

TRAVESTIES

Tom Stoppard

(Tzara comes forward with rare diffidence, holding a hat like a brimming bowl. It transpires that he has written down a Shakespeare sonnet and cut it up into single words which he has placed in his hat.)

TZARA: Miss Carr....

GWEN: Mr Tzara! - You're not leaving? *(the hat)*

TZARA: Not before I offer you my poem. *(He offers the hat. GWEN looks into it.)*

GWEN: Your technique is unusual.

TZARA: All poetry is a reshuffling of a pack of picture cards, and all poets are cheats. I offer you a Shakespeare sonnet, but it is no longer his. It comes from the wellspring where all atoms are uniquely organised, and my signature is written in the hand of chance.

GWEN: Which Sonnet -was it?

TZARA: The eighteenth.

GWEN: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summers lease hath all too short a date:
Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often in his gold complexion dimm'd:
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance of nature's changing course untrimm'd
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee
You tear him for his bad verses?

(She lets a handful of words fall from her fingers, back into the hat, and her sadness starts to give way to anger.)

These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

TZARA: Ay, Madam.

GWEN: Truly I wish the gods had made thee poetical.

TZARA: I do not know what poetical is. Is it honest in word and deed? Is it a true thing?

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GWEN: Sure he that made us with such large discourse, looking before and after, gave us not that capability, and god-like reason to fust in us unused.

TZARA: I was not born under a rhyming planet. Those fellows of infinite tongue that can rhyme themselves into ladies' favours, they do reason themselves out again. And that would set my teeth nothing on edge-nothing so much as mincing poetry.

GWEN: *(rising to his vicious edge)*: Thy honesty and love doth mince this matter- Put your bonnet for his right use, 'tis for the head! *(Sniffs away a tear)* I had rather than forty shilling my book of songs and sonnets here. *(She has turned away. He approaches with his hat offered.)*

TZARA: *(gently)*: But since he died, and poet better prove, his for his style you'll read, mine for my - love, *(GWEN hesitates but then takes the first slip of paper out of the hat.)*

GWEN: "Darling ". *(She now continues, holding on to all the pieces of paper she takes out.)*
Shake thou thy gold buds
The untrimm'd but short fair shade shines-
See, this lovely hot possession growest
So long
By nature's course-
So.....long-heaven!

(She gives a little shriek, using "heaven" and turns her back on the hat, taking a few steps away from TZARA, who takes out the next few words, lowering the temperature...)

TZARA: And declines, summer changing, more temperature complexion...

GWEN: *(Still flustered)*: Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr. Tzara. Whenever people talk to me about the weather I always feel quite certain that they mean something else.

TZARA: *(Coming to her)*: I do mean something else, Miss Carr. Ever since I met you I have admired you. *(He drops his few papers into a hat, she likewise with hers, he puts the hat aside.)*

GWEN: For me you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. As you know I have been helping Mr. Joyce with his new book, which I am convinced is a work of genius, and I am determined to secure for him the universal recognition he deserves. But alas, in fashionable society a girl receives few opportunities for intellectual connections. When Henry told me that he had a friend who edited a magazine of all that is newest and best literature, I knew I was destined to love you. *(She has the folder she acquired in the Prologue and gives it to TZARA)*

TZARA: *(amazed)* Do you really love me, Gwendolen?

GWEN: Passionately!

TZARA: Darling, you don't know how happy you've made me.

GWEN: My own Tristan! *(They embrace.)*

TZARA: *(breaking off)*: But you don't mean that you couldn't love me if

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I didn't share your regards for Mr Joyce as an artist?

GWEN: But you do

TZARA: Yes. I know I do, but supposing- *(she kisses him on the mouth)*
(They embrace. JOYCE re-enters)

JOYCE: Rise, sir, from that semi-recumbent posture!
(TZARA and GWEN spring apart. JOYCE walks to the main door, picking up his hat, opens the door, addresses TZARA.) Your monocle is in the wrong eye. *(TZARA has indeed placed his monocle in the wrong eye. He replaces it. JOYCE has left on his line.)*

GWEN: I must tell Henry!

TZARA: Have you ever seen my magazine "Dada", darling?

GWEN: Never da-da-darling! *(GWEN kisses him and runs into Henry's room)*

TZARA starts reading the manuscripts in the folder. The main door opens again and JOYCE re-enters, pausing in the threshold. He is covered from head to breast in little bits of white paper, each bit bearing one of the words of Shakespeare's eighteenth sonnet, i.e., TZARA was using JOYCE'S hat. The effect must be immediate and self-evident, and it is probably necessary for the actor playing Joyce to change into a specially prepared jacket and even a duplicate wig; the bits of paper must be lightly stuck on to the hair and jacket, for the play's need of them is not finished.

JOYCE: What is the meaning of this?

TZARA: It has no meaning. It is without meaning as Nature is. It is Dada.

JOYCE: Give further examples of Dada.

TZARA: The Zoological Gardens after closing time. The logical gardenia. The bankrupt gambler. The successful gambler. The Eggboard, a sport or pastime for the top ten thousand in which the players, covered from head to foot in egg yolk, leave the field of play.

JOYCE: Are you the inventor of this sport or pastime?

TZARA: I am not.

JOYCE: What is the name of the Inventor?

TZARA: Arp.

JOYCE: Is he your sworn enemy, pet aversion, bête noir, or otherwise persona non grata?

TZARA: He is not.

JOYCE: Is he your friend, comrade-in-arms, trusted confidant or otherwise pal, mate or crony?

TZARA: He is.

JOYCE: By what familiarity, indicating possession and amicability in equal parts, do you habitually refer to him?

TZARA: My friend Arp.

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- JOYCE: Alternating with what colloquialism redolent of virtue and longevity?
- TZARA: Good old Arp.
- JOYCE: Grasping any opportunity for paradox as might occur in what way is the first name of your friend Arp singular?
- TZARA: In that it is duplicate.
- JOYCE: Namely?
- TZARA: Hans Arp. Jean Arp.
- JOYCE: How can this contradiction of two distinct and equal first names be accounted for?
- TZARA: Linguistically, each being a translation of the other, from German to French and conversely.
- JOYCE: Given a superficial knowledge of your friend's birth and parentage on the one hand, and of the political history of nineteenth-century Europe on the other, how would his bi-lingual nomination strike one?
- TZARA: As understandable.
- JOYCE: Why?
- TZARA: He is a native of Alsace, of French background, and a German citizen by virtue of the conquest of 1870.
- JOYCE: What declaration of an international and belligerent nature brought this ambivalence into sharp conflict?
- TZARA: The declaration of war between Germany and France.
- JOYCE: How did Hans or Jean Arp view the situation?
- TZARA: As absurd.
- JOYCE: How did he redress it?
- TZARA: By making his way to Zurich and inventing the Eggboard, a sport or pastime for the top ten thousand in which the players, covered from head to foot in egg yolk, leave the field of play.