view of the role of art and the artist in society, a view which he still maintains in *In The Native State*.

In *Travesties* Stoppard expressed a contradictory or rather paradoxical attitude to the artist and his art. Thus at the end of Joyce's speech glorifying the artist, part of which was quoted at the beginning of this article, we find the following strange statement:

> And yet I with my Dublin Odyssey will double that immortality, yes by God there's a corpse that will dance for some time yet and *leave the world precisely as it finds it.*
> (pp. 62-63)

This statement has deservedly been criticized.(24) In *In The Native State,* however, Stoppard's achievement is consistent with his viewpoint about the artist. In this play, Stoppard the artist has immortalized Flora Crewe who embodies his vision of how the relations between the British and the Indians should have been in the days of the British Empire. This vision, however, will not change the world since the relations between the British and the Indians have become crystallized and the British Empire is no more. What Stoppard is unwilling to recognize is that although the artist's vision may be a mere platitude or cliché, the images and characters he creates enrich our lives for ever. Our world is certainly much richer with the artist's immortalization of Odysseus, Oedipus, Hamlet, Lear, Cleopatra, Romeo and Juliet and many others. The world's consciousness is never the same after a great work of art

(24) See Michael Billington, *Stoppard the Playwright* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 103.

has been created. Although what Stoppard has to say about critics, scholars and the relations between the British and the Indians may be trite or commonplace the two women he created, Flora and Mrs. Swan, are of enduring interest; and Flora, at least, will no doubt join the gallery of immortal characters.

أهمية شخصية فلورا كرو: دراسة مقارنة بين أسلوب الفنان وكل من الناقد والباحث الأكاديمي في تفهم الواقع والتعبير عنه في مسرحية توم ستوبارد الأخيرة (في الولاية الوطنية)

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ملخص البحث. تناقش هذه المقالة موقف توم ستوبارد من الفن والنقد الأدبي والدراسة الأكاديمية في مسرحيته الأخيرة «في الولاية الوطنية،» وتوضح المعنى الذي تتضمنه هذه المسرحية يرتبط ارتباطًا وثيقًا بعملية الإبداع الفني نفسه والذي يختلف اختلافًا تامًا عن طبيعة وافتراضات النقد الأدبي والدراسة الأكاديمية. وتنقسم هذه المقالة إلى ثلاثة أقسام:

- القسم الأول يتناول موقف توم ستوبارد تجاه النقد الأدبي والنقاد.
- القسم الثاني يناقش موقف ستوبارد من الدراسات الأكاديمية.
- يتناول القسم الثالث شخصية «فلورا كرو» بطلة المسرحية، والتي تجسد عملية الإبداع الفني نفسه وبالتالي تقوم بتوصيل مغزى المسرحية للجمهور. ويتناول هذا القسم أيضًا أوجه التباين بين تها «مسز سوان،» وبين فلورا وأديلا كويستد، بطلة رواية فورستر «رحلة إلى الهند» ، حيث إن مثل هذه المقارنة تلقي الضوء على شخصية فلورا الفريدة والتي من خلالها