"And one lucky bastard who’s the artist": V. I. Lenin and Oscar Wilde's ideologico-aesthetic debate in Tom Stoppard's Travesties

Abstract
Tom Stoppard’s play Travesties was revised considerably between its first edition of 1975 and the new edition of 1994, with the parts pertaining to V. I. Lenin and Marxism bearing the brunt of the cuts. The political fall of Marxism is not sufficient to account for these cuts since the play occurs in 1974 via the erratic memory of Henry Carr, a minor official at the British consulate in Zurich in 1917. The published textual history of Travesties is also insufficient to account for Lenin's diminishment. The archive of the play's composition at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin provides a more detailed history of the play's debate over whether or not an artist can also be a revolutionary, suggesting that the debate can be reduced to two sides, one representing the subversive wit of Oscar Wilde via the intertext The Importance of Being Earnest and the other Leninist-Marxist functional-revolutionary aesthetics. The genius of Wilde functions like an ideologico-aesthetic edifice, manipulating the action to maintain its hegemonic position via theatrical devices in three main ways. Joyce, Tzara, and Carr are pitted against each other in order to split the Wildean aesthetic that makes a claim to the inextricable linkage of freedom and subversion in a sort of aesthetic Bunburyism, which displaces the terms of the debate from an ontology of the artist to the ethics of art. The 'time slip' device simultaneously lets us enjoy and neutralizes the obscene underside of Wildean subversive wit by allowing the play to go "off the rails" (12) and quickly rebound to a state of normalcy. These previous two features represent an effort to demonize Lenin by denying the subversive creativity he shows in the pursuit of his goals. Travesties, in its valorization of detached subversive wit, answers the question of whether an artist can simultaneously be a revolutionary with a dizzying 'no.'
Oscar Wilde was able to express the crisis in the late Victorian age. He was the major representative of the aesthetic movement, which considered art more than important than life as a reaction to the ugliness and the materialism of industrialization, but also as a protest against the falsity and the prudery of the Victorian age. He was born into a novel, well educated family: his father was a surgeon and his mother was considered a minor poetess. He transposed in his life style what he believed in and wrote it in his works; he dressed in an elegant and eccentric way in order to shock the Victorians. One side of the society rejected him as an immoral dandy, while another part sustained him, fascinated by his brilliant conversations. The old woman smiled and answered, “It is the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville, who was murdered on that spot by her husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, in 1575. Sir Simon disappeared seven years later. His body has never been found, but his ghost still haunts the Castle. The blood-stain is a tourist attraction now and it cannot be removed.” “That is all nonsense,” said Washington, the eldest son of the Otis family, “stain remover will clean it up in no time,” and he took a bottle of stain remover out of his pocket and cleaned the spot. But as soon as the blood-stain had disappeared, a ter Dive deep into Tom Stoppard’s Travesties with extended analysis, commentary, and discussion. The title suggests an important device—the travesty or parody. The speeches of Joyce and Lenin are in the two men's sharply contrasting styles; this can be seen if one reads part of Ulysses and some of Lenin's writings. Joyce was also fond of limericks, and part of a scene is done in that form. The main takeoff is of The Importance of Being Earnest. Stoppard’s two creations, Gwendolen and Cecily, are named after Wilde’s heroines. Many lines are quoted or paralleled. Some scenes, such as Tzara’s proposal or the women’s argument, recall Wilde’s originals. The actual production of Wilde’s play in