

Suffering Is the Thing: Henry James's "The Real Thing" and Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*

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Abstract. Although James's short story "The Real Thing," and Stoppard's two-act play, also called *The Real Thing*, deal with different experiences, they have many things in common. Both are works of initiation. Both expose their artist-protagonists to human suffering as a means to effecting their moral development: Stoppard's playwright experiences suffering himself while James's unnamed painter encounters it in others so that they both acquire insights into the human condition. Such an initiation and exposure to suffering will have a great impact on their future work.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the structures of each work, trace the moral development of each artist, and show that though Stoppard's playwright and James's unnamed painter come to embrace different views about art, views which are closely related to the meaning of the title of each work, their views are complementary.

Although James's short story, "The Real Thing" (1898) and Stoppard's long two-act play, also called *The Real Thing* (1982), deal with different experiences, they have many things in common. Both are works of initiation. They both follow the structure observed by van Gennep in the rites of passage which constitute an individual's initiation into a new experience or a new stage: separation (separation), transition (marge), and incorporation or reintegration (agregation).⁽¹⁾ Thus the protagonist in each work is separated from his present experience or situation and is initiated into a new one which transforms his outlook

(1) Arnold van Gennep. *The Rites of Passage*, translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffec (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 3.

on life and art and leads him to a mature reintegration into society and apprehension of the nature of art. Both works have an artist for protagonist: in James's we have the unnamed painter and in Stoppard's we find Henry, the playwright. Both works, moreover, make it clear— though much more so in the case of Henry— that the two artists lack compassion for and sympathy with human needs and suffering. Both works expose the artists to human suffering as a means of bringing about their moral growth: Stoppard's Henry experiences suffering himself while James's unnamed painter encounters it in others so that they both acquire insights into human nature and their own fallibility. Such an initiation into the human condition will, we are sure, have a definite impact on their future work.

It is the purpose of this paper to unravel the dialectical structure of each work, trace the development of the artist's sensibility in each, and show that though Henry and the painter come to embrace different views of art, views which are closely related to the meaning of the title of each work, their views are complementary.

The painter in James's "The Real Thing" lives in his own ivory tower. Oronte, the Italian vagabond, guessed that his "high north window"⁽²⁾ must be of an artist's studio. The two adjectives "high" and "north" are indicative of the artist's isolation from the rest of society. The painter, who is also the teller of the story, works in black and white providing illustrations for magazines and storybooks. However, he dreams of becoming a portrait painter and achieving thereby both fame and fortune. He employs models to sit for him and he sketches them in different positions. One of his "sitters" is a Miss Churm who, although lacking in looks, elegance and education, possesses enough flexibility and spontaneity to impersonate any character (p. 444).

The painter has received an offer to paint illustrations for an "edition de luxe of one of the writers of our day" (p. 442). If his illustrations for the first novel of the group are found satisfactory, the publisher will commission him to do the illustrations for the remaining novels; if not, the rest of the novels will be assigned to some other artist. Hence it is very important for him to succeed in this enterprise as it will provide him with a long-term source of income.

Into this situation are introduced the fashionably elegant Major Monarch and his wife. The Monarchs are impoverished upper-class people. They have spent most of their money and are unable to support themselves. The outside world is too competitive and they themselves are too little prepared and too unpractical to be able to adapt to it. They are faced with the prospect of starvation and have, therefore, "got to do something" (p.438). The painter is their last resort. They hope to pose for him as models and be paid for their labor. They consider that in those works where the painter has to paint characters from

(2) Henry James, "The Real Thing," printed in *Elements of Literature*, eds. Robert Scholes, Carl H. Klaus and Michael Silverman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 450. All textual references are to this edition.

high society they would be the most suitable models, for they are “the real thing.” They are not actors or imitators, like Miss Churm: they are the genuine article.

The painter is surprised and disappointed when he learns the real reason for their coming to him. He was taken in by their elegance and deportment and hoped they had come to have their portrait painted and not to sit and be paid as models.

At the beginning, the painter is amused by these new types. He has never encountered people like them before. To him they become objects or even animals to be appraised:

I was so amused by them that, to get more of it, I did my best to take their point of view; and though it was an embarrassment to find myself appraising physically, as if they were animals on hire or useful blacks (p. 439).

Thereupon he launches into all kinds of presumptuous speculations about their potentialities and shortcomings: “I could take his measure at a glance. ...” (p. 439).

Although there may be some truth in or basis for the painter’s speculations, what alienates us from him, at this stage, is his complacency and complete assurance in making his guesses about people he knows very little about. We even find him embarrassed by their feelings of helplessness and failure (p. 443).

The painter’s initial smugness, lack of warm response to people’s misery and suffering, and self-centredness, constitute the thesis in the dialectical structure of the story. To use rites of passage terminology, he is being separated from his initial condition and introduced into a new situation.

Thus what the painter sees but fails to perceive the value or significance of is the Monarchs’ strength of character. In spite of their poverty, they have kept their elegance, figure and cheerfulness. More important, their marriage has not suffered: they still love each other and enjoy each other’s company. Vulgarly cannot touch them. Whatever their failings, they, like Lyuboff Andreevna and her two daughters in Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* (1903), represent a quality of life that is regrettably but unavoidably dying away gradually and giving place to self-seeking practicality, beauty-indifferent materialism, and soul-lacking adaptability.

Commenting on Henry James’s novelistic practice, Richard P. Blackmur observed:

But the novel was not a play however dramatic it might be, and among the distinctions between the two forms was the possibility, which belonged to the novel alone, of setting up a fine central intelligence in terms of which everything in it might be unified and upon which everything might be made to depend.⁽³⁾

(3) Introduction to *The Art of the Novel* by Henry James (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1937), xviii.

In "The Real Thing" the painter is the central intelligence, However, as we have seen, his first reactions to the Monarchs were prejudiced and hasty; he had not yet outgrown his pre-separation attitude and ideas. The transition phase in the rights of passage is always the most dangerous to the individual being initiated and to others, for in this phase he is in conflict with his old attitudes and beliefs while he is also being exposed to a new situation, new feelings and a new attitude to life.⁽⁴⁾ Henry James himself is aware of the fact that by making his protagonists too clear-sighted he runs the risk of making them priggish and therefore unattractive to the readers:

Therefore it is that the wary reader for the most part warns the novelist against making his characters too interpretative of the muddle of fate, or in other words too divinely, too priggishly clever.⁽⁵⁾

Accordingly, he deliberately shows the painter overhasty in his conclusions about the Monarchs; he is never infallible in his judgements. If he runs the risk of sounding a bit priggish and smug in his initial reaction to the Monarchs, it is because James wants to underscore the magnitude of the change he undergoes as a result of his exposure to the Monarchs' plight.

Like every true artist, the painter prefers to paint a picture of represented reality rather than reality itself, or a representation of reality rather than absolute reality:

Combined with this was another perversity—an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation. I like things that appeared; then one was sure (p. 442).

The artist can look at nature, but what he imitates or represents is the vision of this nature in his own mind. As Joseph Chiari has written: "An artist learns more from art than from nature, and he generally imitates art, not nature; he never copies nature; he essentialises it and abstracts from it."⁽⁶⁾

Representation of reality, however, offers the artist myriads of chances to use his esemplastic imagination and subject reality to as many representations as his imagination desires or is capable of. He can mould the representation so that it would be adequate for suggesting or expressing the new reality perceived. Unlike "The Real Thing," the Representational Thing has no permanent stamp and no final explanation.

(4) See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 95.

(5) "The Art of Fiction," *Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Morris Shapiro (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963), 64.

(6) Joseph Chiari, *Art and Knowledge* (London: Elek Books, 1977), 33.

Thus Miss Churm, in spite of her vulgarity and lack of figure, possesses the talent of representing this protean reality (p. 447). The Monarchs, on their part, fail to realize that their clinging to their past and their inability to keep pace with the present disable them and limit their ability for survival. Their plight is truly pathetic. The painter's growing understanding of their helplessness and hopelessness is indicative of his gradual moral development and forms the antithesis in the dialectical structure of the story.

The painter, however, finds the Monarchs unsatisfactory as models. Although they are "The Real Thing," they are always the "same thing," stiff and unchanging (p. 447). The Monarchs could never be drawn as characters, only as types. Types, however, become boring and insipid. Moreover, instead of trying to paint flexible reality, the painter finds himself constrained to approximate reality to their unchanging type. As a result his work begins to deteriorate (p.447).

Gradually, however, the painter comes to like and admire the Monarchs as people, if not as models. His first realization of his mistaken assumptions about their fecklessness comes when the Major exclaims that they have tried everything: "There isn't a confounded job I haven't applied for—waited for—prayed for" (p. 443). They are simply unlucky: fate and the times are against them. They are both unsuited and unprepared for our times. The painter also finds them simple, modest, patient, tactful, unassuming, and earnest to please. He starts to feel compassion for them as two helpless human beings who are fighting a losing battle against overwhelming odds: "Oh they were determined not to do this [take offence at Miss Churm's pretensions], and their touching patience was the measure of their great need" (p. 449). He is therefore unwilling to make them face the truth about their lack of flexibility and unsuitability for his commission (p. 452). He even defends them against his critical friend, Jack Hawley, who warns him that by insisting on sketching the Monarchs, he is abusing his own talent and producing sketches that are unsatisfactory (p. 453).

Hawley, however, has put his finger on one of the major weaknesses of the Monarchs: their stupidity. In spite of their elegance and charm and in spite of their resilience and many attempts to survive in a world they no longer recognize and which no longer wants them, it is their stupidity which incapacitates them. They cling to a past that is no more and insist on certain modes of behavior that are no longer viable. They have no new ideas and whatever ideas they have do not transcend their limited genteel milieu of elegant drawing-rooms and fashionable parties in their country residence in the days when they were reasonably affluent. A measure of their stupidity is underscored by their inability to understand the meaning of many passages in "Rutland Ramsay," the novel written by the novelist whose works the painter is supposed to illustrate (p. 454).

In spite of feeling pity and sympathy for the Monarchs, the painter soon finds the struggle to conceal the truth from them too irritating and he tells them he has chosen his menial, the vagabond Oronte, and not the majestic Major, to pose for his sketches for

“Rutland Ramsay.” He also decides to subject them to a cruel humiliation. He asks Mrs. Monarch to make the tea and wait on him and his servant Oronte who is posing for him (p. 454). Mrs. Monarch, however, after a slight hesitation, is encouraged by her ever-cheerful husband to comply with the painter’s request and they both set about making the tea and offering it to the painter and Oronte. When his impish mood is over, the painter realizes he has been cruel to the Monarchs. He has become sensitive enough to appreciate the meaning of Mrs. Monarch’s compliance (p. 455).

Unfortunately for the Monarchs, the painter has finally realised he cannot keep them as models, for if he continues to employ them, he will be ruining himself. His sketches of “Rutland Ramsay” which used the Monarchs as models have been rejected by the artistic adviser of the publisher with a warning that unless they are changed, the rest of the books may be taken away from him and assigned to another painter. Therefore, he tells the Major, rather brutally: “Oh my dear Major—I can’t be ruined for you” (p. 455). He decides to use the vulgar Miss Churm and the vagabond-turned-model Oronte for his sketches for they possess the plasticity the Monarchs lack. The Monarchs are unable to comprehend that “in the deceptive atmosphere of art even the highest respectability may fail of being plastic” (p. 455). By attempting to paint them, the painter was trying, in the words of Viola Hopkins Winner, “to represent what is already an abstraction. Reality is embodied in the concrete individual which Miss Churm or Oronte pretends to be.”⁽⁷⁾

The painter is now satisfied with his work for he has come to understand through his mistakes that what art represents is not “The Real Thing” but “The Ideal Thing.” “The Real Thing” is always the same thing for there can be only one real thing, whereas there can be many versions of the ideal thing depending on the vision of the painter himself. Moreover, in spite of feeling compassion for the Monarchs, he realizes he has an obligation towards his art and towards himself. He cannot play God.

The Monarchs finally realize they have been defeated but they refuse to surrender to their cruel fate. Mrs. Monarch, in a gesture of self-abnegation, rearranges Miss Churm’s hair, then “turn[s] away with a low sigh and, looking about her as if for something to do, stoop[s] to the floor with a noble humility and pick[s] up a dirty rag that ha[s] dropped out of my paint-box” (p.456).

Both Mrs. Monarch and her husband decide that if they cannot work as models for the painter, they will not only work as his servants but also as his servants’ servants, serving the tea and doing the dishes. The painter is moved to tears by the pathos of their situation:

When it came over me, the latent eloquence of what they were doing, I confess that my drawing was blurred for a moment—the picture swam. They had accepted their failure, but they couldn’t accept their fate (p. 457).

(7) Viola Hopkins Winner, *Henry James and the Visual Arts* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1965), 110.

The artist's tears indicate how much he has changed since the first time he met the Monarchs and made those presumptuous assumptions about them. As Earle Labor has written: "His attitude has changed radically from what it was at the beginning of the story. He is now involved with mankind."⁽⁸⁾

He decides, however, that it would be too awkward to keep them and so, a week later, he gives them some money and dismisses them.

Thus from being a presumptuous, complacent and self-centred artist (thesis), the artist is humanized through his exposure to the suffering and the tragic predicament of the Monarchs (antithesis), so that he develops into a compassionate, perceptive and more humble human being (synthesis). He has passed through the three phases of initiation, from separation to transition to reintegration or reincorporation into life, enriched by the experience he has acquired. He has overcome the dangers of the transition phase: he could be generous to the Monarchs without continuing to harm his own interests or his art.

What is so remarkable about this short story is that James has created two centers of interest: the Monarchs and the painter himself. The painter mediates between the Monarchs and the reader while the Monarchs show, through the painter's changing reaction to them, the moral development—or transition—that his character is passing through. In his preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, James elucidated his novelistic technique, a technique which he uses with extraordinary effect in "The Real Thing":

Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's [or young man's] consciousness ... and you get an interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish. Stick to that—for the centre; put the heaviest weight into that scale, which will be so largely the scale of her relation to herself. ... Place meanwhile in the other scale the lighter weight ... press least hard, in short, on the consciousness of your heroine's satellites, especially the male; make it an interest contributive only to the greater one.⁽⁹⁾

What is so unusual about "The Real Thing" is that the two "scales" are weighted equally. The Monarchs and the painter in either scale with Oronte and Miss Churm (and, towards the end, Hawley) oscillating between the two (while they throw light on or reveal the Monarchs' deficiencies, they, at the same time, affect the painter's attitude to them and to his art by providing the required antitheses with the Monarchs and a perspective for the painter from which to view them and what is happening to his art).

As a result of this equal weighting of the scales, and the gradual insights the painter gains into the Monarchs' history and predicament, as well as the antithetical relationship of the vulgar but versatile Oronte and Miss Churm with the majestic but monolithic

(8) "James's 'The Real Thing': Three Levels of Meaning," *College English*, 23 (1962), 373.

(9) James, *The Art of Fiction*, 51.

Monarchs, there accrues a gradual intensification of both the painter's feelings of compassion for the Monarchs and a deepening of the feeling of tragedy surrounding them. As James said: "A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression."⁽¹⁰⁾ What makes "The Real Thing" so memorable a short story is the gripping intensity James generates in it by letting us in on both the Monarchs' tragic plight and the painter's compassion for their suffering.

In art, likewise, the painter learns that painting is not merely the representation of reality or an imitation of a represented subject, but that it is an ideal representation of reality. Art imitates represented reality by means of the esemplastic power of the imagination which shapes the painting according to the artist's vision. As E.H. Gombrich has written: "All art originates in the human mind, in our reactions to the world rather than in the visible world itself, and it is precisely because all art is 'conceptual' that all representations are recognizable by their style."⁽¹¹⁾ Art may be "conceptual" but the artist's vision can always be enriched by his enhanced capacity to feel, respond, empathize and sympathize.

Thus, we can safely assume that, in spite of what Hawley says (that the Monarchs did the painter "a permanent harm" and got him "in false ways," p. 457), and in spite of James's enigmatic ending ("if it [Hawley's opinion just quoted] be true, I'm content to have paid the price— for the memory," p. 457), the painter's brief encounter with the Monarchs cannot have been seriously or permanently detrimental to his art. The artist's imagination needs new experiences and new contacts with the outside world in order to grow and mature. In the words of Richard A. Hocks, "The Monarchs have provided the occasion, if not the impulse, for our narrator to develop ... his sensibility."⁽¹²⁾

In Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, Henry, the protagonist, is a playwright who is incapable of writing about love. He cannot even use subtext to express it. He believes that love means exclusive possession of the beloved and therefore cannot be written about interestingly, amusingly, or even sensibly. Stoppard alludes to and quotes from many plays by other dramatists in order to throw light on Henry's deficiencies. Thus in "Miss Julie" Strindberg used subtext in order to avoid being vulgarly explicit about a situation of stark sexual attraction, but managed, nevertheless, to be effective. Chekhov, the acknowledged master of subtext, made use of it in *Three Sisters* in order to portray adultery and suggest the deterioration and despair of the three sisters. Ford used exalted poetic

(10) Henry James, *The House of Fiction*, ed. Leon Edel (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), 29.

(11) E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1977), 76.

(12) Richard A. Hocks, *Henry James and Pragmatic Thought: A Study in the Relationship between the Philosophy of William James and the Literary Art of Henry James* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1974), 133.

language in order to conceal the sordid nature of the incestuous love affair between brother and sister in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*.

Richard Corballis has written that the main concern of the play is with Henry's personality rather than his art:

The nature of Henry's art ceases to be of central importance from Scene IV onwards, however. Indeed, art in general quickly becomes a minor issue. ... When Annie tells Henry, in Scene IV, that he will have to learn to deal with sub-text she is really issuing a challenge to his personality rather than to his craftsmanship. And from this point on Henry's personality becomes the chief centre of interest in what might be called the main plot. ⁽¹³⁾

Mr. Corballis, however, fails to realise that Henry's personality is intricately related to his art or craftsmanship. The defects in his writing are due to certain shortcomings in his personality and attitude to love, women and art. If Henry's personality "becomes the chief centre of interest," we have every reason to assume that by a logical corollary whatever happens to his personality will be reflected in his art.

The Real Thing is partly autobiographical. In an interview with Mel Gussaw of the *New York Times Magazine*, Stoppard pointed out the autobiographical element in his play:

The play contains self-reference jokes. Henry says when he tries to write a play about love, it comes out 'embarrassing, childish, or rude.' The love story, as I wrote it, tries to avoid banality by suggesting it. Henry says in the same scene, 'It makes me nervous to see three-quarters of a page and no writing on it. I talk better than this.' That's self-reference. ⁽¹⁴⁾

Like Stoppard, Henry confesses he has never been able to write about love satisfactorily. Love, as a subject, is not suitable for literature: "I don't know how to write love. I try to write properly, and it just comes out embarrassing..." ⁽¹⁵⁾ Thus his play "House of Cards," in which his wife Charlotte and his friend Max play the main roles, shows all the defects of his personality and attitude to art. It is neither great literature nor is it, therefore, very successful with the audience. In spite of its brilliant wit and sharp ideas, it is dry and unmoving.

One of the reasons why Henry cannot write well about love is his lack of the negative capability. Shakespeare, whom he greatly admires, was able to write supremely well about love in such plays as *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and many

(13) Richard Corballis, *Stoppard: The Mystery and the Clockwork* (Oxford: Amber Lane Press, 1984), 143.

(14) *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 1, 1984, Sec. VI, 18-23, 28 in *File on Stoppard*, comp. Malcolm Page (London: Methuen, 1986), 68-69.

(15) Tom Stoppard, *The Real Thing* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), 40-41. All textual references are to this edition.

others because he had this capability of checking his own ego and becoming the characters of his plays— men or women. In Henry's play, on the other hand, the emotion of love must be filtered through his own inhibitions, prejudices and predilections. Shakespeare, moreover, gave women great roles in his plays. Women in Shakespeare's plays are not only equal to men but they sometimes even tower over them. Henry, as Charlotte tells Max, has a certain preconceived idea about love and, therefore, love in all his plays has to conform to this preconception, however false or inadequate (p. 20). Moreover, according to her, women in his plays are merely used as feeds or to fetch drinks (p. 21). They are never given an equal share of importance with the male protagonists. Therefore, his plays are artificial and, as a result, unconvincing. His play "House of Cards" is a failure because he cannot write convincingly about love or about adultery.

Charlotte also makes some scathing remarks about the artificial nature of the dialogue in Henry's play and the wide disparity between his dialogue and real or felt experience: "You don't really think that if Henry caught me out with a lover, he'd sit around being witty about place and mats?" (p. 22). Her strictures are borne out by what happens in Scene III which is deliberately structured so as to remind us of Scene I in which Max and Charlotte enact a scene from Henry's "House of Cards." Stoppard tells us that the "disposition of furniture and doors makes the scene immediately reminiscent of the beginning of Scene I" (p. 36). In Scene III, Max discovers that his real-life wife Annie has been betraying him with Henry. The self-control he displayed in "House of Cards" is all gone. Also gone are the brilliant witticisms, the Wildean epigrams, and the elegantly balanced sentences with which he showed his superiority to the situation and exhibited his unruffled sophistication which will not stoop to vulgar anger or gross recriminations. Instead, we have direct accusations and insults, broken sentences and tears.

Closely related to Henry's inability to write about love is his attitude to style. He believes that style is everything in literature. *Le mot juste*, or apt word, is the best way to express ideas and make them "travel" (p. 53). He tells Annie that Brodie's play is awkward and boring because it is badly written. It is also made up of a heap of commonplaces and clichés. Brodie tries to define values and the truth about things, but values and the truth are relative (p. 54).

Most critics have noticed the same predilection towards giving words the supremacy over everything else in Stoppard himself. It is a commonplace of Stoppardian criticism that he is a master of *les mots justes*, puns, paradoxes, double entendres, Freudian slips, innuendoes, tongue twisters, funnily suggestive names, and all other kinds of witty fireworks that words can be made to yield. What is wrong with Henry's— and Stoppard's— attitude is, first, that words alone do not guarantee the greatness of the text. Secondly, if a writer does not believe in certain absolutes, his work, like his beliefs, will be of relative significance, no matter how brilliant his style is. If Shakespeare had not believed in a few absolutes such as gratitude, loyalty, friendship, love and others, he would not have been able to give us *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest* and many other

masterpieces. If every value is relative, then what is The Real Thing? And if love is relative, then how can Henry himself be sure that with the two women he married he had The Real Thing? Thirdly, and the critics have taken Stoppard to task rather severely on this issue, if a just cause is awkwardly expressed, this does not diminish its worthiness or importance. Thus C.K. Stead has written: "What comfort will there be for those who attack (as Stoppard's play does) the failings of the language in which the anti-nuclear argument is put, if that argument proves nevertheless to be correct?"⁽¹⁶⁾

Thus the first act of the play offers the main thesis in its dialectical structure. Henry is an artist or playwright who has a wrong attitude to love and is therefore incapable of writing a successful play. Moreover, his attitude to literature is elitist, sterile and deficient. To mention the obvious, in a work of art, both the mind and the emotions have to be engaged. *Le mot juste*, wit, verbal pyrotechnics, and ideas, belong to the realm of the mind or intellect, but when expressing real feelings as those we encounter in real life, there is no place or time for the *mot juste* or for wit and anecdote. Jimmy Porter expresses this point superbly well in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956):

It's no good trying to fool yourself about love. You can't fall into it like a soft job, without dirtying up your hands. ... It takes muscles and guts. And if you can't bear the thought ... of messing up your nice, clean soul... you'd better give up the whole idea of life, and become a saint.⁽¹⁷⁾

Henry will paraphrase this passage later on in the play when he comes to learn about real love through suffering.

We can say here that just as the unnamed painter's initial acquaintance with the Monarchs marks his separation from his present condition and the beginning of his "transition" into the second phase of the rites of passage that would lead to his moral development and maturity, Henry's marriage to Annie also marks the beginning of his separation from his present condition (his marriage to the unfeeling Charlotte) and his transition into a new phase or situation which will also lead to his eventual development both as a playwright and as a human being.

In Act II Henry's Odyssey towards understanding the nature of true love, or "The Real Thing," begins. In Scenes Five, Seven, Nine, Ten and Twelve he has a conversation with another character and through the conversation he makes new discoveries about himself, the nature of human relationships, and, by implication, the dynamics of a successful literary work.

(16) C.K. Stead, "Diary," *London Review of Books*, 18-31 Oct. 1984, 25 in *File on Stoppard*, 72-73. See also the interesting comments of other well-known dramatic critics such as Benedict Nightingale and Michael Stewart, also reprinted in *File on Stoppard*, 72-73.

(17) John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 93-94.

Thus in Scene Five, Henry, irritated by Annie's persistence in making him rewrite her protege's elephantine play, perpetrates a *gaucherie*:

Henry: (*Exasperated*) *Why Brodie?* Do you fancy him or what?

(*She looks back at him and he sees that he has made a mistake.*)

I take it back.

Annie: Too late (p. 56).

His realization that he has been tactless marks the beginning of his moral development. He becomes aware of the fact that not every relationship that Annie forms can be viewed from the narrow perspective of lover and non-lover and that Annie has her own individuality and is entitled to have opinions and make decisions of her own.

In Scene Seven he pays a visit to Charlotte, his ex-wife, in order to discuss with her the problem of their daughter Debbie. In this scene Charlotte's role is to shake him up and open his eyes to certain facts about the nature of love, just as Miss Churm's versatility in James's story opens the painter's eyes to the limitations and deficiencies of the Monarchs.

Charlotte tells him that however intimate a relationship between a man and a woman can be, neither should take the other for granted. Each party should constantly endeavor to inject new blood into the relationship by treating it with the enthusiasm and ardor of a new attachment (p. 62).

Until now Henry has passionately believed that in a love relationship, the two lovers make a commitment for life whereby they accept each other absolutely and permanently. He is therefore shocked to learn from Charlotte that she had nine lovers while she was married to him. His own actions, however, contradict his principles and beliefs since he has betrayed Charlotte with Annie. But more important, his attitude to his lover has, until this point, been characterized by possessiveness, smugness and selfishness. His conversation with Charlotte helps bring about a rude awakening on his part as to the nature of love and the relationships between lovers.

In Scene Nine, Henry and Debbie propound their divergent views of love and sex. To Debbie, love and sex are two different things. Love implies mutual affection and respect, whereas sex is merely satisfying a biological need and therefore can be practised with anybody. Lovers, according to her, should be loyal to and supportive of each other as persons and should respect each other's integrity as human beings (p. 67). A love relationship, therefore, does not automatically mean that the lovers have an absolute monopoly over each other's affections and opinions: "Exclusive right isn't love, it's colonization" (p.69).

Neither Charlotte with her infidelities nor Debbie with her promiscuities, however, propounds the last word about love and human relationships. Stoppard uses with them, as with Henry, his celebrated leap-frogging Shavian technique whereby each character is given only part of the truth and the audience are left to draw their own conclusions.⁽¹⁸⁾ Henry James, likewise, always avoids a “close account of the weak agent [i.e., the protagonist] by “using as a bridge for evasion or retreat and flight, the view of her relation to those surrounding her.”⁽¹⁹⁾ Thus the Monarchs’ uniqueness and deficiencies are thrown into relief through comparison with Miss Churm and Oronte, and the painter’s growing understanding is portrayed through his relation to the Monarchs and the other characters in the story.

Although Stoppard’s play shows that “The Real Thing” does entail fidelity on the part of the lovers and that promiscuity is not ultimately conducive to happiness or fulfilment, nevertheless, its dialectic is predicated on the premise that “The Real Thing” can be attained only after the lovers have come to acknowledge each other’s rights to form independent attachments and entertain different opinions. Complete surrender of one lover to another should occur voluntarily and is not an *ipso facto* stipulation of a love relationship.

In Scene Ten Henry goes through a trial by ordeal and learns his lesson in humility. The scene begins with Henry sitting in the living-room, just as Max was in the first and third scenes. The stage directions even tell us that “It’s like the beginning of Scene I and Scene 3” (p. 70). This scene is therefore deliberately structured in such a way as to invite comparison with those two previous scenes.

Henry suspects that Annie is being unfaithful to him. Like Max in Scene I who, acting a part in Henry’s “House of Cards,” subjects Charlotte, his wife-in-the-play, to an interrogation, he also subjects Annie, his wife-in-real-life, to a similar interrogation. However, unlike Max in “House of Cards,” he is incapable of the elegant epigrams, the sparkling witticisms, or the brilliant paradoxes by which his protagonist had maintained an impossible-to-believe self-control. In a language strongly reminiscent of the passage quoted above from *Look Back in Anger*, he tells Annie:

I don’t believe in behaving well. I don’t believe in debonair relationships... I believe in mess, tears, pain, self-abasement, loss of respect, nakedness (p.74).

(18) In this famous essay, “Ambushes for the Audience: Towards a High Comedy of Ideas,” Stoppard declared: But I must make clear that, insofar as it’s possible for me to look at my own work objectively at all, the element which I find most valuable is the one that other people are put off by - that is, that there is often no single, clear statement in my plays. What there is, is a series of conflicting characters, and they tend to play a sort of infinite leap-frog. You know an argument, a refutation, then a rebuttal of the refutation then a counter-rebuttal, so that there is never any point in this intellectual leap-frog at which I feel that is the speech to stop it on, that is the last word.

(19) A. Smaller James, *The Art of Fiction*, 51.

In his distress he even commits a solecism, which is unpardonable coming from a man who has always prided himself on his mastery of language and tried to correct everybody else:

Henry: Yes, you'd behave better than me. ... Annie: Better than I (p. 74).

Henry's linguistic slip indicates he is unable to control himself well enough to cope with the situation he is dealing with, just as Max, in a parallel situation in Scene III, abuses language by reducing it to a series of insults (p. 37).

Annie then tells him love is not synonymous with possessiveness and that caring does not entitle lovers to exclusive rights over each other. She also warns him she will not be emotionally blackmailed by him (p. 24).

By the end of the scene Henry has reconciled himself to the hard truth conveyed in Annie's words: "You have to find a part of yourself where I'm not important or you won't be worth loving" (p. 75). He is therefore willing to let her continue her affair with Billy realizing that this is only a temporary attraction or "need" on her part and that she will soon get over it. He has learned, in the words of Michael Billington, that "the real thing is not an idealized, devouring, exclusive, colonizing love but one that admits the other person's flawed individuality."⁽²⁰⁾

In Scene Twelve Henry shows he is tolerant of Annie's infatuation with Billy. He is, however, in agony and still, as he tells her "can't find a part of myself where you're not important" (p. 79). He will not make a scene or try to prevent her from seeing Billy because if he did, he would "just be the person who stopped" her, and he "can't be that" (p. 78). Although he does not change his attitude to love, and Stoppard seems to be endorsing him on that, he has learnt to acknowledge his lover's separateness and make allowances for her weaknesses and needs. His moral growth earns him Annie's respect and admiration and accelerates her recovery from her infatuation so that at the end he gets to keep her love and win her back.

When she leaves, he starts a record playing Procul Harmum and smiles. But his smile is "overtaken" by his anguish: "Oh, please, please, don't" (p. 80). Although Henry is not a very likeable character, he earns our sympathy through the intensity of his suffering. His suffering, however, is not of the same kind or the same degree as the suffering of the Monarchs in James's short story. He will get Annie back, but the Monarchs leave the painter's house unrelieved of their tragic situation. The intensity emanating from the Monarchs' tragic ordeal continues till the end of the story and stays behind even after they have made their exit: we wonder what will happen to them. In Henry's case, on the other hand, the intensity of his suffering is soon resolved as soon as Annie goes back to him.

(20) Michael Billington, *Stoppard the Playwright* (London: Methuen, 1987), 155.

In Scene Twelve, which we have been discussing, Henry has realistically experienced what he could not or would not allow his protagonist to experience in “House of Cards.” The Max who is left laughing at the end of Scene One appears to be too self-centered and too fond of his own wit to be really in love. As for the Max who is left snivelling on Annie’s unresponsive shoulder in the real life situation dramatized by Stoppard in Scene Three, he is pathetic but weak and his protestations of love are tinged with self-pity.

Scene Twelve is therefore calculated not only to underscore Henry’s moral development but also to enhance his stature as a human being when compared with Max. The scene also shows that Henry is experiencing true love and the agony of frustrated love, an experience he could never dramatize because he did not have first-hand knowledge of it. So Henry’s suffering has been beneficial to him both as a human being and as a playwright.

We feel certain that Henry’s moral growth and his new insights into love and human relationships will be reflected in his writings. He will come to write the kind of play that will portray *The Real Thing* convincingly, just as Stoppard himself was to write *Hapgood* (1988), in which the major role is given to the titular heroine who is a multifaceted character, and *In The Native State* (1992), in which the heroine, Flora Crewe, is the major interest in the play and a character who believes in the heart’s primacy over the head.

In Scene Thirteen, which is the final scene of the play, Brodie is visiting Henry and Annie. Henry has rewritten Brodie’s play but Brodie does not like it: “I liked it better before. You don’t mind me saying?” (p. 81). When Henry tries to be sarcastic, he rudely retorts: “Don’t be clever with me, Henry, like you were clever with my play. I lived it and put my guts into it, and you came along and wrote it clever” (p.82).

Clever as the rewrite has been, it is not “*The Real Thing*” because it is not how its angry, though boorish, author wanted it to be, but how the sophisticated Henry thought it should be. To borrow Michael Billington’s apt remarks about Stoppard’s and Henry’s flaws as playwrights, what is lacking in Brodie’s play as rewritten by Henry, is the “*saeva indignatio* that lies at the heart of much good writing.” Without this fierce indignation or anger on the part of the author, “it is hard to believe we would ever have had Aristophanes’s *Lysistrata*, Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, Milton’s *Aeropagitica*, Ben Jonson’s *Volpone*, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Dostoyevsky’s *The Possessed*.”⁽²¹⁾

Through Henry, Stoppard indicates that he has become aware that style alone, no matter how brilliant, is not enough. Genuine feelings and passions and the writer’s wholehearted commitment to his subject are also very important. Moreover, in portraying relationships, emotions, and situations, the writer should observe “*The Real Thing*”, i.e., what really happens in life and not what he thinks happens. He should not sacrifice life to

(21) Billington, *Stoppard the Playwright*, 151.

wit, paradoxes and anecdotes. Stoppard who has carefully read and admired Oscar Wilde, using *The Importance of Being Earnest* as the background to his *Travesties* (1974) and imitating Wilde's paradoxes and brilliant repartees in many of his plays, must have realized that Wilde's plays, in spite of their brilliance, do not offer "The Real Thing": their excessive paradoxes and word play render them artificial and superficial.

The dialectical structure of the play is now complete. In the first act we find a priggish Henry who, as a lover, thinks love is total and exclusive possession of the beloved; and, as a playwright, cannot write on love and thinks women are there only to be assigned insignificant roles. He believes wit, elegance and paradox to be the most important ingredients in a play. In Act II we have the antithesis, when, through suffering, he experiences how a cuckolded husband really feels. He realises that all his fireworks are useless when confronted with his wife's infidelity and the prospect of losing her to another man. The synthesis is achieved when through his agony and conversations with his ex-wife Charlotte, his daughter Debbie, and his present wife Annie, he learns the nature of true love; and through Brodie's unappreciative remarks about the improved version of his play, he learns the importance of the writer's trying to recapture "The Real Thing", i.e., what really happens in life.⁽²²⁾ Thus both as a lover and a playwright he has come to understand and experience "The Real Thing." We can say that, like the painter in James's short story, Henry has passed through the three phases of initiation: separation (from his previous wife Charlotte), transition (into a new love, and a new understanding of the nature of love), and reintegration (into life and art).

In his essay "The Future of the Novel" Henry James has written:

The more we consider it the more we feel that the prose picture can never be at the end of its tether until it loses the sense of what it can do. It can do simply everything, and that is its strength and its life. Its plasticity, its elasticity are infinite; there is no colour, no extension it may not take from the nature of its subject or the temper of its craftsman.⁽²³⁾

What applies to a prose picture applies equally well to a painting and a play. The mistake that both the unnamed painter and Henry made was that they did not try to take every color and every extension from their subject or from their own talent. In the case of the unnamed painter, he tried, by accommodating the Monarchs, to paint types and impose a uniformity and sameness upon reality, forgetting that reality is multi-colored and forever

(22) It is only natural that in a play concerned with finding "The Real Thing" that the words "real" and "really" should occur more than twenty times. Also, as the characters go through various adjustments in their relationships, feelings, perceptions, and thoughts, it is to be expected that the phrase "all right" should occur frequently along the way towards exploring the experiencing "the real thing." Leslie Thomason states that this phrase occurs "on more than fifty occasions," in "The Subtext of *The Real Thing*: It's all right," *Modern Drama*, 30 (Dec. 1987), 538.

(23) Henry James, "The Future of the Novel," *Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Morris Shapiro (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963), 222.

changing. As James has also written, but in a different essay: "One perceives... by the light of a heavenly ray that the province of art is all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision."⁽²⁴⁾ Likewise, Henry's mistake was to subject reality to the artificial glitter of words and the contrived play of wit at the expense of real emotion. He also failed to assign to women important roles in his plays and was content to satisfy his egotistic male chauvinism by assigning them such lines as would easily be rebutted by his male protagonists who would thereby demonstrate their superiority. Ultimately it is a question of the amount of "felt life" that the artist experiences and offers in his work. As James has written:

There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth ... than that of the perfect dependence of the "moral sense" of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it.⁽²⁵⁾

Without the "moral sense" the artist produces art for art's sake and his work is unrelated to the world around him. This is what Henry with his stylistic virtuosity but unfeeling attitude to women was guilty of, and this is what the painter, with his attempt to distort reality and life in order to accommodate the Monarchs, was trying to do.

Thus, just as the unnamed painter using models who represented types and abstractions produced works which were uninteresting and unattractive and were, therefore, rejected by the publisher; Henry, the playwright, relying on wit, paradox, puns and repartees, to the exclusion of real feelings or really felt experience, failed to convince or move his audience. However, although the unnamed painter came to realize that art should offer an ideal representation of reality, while Henry realised he had to deal with "The Real Thing" and not let his prejudices and inhibitions distort reality, both the unnamed painter's and the playwright's views and approaches are complementary.

Neither painters nor playwrights attempt to offer an exact copy of reality but an idealized version of it, i.e., reality essentialized and enhanced (or reduced and distorted, in case of satire) and mediated by their peculiar vision. Cleopatra, for example, is a real person, but Shakespeare's Cleopatra and the historical Cleopatra are vastly different from each other. Like a painter, Shakespeare has idealized her by essentializing and abstracting the essence and qualities of many women in order to create his vision of Cleopatra the woman "of infinite variety" who is universally admired. Accordingly, both the painter who looks inside, into his own mind, and paints his conceptualized vision of reality or nature, and the playwright who looks at reality or nature outside himself and then enhances or transfigures what he sees by means of his imagination and technique, offer an idealized or transformed picture of reality. Their approaches are thus complementary. The painter looks inside and dresses his concepts with the flesh he obtains from his observation of the outside world so that his concepts become intelligible and unforgettable. The playwright looks towards nature and life outside himself and through his vision, imagination, and art,

(24) Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," *Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism*, 93.

(25) James. *The Art of the Novel*, 45.

transfigures what he sees into experiences, situations or characters that transcend both their time and place.

In James's "The Real Thing" the unnamed painter discards the Monarchs who represent "The Real Thing" because he knows they cannot approximate those various configurations of reality in his own mind, configurations that are given plastic representation by the flexible and spontaneous Miss Churm and Oronte who can easily transform themselves into embodiments of the painter's vision.

In Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, Henry experiences the agony of jealousy and understands that he can neither take his love for granted nor possess his lover completely. Every individual, as he learns, has his own separate personality and has the right to entertain different views and cherish other attachments. He also learns that if he is so dependent on a woman for his happiness, then women cannot be of less importance than men. It is safe to assume that what Henry has learnt will translate into his work and he will develop into a better playwright. Henry, however, is only a fictional character through whom Stoppard confesses he has learnt more about love and the nature of love. His subsequent work shows, as I have mentioned before, that he has put what he has learnt into practice by writing two plays which have a woman as the main character. Moreover, Stoppard's subsequent work, though still witty, also includes situations of real pathos and emotion.

Both James and Stoppard believe, as these two works which I have discussed clearly show, that the artist should be exposed to suffering and everyday reality, for as James Joyce says in *Travesties*, the true artist is "the magician put among men to gratify capriciously—their urge for immortality."⁽²⁶⁾ The artist, painter or playwright, cannot achieve this unless he understands what men and women are really like.

(26) Tom Stoppard, *Travesties* (New York: Grove Press, 1977), 62.

الألم هو الجوهر: دراسة لقصة هنري جيمس القصيرة بعنوان:
"الجوهر الحقيقي"، ومسرحية توم استوبارد التي عنوانها أيضا: "الجوهر الحقيقي"

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ملخص البحث. بالرغم من أن قصة جيمس القصيرة "الجوهر الحقيقي" ومسرحية ستوبارد المكونة من فصلين، وتحمل العنوان نفسه، تناولان تجربتين مختلفتين إلا أن هذين العملين يشتركان في نقاط عدة. فالعملان يعتبران من أعمال "التكريس" أو "التلقين" (وهي الأعمال التي يتعرض فيها البطل لتجربة إنسانية تؤهله لفهم المشاعر الإنسانية وتؤدي إلى تطوره وسموه أخلاقيا)، حيث يتعرض البطلان في العملين الأدبيين لتجربة المعاناة الإنسانية كوسيلة تؤدي إلى تطورها الأخلاقي. فالكاتب المسرحي في مسرحية ستوبارد يتعرض لتجربة الألم داخل نفسه في حين أن الرسام في قصة جيمس القصيرة يشاهد هذا الألم في الآخرين- مما يؤدي إلى اكتساب رؤيا جديدة عن طبيعة النفس البشرية- وأن تعرضهما لمثل هذه التجربة الإنسانية سيكون له أثره على إنتاجهما الفني في المستقبل.

وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل التركيب البنائي لكلا العملين وتتبع النمو الأخلاقي لكلا الفنانين- كما تظهر هذه الدراسة أيضا أنه، بالرغم من أن المؤلف المسرحي في مسرحية ستوبارد، والرسام في قصة جيمس القصيرة، يحتضنان آراء مختلفة عن الفن- وهي آراء مرتبطة ارتباطا وثيقا بالمعنى الذي يحمله عنوان كلا العاملين- إلا أن آراءهما يكمل بعضهما الآخر.