

1) The Narrator

Three of the central characters in *Travesties* – Tzara, Lenin, and Joyce – were important revolutionary figures, whose influences can be felt today. Why did Stoppard select Henry Carr – a real person, but much less famous and influential than Tzara, Lenin, or Joyce – as the narrator?

We learn early on in the play that Henry Carr’s memory is unreliable. What is the effect on us as readers, and why would Stoppard want his play to have that effect?

2) The Audience

Imagine an audience who was not familiar with one or more of the following

- The Importance of Being Earnest*
- The Dada movement
- The works of Joyce (particularly *Ulysses*)
- The political philosophy of Lenin
- Shakespeare
- Gilbert and Sullivan

How would this audience experience the play? Would *Travesties* still be accessible? If not, why make a play that is only accessible to a certain group of people?

3) The Servant

Excerpt from Stoppard’s note about the real Henry Carr:
“Joyce... visited the Consul General, A. Percy Bennett, in order to procure official approval for [a new theatrical company]”. After the lawsuit between Joyce and Carr, “Joyce intended to make Consul General Bennett and Henry Carr the two drunken, blasphemous and obscene soldiers” in *Ulysses*, “but he eventually decided that Bennett should be the sergeant-major, with authority over Private Carr, who, however, refers to him with utter disrespect.”

What is Bennett’s role in *Travesties*?

4) Time and Space

From the stage directions: “the play is set in Zurich, in two locations: the drawing room of Henry Carr’s apartment (‘THE ROOM’) and a section of the Zurich Public Library (‘THE LIBRARY’).” Why restrict all the action to these two spaces: one private, and one public? Compare the kinds of events that take place in each, and discuss the moment on page 56 when “the boundary between” them becomes obscure.

At the beginning of the play, Henry Carr describes Switzerland's "miraculous neutrality...non-combatant impartiality...non-aggression...international" nature. According to him, these features, along with the clocks, give the country "its reassuring air of permanence." In contrast to the clocks, Carr's memory "occasionally jumps the rails", and the characters are anything but neutral, impartial, non-aggressive, and sympathetic to foreigners. What purpose does this juxtaposition serve? How does the early description of Switzerland affect the way we experience the rest of the play?

Discuss the time slips – why do they happen when they do? Why so many instances of that particular line: "I have put the newspapers and telegrams on the sideboard, sir"? Why purpose do the time slips serve? Are they analogous to the idea of history coming out of a hat (page 57)?

5) Other

On page 60, Carr and Lenin speak a number of lines simultaneously. I believe it is the only instance in the play where two characters deliver identical responses, in sync. What is the significance of this?

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