

Plot Parody in Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *The Real Inspector Hound*, and *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*

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Abstract

Parody as a salient device in postmodern literature is extensively applied by Tom Stoppard in his plays. Having different layers of parody, Stoppard's "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*", "*The Real Inspector Hound*", and "*Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*" exhibit his parodic application of other writers' plots. The analytical-qualitative scrutiny of the plot lines of these plays not only corroborates their parodic nature but also demonstrates the techniques Stoppard employs in each play to parody the plot of its hypotext. "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*" dramatizes a specific parody of the plot of "*Hamlet*" both where it overlaps the plot of the tragedy and more intensely where it touches Shakespeare's plot tangentially. Stoppard's genre parody of the stock plot of the crime genre is portrayed in "*The Real Inspector Hound*". It simultaneously enjoys a parody of the plot of Agatha Christie's "*The Mousetrap*". The three-part performance in the first part of "*Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth*" displays a specific parody of the plot of Shakespeare's "*Hamlet*".

Keywords: Stoppard, parody, plot, parodic techniques

Introduction

The aim of this study is to elaborate on different layers of plot parody in Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *The Real Inspector Hound*, and *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* – which henceforth will be referred to as *RAGAD*, *RIH*, and *DHCM*, respectively. Tom Stoppard, like many postmodern writers, makes use of parody extensively. In Stoppard's cited plays, different layers

of parody in its postmodern sense are employed. Different layers of parody are closely related to different kinds of parody. Kinds of parody are, in turn, based on how parody is defined. Following the lead of Bakhtin, parody can be defined as "a deliberate imitation or transformation of a socio-cultural product that takes at least a playful stance towards its original subject" (Sadrian, 2010, p. 90). The kinds of parody based on such a definition can be enumerated as specific, general, and discourse. Specific parody takes as its hypotext a specific manner, tone, style, diction, attitude, or idea of the text or writer. Genre parody, on the other hand, has a genre or a generic style as its hypotext. The concept of genre is used to embrace every kind of genre or mode of writing, in general. It can be a literary genre or a nonliterary one. Discourse parody takes as its hypotext any type of human activity from verbal to nonverbal forms. This vast group includes all kinds of parodies save the mentioned specific and genre parodies. In this paper, the plot of Stoppard's mentioned plays will be examined from such a perspective of parody in order to delineate his parodic techniques and specifically to demarcate his plot parodies from other closely related kinds.

Although some critics have tried to look at the usage of parody in Stoppard's *RAGAD*, *RIH*, and *DHCM*, there are not extensive deep and in-detail studies of them from the perspective of parody. Most of the critics who have written about the mentioned plays focus on a source study of them. Some of these critics, such as Bigsby (1976), Vickery (1982), and Hunter (1980) point out the influences on Stoppard's plays. A few other critics who criticize Stoppard's plays under the light of their application of parody, such as Cave (1990), are content with a limited analysis. Moreover, there is not a common agreement on what to call Stoppard's usage of imitation. The imitation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Stoppard's *RAGAD*, for instance, is named parody by Kelly (1994) while Cave (1990) calls it travesty. Some critics have particularly been more conservative and simply have called it 'remaking' or 'intertextuality'.

Stoppard creates a multilayer parody in his *RIH*, too. Although the main focus of the play is on parodying critics and the crime genre, it does not fail to poke fun at some specific texts. A few of these works, suggested by different critics, can be enumerated as some of Agatha Christie's country-house thrillers including *The Mousetrap*, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Unexpected Guest* and his *The Hound of Baskervilles*, Ludwig Tieck's *Puss-in-Boots*, Pirandello's trilogy of theater plays, and Joe Orton's *Loot* and his

What the Butler Saw. Some critics have also found parodies of *Hamlet*, with its 'Mousetrap', and Stoppard's own *RAGAD* in Stoppard's play. The specific texts which can be considered as the original subjects of parody in Stoppard's play are so various that Kelly prefers to highlight its genre parody so much that she almost tends to disregard the play's minor focus on parodying specific works (Kelly, 1994, p. 82).

While the variety of the suggested original texts of the parody in *RIH* seems confusing, there seems to be a kind of general agreement among commentators that Agatha Christie's works provide a main subject of parody in Stoppard's play. Kelly notes that "while all sense the Christie behind *Hound*, none agrees on exactly which Christie is being parodied" (1994, p. 82). Although Kelly's observation might be true, there are many critics who agree that at least Christie's *The Mousetrap* is one of the major subjects of parody in Stoppard's play (Billington, p. 67; Gabbard, p. 67; Jenkins, 1989, p. 82; Whitaker, p. 113). This, however, does not mean that Stoppard's specific parody is restricted to Christie's *The Mousetrap*. It rather means that the play parodies a variety of specific works both written by Christie and other writers but the parody of *The Mousetrap* seems to be more systematically applied and it is more easily recognizable.

In spite of the fact that *Dogg's Hamlet* comically dramatizes a school performance, what is performed humorously in the play is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. A few critics, such as Billington, contend that Stoppard's parody in *Dogg's Hamlet* does not include *Hamlet* (Billington, p. 138). There are others, however, who directly or indirectly point out that the parody in Stoppard's play embraces Shakespeare's tragedy, as well (Egri, 1996, p. 87; Kelly, 1994, p. 130). One way or the other, the humor in the play does not exclude Shakespeare's tragedy. In *Dogg's Hamlet*, Hu comments, Stoppard "revive[s] Shakespeare's lengthy tragedy as a brief farce" (p. 181). Parodying Shakespeare's tragedy at large, the school performance in *Dogg's Hamlet* exhibits a parody of the plot of *Hamlet* specifically.

Stoppard's *RAGAD*, *RIH*, and *DHCM* are selected to be studied under the light of parody because all of these plays exhibit the usage of plot parody in a variety of ways. As the title of *RAGAD* suggests, this play feeds on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in a parodic way. *DHCM* makes parodic use of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and

Macbeth. *RIH*, on the other hand, parodies the generic plot line of detective stories as well as Christie's *The Mousetrap*.

Discussion

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead

Describing his job as an actor, the Player in Stoppard's *RAGAD* asserts: "We do on stage the things that are supposed to happen off. Which is a kind of integrity, if you look on every exit being an entrance somewhere else" (p. 28). What the Player says is indeed what Stoppard does with the plot of *Hamlet* in his *RAGAD*. He dramatizes what occurs to Ros and Guil, two insignificant characters in *Hamlet*, from the time they are traveling to Elsinore – which is itself because of a royal summons – to the time they are executed and the report of their execution reaches the Danish court; however, the main portion of Stoppard's plot is about what happens to Ros and Guil when they are not present in the plot of *Hamlet*.

To make the connection between the plot of *Hamlet* and his plot more flamboyant for the spectator/reader, Stoppard both represents some of the scenes of Shakespeare's plot and displays some scenes where Ros and Guil witness what happens in them. The other parts of Stoppard's plot are dedicated to what happens to Ros and Guil when they are not acting in the plot of *Hamlet* or witnessing it.

The main parody of the plot of *Hamlet* can be seen where Stoppard's plot overlaps Shakespeare's – i.e. where the plot of *Hamlet* is represented – and still more intensely where it touches Shakespeare's plot tangentially (i.e. Ros and Guil witness the plot of *Hamlet*).

Stoppard's plot overlaps the plot of *Hamlet* in eight scenes, in addition to touching it tangentially in seven scenes. Some of the examples of these scenes can demonstrate how Stoppard imitates them and also treats them playfully, i.e. parodies them. After being ordered by the king to find Hamlet and the dead body of Polonius, Ros and Guil exhibit a comic scene wherein they try to catch Hamlet by a trap they make using their belts. They, then, try to call him:

ROS: Give him a shout.

GUIL: I thought we'd been into all that.

ROS: (*shouts*): Hamlet!

GUIL: Don't be absurd.

ROS: (*shouts*): Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET *enters*. ROS is a little dismayed.

What have you done, my Lord, with the dead body?

HAMLET: Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin. [...]

ROS: My Lord, you must tell us where the body is and go with us to the King.

HAMLET: The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing---

GUIL: A thing, my Lord---

HAMLET: Of nothing. Bring me to him.

HAMLET *moves resolutely towards one wing. They move with him, shepherding. Just before they reach the exit, HAMLET, apparently seeing CLAUDIUS approaching from offstage, bends low in a sweeping bow. ROS and GUIL, cued by Hamlet, also bow deeply—a sweeping ceremonial bow with their cloaks swept round them. HAMLET, however, continues the movement into an about-turn and walks off in the opposite direction.*

ROS and GUIL, *with their heads low, do not notice.*

No one comes on. ROS and GUIL squint upwards and find that they are bowing to nothing.

CLAUDIUS *enters behind them. At first words they leap up and do a double-take.*

CLAUDIUS: How now? What hath befallen? (RAGAD, pp. 90 – 91)

Shakespeare's plot shows Ros and Guil both calling to Hamlet, too:

Elsinore. A passage in the Castle.

Enter Hamlet.

Hamlet: Safely stow'd.

Gentlemen: (*Within*) Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!

Hamlet: But soft! What noise? Who calls on Hamlet? O, here they come.

Enter Ros and Guil.

Rosencrantz: What have you done, my Lord, with the dead body?

Hamlet: Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin. [...]

Rosencrantz: My lord, you must tell us where the body is and go with us to the King.

Hamlet: The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing-

Guildestern: A thing, my lord?

Hamlet: Of nothing. Bring me to him. Hide fox, and all after.

Exeunt.

Scene III.

Elsinore. A room in the Castle.

Enter King.

King: I have sent to seek him and to find the body.

How dangerous is it that this man goes loose!

Yet must not we put the strong law on him.

He's lov'd of the distracted multitude,

Who like not in their judgment, but their eyes;

And where 'tis so, th' offender's scourge is weigh'd,

But never the offence. To bear all smooth and even,

This sudden sending him away must seem

Deliberate pause. Diseases desperate grown

By desperate appliance are reliev'd,

Or not at all.

Enter Rosencrantz.

How now? O, what hath befall'n? (Hamlet, IV.ii.2631-2673)

The verbal texts of the dialogues in both plays are closely similar; however, there are differences in Stoppard's imitation of this scene of Shakespeare's tragedy which make the effect of the whole scene substantially diverse and eventually funny.

In Stoppard's play the scene is preceded by the Beckettian funny act of Ros and Guil where they try to catch Hamlet by joining their belts while Ros's trousers slide down. In Shakespeare's drama, on the other hand, it is preceded by Hamlet's short monologue: "safely stow'd". In Stoppard's play, the setting of place is the upstage with no further clue; in Shakespeare's drama, the scene is supposed to take place in "a passage in the Castle". In Stoppard's play, it is only Ros who shouts "Hamlet" while in Shakespeare's drama both Gentlemen call to Hamlet. In Stoppard's play, Hamlet responds to the call and goes to see Ros and Guil – enters the stage. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Ros and Guil enter the passage in the castle where Hamlet has already been talking alone. Stoppard deletes the last words of Hamlet – "Hide fox and all after". In Stoppard's play, instead of Claudius's monologue – where he

reasons why he should not execute Hamlet and instead must send him away – there is a very funny mute action where Hamlet fools Ros and Guil and walks away. In Stoppard's play, Claudius enters the stage when Ros and Guil find out that Hamlet has fooled them. In Shakespeare's tragedy, on the contrary, Ros goes to Claudius while Guil, Hamlet, and attendants are waiting outside to be called in.

As a result of the changes that Stoppard makes in this scene of *Hamlet*, including re-contextualizing it, the significance of Hamlet and Claudius, as the protagonist and antagonist of Shakespeare's tragedy, is diminished and instead Ros and Guil are given prominence. Although the plot of the aforementioned scene in Stoppard's play is more or less a copy of the same scene in *Hamlet* – Hamlet is called and he responds, then Ros and Guil take him to the king and he asks them about Hamlet – its effect is diametrically divergent. By adding the part that Ros and Guil are fooled by Hamlet, Stoppard creates a hilarious show instead of a serious, grave scene. By having Claudius go to see Ros and Guil, who are surprised and instantly make a double-take before him and by omitting Claudius's monologue, the serious scene of *Hamlet* is turned to a funny spectacle for the spectators. Stoppard imitates this part of *Hamlet*; nonetheless, by the changes he introduces to it, he proffers a playful treatment of it. This is how Stoppard parodies some parts of the plot of *Hamlet*.

There are seven scenes where the plot of *RAGAD* touches the plot of *Hamlet* tangentially. In these scenes, Ros and Guil are positioned downstage while a part of the plot of *Hamlet* is acted out upstage. An instance can be seen at the end of the first act of *RAGAD*. Before greeting Hamlet, Ros and Guil watch and hear a part of the conversation between Hamlet and Polonius:

HAMLET *enters, backwards, talking, followed by* POLONIUS, *upstage. ROS and GUIL occupy the two downstage corners looking upstage.*

HAMLET: ...for you yourself, sir, should be as old as I am if like a crab you could go backward.

POLONIUS (*aside*): Though this be madness, yet there is method in it. Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

HAMLET: Into my grave.

POLONIUS: Indeed, that's out of the air.

HAMLET *crosses to upstage exit*. POLONIUS *asiding unintelligibly until---*

My lord, I will take my leave of you.

HAMLET: You can not take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal---except my life, except my life, except my life....

POLONIUS: (*crossing downstage*): Fare you well, my lord.

(*To ROS*): You go to seek lord Hamlet? There he is.

ROS (*To POLONIUS*): God save you sir.

POLONIUS goes.

GUIL: (*calls upstage to HAMLET*): My honoured Lord! (RAGAD, pp. 52-53)

The same scene in Shakespeare's drama does not show Ros and Guil witnessing the conversation between Hamlet and Polonius:

Hamlet: [...] for you yourself, sir, should be old as I am if, like a crab, you could go backward.

Polonius: [*aside*] Though this be madness, yet there is a method in't.- Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

Hamlet: Into my grave?

Polonius: Indeed, that is out o' th' air. [*Aside*] How pregnant sometimes his replies are! A happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of. I will leave him and suddenly contrive the means of meeting between him and my daughter - My honourable lord, I will most humbly take my leave of you.

Hamlet: You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal- except my life, except my life, except my life,

Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Polonius: Fare you well, my lord.

Hamlet: These tedious old fools!

Polonius: You go to seek the lord Hamlet. There he is.

Rosencrantz: [*to Polonius*] God save you, sir!

Exit Polonius.

Guildenstern: My honour'd lord!

Rosencrantz: My most dear lord! (Hamlet, II.ii.1241-1266)

In *Hamlet*, Ros and Guil enter when Polonius wants to leave and thus they only hear the last two sentences of the conversation between Hamlet and Polonius. Stoppard, however, lets his Ros and Guil hear more than the last sentences from the conversation

between Hamlet and Polonius. In Shakespeare's tragedy, Hamlet and Polonius are already on the stage when Ros and Guil enter; however, in Stoppard's play Ros and Guil are already on the stage while Hamlet and Polonius enter. In Stoppard's play, Hamlet enters backwards as if trying to escape his conversation with Polonius – at the same time, it can be a parodic pantomime of his later sentence to Polonius: "if like a crab you could go backward".

Stoppard's version of this scene of *Hamlet* omits some parts of the original dialogues and distorts Shakespeare's text by having Ros and Guil watch the conversation between Hamlet and Polonius. Ros and Guil seem not to be playing in *Hamlet* but watching it; however, the spectators know that Ros and Guil are part of the same play they are just watching. Stoppard's main strategy in the aforementioned scene is to have his course of the plot run on the downstage and let Shakespeare's plot be performed on the upstage till the time that both of the plots overlap each other. In other words, Stoppard makes Shakespeare's plot back-grounded while making his own plot fore-grounded. By so doing, Stoppard creates another kind of parody of the plot of *Hamlet*. The plot of *Hamlet* is introduced to the audience not as it is but as observed by Ros and Guil while stupefied and frozen on the stage they watch it. The plot of *RAGAD*, here touches a distorted part of the plot of *Hamlet* and altogether yields a playful treatment of the plot of *Hamlet* two minor characters of which are separated to watch a part of it and at the same time play in it.

In the aforementioned scene, not only are Ros and Guil the protagonists of Stoppard's play but also they are a narrow window through which the audience can watch the plot of *Hamlet*. Stoppard, thus, shifts the point of view of the plot of *Hamlet* to the limited stupefied point of view of Ros and Guil.

The largest portion of the plot of *RAGAD* is dedicated to what happens to Ros and Guil when they are not interacting or watching the plot of *Hamlet*. This large portion can itself be divided into two other smaller parts. Stoppard constructs some parts of the plot of *RAGAD* based on the information asserted by the characters in *Hamlet* – like changing Ophelia's speech to dramatic action (pp. 34, 35) or Hamlet's dialogue about the pirates, the sea fight, and his changing of letters which leads to the execution of Ros and Guil to a whole novel act, the third act (pp. 97–126). The remaining portion of the plot is what Stoppard genuinely creates himself – like what

happens to Ros and Guil on the road to Elsinore including the improbable run of the heads in the game of coin tossing between Ros and Guil (pp. 11-35).

The less vivid parody of the plot of *Hamlet* – compared to the parodied parts of it when Ros and Guil interact in it and when they witness it – can be traced where Stoppard transforms the information provided by the characters of *Hamlet* to dramatic scenes. Although Stoppard's playful creativity is still at full bloom in creating the dialogues and actions for these scenes, their ideas are originally provided by Shakespeare. For instance, addressing Horatio in his letter, Shakespeare's Hamlet notes:

Horatio: (*reads the letter*) 'Horatio, when thou shalt have overlook'd this, give these fellows some means to the King. They have letters for him. Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour, and in the grapple I boarded them. (IV.vi.2986-2991)

Later, explaining what happened on the ship, Hamlet refers to the sea-fight again: "Now, the next day \ Was our sea-fight" (Hamlet, V.ii.3556-7). Stoppard, on the other hand, dramatized Hamlet's account playfully:

ROS: Incidents! All we get is incidents! Dear God, is it too much to expect a little sustained action?!

And on the word, the PIRATES attack. That is to say: Noise and shouts and rushing about. "Pirates."

Everyone visible goes frantic. HAMLET draws his sword and rushes downstage. GUIL, ROS and PLAYER draw swords and rush upstage. Collision. HAMLET turns back up. They turn back down. Collision. By which time there is general panic right upstage. All four charge upstage with ROS, GUIL and PLAYER shouting:

At last!

To arms!

Pirates!

Up there!

Down there!

To my sword's length!

Action!

All four reach the top, see something they don't like, waver, run for their lives downstage. (RAGAD, p.118)

Stoppard, thus, dramatizes what Shakespeare's *Hamlet* only talks about. In Shakespeare's drama, the sea-fight is referred to as a past event while Stoppard dramatizes it as a present action. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* uses friendly Elizabethan prose and later blank verse to give an account of the event; Stoppard, on the other hand, uses a mid twentieth-century prose to demonstrate the frantic state of his characters, although for Rosencrantz the event may seem as if his wish comes true¹. In *Hamlet*, the scene is narrated by applying a first person point of view – Hamlet's point of view – which implies that the stress is on how Hamlet observes and interprets the event. In Stoppard's play, the scene is dramatized through a third person objective point of view, the tendency of which is towards Rosencrantz's perspective. There is a ship chase by the pirates before they capture the ship in Shakespeare's drama. In Stoppard's play, the pirates all of a sudden break in without any ship chase. In *Hamlet*, there is no account of the band of players nor is there a character named the Player. The event in *Hamlet* is interpreted as a part of a tragedy. In Stoppard's play, however, the pirate scene is turned to a comedy which is a part of a larger one. The funny scene is initiated by Ros who asks for "a little sustained action" and suddenly the pirates break in. The 'collision' of characters – Hamlet being one of them – who cannot handle the situation, is yet another source of the comic spectacle that Stoppard portrays. Not only does Stoppard create a part of his plot according to what is narrated in *Hamlet* but also he modifies it to suit his entertaining and comic purposes; after all, as he says himself, his purpose of writing *RAGAD* is "to entertain a roomful of people" (*Ambushes*, p. 6).

The Real Inspector Hound

In the thriller staged in *RIH*, Stoppard parodies the staple plot of crime fictions. Before the main-frame plot overlaps the inner-play plot, the exposition of crime fictions is parodied by the way the thriller begins. While the main-frame plot merges into the whodunit plot and then leads to the unmasking of the real police agent, the stock complication and denouement of the crime genre are ridiculed. The critical observations of Moon and Birdboot on the plot of the play-within-the-play highlight the stereotypical nature of the plot of

the whodunit and, at the same time, invite the audience of the play to laugh at its conventionality.

The inner play commences with "Mrs. Drudge the Help" who "*heads straight for the radio*" and switches it on (RIH, pp. 8-9). Exactly timed, the radio announces that there is an interruption "for a special police message" about the country police's search for a madman "around Muldoon Manor", where the thriller takes place (RIH, p. 9). Mrs. Drudge turns off the radio and continues her dusting towards the onstage telephone set. She dusts the phone "*with an intense concentration*", displaying amateurishly that she is "*waiting for it to*" ring. When it rings, she snatches the receiver up:

MRS. DRUDGE (*into phone*): Hello, the drawing-room of Lady Muldoon's country residence one morning in early spring?...Hello!—the draw—Who? Who did you wish to speak to? I'm afraid there is no one of that name here, this is all very mysterious and I'm sure it's leading up to something, I hope nothing is amiss for we, that is Lady Muldoon and her houseguests, are here cut off from the world, including Magnus, the wheelchair-ridden half-brother of her ladyship's husband Lord Albert Muldoon who ten years ago went out for a walk on the cliffs and was never seen again—and all alone, for they had no children. (RIH, p. 11)

Relying "too heavily" on only one element of theatre, the fictional playwright amateurishly and swiftly starts his play in an unrealistic manner, blatantly giving the necessary information to his audience only by "the technique of dramatic exposition through dialogue" (Hu, p. 64). First the starting radio message which has been waited for by the char creates an amateurish suspense and then Mrs. Drudge humorously bursts out telling the setting of place and time, the major characters' names and their biographies, and the mysterious dramatic atmosphere. The char actually speaks as the fictional playwright's talking stage direction – she reiterates the same funny role at the beginning of the second act of the thriller (RIH, p. 24). It becomes hilarious for the spectators when they realize that she tells all this information, in addition to her irrelevantly funny creation of suspense, by asserting the mysterious nature of the situation, to a wrong-number caller.

Simon's appearance, as the stock 'newcomer' or 'outsider', increases the initial suspense necessary in the whodunit; however,

his too early arrival, just after the police bulletin, and his realization of his looking suspicious by creeping in and out make the situation more artificial. His following conversation with Mrs. Drudge, comparable to the maid's blurting out unnecessary information to a wrong caller, is redundantly used to convey more information about the settings of the thriller. Simon's emergence at the beginning of the thriller playfully helps the maid create the exposition. Verbal description and descriptive dialogues, thus, create the humorous exposition of the inner play, "presenting in the compressed course of a single French scene within three or four minutes of stage time, information that does not arise naturally in the course of the characters' conversations" (Hu, p. 65).

The main-frame plot running along the exposition of the whodunit increases the hilarity of the situation. Birdboot and Moon who have just heard Mrs. Drudge's information told to a wrong-number caller comment on it in their pompously mannerist public voices:

MOON: Derivative, of course.

BIRDBOOT: But quite sound. (RIH, p. 11)

Moon's redundant observation that the exposition of the inner play is "derivative" and Birdboot's inanity to accept it as "sound" reveal Stoppard's parallel comic intention in presenting both a parody of critics and a parody of the stereotypical exposition of whodunits while the first one highlights the comicality of the latter.

The conventional exposition of the whodunits, with exact timing for turning on the radio to broadcast the interrupting ominous police report about a criminal on the loose and with mysterious 'newcomers', is the main original subject of the parody in the exposition of the inner play of *RIH*. Stoppard pokes fun at these conventions by his heavy reliance on dialogues uttered by the maid and Simon. Notwithstanding, the parodic dimensions of Stoppard's comic exposition can also be extended to embrace the "lazy cliché of many 1930's realist plays" as well as "the sheer technical inefficiency of some amateur productions" (Hunter, 1982, p. 40).

After the exposition, the thriller continues with complicating its plot. It presents two acts and then the plot is repeated with different characters; first Birdboot and then Moon, from the play's main-frame plot, take the roles of Simon Gascoyne and Inspector Hound in the

whodunit plot, respectively. In its complication and repetition, the plot of the thriller ridicules the plot of crime fictions with their predictable stock conventions. Furthermore, when the main-frame plot is still separate from the plot of the inner play, the critics' commentaries ironically stress the predictable nature of the stock plot of the thriller.

The first two acts of the inner play complicate the mystery humorously. In the first act, the radio is switched on another time, this time by Simon who is alone on the stage and feels "a *strange impulse*" to turn it on (RIH, p. 14). Again it is the exact time for a police report about the madman on the loose. The 'outsider', Simon, introduces himself to the char swiftly and reveals that he knows the lady of the house. The stranger and the other household members then play a card game and the first act finishes. Besides poking fun at the cliché police messages broadcast on the radio in thrillers, Stoppard's plot of the thriller presents the stock 'outsider' character with a shady past in the first act. Birdboot's following observation that "the skeleton in the cupboard is coming home to roost" (RIH, p. 15) both stresses the conventionality of the plot in its introducing the formulaic 'outsider' and foreshadows what will happen to Simon.

Like its first act, the second act of the thriller starts with Mrs. Drudge, who continues her role as the fictional playwright's talking stage direction. The humor of the situation still derives from the maid's irrelevant reply to a wrong-number caller. The plot continues with parodying the tedium of eating and drinking common in country-house crime fictions or, as Hunter suggests, common in "clumsily-written realist plays" (1982, p. 40).

MRS. DRUDGE: Black or white, my lady?

CYNTHIA: White please.

(MRS. DRUDGE *pours*.)

MRS. DRUDGE (to FELICITY): Black or white, miss?

FELICITY: White please.

(MRS. DRUDGE *pours*.)

MRS. DRUDGE (to MAGNUS): Black or white, Major?

MAGNUS: White please. (RIH, pp. 24-5)

Mrs. Drudge repeats her questions when she offers sugar and biscuits, too. Her repetition of "Black or white" is meant by the fictional playwright to stress that the characters drink coffee not tea; however, it is an irrelevant emphasis. The cliché scene is so boring

for Birdboot, the sensational critic, that he immediately writes down "The second act, however, fails to fulfil the promise..." (RIH, p. 25).

The radio then is turned on for the third time, this time by Felicity, to interrupt its program for another police report. The police bulletin does not mention the name of Inspector Hound at all – the name of the detective, Inspector Hound, was announced in the first two radio police messages when, in the first one, Mrs. Drudge was alone on the stage and, in the second one, Simon was the only listener on the stage (RIH, pp. 9, 14). The other actors, thus, have not heard the name of the police detective and must not know about him. On the contrary, just after the third police message, Magnus starts talking about Inspector Hound and it becomes clear that Felicity knows him, too:

MAGNUS: Hound will never get through on a day like this.

CYNTHIA (*shouting at him*): Fog!

FELICITY: He means the Inspector.

CYNTHIA: Is he bringing a dog? (RIH, p. 26)

The actors talk about Inspector Hound while they must not know about him because they were not present when the radio announced his name. This scene underlines Stoppard's intention to present the whodunit as unconvincingly as he can and thereupon draw attention to the implausible nature of the generic crime fictions.

Inspector Hound then arrives and is frustrated that there has been no crime or trouble in Muldoon Manor. Leaving Inspector Hound notices a corpse just under his feet. The corpse has been lying there on the stage all the while since the thriller started, yet none of the actors has seen it. Stoppard's ironical fun of the genre reveals itself more intensely here. While the crime fictions typically tend to start with a crime already discovered and a sleuth who discovers a familiar clue unnoticed by others, Stoppard's whodunit presents the crime – that is, the corpse – as the unnoticed clue discovered humorously by Inspector Hound, who has to find the culprit.

The plot of the thriller starts to get complicated as Inspector Hound points to the missing Simon as the murderer of the onstage dead man. Inspector Hound identifies the corpse as Albert, Cynthia's long-time missing husband, and humorously insists on his belief while Cynthia repeatedly assures him that the murdered man

is not her husband (RIH, pp. 29-30). Inspector Hound, who has misidentified the corpse, then wants everyone to search for the murderer, Simon. While all the actors are searching to find him, Simon enters the empty stage and is shot dead. Hiding the first corpse under the sofa, Inspector Hound faces Cynthia to ask her "And now – who killed Simon Gascoyne? And why?" (RIH, pp. 30-31). While the other actors should have directed these questions to Inspector Hound who is 'masterminding the operation', he himself asks them as if the other actors are to provide him an answer. Since his question finishes the second act of the thriller, it is inappropriately used to highlight the suspense already created awkwardly in the thriller. At the same time, it parodies the stock cliff-hanging suspense of crime fictions and TV crime serials which at the end of each episode tend to create a cliff-hanging suspense.

Along with the thriller, the reviewers' critical observations are manipulated in order to enhance the humor of the thriller, mainly derived from presenting the hackneyed conventions of the genre awkwardly. Just before Simon is shot, for instance, Birdboot prophesies: "This is where Simon gets the chop" (RIH, p. 30). His prognostication of Simon's immediate death, in addition to his earlier foreshadowing about Simon's death (RIH, p. 20), stresses the predictability of the plot of the thriller because of its conventionality. After the second act of the thriller, Birdboot points to the conventionality of the thriller directly:

BIRDBOOT (*clears throat*): [...] The groundwork has been well and truly laid, and the author has taken the trouble to learn from the masters of the genre. He has created a real situation, and few will doubt his ability to resolve it with a startling denouement. Certainly that is what it so far lacks, but it has a beginning, a middle and I have no doubt it will prove to have an end. (RIH, p. 31)

His bombastic ironic comment on the plot of the thriller actually provides him grounds to admire Cynthia's performance, which he spells out with no hesitation. At the same time, his observation emphasizes the conventionality of the presented plot: the fictional playwright, after all, "has taken the trouble" to display the worn-out clichés used by "the masters of the genre". Still stressing the predictability of the plot of the thriller – and thus the genre's – Birdboot anticipates a startling denouement for it which is, along

with its exposition, a major concern of Stoppard's parody of typical thrillers' plot.

Having already had its climax, the thriller starts to unfold hilariously. The falling action of the inner plot first engages Birdboot, from the main-frame plot, by his wife's onstage call and then envelopes Moon. Birdboot has just answered his wife's onstage call when the third act of the thriller starts. The audience then learn that the third act is a repetition of the first two acts. Birdboot has no choice but to stay on the stage because Felicity enters and her assigned theatrical dialogues, which are almost exactly the same as her previously assigned dialogues with Simon, are about her (more)ⁱⁱ real last night relationship with Birdboot. Birdboot's real world – from his own point of view – overlaps Felicity's theatrical world. Being taken for Simon by the actors, Birdboot finds the object of his desire, Cynthia, in the now-semi-real-onstage world.

The first two acts of the thriller then repeats swiftly; even the card game is repeated. This world becomes thoroughly real for Birdboot when he identifies the corpse as the first-string critic Higgs, who is (more) really dead. Just like Simon who was shot earlier, Birdboot is shot in the repetition of the thriller but he dies (more) really – of course, compared to Simon's theatrical death. Noticing his colleague's onstage death as real, Moon steps into the theatrical world of the thriller, being taken as Inspector Hound by the actors. In this now-semi-real world, Moon tries to discover who killed his critic friend. At this point, the plot of the thriller introduces the conventional red-herrings. Aided by the stock convention of over-hearings, displayed by the maid, Moon figures out that almost all of the actors, who have already professed that they will kill Simon/Birdboot, had enough motives to do so. Moon's semi-real world becomes completely real when he identifies the first corpse as his superior critic, Higgs. Revealing himself as the Real Inspector Hound, Magnus proves that Moon is not Inspector Hound and Moon recognizes Magnus as his stand-in critic, Puckeridge. Perceiving that Puckeridge has cunningly planned to get rid of his superior critics, Moon tries to escape but he is shot and dies in his real world.

From a parodic perspective, the plot of the thriller in its repetition and especially in its denouement ridicules the conventional plot of crime fictions, explained earlier. Stoppard pokes fun at his thriller by introducing it in a circular structure, engaging Birdboot and Moon who are from a (more) real world; in the

repetition of the thriller's plot, two members of the audience, Moon and Birdboot, take the places of two of the major characters in the thriller – that is, the 'suspect', Simon, and the 'sleuth', Inspector Hound – without any significant changes in the course of the actions. Stoppard makes fun of the stock plots of crime fictions by caricaturing their unrealistic emphasis on plot which is usually so fixed that almost any member of the audience, or any character, can fill in the roles of thrillers' characters without harming its plot – typical thrillers, after all, emphasize plot and its actions more than characters and their plausible characterizations.

Although some crime fictions are constructed on a circular basis, such as Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*, their authors try to justify the circularity of their plots. Stoppard's inner play, however, has a circular plot without establishing enough grounds for its repetition. The unjustified repetition of the thriller, in a way, underlines the unconvincing nature of the generic thrillers although it can more vividly display a parody of the circular plot of Christie's *The Mousetrap* – this parody will be explained in detail later.

The denouement staged in the thriller is itself another hilarious mockery of the conventions of the crime genre, earlier referred to. Stoppard's denouement mocks the unrealistic clichés of the genre, not only by letting his criminal go away with his crime but also by displaying the very criminal as the real representative of law. The unmasking cliché of crime fictions finds a hilarious extreme personification in the character of Magnus. After his thorough unmasking, he is revealed to be the criminal critic, actor Magnus, the Real Inspector Hound, and Albert, Cynthia's long-time missing husband. Instead of the lost order being restored, a new order is formed where the criminal is the real winner. In other words, Stoppard's thriller highlights the unconvincing nature of the generic crime plots, which presuppose a crime and its unraveling as clock work, by being unconvincing enough in its repetitionⁱⁱⁱ and unrealistic enough in its surprise ending.

Parody of Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*

Stoppard might have had a good reason to parody Christie's *The Mousetrap* in his *RIH*. Besides its melodramatic conventionality, Christie's play can boast holding a world record for its longest initial

run in the world. In 1947, the play was originally written as a short radio play named *Three Blind Mice*, and it was a birthday gift for Queen Mary. Later, Christie turned it into a fiction while working on a stage version of the same plot. She had great hopes for the stage play so she asked for suppressing the publication of its fiction version in England as long as it ran as a play in London – it is the reason why the fiction appears only in American publications.

The parody of Christie's *The Mousetrap* in Stoppard's play can be traced in its plot and many other dimensions. While parodying the plot of *The Mousetrap* with its surprise ending and its circularity, Stoppard has been careful not to follow Christies' plot exactly. Stoppard's clever parody intends in a way not to let the producers of Christie's play and its copyright holders complain publicly that the surprise twist of Christie's play was copied or revealed; a surprise ending which has ever since been asked not to be revealed by the play's audience although after so many performances of the play, it is now a rather comic cliché delivered by the actors at the end of its performance^{iv}.

Stoppard's thriller commences by mocking Christie's radio report of the criminal on the loose by having Mrs. Drudge funnily turn the radio on. Stoppard pokes fun at Christie's application of the radio message by having the maid enter the stage and head straight for the radio. The police report on the radio, which interrupts the ongoing program and is broadcast exactly when the radio is turned on, humorously points to the unrealistic nature of the police bulletin broadcast in *The Mousetrap*. From the viewpoint of its contents, the police warning parodies read by Molly: "the man the police are anxious to interview was wearing a dark overcoat and a light Homburg hat, was of medium height and wore a woolen scarf" (*Mousetrap*, pp. 20-21). The police description is so general that most of the men can answer to the description. This is verified by Christopher Wren who comments laughingly "he looks just like everybody else" (p. 21). Stoppard's police message, likewise, describes its madman on the loose as "wearing a darkish suit with a lightish shirt ... [who] is of medium height and built and youngish" (RIH, p. 9).

The plot of Stoppard's thriller then introduces Simon Gascoyne, 'the unexpected guest'. In a way, he is a parody of his counterpart character in *The Mousetrap*, Mr. Paravicini, who turns up out of the blue – or rather white, as the roads are snow-covered and

impassable. Simon pokes laughter at his parodied role by acting suspiciously right from the beginning of Stoppard's whodunit. The other dimension of his humorous portrayal is his unjustified vanishing away through the second act of the thriller only to appear later and be murdered.

After introducing the suspicious outsider, Christie's plot thickens by presenting Detective Sergeant Trotter who has come to protect the characters against a possible danger. Although the roads are impassable because of the heavy snowfall, he manages to get himself to Monkswell Manor by skiing and his arrival attire, having his skis on, confirms that. The plot of Stoppard's thriller follows almost the same pattern by introducing Inspector Hound. His arrival, just like that of his counterpart's, is surprising because the fog has already made the surrounding swamps of Muldoon Manor impassable. Inspector Hound's hilarious arrival reveals how he has been able to do the impossible job: *"on his feet are his swamp boots. These are two inflatable – and inflated – pontoons with flat bottom about two feet across. He carries a foghorn"* (RIH, p. 16). Like his original character, he tries to protect the characters from a potential danger, yet he fails and someone is murdered. While Christie presents her Detective Trotter as the real murderer, Stoppard does not let his audience know who kills Simon or who really Inspector Hound is. Stoppard thus makes fun of what Christie's detective does by portraying his Inspector Hound unconvincingly and, at the same time, mocks his very character.

Christie's plot then goes on with Detective Trotter asking the characters to repeat what they have been doing when the second murder was committed. The characters claim to have done the same actions but the doers of the actions have changed. Stoppard's thriller displays the same course of actions however humorously. After the second act of the thriller, it repeats from the first act but the reason for the repetition is not clear for the audience. The unconvincing and unjustified circularity of Stoppard's play, with its blurring the line between reality and theater, in a way derides the circularity and repeated actions of *The Mousetrap*. Almost like Christie's plot, in the repetition of Stoppard's thriller, the same actions of two actors – that is, Simon and Inspector Hound – are reiterated by two other characters. The humor of Stoppard's repeated plot mainly derives from having Birdboot and Moon, two theater audience/critics from a (more) real plane of reality,

recapitulate what Simon and Inspector Hound have already delivered and done in the thriller.

The denouement of *The Mousetrap* turns out to have a surprise ending when Major Metcalf unmask himself as the real police officer, Inspector Tanner, and arrests the criminal, who has been in the guise of Detective Sergeant Trotter. Order then is restored after the chaos created by the lunatic criminal. *RIH* follows the same denouement but turns it to a hilarious spectacle. Major Magnus unmask himself as the real police agent. Humor derives from Stoppard's denouement as Major Magnus, now the Real Inspector Hound, unmask himself again. He introduces himself as Albert, Cynthia's lost husband, as well. Right at this time Moon, who is now the fake Inspector Hound, recognizes Magnus as Puckeridge, his own stand-in critic in the (more) real world. Magnus – the real Inspector Hound – Albert – Puckeridge – the real criminal shoots Moon/fake Inspector Hound. Instead of the lost order being restored, a new order is formed where the real policeman is the real culprit and gets away with his crimes and where, as the critic Moon had dreamed before, the stand-ins take the places of their superiors by murdering them.

Dogg's Hamlet

Parodying Shakespeare's tragedy at large, the school performance in *Dogg's Hamlet* exhibits a hilarious parody of the plot of *Hamlet* specifically. There are three parts in the performance: a prologue, an enactment of an over-compressed version of *Hamlet*, and an encore reprising the whole in 38 lines. Unlike Shakespeare's tragedy and an ordinary performance of it, *Dogg's Hamlet* adds the prologue and the encore to its performance.

The prologue is delivered by 'Shakespeare', an added character who has no role in *Hamlet*. Being a sketchy résumé of some of the tragedy's key lines, it consists of 17 well-known lines originally told by Fortinbras, Hamlet, Polonius, Horatio, and Gertrude. Out of their context, the lines vaguely yield a coherent meaning although they are grammatically correct. Rendering *Hamlet*'s grand blank verse lines virtually meaningless by combining them in the way that they appear in the prologue, and having a character named 'Shakespeare' deliver them are both ridiculously

comic. The humor increases near the end of it when, interrupting 'Shakespeare', "LADY in audience shouts 'Marmalade' " and 'Shakespeare' continuing his speech asserts "The lady doth protest too much / Cat will mew, and Dogg will have his day" (DHCH, p. 164). The English spectators/readers of the play have already learned that none of the participating characters in the performance, including Dogg who plays 'Shakespeare' and Lady, knows English. The word 'Marmalade' then is readily understood as a Dogg word. It actually "denotes pleasure and satisfaction" (DHCH, p. 156). Although the spectators may not know the meaning of 'Marmalade' in Dogg, the tone and manner of saying it by the Lady make it clear for the audience that at least she is not using it derogatorily. Shakespeare's response to the Lady's exclamation of pleasure, then, seems a funny and insulting coincidence. In addition, having the Lady, who is a character in the play, among the audience destroys the theatrical illusion of the fourth wall while it insinuates that the present English spectators of the play are the Dogg-speaking spectators of the school performance. The prologue then creates a comic scene for the audience.

After the prologue, in a lightning-fast speed the play dramatizes 10 abridged scenes from *Hamlet* and a comic mute interlude presenting Hamlet en route to England. The added interlude to the plot of *Hamlet* occurs just after the seventh scene and is Stoppard's brief onstage presentation of the sea events narrated and kept offstage in Shakespeare's tragedy; it recalls the third act of *RAGAD*. The interlude becomes hilarious when Hamlet is mutely presented as "swaying as if on ship's bridge", becoming seasick, and leaving the stage "holding his hand to his mouth" (DHCH, p. 169).

In addition to the shipboard interlude, Stoppard introduces a few other changes to the plot of *Hamlet*, most of which prove to be humorous. One of these modifications is *Hamlet's* play-within-play acted out by characters in Shakespeare's tragedy while Stoppard dramatizes it by a mute puppet show (DHCH, p. 169). The incongruity between Shakespeare's grand blank verses in the performance and the puerile puppet show is a source of humor.

Another modification occurs in the scene where Ophelia dies. While presenting her madness, the performance adds some actions, which are not in the original tragedy, to her truncated speech:

OPHELIA: They bore him barefaced on the bier,

(After her first line she gives a flower to LAERTES.)

Hey nonny nonny, hey nonny.

(After her second, she slams the bouquet in CLAUDIUS's stomach [...].)

OPHELIA: And on his grave rained many a tear...

(Half-way through her third line she disappears behind the screen stage left and pauses. CLAUDIUS and LAERTES peer round the side she disappeared and she runs round the other behind them.) (DHCH, p. 169)

A couple of lines later, she dies sitting "up to reach gravestone which she swings down to conceal her" (DHCH, p. 170). In Shakespeare's tragedy, Ophelia neither slams the flowers in the King's stomach nor plays hide-and-seek with the King and her own brother or sits up to swing down a cut-out gravestone to display her death. The added actions turn Ophelia's tragic madness and death to comic spectacles which are in sharp contrast with the tragic mood of Shakespeare's drama.

Yet another slight modification of the plot of *Hamlet* can be detected at the end of the performance. Before the encore commences, Fortinbras enters while Hamlet is still alive:

GERTRUDE: The drink, the drink! I am poisoned! (*Dies.*)

HAMLET: Treachery! Seek it out.

(*Enter FORTINBRAS.*)

LAERTES: It is here Hamlet. Hamlet thou art slain. (DHCH, p. 172)

In Shakespeare's tragedy, Fortinbras enters when all the major characters are already dead (Hamlet, V.ii.344). Allowing Fortinbras to be present when Hamlet dies does not add to the humor derived from the major changes Stoppard introduces to the famous drama. There are some other minor changes like this in the performance but they are not intended to be humorous nor do they show themselves so. The rest of the compressed performance more or less follows a compressed outline of the plot of *Hamlet*.

The modifications introduced to the plot of *Hamlet* make the performance amusing; however, the truncation of Shakespeare's plot is itself another main source of humor in the performance. The swift speed of the plot thoroughly eliminates a couple of the original scenes – scenes i and ii from Act V of *Hamlet* – and it intermingles

the remaining ones so that what is presented cannot display either the tragic mood of Shakespeare's tragedy or the characters' motivations for what they do and say. In the fourth scene of Stoppard's play, for instance, right after talking with Polonius about the players, Hamlet delivers nine lines of his soliloquy ending with "The play's the thing/Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King" (DHCH, p. 167). The original soliloquy which is in Act II, scene ii of Shakespeare's tragedy has 59 lines (Hamlet, II.ii.522-580). In Stoppard's play, Hamlet continues the soliloquy: "To be, or not to be (*Puts dagger, pulled from his sleeve, to heart. Enter CLAUDIUS and OPHELIA.*) / that is the question (DHCH, p. 167). What Hamlet utters while continuing his first soliloquy originally belongs to his next soliloquy in the next Act of Shakespeare's tragedy (Hamlet, III.i.1710). Besides, from the 35 lines of his second soliloquy – starting with "To be, or not to be" – only the first line is delivered in the performance. Just after this in the same scene, Ophelia who has just entered says "My lord—". Hamlet without hesitation exclaims "Get thee to a nunnery!" and Ophelia leaves (DHCH, p. 167). The lines Hamlet and Ophelia deliver here are indeed a couple of lines cut out from their passionate speech in the counterfeit meeting scene in Shakespeare's tragedy (Hamlet, III.i.1745-1805). In the school performance of *Hamlet*, Hu observes, "comic pace violates the convention of decorum" (p. 183). The incongruity between the oral deliveries of lines and the pace of actions evokes laughter at the performance. In other words, the over-truncation of the plot of Shakespeare's tragedy is what renders the performance comic rather than tragic.

The encore which is the last part of the performance in *Dogg's Hamlet* dramatizes 35 lines of *Hamlet* in a break-neck speed. Containing eight characters of Shakespeare's tragedy, the two-minute abstract presents a farcical version of the humorous 13-minute distillation of *Hamlet*. The encore is indeed a self-parody – a parody of the already performed parody of *Hamlet*. After all, nothing of the context of 3907-line *Hamlet* remains when summarized to 38 lines, nor does Shakespeare's high and tragic viewpoint become clear for the audience. The compression of the plot of Shakespeare's tragedy reaches its extreme in the one-scene encore, yielding a farcical skit of it. The scenes intermingle in such a way that the spectators cannot help laughing at the performance of the tragedy. The 'closet scene', where Hamlet kills Polonius, for instance, starts with Hamlet addressing his mother:

HAMLET: [...] Mother, you have my father much offended.

GERTRUDE: Help!

POLONIUS: Help, Ho!

HAMLET: (*Stabs POLONIUS.*) Dead for a ducat, dead!

(*POLONIUS falls dead off-stage. Exit GERTRUDE and HAMLET. Short flourish of trumpets. Enter CLAUDIUS followed by HAMLET.*)

CLAUDIUS: Hamlet, this deed must send thee hence

(*Exit HAMLET.*)

Do it England.

(*Exit CLAUDIUS. Enter OPHELIA, falls to ground. Rises and pulls gravestone to cover herself [...].*) (DHCH, pp. 173-4)

The characters have to comically rush on and off the stage to be able to deliver their desperately truncated dialogues. The visual speed of the characters' movements, created by the break-neck pace of the plot, is in sharp contrast with the hasty aural deliveries of the cuts from Shakespeare's stately tragic blank verses.

The encore displays how much a work of art can be abridged. It is a hilarious over-minimal presentation of the already performed minimalist dramatization of *Hamlet* and, as Hu confirms, a parody of minimalism in art (p. 182). Although almost all the main threads of the plot of *Hamlet* sequentially emerge more or less intact in the encore, their over-compression not only omits most of the events which give them meaning and significance in the original tragedy but also intermingles and reduces the events of Shakespeare's 20 scenes into one short scene. The plot of the encore is a parody of the plot of *Hamlet* and the plot of the already performed truncated performance of it.

Conclusion

Stoppard's fascination with other writers' plots manifests itself in his parodic integration/imitation of them in his *RAGAD*, *RIH*, and *DHCH*. By looking closely at the plot line of these plays and their hypotexts, this paper demonstrates that these integrations/imitations have sufficient factors to bear the name of parody. The plot of *RAGAD* dramatizes a parody of the plot of *Hamlet* both where it overlaps the plot of the tragedy and still more intensely where it touches Shakespeare's plot tangentially. Stoppard's parody of the

stock plot of the crime genre is depicted through both parts of *RIH*. When the main-frame plot is separate from the inner plot, the thriller displays its conventional exposition and complication humorously while the main-frame play stresses and increases the humor directed towards the inner play.

Crime fictions' conventional falling action and denouement are also ludicrously staged and parodied, when the main-frame plot merges into the play-within-the-play. *RIH* parodies the main threads of the plot of Christie's *The Mousetrap*, too. The most obvious parts of this parody are the circularity of the plot of Stoppard's thriller, which parodies the same kind of repetition in Christie's plot, and its denouement intended to ridicule the surprise ending, along with the unmasking of the real policeman. The three-part performance in *Dogg's Hamlet* displays a parody of the plot of *Hamlet*. It adds a comic prologue and a ludicrous encore to the usual performance of *Hamlet*. Also, the slight modifications Stoppard introduces to the outline of the plot of *Hamlet* augment its comic effect. In addition, the truncation of the plot of Shakespeare's tragedy leaves out some original scenes thoroughly and merges the rest in such a way that what is performed can no longer bear its original tragic mood and name. In spite of the fact that Shakespeare's tragedy is not the immediate subject of the parody in *Dogg's Hamlet*, its school performance exhibits a comic treatment of the plot of the very play it puts on the stage and thus parodies it.

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ⁱ Since Ros wishes for a sustained action just before the pirates attack, he feels satisfied to have it. Stoppard does not indicate who shouts what in this scene; however, a feasible sequence can be the sequence he provides in his stage direction just before the characters shout: "...with ROS, GUIL and PLAYER shouting". Ros, thus, shouts first. His words, then, can be: At last! ... Up there! ... Action! Rosencrantz enjoys the event as Stoppard insinuates. This interpretation, which seems the most viable one, makes the scene more playful and entertaining. When Ros's action, just after these words, – leaping into a barrel because of being scared – is seen, the discrepancy between what he asks for and says, on the one hand, and what he does, on the other, creates a comic scene.

ⁱⁱ The word "more" is used in parentheses before real/really when talking about the participation of the critics, Birdboot and Moon, in the inner play. From the view point of the spectators, Birdboot and Moon are in the theatrical world both when their plot is separate from the plot of the thriller and when it fuses into the thriller's plot. Their theatrical world, however, is presented on a more real plane than the world of the actors in the thriller. The world of the critics, representing the audience of the thriller, is not real, compared to the real world of the spectators. Nor is it dramatized as theatrical as the world of the thriller's actors is portrayed. To display that their world is presented as the real world of the

spectators but still it is within the frame of theatrical world, the word "(more)" is used when this plane of reality is referred to.

- iii The circularity of the plot of the thriller along with its "startling denouement" – to use Birdboot's commentary (RIH 31) – echoes absurdist's conventions which are also underlined by Moon in his parodic attempt to find the sources of the trivial thriller; he mentions Beckett as one of its sources (RIH 32).
- iv For the same reason the text used in this study is the fiction version of *The Mousetrap*. It is noteworthy that, in regard to the subject of this study, there is not much difference between the play version and fiction version of Christie's work.

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