

The Actual versus the Fictional in *Betrayal, The Real Thing* and *Closer*

by

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I declare that “The Actual versus the Fictional in *Betrayal*, *The Real Thing* and *Closer*” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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ABSTRACT:

Although initially dismissed as superficial, Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*, Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, and Patrick Marber's *Closer* use the theme of marital betrayal as a trope to investigate metatheatrical and epistemological issues. This study aims to demonstrate how these three plays define and explore the concept of authenticity within the fictional as well as the actual world; how arbitrary the construction and mediation of the characters' identities are, not only from their own perspective, but also from the audience's; the significance of the audience's role in these plays and how issues of authenticity, fictionality and dishonesty impact on a genre that depends on illusion.

This study intends to provide a new interpretation of these three texts through an analysis drawn from postmodern and poststructuralist theories, concerning the concept of authenticity within art and language.

This study finds that the fictional worlds in these plays are created through mediation, which includes everyday language as well as complex works of art. Authenticity is shown to be an elusive concept. Language is either unsuccessfully used to force authentic responses from characters, or as a shield. In *Betrayal*, language functions as a protective barrier, preventing the characters from knowing one another. *The Real Thing* suggests that although inauthenticity may be established, the inverse is not necessarily true. In *Closer*, the characters try in vain to access authenticity through different registers of language. Furthermore, neither the body nor the mind is shown to be the locus of authenticity in *Closer*. Within the postmodern context where originality is impossible, mimicry is not seen as something external and inauthentic, but as inextricably part of human existence.

The audience is drawn into the fictional world of these plays as its members are able to identify with the disillusionment of the characters and their inability to form a definitive view of each other. Simultaneously, the audience is ousted from the fictional world by being reminded of the author's presence through metatheatrical devices. These plays take advantage of the fictional status of theatre to explore issues of authenticity, positioning them in direct opposition to postdramatic and verbatim plays.

Keywords: authenticity; *Betrayal*; *Closer*; fictional world; Marber; metatheatre; mimicry; Pinter; postmodernism; poststructuralism; Stoppard; *The Real Thing*

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT:

All quotations in this document were taken verbatim from the relevant editions used. Apart from obvious errors I have neither indicated any variant forms of spelling nor gender bias in quotations taken from older texts. When quoting from the plays, capitalisation, punctuation, and any textual notation are left intact. Marber uses a system of textual notation to indicate where and how his actors should emphasise certain words. Any underlined, italicised or capitalised words therefore appear as in the original text.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Just because you feel it
Doesn't mean it's there
– Radiohead, “There there. (The Boney King of Nowhere.)” (2003)

1.1. Contextualisation

When Harold Pinter's play, *Betrayal* (1978), was first performed in that year, it was poorly received by theatre critics, with the single exception of Benedict Nightingale (in Elsom, 1981:254). The play was dismissed as an uninteresting, bourgeois soap opera. In fact, according to Elsom (1981:249), Pinter had not received such negative reviews since *The Birthday Party* (1960) in 1958. Billington (2001:129) states in the *Guardian* of 16 November 1978, that in *Betrayal*, “Pinter has betrayed his immense talent by serving up this kind of high-class soap opera.” Kennedy (in Page, 1993:57) also disliked the play and felt that “the characters and their petty, bourgeois concerns fail to suggest a significance wide enough or deep enough to justify sustained interest.”

Billington (1996:258) did review his initial reaction to *Betrayal* later, while more recent critics such as Gray (2004:149) and Scolnicov (2012:106) do point out that the early reviewers of the play ignored the fundamental epistemological questions that it poses. Pinter chose to explore the question of “how can we trust what we know?” specifically through the plot line of adultery in this play, to focus on the social grouping of a romantic couple: the most intimate relationship between people. Subsequently, two other playwrights have also used marital betrayal as a means to explore the concept of authenticity or the question, “how can we know what is real?” Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing* (1983) was first produced in 1982 whereas Patrick Marber's *Closer* (2004) – which Dromgoole (2000:194) dismissed as “not art” – debuted in 1997. Hence, through the 1980s and into the 1990s, two other notable dramatists returned to the themes of infidelity and jealousy to investigate epistemological issues.

Plays that deal in one way or another with infidelity or sexual jealousy are not new. The plots of Euripides' *Medea* (431 BC), Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604), and Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1873), for example, are all dependent in some way on marital betrayal or envy. Yet, when this theme is coupled with postmodern and poststructuralist concerns about the elusiveness of authenticity, it adds a new layer to the play's significance.

1.2. Postmodernism, poststructuralism and the concept of authenticity in popular culture

The epistemological questions that Pinter, Stoppard, and Marber probe in their respective plays resonate with postmodern and poststructuralist scepticism about truth and authenticity. Postmodernism and poststructuralism are both rooted in the concept that no essential truth can be established in the centre of what was generally conceived as the structures of knowledge. In the 1880s already, Nietzsche (1998:82) was arguing that no authority or "higher being" exists who can "with absolute knowledge" criticize the human intellect and distinguish reality from appearance. According to Nietzsche (1998:83) there are no such things as facts, but only interpretations. Even the concept of the subject (in popular psychology often referred to as the "authentic self") is for Nietzsche (1998:83) "something added and invented and projected behind what there is."

Castle (2007:145) therefore describes postmodernism as questioning "language, truth, causality, history, and subjectivity." It is incredulous towards master narratives as well as totalising and unifying discourses as representative of progress and "human perfectability" (Lyotard in Barry, 2002:86-87). Postmodernism rejects any notions of authenticity, regarding them as "romanticised myths that disguise interminable conditions of repetition, deferral, and self-reference." Metadiscourse is therefore prevalent within postmodernism as a means to investigate a self-conscious attitude towards literary structure (Castle, 2007:146).

Poststructuralism, on the other hand, emerged as a reaction to structuralism and rejects the idea that all of Western thinking depends on a notion of a fixed foundation to all knowledge, the so-called "ever-active yet always absent centre" (Abrams, 2005:247). For poststructuralists, there is no "fixed landmark" with which to interpret the world, beyond linguistic processing (Barry, 2002:61). We use language not only to describe the world, but to *create* it. According to Barry (2002:61), "*how* we see is *what* we see." Although

postmodernism and poststructuralism thereby share a distrust of any stable foundations of knowledge, postmodernists generally avoid the linguistic and semiotic solutions and discourse analysis that poststructuralists favour. Rather, postmodernists focus on “language games, chaos theory, and information theory” (Castle, 2007:145).¹

Eco (1983a:67) describes the postmodern attitude as

that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, “I love you madly,” because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, “As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly.” At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her, but he loves her in an age of lost innocence.

Eco (1983a) demonstrates in this quotation that, in postmodern times, everything has already been said. The postmodern speaker is aware of this, and therefore communicates through irony, parody, and citation.

In postmodern times, language is, in consequence, unoriginal. Yet, it is the medium of our ontological perception. As Hartman (1985: xii) puts it, “nothing can lift us out of language.” Both perception and language are regarded as complex phenomena. Within postmodernism it is therefore impossible to use original language to proclaim a particular subject or object as authentic.²

Nonetheless, amidst these notions of language and authenticity, a troubling debate has arisen in popular culture. Despite the fact that postmodernists regard terms such as “authenticity” and “truth” with scepticism, these terms seem to be accepted without scrutiny in popular culture today, where a reductive binary between what is “real,” or authentic, and what is “artificial,” or inauthentic, has been formed.

According to Taylor (1991:3) and Guignon (2004:3), the concept of authenticity, and especially the quest for an “authentic life”, has indeed become a buzzword and fad in contemporary society, obsessed as it is with “real life stories” and reality television. Guignon (2004:4) argues that this “fad” is fuelled by pop psychology, self-help trends, and a talk-show

¹ Although postmodernism and poststructuralism are two separate approaches, this study focuses on the overlapping concerns between them with regard to issues of language, identity and intertextuality. The terms will sometimes be used interchangeably – unless otherwise denoted.

² Authenticity is defined, for the purposes of this study, as that which is genuine or original, in the sense that it is not an imitation, mimicry, or copy of something else.

culture. Pop psychology “generally presupposes that we have something within us that we are unwilling or unable to raise to expression” (Guignon, 2004:4). According to pop psychology, there is a very definite authentic core to each human being which can be accessed with the right psychological guidance.

This obsession with what is real also permeates much of current journalism. According to De Kock (2008:89), anti-intellectualism is a widespread phenomenon resulting in a preference for “real” journalistic content versus “intellectual” content. Journalistic content with a more intellectual angle is consequently regarded as somehow less authentic or further removed from reality than content without such an angle. As De Kock (2008:89) states, this is “an extremely vicious and reductive binary,” since “intellectualism” is unfortunately usually defined as concepts which need more than two or three syllables per word to be described in these discourses, ignoring Spivak’s crucial statement that “plain prose cheats, and [...] clear thought hides” (in De Kock, 1992:40). De Kock (2008:89) therefore argues that more accessible journalistic content is not necessarily as transparent as it seems.

Authenticity is generally regarded as that which is original or genuine, in the sense that it is not an imitation, mimicry, or copy of something else. Yet, according to Guignon (2004:82), there has been a conflation of various dichotomies within popular culture to form a master binary. What is deep, spiritual, innocent, childlike, sensual, and emotional is conflated and regarded as “authentic,” while that which is superficial, materialistic, knowledgeable, mature and intellectual is regarded as “inauthentic.”

The quest for authenticity can also be found in contemporary theatre where the fictional is often shunned in favour of reality, or the actual, which is supposedly more authentic.³ According to Kron (in Greenfield, 2006:168), there has been a preference for autobiographical mono-drama on American stages. Greenfield (2006:168) attributes this to an “obsession with personal stories, brought about by the talk-show revolution.” She adds that “we might even consider the degree to which so-called reality television whets the appetite for telling and hearing ‘real’ stories on the stage.” Correspondingly, Sierz (2011:58) ascribes the high prevalence of verbatim drama on British stages in the 2000s to “a hunger in audiences for factual truth, theatre’s answer to reality TV, when what you see is not fiction at all.”

³ When distinguishing between fictional levels or frames in film, Crous (2011:283) employs the terms “actual” and “fictional” to distinguish between real life and artistic creation. These terms are useful to distinguish also between the different ontological levels in theatre, since they avoid the pitfalls surrounding the word “reality.”

The idea that theatre should conform to a standard of authenticity, based on a reductive binary which shuns the fictional as inauthentic, is, however, problematic, since theatre is inherently fictional. Theatre, as live performance, necessarily represents. According to Elam (2002:7), everything on stage is shown within a fictional frame. In theatre, x always stands for y. As Elam (2002:7) states, “a table employed in dramatic representation will not usually differ in any material or structural fashion from the item of furniture that the members of the audience eat at, and yet it is in some sense transformed: it acquires, as it were, a set of quotation marks.” In other words, all objects acquire the same ontological status, that of being fictional, on stage. This is the case irrespective of the resemblance this object may have to that which it is supposed to represent.

Playwrights, then, often refer to theatre’s necessary fictionality through metareferences, or metatheatrical devices, but these devices still function within the fictional frame of theatre. Theatre accordingly functions within a fictional frame, regardless of forms such as autobiographical mono-drama or verbatim drama which suggest the converse. Theatre is thus directly opposed to the popular notion of “authenticity.”

1.3. Pinter’s *Betrayal*, Stoppard’s *The Real Thing*, and Marber’s *Closer*

The antithesis between that which is actual and that which is fictional, both in life and in art, is explored in *Betrayal*, *The Real Thing* and *Closer*. Each of these plays compares marital fidelity with honesty in art. Pinter’s *Betrayal* concerns the love triangle between two best friends and one of their wives. It is set in upper middle class London, where both men work in the literary field: Robert (the husband) is a publisher, Jerry (the adulterer) is a literary agent while Emma is an art curator. The events of the play are presented (mostly) in a reverse chronological order, and the audience therefore first encounters Jerry and Emma two years after their affair has ended. As the play moves backwards in time, the audience uncovers – with the characters – not only the one major betrayal of Jerry and Emma’s affair, but also various layers of inextricable betrayals between the three characters. Layers of dishonesty are stripped off, only to reveal more layers of deceit.

Stoppard’s *The Real Thing* is a distinctly metatheatrical play about infidelity. Henry is a playwright married to an actress named Charlotte. Charlotte stars in one of Henry’s plays,

incidentally also about infidelity, alongside Max. Max's wife Annie is having an affair with Henry, and the two of them divorce their spouses and marry each other. But this is not the end of the infidelities. Charlotte reveals that she conducted nine affairs while married to Henry and Annie also cheats on him in the second act with Billy, a young actor and her co-star in a play written by a convict named Brodie. Stoppard mixes up scenes from Henry and Brodie's plays with scenes from the characters' real lives. The audience is thus deliberately confused as its members are obliged to work out which scenes are plays-within-the-plays, and which are happening in the outer play (and consequently "really" happening in the lives of the characters).

Patrick Marber's *Closer* is also a play dealing with infidelity, and it too is set in London. It is about four characters (from the middle and working classes respectively) who are in a succession of (relatively) short lived relationships or affairs with each other. Dan and Alice are a couple, but Dan has an affair with Anna, who is married to Larry, who later becomes Alice's lover after she has left Dan. Dan is a novelist and Anna a photographer, and the characters debate the authenticity of photographic or literary interpretations of identity. In the unfolding of the plot, Marber only shows the audience snippets from the lives of these characters, either at the beginning or the end of a relationship. The audience is thereby given limited, but crucial, information to piece together the plot of the play and, like the characters, struggles to form a clear image of each character, because each scene exposes the image created in the previous one as a lie.

All three of these plays thus use literature and/or art to explore the deceptive ways in which we make sense of the world around us, using a combination of realist and metatheatrical forms. The characters' encounters with each other are shown to be based on unstable, shifting versions of themselves, frequently including deliberate lies. In these plays, art and language fulfil similar functions and both prove to be, if not inadequate, misleading. Instead of uncovering a firm or stable identity, language, rather, obscures, conceals, and deceives, functioning as a fiction. The motif of betrayal in all three plays is expressed in the romantic relationships of the characters, but these infidelities also point to an even more fundamental epistemological betrayal. The concept of dishonesty not only concern the characters within the play, but also point outward towards the actual world of the audience and questions the way in which its members trust what they know to be true.

1.4. Literature survey

To ensure that duplication of research did not take place, various databases were consulted. The NRF Nexus database and ProQuest were respectively consulted for South African and international theses and dissertations. For other studies, Academic Search Premier, JSTOR, Literature Online, Literature Resource Centre (Gale) and Wilson Web were consulted.

Although a multitude of studies have been conducted on the plays of Pinter, none that I could find discuss the metatheatrical aspects of *Betrayal* in depth. While Stoppard's *The Real Thing* has been discussed as a metatheatrical text, I do not believe that it has been read in tandem with *Betrayal* and *Closer*, a reading which more clearly uncovers the link between metatheatrical and romantic relationships. The link between *Betrayal* and *Closer* has been explored by Shaw in his doctoral thesis entitled "Positive influence: Harold Pinter and the in-her-face generation" (2008). Still, Shaw focuses mainly on the gender construction of the characters in the two plays. He compares the identities of *Betrayal*'s characters with *Closer*'s from the perspectives of feminism and Girard's model of mimetic desire. Consequently, Shaw does not investigate issues of fictionality in either play.

Hence, to my knowledge, no prior study has investigated the metatheatrical aspects concerning authenticity and fictionality comparatively in the above mentioned texts.

1.5. Research problem and objectives

In the light of the given context, the following research questions are addressed by this study:

- How is the concept of authenticity portrayed in Pinter's *Betrayal*, Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, and Marber's *Closer*?
- How are the characters' identities constructed and conveyed to the other characters as well as the audience?
- How and to what extent does the audience become involved in the fictional world of the characters?
- What are the implications of these findings for theatre as an art form?

The aims of the study are the following:

- To demonstrate how Pinter, Stoppard, and Marber define and explore the concept of authenticity in the fictional and the actual through their metatheatrical plays.
- To show how arbitrary the construction and mediation of the characters' identities are, from the perspective of the other characters as well as that of the audience.
- To show the significance of the role that the audience fulfils in these plays, not only within the fictional world of the play, but also in the actual world of the audience.
- To show how issues of authenticity, fictionality and dishonesty impact on a genre that by definition depends upon illusion.

1.6. Thesis statement

This study argues that the three plays in question explore the boundary between the actual and the fictional by presenting authenticity as something which cannot be accessed directly by either the characters or the audience. Therefore, what is perceived as authenticity is inextricably linked to mediation, which comprises language and artistic expression. These forms of communication prove to be evasive and misleading, continually betraying authenticity. And yet, mediation remains the only way through which to perceive and interpret the world.

The identities of the characters in the three respective plays are consequently and inevitably constructed and conveyed through mediation, evasive as it may be. In these plays, language is not a simple, linear process but represented as a way to depict constructed "versions" or "fictions" of the characters' identities. These perceived versions of the characters' identities are continually dismantled and recreated when they turn out to be deceiving.

The spectators are drawn into the fictional world of the characters since they also have to navigate their way through the various fictions presented on stage. The hand of the dramatist is in each case clearly perceptible as the audience members are confused by a proliferation of fictions which point outwards toward their own actual existence. They are therefore invited to evaluate their own actual world according to the standards of the fictional play and are therefore simultaneously pulled into and pushed out of the fictional world.

By exploring the boundary between the actual and the fictional through a combination of realist and metatheatrical forms (as opposed to verbatim drama or autobiography), these plays do not presume to bypass the fictional in favour of the actual. Instead, they demonstrate that the boundary between the fictional and the actual may easily become confused. Although art implies artifice and theatre necessarily represents, fiction is not confined to art and theatre. Nor is artifice confined to intellectual discourse: fiction permeates every aspect of human life, from the interpretation of an intellectual play by a canonised playwright to the love affairs of working class people.

1.7. Methodology

This is a text-based study, aiming to provide a new interpretation of the selected texts of Pinter, Stoppard and Marber. Since the evasive nature of language and scepticism about authenticity are salient themes in all three texts, a theoretical framework, drawing on postmodernism and poststructuralism, is appropriate for the analysis of these texts.

The notions of Guignon (2004) and Baudrillard (1994) about the concept of authenticity within the postmodern context, were valuable in explaining certain misconceptions about the term, relevant to these plays. The poststructuralist thought of Hartman (1985) and Derrida (1978), which in turn draw on Nietzsche (1998) and Heidegger (2010), is useful in the investigation of the use of language in these plays. The theories advanced by Bakhtin and Maturana, on the other hand, explain how meaning is constituted through interaction whereas Eco's (1992) writing sheds light on how to navigate through a proliferation of fictions.

With regard to literature and art as mimesis, the studies of Potolsky (2006) and Melberg (1995) (respectively titled *Mimesis* and *Theories of mimesis*) proved insightful. Beaumont's (2010) *A concise companion to realism* and Wolf's (2009) seminal *Metareference across media* were useful in mapping out the interplay between the forms of realism and metatext within a postmodern context, as also discussed by Hutcheon (1984).

While applying these lines of thought to the genre of theatre, I relied on the research of Bogatyrev (1976), Kurman (1975-1976), Bigsby (1980), Hornby (1986), Elam (2002), Carlson (2004), Eversmann (2004), Filmer (2008), and Klimek (2009) to explain the concepts

of ostension and duplexity in theatre. In the testing of the fictionality of theatre, I refer to the theories of Sartre (1976), Artaud (1968), Brecht (1968), and Grotowski (in Kumiega, 1982) as well as studies by Sayre (1999), Jurgensen (2007), Schmidt (2013), and Wake (2013).

In my discussion of metatheatre, I consulted the work of Abel (1963), Hornby (1986), Esslin, (1987), Klimek (2009), and Wolf (2009) while Sierz's (2000) study, *In-yer-face theatre: British drama today* was seminal in defining and establishing the significance of in-yer-face theatre.

In the subsequent chapters of this thesis, I investigate the concepts of authenticity and mediation in the actual and fictional levels of the texts of Pinter, Stoppard and Marber, making use of the aforementioned theories, which not only sheds light on the significance of these concepts in the selected plays, but also aids in directing the discussion.

1.8. Conclusion

Despite the fact that these works tackle infidelity, Pinter's *Betrayal*, Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, and Marber's *Closer* grapple with uncovering the truth: about each other, about life in general and about art. The characters question the authenticity of art and accuse it of being inauthentic, sometimes relying on popular notions of the term. However, in the three plays, the fictional is shown to be inextricable from the actual, and the characters' own interpretations of the world are thus no more "authentic" than the artistic expressions in the plays.

This correlates closely with poststructuralist theories of language which assert that meaning cannot be separated from perception. Our explanations of the world therefore are not recordings of the world, but constitute it. Therefore, as suggested in these plays, after an illusion is broken, there is no objective truth behind it, only more interpretations or representations.

In addition, these plays are self-reflexive. The audience is thereby drawn into the fictional world of the characters, complicating the boundary between the fictional and the actual.

In the next chapter, I discuss the above mentioned theories regarding authenticity, language, mimicry, and theatre. Chapters Three, Four and Five apply the theory discussed in

Chapter Two to investigate the use of language and art as a kaleidoscope, hall of mirrors and a mirage in *Betrayal*, *The Real Thing*, and *Closer* respectively, thereby answering the research questions about authenticity, mediation and audience involvement articulated above. Chapter Six concludes the study by articulating the salient findings of the preceding chapters and discussing the significance of reading the plays in tandem.

CHAPTER 2:

THEORIES ABOUT TRUTH AND ARTIFICE IN LITERATURE AND THEATRE

In any case, the person who finds this diary will have one certain advantage over me: with a written language it is always possible to reconstruct a dictionary and a grammar, isolate sentences, transcribe them or paraphrase them into another language, whereas I am trying to read in the succession of things presented to me every day the world's intentions toward me, and I grope my way, knowing that there can exist no dictionary that will translate into words the burden of obscure allusions that lurks in these things. – Italo Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1981)

2.1. Introduction

In the epigraph above, Italo Calvino's character suggests that it is easier to make sense of sensory experience once it has been written down, implying a definite distinction between actual experience and writing. This distinction is, however, often muddled in postmodern times, when the idea of the core or essence of reality is regarded with scepticism and the writing or mimicry of experience, certainly seems more trustworthy than actual experience.

Having, in the previous chapter, posed certain questions about authenticity and theatre, I shall now proceed to discuss the most important theoretical discourses within postmodernism and poststructuralism in this regard. I start with a discussion on the way in which these regard authenticity as impossible, following with a discussion on how language and literature represent actual experience. Towards the end of the chapter, I narrow my focus to theatre's unique relation to actuality, emphasising the tension between the actual and the fictional in each instance.

2.2. The impossibility of authenticity

In Chapter One, I suggested that the current binary opposition between authenticity and intellectualism is rooted in the dichotomy between nature and culture. Derrida (1978:283) traces this dichotomy back to the time of Plato, stating that it is "at least as old as the Sophists." He argues that the claim that nature is opposed to law, education, art, technics, liberty, the arbitrary, history, society and the mind, has been passed on through history.

In *On being authentic* (2004), Guignon traces notions about authenticity from premodern times to pop culture's current preoccupation with it. Guignon (2004) refers to various worldviews dating from the 16th, 17th and 19th centuries respectively, which directly influence our concept of authenticity, based on the nature/culture binary to which Derrida also refers.

The Romantic worldview developed at various times in diverse ways in different parts of Europe. It was a reaction against the modern worldview, which saw the pursuit of happiness as the highest goal in life, whose most influential advocate was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Rousseau attempts to recover a sense of wholeness that was lost with the rise of modernity and claims that "truth" is discovered, not by rational reflection and scientific method, but by a total immersion in one's own and most intense feelings. According to Rousseau, the self is the highest and most all-encompassing of all that is found in reality. Rousseau urges humankind not to listen to society, but to listen to nature, which he sees as the voice of God, and aims to discover the shape of life through self-expression, or autobiographical writings. He thus regards individual perception as truth and his worldview is clearly in keeping with the time in which he lived – before Darwin and Nietzsche questioned the existence of a God (Guignon, 2004:52-60).

Rousseau (1953:262) does, however, find unfiltered self-expression problematic, as memory is fallible and finite: "I may omit or transpose facts, or make mistakes in dates; but I cannot go wrong about what I have felt or about what my feelings have lead me to do." Therefore, Rousseau makes a distinction between subjective truth and objective truth, favouring the former.

Rousseau's distinction may be linked to the nature/culture dichotomy to which Derrida (1978) refers and which still permeates academic and philosophic discussions as well as popular culture and journalism (De Kock, 2008:89). Guignon's (2004:82) binary of the authentic versus the inauthentic, with its implied bias towards the "natural" or "authentic", may in turn be linked to what De Kock (2008:89) refers to as "anti-intellectualism," a widespread and undesirable phenomenon. As stated in Chapter One, De Kock (2008:89) argues that the South African media has, for example, a prejudice against "intellectual" content as opposed to "real" content and describes this distinction as "an extremely vicious binary." For De Kock (2008:89), regarding intellectual journalistic content as inauthentic, or,

somehow less “real” than, for example, human interest pieces, narrows the public sphere. This is particularly so when the intellectual is defined as that which needs to be expressed in words of more than two syllables, which is often the case.

This dichotomy exists despite various philosophical and academic discourses which have debunked it altogether. Drawing from Kant, Eco (1999:76) rejects a binary between the senses and intellect on the grounds that “information provided by the senses is insufficient, because you need the intellect that reflects on what the senses have put before it.” Eco (1999:145-146) argues that the environment is overwhelmingly complex and that we consequently tend to categorise it, making “different things equivalent, grouping objects and events into classes.” This conflation of things and concepts ultimately leads to binary oppositions, such as that between nature/culture.

Derrida (1978:283-284) sets out to invalidate the nature/culture binary by referring to the sociological work of Claude Lévi-Strauss. According to Lévi-Strauss’ observations, the nature/culture binary depends on the assumption that nature includes “that which is *universal* and spontaneous, and not dependent on any particular culture or any determinate norm” (Derrida, 1978:283). On the other hand, culture is “that which depends on a system of *norms* regulating society and therefore is capable of *varying* from one social structure to another.” Yet, the incest prohibition confounds this distinction since it requires the predicates of *both* nature and culture. This prohibition is a phenomenon which Lévi-Strauss found to be universal – therefore belonging to nature. Yet, it is also an imposed prohibition, suggesting that it belongs to the domain of culture. By belonging to both the domains of nature and culture, the said prohibition resists the clear cut distinction between that which is natural and that which is imposed, or cultural. According to Derrida (1978:284), the incest prohibition is only one of various such examples which dismantles the binary between nature and culture.

Furthermore, in his work, *Of grammatology*, Derrida exposes a contradiction in the roots of this binary: that of Rousseau’s *Confessions* (Murfin, 1996:188):

Rousseau – who has often been seen as another great Western idealist and believer in innocent, noble origins – on one hand condemned writing as mere representation, a corruption of the more natural, childlike, direct and therefore undeviating speech. On the other hand, Rousseau acknowledges his own tendency to lose self-presence and blurt out exactly the wrong thing in public. He confesses that, by writing at a distance from his audience, he often expressed himself better.

As Derrida points out, Rousseau in consequence fails to illustrate the nature/culture dichotomy in his own writing. When trying to draw a line between that which is inherently part of a person and that which culture or convention imposes, it quickly becomes clear that this line is blurred.

While Heidegger distinguishes a “they-self” from an “authentic self,” where the former is “a form of being, which has been dispersed into the ‘they’ or mass of otherness found in groups of others” (Ekberg, 2011:76), Waskul (2009:59) finds such a demarcation impossible. Waskul (2009:51) performs a hypothetical “Garfinkelian” social experiment in which, for one entire day, he proposes to perform only actions which are completely sincere and express him authentically. In exploring such an hypothesis, Waskul (2009:53) finds that simple, everyday tasks, such as picking an outfit to wear, become overanalysed:

The decision is agonising because clothing is one of many “sign vehicles” (Goffman, 1959): a source of information about a person’s character. On any other day, I wouldn’t have given it a second thought. Today, however, in my efforts to be utterly sincere and authentic, I am paralysed by choices.

Waskul (2009:58) thus draws the conclusion that sincerity and authenticity are shifting and nebulous concepts. They are

...neither concrete nor tangible but *performances* that are patently emotional and affective. As much as people may value sincerity and authenticity they are relative definitions of the situation, emergent in shifting fields of meaning, attainable only in partial degrees, and rather irrelevant to self and society.

The relationship of a person to nature and culture is accordingly not one of a metaphorical face and mask. One does not have a natural face which is hidden with a cultural mask. The self is, rather, plural and multiple: “people have as many selves as they have unique situations for interaction” (Waskul, 2009:60). By trying to separate what is natural or authentic from what is cultural or inauthentic, Waskul realises that this is impossible, as a quest for “purely” authentic behaviour leads to heightened levels of introspection which destroy any attempts at spontaneity and “normality.” Waskul (2009:62) concludes by quoting Goffman (1959:13) who argues that although it is quite possible to determine if something is “unreal,” or, for that

matter, “inauthentic,” this does not mean that “reality” or “authenticity” is clearly recognisable or definable.

In agreement with Waskul, Guignon (2004:112-113) applies Nietzsche’s conception of reality to the postmodern condition, describing the postmodern self as comprising “many identities inhabiting one body and showing themselves to greater or lesser degrees in the public arena, many characters making their entrances and exits as the context demands.” Durham (1998:11) explicates Nietzsche’s notion by observing that

...no image is so well-founded that it is not subverted by movement of difference and divergence. No identity is so well-established that it is not haunted by a series of masks and simulacra expressing a virtual potential that remains as yet unactualised within it: the power to assume another role, to become other than itself.

Since, as stated earlier, there can be no core or essence to truth, according to Nietzsche, there also cannot be a core or essence to any person’s identity. According to Schmidt (2005:49), masks can effectively express the illusory nature of a supposedly “stable self,” suggesting a sense of self which can be transformed at will, resulting in a number of provisional selves, “none of which can fully represent the self.”

Guignon (2004:120) subsequently draws the conclusion that although the self cannot be “boiled down” to an essence, core or “face” which may be revealed when the metaphorical cultural “mask” is removed, it can be constituted through interaction. Guignon (2004:120) cites Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism to substantiate this claim. Bakhtin (in Shotter & Billig, 1998:16) proposes that meaning resides in interaction and that the only means to come to know either the self or the Other, is through dialectic discourse. According to Shotter and Billig (1998:16), “our sense of our own and other people’s mental states exists only ‘in’ the *internal relations* within such [observable] acts [of communication].”

Yet, it is impossible ever to fully know the Other. According to Hitchcock (1998:92), Bakhtin affirms that “pure identification with the Other is a fiction (no one can fully experience his pain).” In this, the members of the human race are both isolated from one another, since no one can ever experience another’s perspective, and yet also joined together as this isolation is a universal attribute (Holloway & Kneale, 2000:74). This poses the question, to what extent *can* language be seen as a conduit between people?

2.3. Language: barrier or conduit to the real self?

The fact that language is not perceived as something external to the self or some inadequate tool which taints the self in the process of revealing it, has led to the “linguistic turn,” described by Melberg (1995:4) as “the well-known *signum* of modern philosophy and literary theory, most often expressed as a discrepancy of meaning and reference.” Poststructuralist notions of language are thus pointedly sceptical and the failure of communication is almost taken for granted. And yet, Hartman (1985: xii) aptly sums up the poststructuralist attitude towards language by stating that “nothing can lift us out of language into a surer medium.” This is rooted in Wittgenstein’s view that although we know that preverbal experience exists, we need verbal concepts to be conscious of this (Hutcheon, 1984:91). Castle (2008:146) also explains the postmodern condition as a condition in which words are solely able to refer to other words. If nothing can lift us out of language and words cannot be trusted, poststructuralism leaves us in an intellectual deadlock.

Additionally, Heidegger’s (2010:987) ideas about consciousness and phenomenology reject the view of language which decrees that “speaking is expression,” that “speech is regarded as” a mere “activity of man” and that “expression is always presentation of the real and unreal.” Heidegger does not view language as a tool separate from the self with which he or she can refer to an objective world. According to Leitch (2010:983), Heidegger regards language as: “neither mimetic nor expressive: it does not represent an external reality, nor does it express a preexisting feeling or thought. Language shapes consciousness and perception, calling things into being, it does not merely designate or label objects.”

Similarly, Maturana and Varela (1980:88) perceive humankind as bound in description. Maturana and Varela (1980: xi) view language as the way in which we sculpt ourselves into being. In his explanation of the implications of Maturana’s theory for language and literature, De Kock (2008:92) argues that language is not reserved for bloodless matters of the intellect, but that language interactions are as powerful as physical interactions, because they are always entwined with emotion. De Kock (2008:92) cites the example of a compliment that is experienced like a stroke, or conversely, an insult, which is experienced like a blow in the guts. According to Maturana, our rationality and emotions are inextricable (De Kock, 2008:93).

Maturana thus seems to agree with Nietzsche (in Zima, 1999:141) who attacks the binary in language between the content plane (or the meaning of what a person is trying to say) and the expression plane (or the manner in which he or she expresses him- or herself). The world is not revealed by, or described with language, but *created* in language. According to Nietzsche (1998:77), the world is a fiction we create for ourselves. Since there might, according to Maturana and Varela (1998:212), be no limit to what we can describe or imagine in words or language, there may, to a certain extent, be no limit to the world. Maturana (in De Kock, 2008:88) accordingly refers to the universe as the multiverse, as it is continually recreated “in every single negotiated moment in every individual’s so-called consciousness.” In Maturana’s view, it is therefore impossible to distinguish between so-called reality and hallucination, without confirmation from an external source.

Maturana (1978:63) thus echoes the theories of Bakhtin regarding human communication, and also points out that what an individual observes, may only be observed from the specific position of the observer. Since each individual’s perception is thus unique to him or her, knowledge cannot be transferred (Maturana & Varela, 1980:5). A consensual domain needs to be established in which language could take place (Maturana, 1978:50). Since language may thus not be regarded as a stable code referring to a stable entity, meaning has been regarded as shifting by postmodernists and poststructuralists, such as Schechner (2000:4). Maturana (in Köck, 1980:88) remarks that “communication seems, once we come to think about it, basically unreliable, hazardous, ambivalent” because its meaning is continually shifting.

For Bakhtin, as for Maturana, meaning is always context-bound as an utterance and does not consist solely of linguistic matter, but also of nonverbal enunciation, which includes the spatial horizon, the knowledge shared by the interlocutors and a common evaluation of the situation (Todorov, 1984:42). Therefore, an utterance cannot be separated from “particular subjects in specific situations” (Holquist, 1990:68) which means that every utterance is necessarily unique. Even if the linguistic matter of an utterance is repeated, its exact time and space can never be, and in consequence an uttered word carries a meaning which it would not in another time or place (Holquist, 1990:69).

Hence, although we try, with centripetal force, to determine the exact meaning of an utterance, centrifugal forces are simultaneously at work, undoing the bond between a word and that which it refers to; a phenomenon which also interests Derrida:

It is of course in the nature of language, conventionally conceived, that meanings are sought, definitions desired. This is because we use language in the vast number of instances without respect for the singular or the idiomatic. Instead we ignore language's figurality in favour of a single figural model whereby all language is in the service of representation. Conventionally language functions mimetically, or, at least, it is assumed to have this ability, to become a copy, to assume a likeness, of that which is not present, that which we seek to describe. (Wolfreys, 1998:14-15)

While we try to fix definitions to specific objects, ideas or things, these definitions continuously collapse. Derrida draws on the theories of De Saussure who demonstrates that "words are *not* the things they name and, indeed, they are only arbitrarily associated with those things" (Murfin, 1996:187).

To believe that a word or definition may absolutely represent a thing is to rely on the absolute idea of truth, mentioned above, rooted in structuralist thought, which Derrida rejects:

The assumption about such truths often lies with the idea that somewhere behind or beyond all the questioning and debate, all the discursive and textual movement, there is a guaranteed, solid, unchanging absolute, a value at the heart or centre (supposing such a location to exist is the work of certain kinds of thought and discourse, the purpose of their questions being to offer signposts to the imagined centre). This assumption imagines that the heart or centre around which questions are permitted to proliferate is self-sufficient, fully formed, and not open to questioning itself, with regard to the ideas, concepts, discourses which serve to structure it. (Wolfreys, 1998:24)

Again, in a manner similar to Nietzsche and Maturana referred to above, Derrida also rejects the binary opposition between the content plane and the expression plane, since he perceives the meaning of the content plane as forever shifting: there is no objective, stable truth. A definition, or word, alters each time it is used. Re-iteration does not lead to consolidation of meaning, but to disintegration (Zima, 1999:114). Thus, what Nietzsche refers to as the "expression plane" is never able to accurately reflect the so-called "content plane." Concurring with Bakhtin, Derrida emphasises the contextually bound nature of any reading and asserts that "each reading differs from the one already gone and those to follow" (Wolfreys, 1998:14). As a result, no definition may ever be permanently fixed and the meaning of any utterance or text is consequently unstable. According to Murfin (1996:187),

“the meanings of words lie in the differences between them and the differences between them and the things they name.”

In *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2002:378), Derrida illustrates this notion with an excerpt from Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* (1971):

[Alice] seems [...] to believe that one can in fact discern between a human “yes” and “no.” She seems confident that when it comes to man it is possible to guess whether yes or no. Let us not forget that the Cheshire Cat had told her, in the course of a scene that deserves a long meditation: “‘We’re all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad’” (AW, p. 72). After that he undertakes to demonstrate to her this collective folly. It is the moment of simulacrum of discussion, but which comes to grief as they are unable to agree on the sense of the words, on what a *word* means, and in the end no doubt, on what *word*, what the term *word* could ever mean. “‘Call it what you like,’” the Cat ends up saying concerning the difference between growling and purring.

According to Derrida, Alice and the Cheshire Cat will never be able to reach an agreement on the meaning of either growling or purring. In his essay *Khōra* (1998b:231), Derrida explains the similar difficulties in defining the word *khōra*:

at times the *khōra* appears to be neither this nor that, at times both this and that, but this alternation between the logic of exclusion and that of participation [...] stems perhaps only from a provisional appearance and from the constraints of rhetoric, even from some incapacity of naming.

Wolfreys (1998:30) refers to Royle who argues that a reading will necessarily differ from “that which it expounds,” since meaning cannot be fixed. There can accordingly never be a complete way to read or interpret a text.

Furthermore, Derrida (1998a:71-72) argues that, apart from failing to uncover precise meanings, language may also obscure meaning, as in the case of ancient Egyptian priests making theological science “more difficult to understand” through hieroglyphs. Eco (1983a:3) agrees with this fluidity of meaning and argues that a word (in his example the word “rose”) can become so rich in meaning that it “hardly has any meaning left.” He also seems to be in agreement with Maturana and Bakhtin in viewing knowledge as inherently private. Eco (1999:219) explains this by citing the example of a person’s recollection of his or her hometown:

If I were blindfolded and taken to my hometown, and then left at the corner of a road, with the blindfold removed, I would recognise instantly – or fairly quickly – where I

was. [...] This eminently visual knowledge of mine is still private, because it would be hard for me to give someone a description of my hometown that would enable him to recognise it in analogous circumstances.

Yet, according to Collini (1992:8), Eco, having been one of the most influential scholars in investigating and emphasising the role of the reader in the production of meaning, expressed unease in his later work about the licensing of the reader to “produce a limitless, uncheckable flow of ‘readings’” associated with “that style of Derrida-inspired American criticism calling itself ‘Deconstruction’ and associated above all with the work of Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller.” According to Eco (1999:48):

While it is a principle of hermeneutics that there are no facts, only interpretations, this does not prevent us from asking if there might not perchance be “bad” interpretations. Because to say that there are no facts, only interpretations, certainly means saying that what appears to us as fact is the effect of interpretation but not that every possible interpretation produces something that, in the light of subsequent interpretations, we are obliged to consider as if it were a fact.

While Eco (1992:24) thus acknowledges the instability of meaning, he also argues that not every act of interpretation “can have a happy end.” Eco (1999:274) contends that although meaning is arbitrarily linked to language, this should not “rule out [...] the existence of a grain that binds our cognitive types” or “the linguistic conventions that register these bonds and supply the basis for successive interpretations and negotiations.” Although not permanently fixed or clear cut, meaning can be negotiated and determined – to a certain extent – through convention.

Although there cannot be any rules with which to ascertain which interpretations of a text are the best ones, there can be rules to ascertain which ones are “bad” (Eco, 1992:52). Eco (1992:64-65) suggests that an interpretation “of a certain portion of a text can be accepted if it is confirmed by, and must be rejected if it is challenged by, another portion of the same text.” It is consequently the “internal textual coherence” of the text that controls its valid interpretation. According to Eco (1999:20), we *can* distinguish between a dream, a poetic invention and an acid trip, and as a result are also able to distinguish between a “good” interpretation and a “bad” one. He therefore defies Maturana’s concepts which suggest that any interpretation needs to be externally confirmed by arguing that there are lines of resistance in texts which encourage certain interpretations and discourage others.

Still, Culler (1992:113-114) regards Eco's argument as a misunderstanding of Deconstruction and states that certain "bad" interpretations might merely enable us to reflect on the way communication functions. According to Culler (1992:120), Eco's definition of deconstruction is flawed. For Culler, deconstruction insists rather that meaning is context bound than implying that a text may mean anything that the reader wants it to mean.

Therefore, although there is significant disagreement between scholars within postmodernism and poststructuralism, some issues regarding language and meaning seem to dovetail. In poststructuralist thought, language is not perceived as an external tool to describe an objective reality, but is inextricable from both human consciousness and the reality which it is assumed to describe. This reality exists only in language; hence no utterance can ever be divorced from its context. As Eco expounds, although language is sometimes proposed to be unreliable and hazardous, since no meaning may be absolutely fixed to any word, meaning is not entirely arbitrary, but may to a certain extent, be negotiated and determined.

We have thus established that, although determined by convention, language cannot be regarded as inauthentically cultural in the nature/culture binary. Language is inherently part of the way in which we perceive the world. But, apart from day to day communication, there is also another level on which language operates, and that is in literature. While language consists, on the one hand of "predominantly pragmatic and argumentative discourses and uses of sign systems," there are, on the other hand, also "the media and in particular the arts" which are "at least capable of [...] fulfilling non-pragmatic, playful and aesthetic functions as well as in many, albeit not all cases the additional function of representation" (Wolf, 2009:32-33). We do not communicate merely to get along in our day to day existence. Language also fulfils a higher, playful aesthetic function. Clearly, language is neither barrier nor conduit to meaning. But can we say the same for the playful and aesthetic literary text?

2.4. Literature: mimesis and metatext

2.4.1. Art as reproduction of the actual world

Art is often interpreted as a reproduction of the actual world and described in expressions such as "a slice of life." Nevertheless, the relationship between art and the actual world is just as –

if not more – complex as the relationship between language and the actual world. Potolsky (2006:1) investigates this relationship in his study, *Mimesis*, in which he argues that “mimesis fundamentally defines the way we think about art, literature and representation – whether we are aware of it or not.”

As can be expected, Potolsky (2006) devotes an important part of his study to Plato’s and Aristotle’s contrasting views on mimesis, which currently form the basis of many similar debates. Potolsky (2006:2) ascribes the nature/culture divide and the entire history of literary theory to Plato’s notion that art imitates something real and natural. To him, mimesis is “more than a theory” about “art and images”: it connects “ideas about artistic representation” to “more general claims about human social behaviour” and “the ways in which we know and interact with others and our environment” (Potolsky, 2006:2).

In *Republic*, Plato defines art as “essentially mimetic, as a representation of something else,” which marks an important moment in the philosophy of art, since Greek culture regarded images as actualisations of what *they* represent prior to this claim (Potolsky, 2006:15-16). For Plato, there is a definite divide between real objects and “semblances” such as miming, pictures, shadows, dreams, reflections and footprints. To him, art is in consequence an appearance, “not a real thing” (Potolsky, 2006:16-17). According to Plato, the philosopher “comes closest to first-hand knowledge of real reality.” Any “imitation” can thus be disregarded (Melberg, 1995:10).

In contrast to Plato, Aristotle defends mimesis. Unlike Plato, he does not consider mimesis as being opposed to reason and proposes that “tragedy offers quasi-philosophical insights into human actions” (Potolsky, 2006:33). For Aristotle, mimesis is “a real thing” and he argues that, because children tend to mimic adults and therefore learn chiefly through an action resembling mimesis, it can be regarded as natural and inherently part of human beings (Potolsky, 2006:37).⁴ Unlike Plato, who feels that mimesis elicits undesirable emotion, Aristotle avers that tragedy can lead to the purgation of emotion (Potolsky, 2006:45) since the fictional distance implied in mimesis protects us from what is represented and enables us to learn from the representation (Potolsky, 2006:37). Yet, Aristotle remains biased against the spectacle of theatre (Balme, 2008:66).

⁴ For the purposes of this study, “mimesis” is regarded as the imitative representation of actuality in art and literature, and “mimicry” as the imitation of something or someone. Although the two terms are related, the first refers to an aesthetic theory while the latter refers to an action.

Potolsky (2006:3-4) argues that the conflict between the views of Plato and Aristotle led to a divide in Western thought concerning two notions about life and art, derived from a combined approach of Plato and Aristotle's views. The first view proposes that art reflects the world as it is, functioning as a mirror to the world (another often quoted expression). According to the second view, art is a self-contained "heterocosm," a simulation of a familiar world which copies our ways of knowing and understanding: art is thus a mirror of the spectator and his or her beliefs.

While the second view seems to carry considerably more weight than the first, the implication of a mirror image of the spectator and his or her beliefs is still somewhat problematic. Melberg (1995:1) asserts that mimesis inevitably turns to repetition. Yet, as is the case with the repetition of any utterance, repetition cannot lead to a reproduction, replica, or exact copy. Melberg (1995:2) continues: "*mimesis is never* a homogenous term, and if its basic movement is towards similarity it is *always* open to the opposite." Mimesis is based on the "fact" that the truth cannot be reproduced as Heidegger asserts (Melberg, 1995:3). Mimesis therefore necessarily implies illusion, which in turn asks questions about the convention of realism, which supposedly mimics the actual world in a straightforward manner.

2.4.2. Realism

In his article *Supernatural Realism*, Smajić (2009:1) tests the boundaries of the convention known as realism. As a starting point, he cites the following received definition: "realism is thought to exemplify a mode of perceiving, comprehending, and representing persons, objects, and events in accordance with natural laws and rationally explicable causal relations." Realism thus aims to represent a fictional world that closely resembles what is thought to be the actual world. And, particularly initially, realism would seem to provide a fiction representing the actual in contrast to the preceding romance fiction. In fact, realism was at first defined as non-romance fiction (Jameson, 2012:475).

Nonetheless, it quickly becomes clear that this term is (once again) not so easily defined. One could argue that because "truth" cannot be reproduced, realism is a venture doomed to fail from the onset. And if realism's proposed resemblance to the actual world is

used as a measuring stick, then its meaning would be continually shifting. Thus, Smajić (2009:1) comments on the elusive nature of the term: “few key terms in the vocabulary of literary criticism, and criticism of the novel in particular, have consistently proven to be as indispensable yet elusive, unruly, or downright unmanageable as *realism*.” Thus, as is the case with many poststructuralist terms, “realism” is often defined in terms of what it is not, rather than what it is: it is not magic realism, science fiction, fantasy or metafiction.

Yet, despite his acknowledgement of the “unmanageability” of the term, Smajić (2009:4) agrees with Watt’s (1963:33) definition of realism as attempting “a full and authentic report of human experience.” Smajić (2009:4) uses this definition in order to defend the inclusion of phenomena such as dreams, premonitions and other supposedly supernatural occurrences in realist works of literature. Valid as such an argument may be, the use of this definition is clearly problematic as it relies on the idea that the actual world can be authentically “reported.” Likewise, Jameson (2012:479) finds any claims to authentic representation futile because they depend on Lukaćs’ concept of realism as an accurate or verisimilar presentation: “these conceptions seem to me static; they convey (perhaps in spite of themselves) the idea that reality is a kind of thing out there, to be described as faithfully as possible.”

Similar to many scholars who tend to be careful in defining realism, so as not to be vulnerable to the accusations that their definition is “myopic,” constricting, unable to “encompass the broad spectrum of its themes and expressive modalities (Smajić, 2009:1), Potolsky (2006:94) approaches realism with more caution. According to him, “realism” is “something we recognise when we encounter it, or miss when it is absent, rather than a single quality in any given work.” For Potolsky (2006:94), the difficulty in defining the term “realism” lies in the ambiguity surrounding the word “real.” The “real” can be understood as that which may be perceived with the senses, as opposed to that which is false or imaginary; it may also be regarded as something which is impossible to perceive with the senses, as opposed to appearance; or the word can be used to refer to the practical.

But, in artistic discourses, works of art are still often “legitimised” on the grounds that they resemble reality. Jameson (2012:476-477), points out, for example, that there are various subgenres within realism, each claiming to be more “realistic” than the one preceding. Hence, “social realism” may, for example, be distinguished from “bourgeois realism.” Potolsky

(2006:93) also refers to various artistic movements which each claimed to reach an unprecedented level of truth or realism. Nineteenth-century novelists claimed to reveal the truth about ordinary people for the first time, while photography was initially regarded as an advance over painting.

Thus, it was only a matter of time before realism was “dethroned” as the literary style supposedly closest to the actual world by other literary conventions, such as naturalism and modernism. Where realism presented a “social totality” by selecting representative elements, naturalism shows chaos and unconnected, disorganised details. It aims to directly mirror the humdrum of capitalist reality rather than focusing on special relationships – as realism proposes to do (Potolsky, 2006:105). But, although differing significantly from realism, naturalism also has its own agenda. The naturalism of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century “was not simply a distillation of realism.” Realists such as Flaubert aimed to “sustain an attitude of detached neutrality;” while naturalists “imposed a very specific view of mankind onto their fictional narratives, fictional realism can be described in general terms as an aesthetic mode; literary naturalism was more specifically an aesthetic doctrine and recognisable school” (Ledger, 2010:87). Ledger (2010:87) also notes that naturalism was more limited and narrower than nineteenth century realism and that it was markedly influenced by Darwin in that it represented life as a continuous struggle and perceived humans as only slightly elevated from animals. Even into the second decade of the 21st century, naturalism is still being used in conjunction with a social realist agenda to strengthen claims of genuineness in “a view of society which depicted working-class or lower-class life in an unglamorous – and often deliberately dirty – way, while stressing the truth or authenticity of this experience” (Sierz, 2011:17).

Modernism, on the other hand, sought to uncover the truth that lay beneath “an accumulation of misrepresentations, platitudes and stereotypes” established by realism and presented itself as an operation that “could establish contact between mind and language” (Armstrong, 2010:117).

Therefore, Beaumont (2010: xv) argues that in the postmodern climate of the twentieth century, realism has been regarded with impatience and apathy. It has become a straw doll to “show up the authentic and original literary or critical action occurring elsewhere” (Bowlby, 2010: xv). Realism is regarded as presenting a Eurocentric, heteronormative version of the

actual world (Cleary, 2012:161) and has therefore been rejected from a political viewpoint rooted in a suspicion of representation. In the twentieth century, realism was perceived as philosophically naïve and ideologically deceptive (Esty & Lye, 2012:271). A number of feminists have also expressed dissatisfaction with realist forms, claiming that these represent a mainly patriarchal “reality” (Aston, 1995:60).⁵

On this succession of literary styles, Potolsky (2006:93) remarks:

Each technique has doubtlessly improved an ability to reproduce the world we see and experience. Yet this relentless artistic and technological quest for better ways of depicting reality is strangely fixated on traditional ideas about mimesis. [...] We might go so far as to suggest that it is only because Plato defined art by its more or less accurate reproduction of the real that linear perspective or photography or virtual reality can be understood to mark progress in art, rather than just a change in medium or style.

If we accept that an authentic representation of the actual world is impossible and we no longer value art according to its supposed ability to accurately reproduce the world, the above mentioned hierarchy falls flat. One literary style is then no longer able to dethrone another on the grounds that it is supposedly closer to the actual world than the preceding style. For Hutcheon (1984:41-42), postmodernism merely revealed “that what had formerly been accepted as an unimpeachable canon of ‘novelistic realism’ was really just another set of literary conventions.”

Robbe-Grillet (in Bowlby, 2010: xix) contends that representation styles do not change in order to “dethrone” one another as accurate representations of the actual world. He cites three reasons for the continual alteration in styles: firstly, a style loses its power of novelty as soon as it becomes established. Secondly, the world is always changing and literary styles are influenced by this process. Lastly, new realisms may also create new ways of seeing reality, which in turn, warrant new styles of representation.

Hence, while realism may be reduced to a conservative convention, that which “has *already* been read, seen, done, experienced” (Barthes, 1974:20), it is also argued to be an exceptionally “elastic” one. According to Taft (2011:362) genres become exhausted when they are no longer “artistically useful.” So, for example, realism has, from the end of the nineteenth century – apparently – given way to naturalism, or lives on “in a debased,

⁵ See also Kerr (2004).

trivializing form.” Taft (2011:379), however, points out that realism can exist peacefully alongside modernism and naturalism and cites George Gissing’s novel, *New Grub Street* (1891) to illustrate. This novel “shows us that literary history is not a succession of one dominant genre after another, but a gradually evolving literary field with many genres and modes coexisting – peacefully and otherwise – at once.”

In addition, Smajić (2009:4) demonstrates how nineteenth century realist works, such as those of Dickens, Eliot, James and Charlotte Brontë, encompass the paranormal, supernatural and metafictional. In Walter Scott’s *Waverley* (1972), first published in 1814, for example, Fergus and Edward realise that they are fictional characters (Smajić, 2009:7-8). George Eliot’s *Silas Marner* (1861) indicates that “the question of the reality of ghosts” is “inextricable from the question [...] about the nature and uses of language” (Smajić, 2009:12). Lastly, in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) Jane’s experience of extrasensory perception is a motif for reading and the mind’s eye (Smajić, 2009:17).

Valis (2012:194-195), on the other hand, engages Barthes’ structuralist view that “the language of the realist novel does not refer to real things, but to the ways society conventionally understands these things,” and that “realist novels reproduce the status quo.” According to Valis (2012:194), “the best critical insights” on realism, since Barthes, are those which are “least ideologically reductive” and “both confirmed and undermined Barthes’ presuppositions” by demonstrating that the “substance behind the mirage of the realist novel” is a “kind of construction.” Yet, Valis (2012:195) argues that – for example – in Spanish studies, realism has become overfamiliar and as a result, many critics ignore its “slantedness,” its way of defamiliarising certain things, of making the stone *stony*, in Shklovsky’s terms.

These above mentioned scholars in consequence make it clear that, not only is realism a complex and encompassing style, but it is also contradictory. Alter (1975: x) summarises this stance as follows:

...in many important novelists from Renaissance Spain to contemporary France and America, the realistic enterprise has been enormously complicated and qualified by the writer’s awareness that fictions are never real things, that literary realism is a tantalizing contradiction in terms.

Therefore, each new literary technique merely seems more real because it breaks an accepted convention (Potolsky, 2006:99). Yet, the question of realism always comes back to the

question of how literature represents life, or the “relation between literature and life” (Valis, 2012:194). However, even Rousseau’s supposedly authentic epistolary form of writing is no more real than prose. Rousseau cannot escape the contrived nature of his fiction, as Melberg (1995:88) wittily remarks when Rousseau’s protagonist seems to be writing letters right before and after the act of love: “the situation may seem slightly bizarre; one might imagine that the lover in his excitement before and/or after would let go of pen and paper.” Melberg (1995:12) also points out how Plato’s argument against mimesis is in itself mimetic, while Bowlby (2010: xv-xvi) remarks that not even, or maybe especially, so-called “reality television” portrays an uncontrived situation.

As a result we can conclude that there is a level of contrivance in all art forms. Realist media are often even purposefully distorted to grant a feel of authenticity. In film, for example, a shaky camera and distorted sound and lighting are supposed to add a sense of being random and unrehearsed (Potolsky, 2006:98). Marcus (2010:195) also remarks that even film – supposedly the genre representing the actual world the most faithfully – relies on a trick of the eye, for its supposed realism. It is only through an optical illusion that the succeeding images on a film reel (or a digital video recording, for that matter) seem to move.

Although all art forms contain a level of contrivance, it is seldom the aim of art to fool the audience (Potolsky, 2006:95). Except in the case of a small number of marginal art works, the audience knows that it is dealing with a work of artifice and not with the actual world. Artistic “lies” make no claims to realism or truth (Potolsky, 2006:109) and the question of truthfulness is thus irrelevant to fiction (Mukařovský in Hutcheon, 1984:90). As Wellek (in Hutcheon, 1984:17) also pleads, art should be judged not only by its ability to represent the world.

And if one abandons this measuring stick of authenticity, realism is not a venture doomed to fail, or a politically incorrect, naïve and outmoded genre. It is a literary style in which a possible world is constructed that the members of its audience (and this audience is often time-bound) are able to recognise as familiar or reminiscent of the actual world in which they live. This style may be conservative, but also highly flexible and encompassing.

2.4.3. Postmodern metatext

2.4.3.1. Definition

If we accept that no fiction is more or less “real” than any other, however, we still acknowledge a basic binary opposition between that which is real, or actual and that which is fictional: a binary that postmodernism aims to dismantle.

For Potolsky (2006:153-154), the postmodern obsession with the replica (or the revitalisation of mimesis) stems from the fact that, while nineteenth century capitalism was based on the production of commodities, postmodern capitalism is based on the production of appearances. Potolsky (2006:153) considers that “postmodern societies are so saturated with images that we can no longer distinguish the original from the copy” and as a result, “mimesis is inextricably woven into the fabric of reality itself.” Also, according to Auslander (in Schmidt, 2005:77) we can no longer distinguish between lived and mediated experience, living in what Baudrillard (1994:1) refers to as the “hyperreal” where we deal with “models of a real without original or reality.” For Baudrillard (1994:2), the sign of the real has replaced the real, which renders any questions about imitation, duplication, or parody void.

Whereas Plato viewed the simulacrum negatively, as repeating only the “external appearance” of an icon without participating in the Idea that establishes it itself, as opposed to the icon which “inwardly participates in the Idea” (Durham, 1998:7), postmodern critics, such as Deleuze and Foucault, therefore view the simulacrum positively. According to Deleuze (in Durham, 1998:8):

It is *art* which invents the lies that raise falsehood to this highest affirmative power, that turns the will to deceive into something which is affirmed in the power of the false. For the artist, *appearance* no longer means negation of the real in this world, but this kind of selection, correction, redoubling, and affirmation. Then truth perhaps takes on a new sense. Truth is appearance. Truth means bringing of power into effect, raising to the highest power. In Nietzsche, “we the artists” – “we the seekers after knowledge and truth” = “we the inventors of new possibilities of life.”

Yet, this condition is not surprising if one considers that mimesis is an inherent attribute of human nature and that art is viewed as “an exemplary instance of an inherent human tendency towards imitation” (Potolsky, 2006:115). Potolsky (2006:115-135) goes on to

cite Lacoue-Labarthe, Diderot, Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, Tarde, Lacan, Borch-Jacobson and Laplanche who all regard mimesis as fundamentally part of human life.⁶ For Lacoue-Labarthe, “human existence is but a series of copies without a true original,” which is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s views regarding identity, cited above (Potolsky, 2006:116).

For Hutcheon too (1984:58), the act of fiction-making is vital and natural to humans – as illustrated in John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969) where the narrator realises that the reader, like the characters in the novel, constantly fictionalises his or her own life. Just as we function within language, the novel is not a representation of life, but a continuation of it:

The novel is not a copy of the empirical world, nor does it stand in opposition to it. It is rather a continuation of that ordering, fiction-making process that is part of our normal coming to terms with experience. (Hutcheon, 1984:89)

Fowles thus disputes the idea that the reader need not respond seriously to fiction since it is supposedly not “real” (Hutcheon, 1984:59).

Baudrillard (1994:20) furthermore points out how the actual and fictional may become confounded, using a simulated robbery as example. The gestures and signs for a simulated robbery are the same as those for a real robbery and, “in the absence of any evidence of simulation,” the police would treat the robbery as a real one and could even “fire real bullets” (Potolsky, 2006:154-155). The actual is also able to simulate the fictional, where criminals imitate television crime series, “which in turn obsessively fictionalise true crime stories.”

McHale (1987:11) thus regards schizophrenia as “the most evocative manifestation of [the] fragmentation of personal identity” in postmodern culture, whilst Pfeifer (2009:416) points out how this identity crisis is also a “favourite type of postmodern metareference laying bare the constructedness and lack of authenticity of characters or the conception of the self in general for that matter.” The prevalence of metareference in postmodern media is so great that Wolf (2009:10-11) speaks of a metareferential turn: “one of the most outstanding features of contemporary, postmodernist culture in the Western world is a hitherto unknown increase in meta-phenomena” in popular culture, television and animated films, advertising and computer games.

⁶ Potolsky (2006:159) also points out how repetition is a vital feature in biology. The human race, and all life on earth for that matter, can only survive if certain genes are continually repeated.

Metafiction may simply be defined as “fiction about fiction – that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity” (Hutcheon, 1984:1), or, as the *Concise English Oxford Dictionary* (2004:896) states, “fiction in which the author self-consciously parodies or departs from novelistic conventions.” Similarly, metatext may be described as a text that investigates its own conventions.

Although metafiction is a very popular convention in postmodern times, it is not new. Cervantes’ *Don Quijote* (1605) is often cited as one of the seminal metafictional literary works. Here, Cervantes uses imitation and repetition to create one of the most influential literary works in the Western canon (Melberg, 1995:55). In this novel, the character of Don Quijote intends to bridge the gap between the fictional and the actual, by bringing literature to life; in naming things, he brings the “golden age” back into being (Melberg, 1995:65-72). Wolf (2009:71-72) also refers to Aristophanes’ comedy, *The Frogs* (405 BC) and Shakespeare’s comedies such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (c. 1595) as examples of early metatextual works. Yet, Wolf (2009:72-73) also points out that it is not until the 19th and 20th centuries that “that we find non-comic metatexts on a major scale,” with the exception of painting, where non-comical metareferences proliferate from as early as the 1600s, with Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* (1656) and the paintings of Vermeer (1632-1675).

What distinguishes postmodern metatext from earlier forms, is that in postmodern times, metatext has become more explicit, intense and critically self-aware (Hutcheon, 1984:18). Furthermore, postmodern meta-narratives often address broader ontological and epistemological issues (Pfeifer, 2009:410). Therefore, it is important to map out the field of postmodern metatext in a more detailed manner and also to include a more specific definition of this term.

Metareference across Media: Theory and Case Studies (2009), edited by Wolf, is the product of an extensive research project on the topic. In his introduction to this volume, Wolf (2009:15) states that a variety of different terms all refer to the concept of metareference. These terms include self-consciousness, self-reference, auto-referentiality, self-reflexivity, reflexivity, metanarrativity, metatextuality, metafiction, metanovel, introverted novel, metadrama, metatheatre, and metapoetry. Wolf (2009:15-17) nonetheless prefers the term

“metareference” because the word “reference” denotes any relation of signs to other signs or the “extralingual world,” and this term consequently includes transmedial examples.⁷

Wolf (2009:18) therefore distinguishes between “heteroreference” and “self-reference,” where “heteroreference” refers to extralingual references and “self-reference” to reflexive references. He does, however, concede that this distinction is problematic in the context of poststructuralism where the concept of “heteroreference” seems naïve, “in particular, the notion that there is meaning outside of language.” But, he insists, despite poststructuralist ideas about language, we still expect signs “to inform us about the world rather than about sign systems.” Wolf (2009:18) continues: “regardless of contemporary sceptical stances in the fields of linguistics and the philosophy of language and also in spite of the fact that, of course, the media are themselves part of our world, it is therefore justified to maintain the basic difference of self- vs. heteroreference.”

Wolf (2009:19) explains self-referentiality as usually non-accidental, signs pointing or referring in various ways to “(aspects of) themselves or to other signs and sign configurations within one and the same semiotic system or ‘type’ of which they are part or ‘token’ rather than to (an element of) reality outside the sign (system).” Hence self-reference is a reference that reflects on itself or its system of communication. Yet, Wolf (2009:24) also contends that signs are never entirely self- or heteroreferential, but rather a hybrid of these two forms of reference. It is, however, the predominance of the one or the other that suggests an opposition: “who has ever read a metafictional novel which did not also tell some sort of heteroreferential story?” We can thus declare that the distinction between self- and heteroreference is not a binary, but a continuum.

In light of this distinction between different forms of reference, Wolf (2009:31), therefore comes up with the following definition for “metareference” (italics in the original):

It is a special, transmedial form of usually non-accidental self-reference produced by signs or sign configurations which are (felt to be) located on a logically higher level, a ‘meta-level’, within an artefact or performance; this self-reference, which can extend from this artefact to the entire system of the media, forms or implies a statement about an object-level, namely on (aspects of) the medium/system referred to. Where metareference is properly understood, an at least minimal corresponding ‘meta-awareness’ is elicited in the recipient, who thus becomes conscious of both the medial

⁷ In this study, “metareference” will be used interchangeably with “metafiction,” “metatext,” “metadrama,” and “metatheatre” – where appropriate.

(or ‘fictional’ in the sense of artificial and, sometimes in addition, ‘invented’) status of the work under discussion and the fact that media-related phenomena are at issue, rather than (hetero-) references to the world outside the media.

Metareference is consequently a phenomenon which comments on, not only the artefact or performance in which it occurs, but also on all other media. Transmedial metareference, for example, is a dialogue “between different media such as, for example, narrating text and photography” (Seeber, 2009:438). Seeber (2009:438-439) views this as a form of implicit metareference “since it assumes and triggers awareness of what the different media are and what their cooperation can possibly achieve.” Nevertheless, Hauthal (2009:570) points out that intermedial references do not necessarily reflect on both the medium they refer to and the medium in which they occur.

Metareference also disrupts the illusion that the artefact or performance in question presents a self-contained reality, by drawing attention to its fictional and medial status. Hutcheon (1984: xii), however, describes this illusion-breaking as a metafictional paradox. While reading reflexive literature, the reader is distanced from the fictional world, but is simultaneously mindful of their own role as reader – since the reader (or spectator) is always a mediating presence (Hutcheon, 1984:141).

2.4.3.2. Conditions of metareference

Limoges (2009:397-401) distinguishes five conditions relevant to the degree of illusion-breaking in self-reflexive devices. The first is perceptibility. Sometimes, a perceptive spectator might notice self-reflection where it was not intended, and vice versa (Limoges, 2009:397-398). Hutcheon (1984:7) makes use of the terms “overt” and “covert” to distinguish between explicit examples of self-reflection and implicit self-reflection, which is not always perceptible. It is important to remember that although a shrewd spectator may discern unintended metareference, metareferential illusion-breaking always remains fictional (Hutcheon, 1984:46-47). As Wolf (2009:31) states in his definition, metareference must be non-accidental.

In other words, an astute spectator could, for example, pick up covert metareference in film about a man struggling through a divorce, whose son is incidentally a photographer. The

main theme of the film would be divorce, although the profession followed by a supporting character could point to intermedial self-reference. If this astute spectator, however, also notices that the camera crew is accidentally reflected in a mirror in the divorced man's new home, and is therefore reminded that he or she is watching a film, it is not metareference, for the illusion is therefore actually – not fictionally – broken.

The second condition relevant to the degree of illusion-breaking is the context of reception. Certain contexts stabilise or destabilise aesthetic illusion. In academic discourse there are, for example, no more “innocent” readings (Limoges, 2009:398-399), and therefore the aesthetic illusion of a work being researched or taught at a university would already be destabilised. Thirdly, certain genres require a higher level of immersion in a fictional world – such as thrillers or suspense dramas. Genres, such as comedy or the musical, require lower levels of immersion, and therefore often utilise metareferential techniques in a playful manner (Limoges, 2009:399-400).

Limoges' (2009:400-401) fourth condition is the modality of occurrence. When a self-reflexive device is used only at the end of a novel, film or play, the illusion is broken to a greater degree, because the reader or spectator must now re-interpret everything he or she has seen so far. If such a device is employed at the beginning of the novel, film, or play, it becomes part of the spectator's “horizon of expectations” and therefore does not disrupt the illusion to such a great extent.

Lastly, motivation is also a condition relevant to the degree of illusion-breaking. Sometimes metareferential devices may be absorbed into the diegesis of a literary work, resulting in minimal illusion-breaking. The device of looking directly into the camera is, for example, a familiar metareferential device in film, the most well-known example probably being Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977). This device can, conversely, be used to strengthen the aesthetic illusion as in Ricky Gervais' television series *The Office* (2001-2003). The style of this series is reminiscent of a documentary: scenes filmed with a hand-held or sometimes shaky camera are interjected by interviews with the characters to strengthen the (fictitious) idea that actual events are portrayed in the series.

2.4.3.3. Forms of metareference

Clearly, metareference can take different forms and have different functions in different media. Wolf (2009:37-38) distinguishes the following forms: intracompositional versus extracompositional; explicit versus implicit; fictio versus fictum; and critical versus non-critical. Intracompositional metareferences refer directly to the works in which they occur. A novelist may, for example, comment on his or her style or ability to give a convincing picture of actuality such as Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1981:3) which begins with the following sentence: "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*." Extracompositional metareference, on the other hand, includes "parodies of pre-existing works, but also meta-remarks that are not, or do not seem to be, immediately applicable to the work in which they occur" (Wolf, 2009:39), such as references to the character, Briony Tallis', profession as a novelist, in Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* (2001).

While explicit metareference *denotes* metareference, implicit metareference often contains deviations from usual conventions, which, as a result, point to their contrivance. For example, Amanda Palmer's song for the Dresden Dolls, *Coin-operated boy* (2003), is explicitly metareferential, since the lyrics to the bridge read: "this bridge was written / to make you feel smittener," while a sentence-long chapter in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760-1767) is implicitly metareferential since it is unconventional, and therefore interrogates the convention of dividing novels into chapters (Wolf, 2009:40).

Fictio-metareference, on the other hand, is centred on mediality while fictum-metareference is concerned with the truth-value of the work under discussion. Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1948:3) is therefore a form of fictio-metareference, since the character Tom explains the use of certain devices to the audience: "I am the narrator of the play, and also a character in it." Ian McEwan, on the other hand, writes his novel, *Sweet Tooth* (2012), as the autobiographical novel of the character Thomas Haley. The novel is set in the 1970s and ends with the recommendation that the tale it tells should not be published for at least 30 years, suggesting that the novel the reader holds in his or her hands is indeed the novel that Haley writes. Wolf (2009:41) states that "in all cases, metareference by definition implies a statement on, and elicits the idea of, mediality and the ontological artefact status of

the work in question.” Fictum-metareference need not always focus on fictionality in the sense of invention, but can also suggest truthfulness: “in this form, the common meaning of the term ‘fictionality’ frequently comes to bear, namely a certain relation of the work to reality.” Hutcheon (1984:117) also remarks in this regard that

...there is a two-way pull of contradictory impulses in regarding the language of fiction – for both writer and reader there is the impulse to communicate and so to treat language as a means (to order as well as to meaning), and there is also the impulse to make an artifact [*sic*] out of the linguistic materials and so to treat the medium as an end.

Therefore, a work of fiction might either use language to create a seemingly pristine microcosm, or utilise itself to point out the inability of creating such a microcosm through language.

The last form, critical versus non-critical metareference, entails whether or not the text is critical of itself. It may be used to suggest that the story one reads is authentic (as in the example of *Sweet Tooth* above) or it might explain certain aesthetic conventions (as in *The Glass Menagerie*) (Wolf, 2009:43). In both these cases the metareference is thus non-critical. Eco (1983a:19), on the other hand, describes his own difficulty in narration, in finding an authentic voice in which to narrate his *The Name of the Rose* (1983b). He confesses to needing a “mask” with which to narrate. Therefore, he encased his narrative inside three other narratives: “I am saying what Vallet said that Mabillon said that Adso said...” (Eco, 1983a:20). Without this mask, Eco’s narration would seem insincere, since “every story tells a story that has already been told.” By conceding that his story is not original, through the mask of four narratives, Eco is paradoxically able to narrate “authentically,” and this metareference is therefore critical.

2.4.3.4. Functions of metareference

Wolf (2009:65-70) furthermore distinguishes various functions of metareference which he categorises under work-centred, author-centred, recipient-centred and context functions. “Work-centred functions” foreground the frame of the fictional work (in the case of theatre, the fourth wall), since the classification of the work as ‘art’ “can generally confer value on the

work on question (or disparage other works)” (Wolf, 2009:65-66). This function includes self-praise and claims of authenticity, interpreting the work as interesting or amusing, points of criticism at other works, self-criticism and foregrounding certain aspects of the work’s production, structure and reception (Wolf, 2009:66).

“Author-centred functions” on the other hand include a revelation of the author as intellectual or capable of amusing devices, or may be a means of experimenting with a medium. They may also educate recipients or comment on the products and personalities of the author’s colleagues (Wolf, 2009:66-67).

Furthermore, “recipient-centred functions” include the undermining of immersion and destruction of the aesthetic illusion; however, as mentioned above: “the basic distancing effect of metareference can at least in part be overruled, in particular in non-critical forms, and sometimes leads to the stabilization of aesthetic illusion” (Wolf, 2009:67). These may therefore also function to provide entertainment and amusement, satisfy ludic desires and gratify intellectual stimulus.

The “context function” makes a contribution to the tendency of semiospheres to become self-reflexive, which is an indication of a crisis in representation, a contribution to increased media-literacy and the further development of arts and media by reflecting on them. It also contributes to the theoretical discussion of fundamental cultural and epistemological issues, such as differentiating reality from fiction, “an issue of particular topicality in our ‘hypermediated culture’ and the current ‘precession of simulacra’ as discussed by Jean Baudrillard” (Wolf, 2009:70). Hutcheon (1984: xi-xii) also views this as an important function of metafiction, since “it can teach us much about both the ontological status of fiction (all fiction) and also the complex nature of reading (all reading).”

Metareference is consequently also able to explore verbal language and question how to acquire and represent knowledge. Lastly, metareference may acknowledge the impact of media on ourselves and our culture. Although realist fiction and metafiction seem to be in direct opposition with regard to the illusion created in literature, this opposition is problematic within the postmodern context. While a realist text generally does not refer to the fact that it is a text but metatexts do, these two terms may, rather, be regarded as two opposing ends on a continuum (Figure.1). The extent to which a text is self-reflexive increases from left to right

This plurisignation is further increased by the different meanings actors convey to the audience, fictionally to the characters on stage, and also by each audience member's unique interpretation of the play. In the words of Edward Albee (in Bigsby, 1980:196), "no two audiences see the same piece, no two members of an audience allow themselves the same opportunities; they are always in different places."

As in life, meaning in theatre is therefore exceptionally unstable. According to Bigsby (1980:196), theatre incorporates the contingent more easily than the novel and is rather notorious for this contingency, as is evident from the premise of Mel Brooks' 1968 film, *The Producers* (remade in 2005 by Susan Stroman). In this film, two theatre producers purposely try to produce an unsuccessful Broadway musical, in a scheme to con their investors out of their money. They choose to produce the politically incorrect musical, "Springtime for Hitler," which was sure to offend audiences and ensure a financial flop. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, the flamboyant director has to step in on opening night and portray the lead role of Hitler. His excessively camp acting sends the musical up. The audience interprets it as an unflattering parody of Hitler and, to the producers' consternation, the show becomes very popular.

The film illustrates that, just as language does not describe an objective world, but takes part in its creation, theatre does not reflect life, but as Hornby (1986:17) states, operates within it, adding to the complexity with which it communicates. McGrath (1981:5) explains that when one wants to investigate how theatre communicates, one should take into account not only the various levels Bogatyrev (1976:42) mentions, but also the nature of the audience, the social, geographic and physical nature of the venue, the price and availability of tickets and factors such as how the show was publicised and the distance to the nearest pub. In the plot of *The Producers*, the recasting of the lead actor radically modifies the anticipated reception of the play within the film.

This is often the case in theatre, as Carlson (1989:86) describes:

Every actor or director can recall instances when an audience created a meaning for a line or action not at all intended by the producers – and audiences have been known to wrest interpretive control entirely and openly from expected patterns, treating a presumed serious work, for example, as stimulus to laughter.

And yet, although theatre is perceived in the same way that the actual world is, it is also carefully controlled and rehearsed, unlike the actual world. Theatre has “no first time, no origin, but only recurrence and reproduction” (Blau in Carlson, 2004:149-150). Hence it does not consist of a final product, but of a series of repetitions which may occur on various levels. Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953) is, for example, set in 1692. Its performance implies a recreation of that time period and milieu in costume, décor and props. This drama has undergone several revivals where each revival is a recreation, not only of the fictional time period, but also of the text. Furthermore, each performance in the run of a specific production of the text is a recreation of that first production. Although highly unstable, theatre is thus to a certain extent also unspontaneous and therefore “unreal” or very obviously representational.

In consequence there are two forces simultaneously at work in the way meaning is conveyed in theatre. Using centripetal force, theatre makers assert a level of control over the production to ensure a valid interpretation by its audience. Yet, the fact that theatre is performed live, wrests this control from them in a centrifugal manner.

As a result this conflict in interpretive control explains the ambiguity regarding realism or naturalism in theatre. Theatre’s plurisignation, which allows it materially to resemble actuality, makes it a suitable genre for realism. As Wake (2013:106) notes, theatre does not merely use realist narration (diegesis), but also realist imitation (mimesis).⁸ According to Begley (2012:338), “drama bears a distinct and intimate relation to material reality.” Props and décor may accordingly be used to create a *mise en scene* which is verisimilar to the actual world. Yet, this is easily able to be used to “flesh out and naturalize” a perspective, which is ideologically inclined.

According to Barthes (1972:261), theatre’s polyphony merely makes it *appear* real. Reinert (2010:214) describes this conflict between contingency and control in the theatre of Ibsen as follows:

What may appear as an arbitrary collage of things and words is a device for authenticating as pristine reality the author’s artful design. Smalltalk turns out to mean something, and stage props signify beyond their looks. But the talk still sounds small and the doors and chairs and hats and shawls look like their real life counterparts. They are illusions of the actual.

⁸ Here the word “mimesis” should be taken to refer to that which can be visually observed by the audience, or *shown*, rather than verbally recounted, or *told*.

Therefore, despite – or possibly because of – the instability of meaning in theatre; that which is presented to the audience is carefully manipulated, although this contrivance may easily be hidden due to theatre’s material reality, which in turn leads to its double ontological status.

2.5.1.2. The duplexity of theatre

According to Eversmann (2004:141) theatre is simultaneously produced and received, and therefore encompasses what Calderwood (1971:12) refers to as a duplexity. This feature of theatre entails that it contains, in Goffman’s (1974:10) sense, different “worlds” or “frames.” The actual frame includes actors, décor and props, while the fictional contains characters in their environment. Every object or person on stage therefore possesses a double ontological status by both presenting and representing. An actor presents him or herself in their occupation by appearing on stage, but also represents a fictional character. While the audience usually forms part of the actual frame, its members can sometimes be included in the fictional frame, depending on how firmly the aesthetic illusion (or fourth wall) is kept in place.

For Elam (2002:50), the duplexity of theatre is easily evident in the architecture of the performance space (Figure. 2). The stage is a space distinguished by certain markers which separate the actual from the fictional. These markers might include a raised platform and curtains, or even just an adequate distance demarcating the “audience area” (which usually implies the actual frame) and the “acting area” (implying the fictional frame). Filmer (2008:160), however, points out that the backstage area of a theatre also suggests the distinction between these frames, albeit in a more nuanced manner. Between the green room, dressing rooms and the stage, there are the wings: “the space offstage on either side of the acting area” (Law, 2011:548). Filmer (2008:160-161) describes a performer’s experience of this space as follows:

A performer’s journey through the wings involves a transition from one state of being to another, moving from a relatively certain space of everyday activity into a relatively uncertain space in which every action is framed as meaningful. Richard Schechner has characterized this move from offstage to onstage as a ‘leap:’ “The warm-up takes place on the ordinary-life side, preparing the performer for the leap, giving the performer the courage to jump into the performance.”

Schechner (in Filmer, 2008:160-161) makes a pronounced distinction between the actual frame and the fictional frame from the actor's point of view. Theatre's duplexity therefore applies to both spectator and performer. The wings serve as a liminal space for the actor in which he or she is caught between their everyday lives and the altered state of acting which includes heightened concentration, engagement and action.⁹

Although audiences are always aware of the duplexity of theatre, the ontological demarcation between the actual and fictional is not always clear. Klimek (2009:177) points out that because drama is performed live, it particularly invites "metalepsis-like confusions between reality and fiction." Actors sometimes make mistakes which they are obliged to hide from the audience by integrating these into the play through improvisation. Therefore, spectators can never be sure if what they see was intended by the performers or not. They may even mistake actual events for fictional ones and either realise their mistake later, or not realise it at all. Klimek (2009:177) cites the bizarre example of a performance at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre in October 2002. Chechen rebels took the cast and audience hostage and several of the audience members took the "masked, armed men that ran onto the stage for actors in the military play they were watching."

Interestingly, Billington (1996:313) mentions the opposite situation occurring in London in 1996. Members of a theatre company consisting of London-based Kurdish actors were rehearsing Harold Pinter's *Mountain Language* in a community centre in north London. When local residents noticed the actors in their military costumes, carrying prop weapons, they mistook them for Turkish terrorists about to attack the Kurdish community centre. The residents contacted the police; the actors were taken into custody and interrogated before the police realised their mistake.

The fact that even authorities such as the police confuse the actual and the fictional, when taken out of context, illustrates how readily the distinction between the two can be blurred, despite the fact that the audience is aware of the duplexity of theatre. It also points to the fact that although the actual could aid the fictional in performance, it may also contradict it.

⁹ Without discussing theories of acting in superfluous detail, it would be relevant to mention that most actors find a balance between two extremes of complete identification with a character and complete distance from it, regardless of his or her approach (whether following Brecht or Stanislavski). According to Hernandi (1976:126), "the kind of balance he strikes will be appropriate to his individual talent and the prevailing literary and theatrical tradition of his day." Thus, not even the stage necessarily represents a purely fictional space.

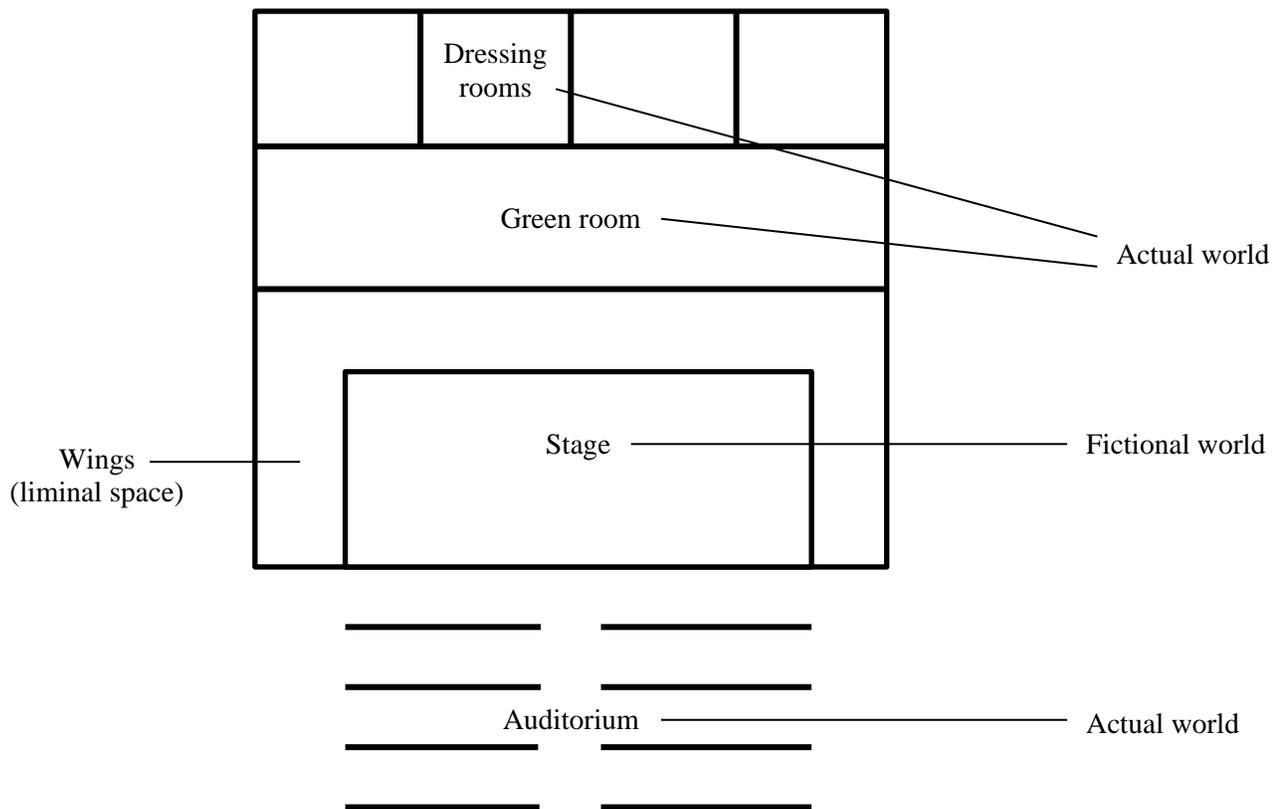


Figure. 2: The architecture of the performance space showing a separation between areas representing the actual and fictional worlds.

2.5.1.3. The actual frame running with or against the fictional

Theatre, therefore, represents a fictional world which resembles the actual world in its corporeality, while its (theatre's) corporeality may also at times contradict this fictional world. States (1985:377-378) observes that some things retain a "high degree of self-givenness" even in a fictional context on stage. These include clocks, fire, animals and children. Their uncontrollable dynamism lies in the fact that there are things which cannot be imitated. Although stage technology has progressed to the point where clocks could be manipulated to

follow fictional time instead of actual time, a living animal or child can still only be realistically represented by themselves.¹⁰

Just as fictional nudity can only be realistically represented by actual nudity, certain actions such as kissing or eating have to be performed in actuality. In a 2012 Afrikaans version of Keren Tahor and Fresco Theatre Company's play, "Jutro" (unpublished), the Jewish character, Mina, is seen eating pork sausage as she tries to survive during World War II. When another character, Janusz, points out to her that she is eating pork, the script instructs the actress to pause or stop chewing and then to slowly swallow as this realisation dawns on her. In this production, director Gérard Rudolf wanted to emphasise the moral crisis that the character experienced in this action and to dramatise how her survival instinct in the end trumps any moral qualms. She therefore did not only pause, but spat the sausage out in her hand and, after an excruciating deliberation, ate it with some disgust. Of course, there is no way of imitating this action without having the actress spit chewed salami out into her hand and then eat it – an action which could surely provoke a feeling of nausea, not only in the actress, but also in the audience. Both actress and character thus experience feelings of disgust, albeit due to squeamishness or moral qualms. Hence this is a situation where a fictional act elicits a real physical response, due to the corporeality of the representation.

Karen Finley's play "The Theory of Total Blame" (1989, unpublished) elicits a similar response. This play, a wry parody on the traditional homecoming narrative, shows a mother, Irene, preparing a meal for her family. This ritual, however, becomes a source of disgust as Irene mixes random items she "grabs from the refrigerator" into unappetising messes. She uses her hands to prepare these mixtures, and her body – as well as the stage area – becomes increasingly soiled (Hart, 1996:114). Finley makes use of the "mechanisms of disgust" that this arouses in her audience to subvert ideas about the female body as a "sexually evocative signifier" (Geis, 1996:168).¹¹

¹⁰ Sometimes, of course, children can be represented by dolls as a deliberate non-realist device, as in Charles Mee's *Orestes 2.0* (1992). For a child character to blend in with a realist play, he or she would have to be represented by an actual child. In the South African production of Athol Fugard's latest play, *The Shadow of the Hummingbird* (2014), for example, the 24 year old Marvianto Baker portrayed a 10 year old boy. Baker's character was incongruous with the realist style of the play and a child actor might have been more convincing (see Fick, 2014).

¹¹ See also Brown (1992) for a discussion on how Hanoch Levin uses the mechanisms of disgust to blur the boundary between the actual and the fictional in his political plays.

Theatre thus provides the means for an audience – and actors – to experience actual reactions that coincide with the fictional world. There is, however, yet another level on which actors experience a performance physically. Stage fright refers to the feelings of anxiety or nervousness typically experienced by performers, right before and/or during a show. These often manifest themselves in an increased heart rate, shaky and sweaty hands, blushing, nausea, a dry mouth or tingling feeling in the limbs. According to Aaron (1986: ix), stage fright is not a mere inconvenient side effect or occupational hazard of performance but integrally part of it. Performers have linked shows lacking in energy and tension to an absence of stage fright; therefore, they often increase the uncertainty and danger in the theatre through playing tricks on each other in order to test their degree of control and reassess their own creativity (Filmer, 2008:164).

Yet, this very real and bodily experience also demonstrates how theatre is very definitely removed from the actual world. While actual feelings of disgust often coincide with the fictional world, stage fright sets the actor apart from his or her character, since the character presumably does not experience these physical symptoms in any given play. Hence, for example, Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962) opens with a drunken couple, George and Martha, returning home after a party. Doubtlessly, these characters are not experiencing a dry mouth, sweaty palms or increased heart rate and tingling in their limbs, while the actors who portray them very possibly do.

Therefore, although theatre's corporeality involves a confusion and blending of the real and the actual, the notion that events on stage are more "real" because they resemble the actual world through ostension is false. According to Hamilton (1982:41), the ontological status of a signifier does not necessarily alter the ontological status of the performance. A fictional room represented by brick and plaster is – after all – no more actual than one represented by plywood and paint. Being necessarily fictional, real objects and people as a result behave as images on stage (Rozik, 1999:202). Theatre therefore simultaneously sustains and destroys the illusion of authenticity.

2.5.2. Experiments in eliminating the actual and fictional in theatre

Nonetheless, we may ask: is the presence of both actual and fictional frames necessary in theatre? In the twentieth century various theatre practitioners and theorists experimented with the aesthetic distance between the fictional and the actual. As Büdel (1961:281) observes, there has been a tendency either to “overdistance” or “underdistance” the aesthetic of theatre. To Sartre (1976:143), the meaning of theatre is the following: “its essential value is the representation of something which does not exist.” Therefore, he regards the aesthetic distance between the actual and the fictional as theatre’s greatest strength, and favours overdistance:

While there can be no doubt that this is one of the principles of theater, I think we should never underestimate this distance; whether we are author, actor, or producer, we should not try to reduce it, but should exploit it and show it as it actually is, even manipulate it. (Sartre, 1976:12)

For this reason, Sartre (1976:145-146) insists that theatre destroys itself in happenings and docudrama which aim to merge the actual and fictional worlds. According to Sartre (in Ben Chaim, 1984:19), the distance between the actual and the fictional permits vulnerability in the audience, and its members can thus be reached in ways which would be impossible if their usual defences were up. Sartre (in Ben Chaim, 1984:16) asserts that increased distance leads to increased imaginative involvement: the aesthetic object only appears when the audience member is completely absorbed in the fictional world and loses his or her “awareness of self” (Sartre, 1976:9). However he does contradict himself when he claims that involvement in either of these frames is mutually exclusive. His theory thus becomes vague, as the circumstances under which an audience member become involved in the fictional world are unclear (Ben Chaim, 1984:20). Interestingly, Sartre’s views of the fictional frame as harmless contrast with Genet’s who views the entanglement of art and life (such as in theatre) as “a dangerous game [...] which affords no safe haven” (Sheaffer-Jones, 2007:50).

Brecht’s well-known theory of *verfremdung* also favours overdistance, but – unlike Sartre who wishes to pull his audience into the fictional world – Brecht wants to avoid emotional identification with the character, and thus keeps his audience in the actual frame (Ben Chaim, 1984:28). Brecht (1968:91) insists that the actor should not merge with the subject he or she is portraying: “the object of this ‘effect’ is to allow the spectator to criticize

constructively from a social point of view.” Brecht (1968:86) explains that an actor should act with the detachment of an eyewitness of a car accident, who demonstrates what he or she saw. The actors and audience should therefore remain in the actual frame, and Brecht (1968:85) uses projections on the cyclorama as well as time breaks between scenes to block emotions and give the audience time to make judgements. Later in his career, Brecht nevertheless did decide to use the emotion that his plays inevitably evoked (Ben Chaim, 1984:34).

Whereas Sartre and Brecht insist on the distinction between the actual and the fictional frames, Grotowski and Artaud attempt to diminish this distance through underdistance. For Grotowski, “the core of theatre is the communion between actor and spectator” (Kumiega, 1982:193). Therefore, Grotowski (in Ben Chaim, 1984:39-40) tries to do away with the supposed psychological protection of the theatre for both actors and the audience. He enquires, “to what extent can theatrical activity successfully eliminate the manipulative elements in the director/actor/audience relationship and still remain theatre?” (Kumiega, 1982:196). He believes that an actor should reveal his or her inner self to the audience and tries to shock the audience members in order to reveal their outer masks of artificiality. Although Grotowski succeeded in eliminating the distance between the actual and the fictional frames, this search for sincerity took him beyond the realm of art and into that of ritual (Ben Chaim, 1984:39-40):

We noted that when we eliminate certain blocks and obstacles what remains is what is most elementary and most simple – what exists between human beings when they have a certain confidence between each other, and when they look for an understanding that goes beyond the understanding of words... Precisely at that point one does not perform any more... One day we found it necessary to eliminate the notion of theatre (an actor in front of a spectator) and what remained was a notion of meeting – not a daily meeting and not a meeting that took place by chance... (Grotowski in Kumiega, 1982:200)

Artaud also wanted to thrust theatre into real life (Ben Chaim, 1984:40). He insists that the spectator should not only observe the theatrical spectacle, but should also experience it aurally and sensually and – like Sartre – that theatre should consequently exploit that which makes it different from other genres (Ben Chaim, 1984:41). Artaud thus aimed for theatre to break through language and touch life (Andrucki, 1990:294). He (1968:57) envisioned a language of theatre which should ultimately break

...away from the intellectual subjugation of the language, by conveying the sense of a new and deeper intellectuality which hides itself beneath the gestures and signs, raised to the dignity of particular exorcisms.

Artaud (1968:55) also emphasised that theatre was subjugated to the text and wanted “to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought.” Derrida, however accused Artaud of prejudice against the written word in his attempts to free theatre from the text (Meisner & Mounsef, 2011). In addition, Ben Chaim (1984:40) points out that although Artaud’s theories are of value, his application of them never succeeded in practice. Roberts (2007:37) describes Artaud’s impossible attempt to merge the actual and fictional as follows:

The theatre of cruelty, more exactly, the idea of a theatre without representation, signifies the impossible attempt to banish God from the scene by destroying this structure of reduplication and repetition. Artaud’s paradoxical dream of an originary representation of pure self-identical presence cannot escape the closed circle of representation.

Nonetheless, theatre practitioners still continue to test and contest the distinction between the actual and the fictional in theatre. Like Grotowski, some feminist theatre practitioners wish to free theatre from the supposedly patriarchal hierarchy of director/actor/audience by staging the “real” stories of “real” women. When discussing the prevalence of autobiographical monodrama on American stages, Greenfield (2006:168) explains America’s preference for so-called “real” stories also as an obsession with the actual as opposed to the fictional, as discussed in Chapter One. According to Sierz (2008:102) this phenomenon also prevails in Britain:

Today, given the anxieties created by the digital age’s affront to old and established views of reality, and to the ongoing global uncertainties unleashed by the War on Terror, the British public’s desire for reality is more intense than ever – and this is manifested not only in a seemingly insatiable appetite for reality TV, but also in a need to be assured that the best theatre is somehow “real,” explanation enough perhaps for the current vogue for verbatim drama.

However, in an essay entitled “True stories: Spalding Gray and the authenticity of performance,” Sayre (1999) describes how Gray’s performance highlights exactly the impossibility of, firstly, completely eliminating the fictional frame in theatre and, secondly,

presenting an authentic self in an autobiographical performance. He describes two autobiographical performance pieces by Gray, *Swimming to Cambodia* (1985) and *Monster in a box* (1992). In these performances, which Sayre (1999:255) refers to as “the real thing,” Gray recounts events in his own life such as acting in the film, *The Killing Fields* (1984) and his mother’s suicide. Nevertheless, Sayre (1999:259) also explains the difficulty in locating the “real” Spalding Gray in these performances:

So there is, in the Spalding Gray we see in performance, something of the “real” Spalding Gray, or at any rate, the Spalding Gray that Spalding Gray thinks he is, but also present before us are the “character” he wishes to project, the Spalding Gray his director, Elizabeth LeCompte, sees, and the Spalding Gray she makes use of to create the play. We have, on the one hand, lost the “original” Gray in a proliferation of performing persona.

No matter how close Gray’s performances are to his actual life, his “original” self is lost in performance.

Max Frisch has also experimented with autobiographical theatre in his *Biography: a play* (1969). According to Jurgensen (2007:104) this play is set in a theatre: “it is important to bear in mind that throughout the play the location remains the stage, or, as Frisch so succinctly puts it, ‘a place completely identical with itself.’” Still, this play to a large extent expresses the impossibility of representing authentic life, since the world cannot be reproduced: “however theatre projects itself, it is art” (Frisch in Jurgensen, 2007:106).

Schmidt (2013:16) also describes a performance named “Entitled” (2011) by the UK theatre company, Quarantine. In this performance, the production manager comes onstage and narrates the process of rigging as if in anticipation of a performance that never arrives. The production manager and crew thus perform exactly the same actions they normally would, with two exceptions: the production manager is narrating the process and there is an audience present. Because of this explicit theatrical frame, Schmidt (2013:17) argues that these actions are in fact not really labour – as they would be without the theatrical frame – but mimesis: “the theatre [...] may be a place where we can give up our desire for the real because it will never deliver it.”

In addition, postdramatic theatre¹² fails to do away with the fictional frame in theatre. Wake (2013:110) describes how Ros Horin's testimonial theatre piece, *Through the Wire* (2004, unpublished) blurs the lines between the fictional and the actual. This work recounts the experiences of asylum seekers in Australia, devised in collaboration with actual asylum seekers. Horin confuses the actual and the fictional by using such rhetorical devices as presenting dialogue as "less structured, more scattered" to seem less rehearsed and more "authentic." She also uses paratextual devices, such as having actors related to the actual asylum seekers or the asylum seekers themselves, play the characters. Lastly, she also uses realist casting techniques, such as avoiding any role doubling and having a strong iconic similarity between the actor and character (Wake, 2013:111). Yet, through the repetition of performance, even these autobiographical accounts become scripted (Wake, 2013:109). The idea of "documentary theatre" is in consequence an oxymoron, since theatre is inherently resistant to non-fiction, due to its repetitive nature. Schmidt (2005:65) argues that "postmodern drama unveils the deceptive character of presence" and that "unmediated action" is only ever able to be an illusion.

For reasons such as these, Auslander (1995:181) describes the postdramatic as a knee-jerk suspicion of the text which caused a false polarity between devised (as actual) and text based (as fictional) performance. Meisner and Mounsef (2011:89) assert that a devised form does not necessarily ensure innovation or authenticity while a text based form does not necessarily ensure conservatism, as is often claimed (see also Jones, 2011). According to Hornby (1986:13), although people call a text "realistic" when it reminds them of the actual world, no fictional world is more or less "real" than any other, since – as we have concluded above – all fiction exists on the same ontological level or, as Schonmann (2002:145) puts it, "when the distance has disappeared, there is no art."

For Bigsby (1980:188), "the fictive quality of drama is in a sense inescapable." He compares theatre's fictivity to a crustacean's skeleton that is always worn on the outside. In theatre, any imaginative processes are externalised and mediated by actors, the director and the *mise en scène*:

¹² Postdramatic theatre may refer either to drama which deconstructs traditional, text based drama, or drama which avoids being text based (Meisner & Mounsef, 2011:90-91).

With movies, the screen vanishes as soon as the image appears and so, to a degree, does the audience since with no possibility of feedback it has no role to play. With theatre the stage remains clearly in evidence and the audience recognises its own role in the events. The film maker can choose to foreground technique [...]. But with theatre that foregrounding is inescapable. The only option is to emphasise it or work to diminish it.

And, as was maintained above, even if the aesthetic distance in theatre can be diminished, it cannot be eliminated, and the fact that drama is thus “honest” about its fictionality makes theatre more truthful than real life, which generally hides its artifice (Homan, 1989:13; Balme, 2008:90-91). According to Reinert (2010:218), expressionism, epic and the absurd theatre have changed the way we approach theatre. Since these movements, “the Aristotelian theatre has fallen into disuse.” Post-Aristotelian theatre conforms to the ethical concept that theatre should “be honest enough to own up to its own nature and flaunt, rather than conceal, its status” as either a “simulation of the actual” or “deliberate refusal to seem lifelike at all,” resulting in the present prevalence of metatheatre.

2.5.3. Metatheatre

2.5.3.1. Definition

It is interesting to note that, even if theatre practitioners take theatre’s fictionality as a given, the dialectic between the actual and the fictional, or the duplexity of theatre, remains an important theme in theatre. Perception (Hornby, 1986:121) and reflexivity (Boireau, 1997: xii) are always major features there. Hornby (1986:31) and Schmidt (2005:31) insist that theatre is always concerned with its own form and is therefore always metatheatrical, even if merely to a very small degree.

Lionel Abel’s book *Metatheatre: a new view of dramatic form* (1963) remains seminal in any study of metatheatre, although it is outdated. Abel (1963:59) defines “metatheatre” as follows:

Only certain plays tell us at once that the happenings and character in them are of the playwright’s invention, and that insofar as they were discovered – where there is invention there also has to be discovery – they were found by the playwright’s imagination rather than by his observation of the world. Such plays have truth in them,

not because they convince us of real occurrences or existing persons, but because they show the reality of the dramatic imagination, instanced by the playwright's and also by that of his characters. Of such plays it may indeed be said: "The play's the thing."

Abel clearly identifies the main characteristic of metatheatre as self-reflexivity and also links its acknowledgement in this regard to truthfulness in the sense that metatheatre is written with "full disclosure" about its own ontological status. Abel (1963:77) continues, suggesting that metatheatre might replace tragedy as preferred dramatic genre. Tragedy has lost its prominence in this regard since it depends on the audience's acceptance of some "implacable values as true," a stance that has become naïve in a Western imagination which regards "*all* implacable values as false." The full disclosing metadrama, about life "seen as already theatricalized", is consequently, according to Abel (1963:60), a suitable substitute for tragedy whose characters are unaware "of their own theatricality."

For Abel (1963:79) metatheatre relies on the fundamental concept that illusion becomes inseparable from reality; he distinguishes two assumptions of metatheatre: firstly, metatheatre suggests that the world is a stage, and secondly, that life is a dream. There is therefore also a fantastical element to metatheatre:

For in this kind of play fantasy is essential, it is what one finds at the heart of reality. In fact, one could say that the metaplay is to ordinary fantasy as tragedy is to melodrama. As in tragedy the misfortunes of the hero must be necessary and not accidental, so in the metaplay life *must* be a dream and the *world* must be a stage. (Abel, 1963:79)

Adler (1980-1981:355) adds to Abel's two assumptions of metatheatre a third: that the "audience is consciously forced into a recognition of themselves *as audience*." Even so, these assumptions do not help us to further define the significance of the prevalence of metatheatre in postmodern drama. Because he treats metatheatre as a genre on its own, rather than as an element that may be found in drama across genres, his criteria are rather vague. Jernigan (2004:310) also finds this definition problematic and points out how Abel merely describes certain features of metatheatre, such as the sense that the world is a projection of human consciousness and the unwillingness of the imagination to regard any view of the world as ultimate, without any claims that metatheatre is simply "theater that takes theater as its subject." Jernigan therefore considers Worthen's (1995:1189) definition more satisfactory,

which regards 'metatheatre' as "a term used to describe plays that self-consciously comment on the process of theater, and so treat the relationship between theater and life."

Jernigan (2004:293) furthermore regards Abel's approach to metatheatre inappropriate for use in literary studies and quotes Quigley (1985:268), whose attitude is more useful, despite the fact that he is "apprehensive of the term *metatheatre*":

What is important is not to bracket these features [commonly thought of as metatheatrical] in a specific genre, nor to consign them to an independent tradition, but to establish the functions they serve in different plays in different periods, and to see in the modern period whether any change in their function can account for [the great outpouring] of works exhibiting such features in that period. This is not then a matter of isolating them for idiosyncratic attention, but of scrutinizing their interaction with other traditional and novel features of drama in the modern period.

It is therefore important to distinguish the postmodern use of metatheatrical techniques from their earlier uses. Abel (1963) traces the incidence of metadrama from Elizabethan times. As was the case with all art forms except for painting, as mentioned above, only in postmodern times has metatheatre prevailed, not only in comedy, but also in drama, with the exception of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1600).

Landfester (2007:129) links the distinction between Elizabethan and postmodern metatheatre to the disappearance of the character of the "Fool." The Fool's privilege was traditionally to reveal not only the truth, but also to show how truth is dependent on fiction: "The Fool makes it clear that there is no speaking the truth without using theatrical forms to express it, while on the other hand the form's self-conscious theatricality paradoxically serves to underscore that what is spoken is, in fact, the truth." This function becomes problematic in postmodern times where any claims to "truth" are regarded with scepticism:

While the Shakespearean metadrama had exhibited 'truth' as the knowledge that man's existence on earth was nothing but that of a puppet, the emancipation of man in the name of reason required a strict separation between playing and reality in order to establish firm ground of authenticity on which man could rely for his sense of self; that included plays being unquestionably and consistently fictitious. (Landfester, 2007:135)

The issue which, as a result, distinguishes the postmodern from the Elizabethan metatheatrical devices, such as the play within the play, is that, in postmodern plays, it becomes difficult to distinguish the represented actual from the fictional – or the inner play from the outer play

(Hornby, 1986:47). Postmodern theatre therefore calls itself, as well as the actual world, into question (Hornby, 1986:46). Consequently we can deduce from the above that, as is the case with all metareference, metatheatre performs specific functions in postmodern drama.

2.5.3.2. The function of metatheatre in postmodern drama

Although these functions are difficult to demarcate since metatheatre can literally fulfil *any* function in a drama, from asking if a transcendental reality exists to merely being comic (Klimek, 2009:177), we can distinguish two important functions. Firstly, postmodern metatheatre aims to question our perception of the world, and secondly it reflects on itself.

The first function has already been considered at length above, but the second warrants further discussion. The self-reflexivity of metatheatre is sometimes very obvious, especially in the case of the play within a play, where “the framing of the inner play exposes the existence of the author from within and, in so doing, gestures towards the actual author (of the outer play) at work” (Beus, 2007:19). However, as was pointed out by Jernigan and Adler above, the self-reflexivity of metatheatre is important, not only with regard to how theatre and performance function, but also with respect to the role of the audience. According to Sheaffer-Jones (2007:47), metatheatre “highlights above all the acts of watching and acting.” Levy (2007:165) shows how the metatheatre of Hanoch Levin, for example, indicts the Israeli community’s enthusiastic yet superficial engagement with theatre:

(self-)conscious theatricality must be regarded as a tool for enhancing deeper engagement of audiences with the stage, its theatrical events and their addressees. It necessarily involves thinking, feeling and (sometimes) acting – in theatre as well as in life. Metatheatricality also involves an ethical approach to histrionics, rather than the more habitual non-committal, sentimental, mostly commercial theatre most Westerners see. It invites free and egalitarian participation by an audience and, sometimes, it may even suggest that the playwright does not want to solely amuse us.

But, apart from critiquing its audience and affirming itself, it is important to remember that metatheatre can also critique itself (Roberts, 2007:38). Edward Albee, in his metatheatre, indicts his characters’ “mimicking of the activity of the artist as he mimicks [*sic*] that of life.” Like Stoppard, Albee is also concerned with language and the use thereof and his plays

become “a parody of the writer’s conviction that language is indeed a net which can successfully trap experience and hence reality” (Bigsby, 1980:194).

When used to fulfil these two functions, metatheatre thus pulls the audience member into the theatrical event, urging him or her to take part and so too, as an actual person, become part of the fictional event. This fictional performance then also becomes part of the audience member’s actual world; thereby, to an extent, crossing the divide between these ontological levels.

2.5.3.3. Metatheatrical strategies

Metatheatre can use various strategies or forms to fulfil these functions. Almost any convention, deviation from a convention, or intertextual reference may be metadramatic. For the purposes of this thesis, I shall focus on the conventions of the *mise en abyme*, the aesthetic of in-*yer-face* theatre, and some of the metadramatic implications of genre.

Wolf (2009:56) defines the *mise en abyme* as “the ‘mirroring’ of parts or the totality of” the frame. In other words, it is a story within a story, a play within a play or a painting within a painting. Although the *mise en abyme* may be a heteroreferential coincidence and need not be metareferential, Wolf (2009:56) asserts that it tends to be metareferential in performative media, possibly because performance implies spectators watching spectators. According to Dällenbach (1989:164), the *mise en abyme* is solely able to be a reduplication, or mirroring of an aspect or part of the text; it can be a repeated duplication *ad infinitum*, leading to an abyss of duplications, or *aporistique*, where a fragment of the text includes the text in which it is included itself.

Fischer and Greiner (2007: xi) define the play within the play as

...a theatrical device or convention, or kind of sub-genre within dramatic literature and theatrical practice. Dramaturgically speaking it describes a strategy for constructing play texts that contain, within the perimeter of their fictional reality, a second or internal theatrical performance, in which actors appear as actors who play an additional role.

The play within the play is therefore “an important means by which the interaction between art and life is re-examined” (Sheaffer-Jones, 2007:48) since it proposes to show, within a

fictional frame, a second fictional frame (twice removed from the actual spectator) and a supposedly actual frame. Reality thus “becomes a series of infinitely receding boxes within boxes” (Bigsby, 1980:188).

According to Büdel (1961:281), the play within a play not only exposes the inner workings of theatre, but also involves the audience by regarding them on the same level as the performers in the external play, thereby fulfilling metatheatres two functions as discussed above. The significance of juxtaposing the fictional and supposedly actual on stage is clear in Genet’s *The Maids* (1947) where he suggests that it is impossible to distinguish between the world outside the theatre and the world within (Curtis, 1974:34) or between play and reality. Sheaffer-Jones (2007:50-51) identifies death and make-believe as inextricable in *The Maids*:

...to a certain extent, what is already questioned [in *The Maids*] is the difference between role-play and life; that living might somehow be free of acting. Claire says: ‘What remains for us is to continue this life, take up the game again,’ to which Solange replies: ‘The game is dangerous.’ In the changing of places, roles become confused. When Claire drinks the poisoned tea as Madame, who does not drink it, is she really still acting as Madame? To what extent she is pretending is uncertain. Claire and Solange also interject their ‘real’ identities. Yet it is as if they were somehow suspended between themselves and the roles which they assume, like the tightrope walker chasing his image.

Genet thereby illustrates that, not only is it impossible for us to distinguish between the fictional and the actual and not only are we trapped within the fictional, unable to engage with the actual, but also that through play-acting, the fictional becomes the actual: fictional acts (such as drinking poisoned tea as someone else) have actual consequences (being poisoned).

A play within a play is, nevertheless often also playfully critical of itself. Esslin (1987:75) remarks how complex the separation between the internal and external plays can become:

The special attraction, for the audience, of all these variants of actors acting actors lies in the opportunity it presents for the display of various levels of “theatricality” and “naturalness,” side by side, to be compared and savoured. Are the “real” characters acted with sufficient realism to be convincing? Do the “fictional” characters give an insight into the nature of theatricality and the art of acting as an enhancement of the “natural”? And how does the author’s imagined world get coarsened by being enacted by professionals who can turn everything into convention and routine?

When a playwright embarks on self-critique in a play within a play, the interior play is consequently often a parody of either that which the playwright would have done in other circumstances, or of current theatrical conventions. Hence, in Chekhov's *The seagull* (1896), Treplyov's play and the fictional audience's reaction to it comments on the theatre-going public of Chekhov's time. Stoppard's *The real Inspector Hound* (1968), on the other hand, mocks the mystery play or thriller of its era, most notably Christie's *The mousetrap* (Carlson, 1993:431). Sometimes dramatists insert intertexts into a play to function as mise en abymes. In cases such as these, it is important to scrutinise the difference in the style of the interior and exterior plays, and – as Esslin (1987) notes above – evaluate whether or not the exterior play avoids the pitfalls which the interior does not.

The juxtaposing of different ontological levels on stage, albeit fictional in itself, accordingly provides the playwright with the means to demonstrate to his audience how they engage with theatre; however, it also presents the possibility of metalepsis, since the boundary between the actual and fictional “seems to become permeable” (Klimek, 2009:178).

Metalepsis is, a paradoxical leap “across the ‘sacred’ frontier between two ‘worlds’ within a text: the level of representation [...] and the level of what is represented” (Klimek, 2009:169). In keeping with a “realistic” aesthetic, fictitious characters are generally not supposed to know about their own ontological status (Klimek, 2009:173), but metalepsis consequently often breaks this rule, as in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1996) and Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound*.

Unlike the mise en abyme, a phenomenon spanning millennia, in-yer-face theatre is an aesthetic found mainly in British theatre in the 1990s. Its main role players were Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, and Anthony Neilson. In his book, *In-yer-face theatre: British drama today*, Sierz (2000:4) defines it as follows: “The widest definition of in-yer-face theatre is any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm.” According to Law (2011:254), in-yer-face theatre is “deliberately aggressive, confrontational, and provocative.” Law (2011:254) continues: “These works share a preoccupation with extreme mental and physical states and a desire to make the audience experience such things viscerally, rather than in a more intellectual or analytical way.” In-yer-face plays thus show shocking scenes of violence, explicit sex and

crude language, presenting sexual relationships with unprecedented frankness (Sierz, 2000:205).

Although Sierz (2002:22) interprets in-*yer-face* theatre as expressing modernist and avant-garde concerns, claiming that it is not a postmodern aesthetic, I believe that it articulates certain postmodern ideas very eloquently. Urban (2004:355) regards in-*yer-face* as rooted in Artaud's theories of the theatre of cruelty, as well as in Heidegger and Nietzsche's respective ideas about nihilism, defining it as follows: "where one expects to find something – a god, a higher power, a unity, a reason – one instead finds an absence" (Urban, 2004:365). According to Urban (2004), there is in this way a direct link between the absence of essence that Derrida (1978) refers to (and also roots in the thought of Nietzsche and Heidegger) and in-*yer-face* theatre.

In Britain, at the end of the twentieth century, in-*yer-face* theatre reacted to the prevailing realist and naturalist forms in theatre where the members of the audience function as unaffected bystanders (Kane in Sierz, 2000:115) as well as to the political stalemate caused by postmodern detachment rooted in nihilism (Tomlin, 2004:503). Tomlin (2004:499) perceives British theatre in the 1990s as preoccupied with "problems surrounding the postmodern crisis of identity." In the 1990s, there was an increasing difficulty in distinguishing between the real and the simulated: "Identity politics was no longer concerned with the disjunction between society's simulated representation – or media distortions – and the reality of those identities (mis)represented" (Tomlin, 2004:500), but, rather, with the absence of a counterpoint to these representations.

Urban (2004:355) however discerns within the detachment associated with this postmodern condition a tension between what he terms "cool" and "cruel." He regards the unifying factor in in-*yer-face* theatre as cruelty rather than violence (Urban, 2004:361). Unlike the deadlock of "cool" detachment, cruelty shocks the audience and provides the possibility of change:

Using the shock of consciousness that cruelty sets in play, the culture of cruel Britannia takes up an ethical struggle and, far from 'giving up' on political engagement or demonstrating reactionary tendencies [...], the art that aligns itself with this cruel undercurrent is invested in social concerns, in issues of life and death.

While functioning within the detachment of postmodernism (and specifically the “cool Britannia” of the 1990s), in-yer-face paradoxically also challenges its political stalemate through cruelty. Nevertheless, in-yer-face theatre takes up this “ethical struggle” without any moral framework or ideological certainty.

According to Sierz (2000:19), such theatre may therefore be identified by its explicit depictions of sex, rape, drug use and vomiting; its breaking of taboos by showing deeply private acts publicly; and by being experiential: the audience feels as if its members themselves have lived through the play. This, in turn, questions social norms:

Questioning moral norms, it affronts the ruling ideas of what can or should be shown onstage; it also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating discomfort. Crucially, it tells us more about who we really are. Unlike the type of theatre that allows us to sit back and contemplate what we see in detachment, the best in-yer-face theatre takes us on an emotional journey, getting under our skin. In other words, it is experiential, not speculative. (Sierz, 2000:4)

The in-yer-face aesthetic is therefore exclusive to theatre because live performance heightens the audience’s awareness (Sierz, 2000:7). In theatre, the audience experiences feelings of embarrassment on a much deeper level than if its members were in the privacy of their own homes. Although in-yer-face professes to shun intellectuality, the fact that it is exclusive to theatre implies a metatheatrical concern. According to Tomlin (2004:499), in-yer-face consequently also questions the efficacy of theatre as an art form in a reality where nothing exists outside of representation. The very fact that an aesthetic, which proposes to be experiential rather than cerebral, therefore turns out to voice metatheatrical concerns, exposes another paradox in its aims.

In-yer-face was initially developed to make theatre more “real” and thereby to diminish the distance between the actual and fictional. But, as Hornby (1986:112) suggests, violence and nudity on stage often result in metatheatrical effects. When an audience is confronted with the corporeality of the actors’ bodies in front of them, its members are often reminded of the fact that, apart from the characters portrayed in the drama, they are also seeing an actor.

Through its visceralness, in-yer-face theatre thus emphasises its own fictionality and prompts the audience to consider certain aspects of it intellectually. Sierz (2000:4) therefore argues, in addition, that it challenges specific binaries, such as human versus animal, clean

versus dirty, healthy versus unhealthy, normal versus abnormal, good versus evil, true versus untrue, real versus unreal, right versus wrong, just versus unjust and art versus life. Through its form, in-her-face theatre therefore metatheatrically dismantles the binaries between intellectual and visceral, as well as detached and committed, theatre.

Hutcheon (1984:71) also observes that form or structure often serve as covert metatextual devices. She singles out four models: the detective plot, fantasy, games and the erotic, which exemplify this. As Carlson (1993:432) also confirms, the detective plot is so conventional and familiar that it readily lends itself to the investigation of postmodern hermeneutic concerns. The reader therefore becomes the detective who needs to decipher the fiction “committed” by the writer or “criminal.” The model of fantasy presents the author with the freedom to introduce properties of metafiction (Hutcheon, 1984:77) while the game model is usually a microcosm for a larger context and, in consequence, functions as a *mise en abyme* (Hutcheon, 1984:84). In the erotic model, the act of reading is compared to an act of possession or control while the mutual involvement of both parties suggests a mutual participation between author and reader (Hutcheon, 1984:85).

It is clear that any theatrical device is able to become a metatheatrical device. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that any device which aims to test and investigate the boundary between the fictional and actual frames is only effective as long as it breaks a taboo (Hornby, 1986:20). Literal images have a life-cycle in which innovation becomes convention, which becomes cliché and self-parody: “today’s truth is tomorrow’s received idea; today’s realism is tomorrow’s melodrama” (States, 1985:83).

For example, Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879) caused much controversy when it was first produced, not only due to Nora’s scandalous behaviour in abandoning her family, but also because of the intimacy depicted in the discourse between Torvald and Nora. This naturalistic play seemed much closer to the actual world than the, by then, overfamiliar realist conventions. In Clare Stopford’s 1988 production of this play, she felt that *A Doll’s House* was still relevant, except for the lack of physical intimacy between the characters. Act Two, which Ibsen sets at the dining room table, Stopford set in the couple’s bedroom after they had sex (Stopford & Krueger, 2006:238). Stopford included intimate details about her direction of this scene, in order to break through fictional convention – much as Ibsen did over a hundred years ago. She describes the scene as follows:

If Nora and Torvald open the last act having just made love and I have her getting out of bed to pack up and leave, then, logically she will have seminal fluid about to flow down her inner thigh. What would she do about this? She would wash, or wipe herself down. [...] By including the gesture, I'm honouring a knowledge that the audience and I share. So although one might be breaking the audience's comfort zones with such an intimate gesture, you're building a kind of trust by stimulating in them real connections with their sense memories.

The voyeurism that Ibsen's play initially intended is in this manner reinvigorated, since it had passed through States' life-cycle of literary images. Furthermore, Stopford's approach to this scene will also only invigorate Ibsen's voyeurism as long as it breaks a taboo.

2.6. Conclusion

If we accept, in agreement with scholars such as Nietzsche, Bakhtin, Derrida, and Eco, that language is inextricable from existence and not an external, intellectual tool, we can conclude that meaning is shifting and unstable. Hence language can never present us with an exact copy of lived experience.

This, however, does not mean that language "fails," but merely that it operates within life and as a result cannot present an objective mirror to it. The same can be said for mimesis – the basis of all art forms, which is, in fact, so ingrained in human existence that it sometimes becomes impossible to distinguish the original experience from the copy. Due to the close relationship between language and mimesis, I shall, like Wolf (2009), use mediation as an umbrella term throughout this thesis to refer to both language and art.

All forms of mediation are inseparable from human existence, and consequently no one form may claim to be ontologically more authentic than any other. They all function on the same level of fictitiousness. Although there is an interesting relationship between the fictional and the actual in theatre, due to its live audience which, in turn, becomes part of the work of art, it is not ontologically any more or less authentic than other art forms, despite its plurisignation.

I therefore do not regard certain theatrical forms, such as realism and metatheatre, as opposed to each other, but as two ends of a continuum, within which the three plays analysed in this study, easily fit. Each of these plays, concerned to a significant extent with the idea of

art and theatre and its (in)ability to reproduce the actual world, functions within a realist style (even in the narrow sense of the term which implies that everything that happens in the fictional world may be rationally explained). And yet, all three texts, to varying extents, also fulfil certain metatheatrical functions. These plays ask questions about the possibility of authenticity, especially concerning the characters' mediated perceptions of each other. These functions involve the audience; for this reason the works also comment on themselves as theatre.

I shall now proceed to analyse Pinter's *Betrayal*, Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, and Marber's *Closer* in view of the preceding theoretical discussion, with emphasis on mediation (both through language and art), mimicry, and metatheatre.

CHAPTER 3:

HAROLD PINTER'S KALEIDOSCOPE OF BETRAYALS

The successful lie creates an unnerving freedom. It shows us that it is possible for no one to know what we are doing. The poor lie – the wish to be found out – reveals our fear about what we can do with words. Lying, in other words, is not so much a way of keeping our options open, but of finding out what they are. Fear of infidelity is fear of language. – Adam Phillips, *Monogamy* (1996)

3.1. Introduction

Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* poses compelling epistemological questions by presenting the audience with the type of lies to which Phillips (1996) refers in the epigraph above – lies which are successful at first, but become uncovered; revealing not only a series of betrayals, but also the complicated ways in which language is used.

In this chapter I aim to analyse *Betrayal* in the light of the ideas about language, mimesis, and theatre, discussed in the previous chapter. After a contextualisation of Pinter's oeuvre, I investigate his use of language and the way the characters use it to negotiate a community with each other or exclude one another from such a community. I also examine the use of recycling and mimicry in the play, both in the characters' dialogue and as used by Pinter in a broader sense. Lastly, I analyse the use of metatheatre in the play, according to Wolf's (2009) guidelines in this regard.

This discussion will consequently illuminate the questions concerning authenticity, communication, and implications for the audience and theatre as an art form, posed in Chapter One of this thesis.

3.2. Pinter's influences and influence

Harold Pinter is possibly the most important playwright of his time in the English language. Even so, it is difficult to place him within the dramatic canon. Initially, he was associated with the "Angry Young Men" of the 1950s and compared to the Absurdist playwrights, Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco (Knowles, 2009:74). Although he was also labelled as a kitchen sink dramatist, Pinter's plays are not realist. But, like Chekhov, he writes for the proscenium arch (Knowles, 2009:78), which makes it difficult to categorise his oeuvre, as well as pinpoint

his cultural influences. Scolnicov (2012:174) contrasts Pinter with Tom Stoppard, “whose work is openly intertextual and intermedial.” But, in an interview with Thompson (2005:45), Pinter states that no writer writes in a vacuum and that playwrights absorb and digest other writing which influences their own work, as his plays are likely to be influenced by Samuel Beckett. According to Scolnicov (2012:174-175), modernist writers such as William Butler Yeats, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce have also shaped Pinter’s drama.

According to Smith (2005:12-19), there are three important factors arising from Pinter’s childhood and early years that should be kept in mind when interpreting his plays. Firstly, he is Jewish. The claustrophobic domestic relations in most of his plays as well as a tension between working class parents and offspring with artistic and intellectual aspirations stem from this fact. Pinter was in his early teens during the Second World War; this experience left him and his generation convinced of the precariousness of life, the centrality of life to art and culture, the importance of sexuality and friendships, as well as the corruptibility of states, politicians and officials (Smith, 2005:12).

Secondly, Pinter’s “outsiderness,” as Smith (2005:17) terms it, also influences his work. Despite Pinter’s origins on the periphery of institutional education, he is often criticised for his intellectualism. According to Smith (2005:10), this is due to the myopic view of his work held by these critics. Much of Pinter’s intellectual grounding took place outside institutional education; he therefore always remained an intellectual outsider to an extent. He enrolled at RADA in 1948, but found it intolerable and dropped out, although he did serve as Associate Director of the National Theatre from 1972 to 1983. Thus, although he is not an intellectual snob, Pinter is also not an anti-intellectual. He, for example, views the phenomenon of “pop,” or , as he refers to it in an interview with Gross (2005:75), “the quick buck, the quick poem, the quick song, the quick whatever you like” as superficial, fleeting and driven by panic.

What Smith (2005:19) refers to as “a looming sense of doom” is the third important factor shaping Pinter’s drama. Events such as Hiroshima and Nagasaki resulted in paranoia, suspicion and a fear of external forces that may never be known. According to Hobson (in Smith, 2005:19), Pinter was living “on the verge of disaster” during his youth. For Pinter and his peers, there consequently did not appear to be an alternative, politically or philosophically,

to capitalist society, although the failings of this society had been pointed out by their predecessors (Smith, 2005:21).

In turn, Pinter's influence on English drama cannot be overemphasised. David Mamet, Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Caryl Churchill and Martin Crimp are all indebted in a general sense to Pinter, while Jez Butterworth, Patrick Marber, Joe Penhall and David Eldridge were all influenced by Pinter's comedy of characters lost in language and improvised confusions. Pinter's modernism, in the tradition of Beckett and Kafka, inspired the plays of Mark Ravenhill and Martin Crimp, whereas the political plays of Sarah Kane and Caryl Churchill carry traces of Pinter's menacing political plays (Waters, 2009:300-302).

Unfortunately, Pinter is also, according to Dromgoole (2000:225), "the aircraft carrier from which many planes take off on shorter, less majestic trips." Spencer (2000), for example, describes Martin Crimp's *The Country* (2000) as an unsuccessful pastiche of Pinter: "That debt is particularly burdensome in *The Country*, and at times the piece seems less like an original play than an immensely skilful parody of dear old Harold."¹³

3.3. Pinter and postmodern drama

Just as Pinter's place in the canon does not neatly fit any category, critics also vastly differ on the level of postmodern innovation in his work. Pinter's work is definitely traditional in the sense that it is firmly text based. In an interview with Bensky (2005:66), Pinter describes himself as a "traditional playwright," who makes use of curtains and curtain lines. There is also no improvisation in his plays: "I don't at all believe in the anarchic theatre of so-called 'creative' actors – the actors can do that in someone else's plays" (Pinter in Bensky, 2005:55).

In an interview with Thompson (2005:46-47), Pinter furthermore explains that he always thinks of the proscenium arch when he writes, although he finds that different theatre forms, like theatre in the round, all have an equal number of liberating qualities and limitations. Smith (2005:31) argues that, although contemporary, Pinter's plays are rooted in character, emotion and plot and therefore not avant-garde. Almansi and Henderson (1983:15) describe Pinter's plays as follows:

¹³ Other less successful Pinter-inspired plays include Simon Bent's *The Associate* (2002) and Mark Ravenhill's *The Cut* (2006). See De Jongh (2002) and Shaw (2008).

His plays are conceived for an orthodox proscenium stage; they are conventionally based on speech and dialogue with only a marginal inference of physical action; they are written fully and intensely, their author seeming to abhor improvisation, 'happenings,' or any kind of aleatory technique (in this sense Pinter is definitely not a post-modernist playwright).

Scolnicov (2012:5-6), however, differs from Almansi and Henderson (1983) and describes Pinter's categorization as traditional, adding to "the deceptive appearance of the plays' surface realism," while she unequivocally regards him as an avant-garde playwright. Scolnicov (2012:7), instead, agrees with Esslin (1992:41) who describes Pinter's work as hypernaturalistic, although Scolnicov (2012:7) prefers the term "hyperrealism:"

At first look, Pinter's plays appear to be realistic: the characters belong to well-defined, contemporary English social groups and classes, who talk in the proper registers and idiolects, and the prescribed scenery is of familiar English rooms. This semblance of realism may lead the actor, director, spectator, and reader to search for motivation and causation. But the search is futile and bound to end in frustration, since the text fails to supply reasons for the actions or behaviour. Accustomed to analysing well-made plays, the reader feels let down and may conclude that the plays are not well made and are written in a puzzling style.

The avant-garde elements of Pinter's plays are thus subtle, yet very evident upon closer inspection. As mentioned in Chapter Two, realism is elastic enough to encompass dissidence. Despite Pinter's resistance towards improvisation and his preference for the proscenium, the postmodern and poststructuralist concerns about language and art investigated in this study are present in Pinter's major themes and techniques. Pinter therefore represents an example of the type of play Meisner and Mounsef (2011:89) describe when they argue that a text based form need not necessarily imply conservative or traditional theatre: "radical performance does not always translate into radical politics."

Even Almansi and Henderson (1983:78), who do not regard Pinter as a postmodernist, concede that he began to investigate the idea that a "fixed, objective reality" does not exist. Pinter (in Esslin, 1992:32) himself has also stated that "there are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false." This idea, consequently, forms the basis of Pinter's notorious silence with regard to the history of his

characters.¹⁴ For Scolnicov (2012:1), it is probably impossible to find a rational explanation for every word and action in Pinter's plays. The audience never finds out who exactly the characters are, and his plays therefore seem opaque since they depart from established ideas of realism in the theatre. Esslin (1992:31) argues that this is exactly the way in which Pinter's plays resemble reality: "we do not know, with any semblance of certainty what motivates our own wives, parents, our own children – why then should we be furnished with a complete dossier about the motivations of any character we casually encounter on stage?" Therefore, Esslin (1992:41) also sees Pinter's plays as highly ambivalent, even multivalent and not traditional, although the plays resemble reality; "for reality itself is equally multivalent."

The non-verifiability of the past and the ways in which we reconstruct the past through memory therefore constitute an important theme in Pinter's oeuvre. In this regard he (2005:21-22) remarks:

I've never started a play with any kind of abstract idea or theory. Apart from any other consideration, we are faced with the immense difficulty, if not the impossibility of verifying the past. I don't mean merely years ago, but yesterday, this morning. What took place, what was the nature of what took place, what happened?

The inaccessibility of the world for Pinter's characters influences how they communicate. Esslin (1992:227) argues that his biggest contribution to modern drama is exposing how stage dialogue overestimated the way in which human beings actually use language. Pinter has often been grouped with the Absurd dramatists on the premise that his plays illustrate the failure of communication. However, he (2008) does not agree with this interpretation of his work:

We have heard many times that tired, grimy phrase 'failure of communication'... and this phrase has been fixed to my work quite consistently. I believe the contrary. I think we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rearguard [*sic*] attempts to keep ourselves to

¹⁴ Shaw (2008:57) cites the anecdote of Pinter's reaction when an audience member wrote the following to him after seeing *The Birthday Party*:

Dear Sir, I would be obliged if you would kindly explain to me the meaning of your play, *The Birthday Party*. These are the points I do not understand: 1. Who are the two men? 2. Where did Stanley come from? 3. Are they all supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to these questions I cannot fully understand your play.

To this, Pinter replied:

Dear Madam, I would be obliged if you could kindly explain to me the meaning of your letter. These are the points which I do not understand: 1. Who are you? 2. Where do you come from? 3. Are you supposed to be normal? You will appreciate that without the answers to these questions I cannot fully understand your letter.

ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility.

Hence Pinter does not investigate the fact that our attempts at communication are unsuccessful, but rather the fact that we communicate in unexpected ways. For Almansi and Henderson (1983:15), humans are alone in Pinter's world and communication is difficult and dangerous. Social connections – supposed to break the isolation of the human condition – are untrustworthy and treacherous.

Pinter's plays are furthermore known for an atmosphere of menace, their commitment to political causes, and his idiosyncratic rhythm and pauses, usually described by the adjective "Pinteresque" (Law, 2011:390). This rhythm obviously also impacts on the way that Pinter is performed. According to Scolnicov (2012:8), it is very difficult for a Method Actor to act in a Pinter play, since "Pinter demands a different approach: a hyperrealistic fidelity to external appearances together with an opaqueness that deliberately refuses to suggest motives or inner workings of the mind." For Scolnicov (2012), an actor should thus not try to find a motivation for every word or action he or she speaks or performs. The actor should merely achieve a guise required by the text.

Peter Hall (2005:137), collaborator and first director of many of Pinter's plays, disagrees, affirming that "people who think that all you've got to do in Pinter is to say it, hold the pause, and then say the next line, are wrong." Hall (2005:137-138) describes his rehearsal method which involves a process of "veiling." According to Hall, Pinter's characters veil their emotions and motivations with discrepant words and actions. In rehearsal, his actors are then required to determine the emotion or motivation which they are veiling:

actors can't play veiling until they know what they're veiling, so we play mockery, we play hatred, we play animosity, we play the extreme black-and-white terms of a character. That stage of rehearsal is very crude, but it's a very important stage, because unless the actor understands what game he is playing, what his actual underlying motivations are, the ambiguity of the text will mean nothing. (Hall, 2005:137)

Although actors are sometimes concerned that an audience might overlook their veiled motivations, Hall (2005:137) is confident that an audience will grasp the full nuance of such a performance.

The other aspect of Pinter, regarding production, which Hall (2005:138) emphasises is that the script should not be altered in performance. Actors and directors often change the words in their scripts until they are comfortable delivering these. According to Hall (2005:138) each pause and silence in Pinter's writing is there for a specific reason and the director and actors' "job is to find out why."

3.4. *Betrayal* within Pinter's oeuvre

By the time Pinter wrote *Betrayal* in the late 1970s, he was already established as a major figure in British theatre, and the above mentioned qualities of his work and its production had already been accepted by audiences. The plays that he wrote in the 1970s also marked a definite shift in milieu, from working class East London to the more affluent centre, or west. Class and social tension do, however, remain as themes throughout, while the emphasis on time and memory is increased (Smith, 2005:32). The plays of the 1970s examine English cultural life and identity viewed through a sense of loss and the uncertainty of the past (Smith, 2005:34).

It is against this backdrop that Smith (2005:35) describes *Betrayal* as a "study in English disillusionment and equivocation." The seemingly simple tale of adultery therefore proves on closer inspection to ask the question "how can we trust what we know?" If the events in the play were to be chronologically considered, *Betrayal* would begin in 1968 with a flirtation at a party between Jerry, the best friend of the host, Robert, and Emma, the hostess. This flirtation develops into an affair which takes place in a rented flat in Kilburn. The audience sees a scene set in this flat, at the height of the affair in 1971, in which Emma reveals to Jerry that she is pregnant by her husband, Robert. Emma and Robert subsequently visit Venice in 1973 where Robert finds out about the affair and confronts Emma. Back in London, Emma and Jerry have another rendezvous in their flat but Emma does not tell Jerry that Robert knows about the affair. Robert and Jerry lunch together at an Italian restaurant shortly after this, where Robert also does not tell Jerry that he knows about the affair, although he seems visibly tense about it. A year later, Jerry drops in at Robert and Emma's house for a drink where all three parties keep up the pretence of a happily married couple and their platonic friend who is visiting. In 1975, the affair is dissolved. This happens in Emma and

Jerry's rented flat; the reasons given for the dissolution are the demands of the characters' respective jobs. Two years later, in 1977, Jerry and Emma meet at a bar for a drink. Emma reveals that her marriage to Robert is over, and that she had told him about the affair between her and Jerry the previous night. The last event of the play is a confrontation between Robert and Jerry where Jerry finds out that Robert had known about the affair since 1973.

This rather banal plotline is, however, related to the audience in a mostly reversed chronological order. The play starts with Emma and Jerry's drink at the pub, moves forward to Jerry and Robert's confrontation after which it shifts backward to the dissolution of the affair, the social gathering at Robert and Emma's house where all three characters pretend that the affair does not exist, then further back to the scene in Venice where Robert finds out about the affair. From here the play shifts forward again to Jerry and Emma's reunion in their flat and Robert and Jerry's lunch at the Italian restaurant, after which it proceeds backward again to the height of the affair – and ends with a scene in Robert and Emma's bedroom where Jerry makes his first advances on Emma.

For Scolnicov (2012:105), the reverse chronology of the play is its most innovative aspect, turning the banality of the subject matter into a novelty. Since the outcome of the events is already known, suspense is replaced with an unpacking of what caused these events: “every new scene turns out to be unexpected because, although we know the outcome, we don't know the steps that lead up to it.” In this regard, Burkman (1982:506) refers to *Betrayal* as an “autopsy,” because of its reversed structure.

Nevertheless, as mentioned in Chapter One, *Betrayal* met with a very hostile reception when it opened in 1978 and was criticised in the main for being banal, insubstantial and uninteresting. According to Elsom (1981:249), Pinter did not “at any point try to conceal the basis of the story, which, as several papers pointed out gleefully, could have had an autobiographical connection. There was nothing perplexing about what happened, no veils of cunning ambiguity.” It is on the grounds of this superficial interpretation of the play that Kretzmer (in Elsom, 1981:251) called it a “woman's magazine romance,” while for Hirschhorn (in Elsom, 1981:251) it was “a very insubstantial so-what piece of work.” Young (in Elsom, 1981:252) felt that “Mr. Pinter has made his characters such uninteresting people” and also asks “well, so what?” of the play. Ironically, Bock (1981:182) states that “the dialogue tells us facts and is without depth,” while Wardle (in Elsom, 1981:253) asserts that

Pinter’s “obsession with the irretrievable past and the fallibility of subjective memory finds no expression in this play.” He adds that “the dialogue throughout is of studied banality, broken occasionally by a short-lived explosion of lust or anger,” but concedes that “it would be false to say that there is nothing ambiguous in the play” (Wardle in Elsom, 1981:254).

Scene number	Place in chronology of the play	Year	Scene synopsis
Scene 9	A.	1968	The flirtation between Emma and Jerry at a party at Robert and Emma’s house. The start of the affair.
Scene 8	B.	1971	The height of the affair, set in Jerry and Emma’s flat. Emma reveals that she is pregnant by her husband.
Scene 5	C.	1973	Robert and Emma on vacation in Venice. In their hotel room, Robert confronts Emma about the affair.
Scene 6	D.	1973	Jerry and Emma meet after Emma has returned from Venice. She does not tell him that Robert has found out about the affair.
Scene 7	E.	1973	Robert and Jerry have lunch at an Italian restaurant. Robert does not tell Jerry that he knows about the affair.
Scene 4	F.	1974	Jerry drops in at Robert and Emma’s house for a drink. All three characters pretend that the affair does not exist.
Scene 3	G.	1975	The dissolution of the affair. A discussion about the demands of the characters’ respective jobs.
Scene 1	H.	1977	Jerry and Emma meet two years after the affair has ended. Emma reveals that she has told Robert about the affair.
Scene 2	I.	1977	Jerry confronts Robert about the fact that he now knows about the affair and finds out that he has known for years.

Figure 3: The sequence of the scenes in *Betrayal* and their place in the chronology of the play.

Despite this wave of negative criticism of *Betrayal*, Nightingale (in Elsom, 1981:254-255), praised the play, in particular its “anti-clockwise” chronology: “it substitutes the question ‘how?’ for the cruder ‘what next?’ in the minds of the audience. And in my view it deepens and darkens our perception of the play, infecting the most innocent encounters with irony, dread and a sense of doom.” Of the critics cited above, only Nightingale, and Wardle to an extent, thus grasped the nuances in Pinter’s text and picked up on the deeper levels hidden beneath the smooth surface of banality.

In his seminal *The life and work of Harold Pinter* (1996:258-259), Billington speculates that he and other critics were initially hostile towards *Betrayal* for three reasons.

Firstly, against critics' expectations, the play was not committed or political. Secondly, the original production did not realise the play's full potential: according to Billington (1996:325), the Lyttleton Theatre, where it was first performed, was too big and the National Theatre was experiencing industrial problems at the time. A subsequent revival of the play in 1990, which was performed in a more intimate venue, had a much better reception. Lastly, the audience interpreted the play as a type of Mills and Boon novel, instead of seeing the self-betrayal as a steadily infecting virus.

The critics' and audience's expectations thus seem to be a major factor in the initial reception of the play. In *Betrayal*, Pinter did address themes and techniques that were by this time associated with him. Language and communication and the various ways in which people use it to mask and obscure, as well as the impossibility of verifying the past, were also investigated. The play moreover features long pauses, questions in response to questions and limited dialogue (Ben-Zvi, 1980:227). But, according to Ben-Zvi (1980:227), *Betrayal* does deviate from Pinter's previous work in that there are no innuendoes, sinister ambiguities or impending disasters. Nonetheless, while I shall argue that there are indeed innuendoes in *Betrayal*, Ben-Zvi (1980) is correct in pointing out the absence of the impending sense of doom so familiar in Pinter's previous work. Scolnicov (2012:106) aptly sums up the initial reaction to *Betrayal*, when she states that

In his previous plays, the audience was left baffled by the inscrutability of the characters. In *Betrayal*, Pinter seems to be mocking us, by providing all the identity data one might wish for; but, for all that, the mystery of the human personality remains unchanged.

The themes usually associated with Pinter thus appear in *Betrayal* in a disguised, but no less effective manner. I continue to explore the themes of mediation, recycling and mimicry in *Betrayal*, for the remainder of this chapter. I additionally investigate the subsequent implications of metatheatre in the play.

3.5. Mediation as theme and dramatic strategy in *Betrayal*

As mentioned above, mediation, for the purposes of this study, refers to any communicative act (be it through language or art) between two or more human beings. As I have noted, for

Bakhtin (in Shotter & Billig, 1998:16) the only way for one person to know another is through dialectic discourse, which entails observable acts of communication. A play by a dramatist such as Pinter, who is known for his idiosyncratic use of language on stage, invites an investigation of the concept of community that mediation establishes between characters, the use of language in the play, the way the characters use narrative to construct their pasts and ideas of deception and originality.

3.5.1. Isolation versus community among the three characters in *Betrayal*

As explained above, Maturana and Varela (1980:5) as well as Bakhtin (in Hitchcock, 1998:92) perceive human beings as quintessentially isolated, since it is impossible to fully experience another's pain. This is especially applicable to Pinter's characters in *Betrayal*, since, as Cahn (1993:4) points out, "no matter how much they talk, no matter how much they attempt to establish a bond through language, these characters remain trapped in loneliness." Griffith (1992:99) links this phenomenon with the theory of Bakhtin in which no character's definition of reality is able to be identical to that of his or her interlocutor, although the latter may have much in common with him or her.

When Robert and Jerry discuss the affair after Emma has told Jerry in Scene One that she has confessed to Robert, the impossibility of completely knowing another becomes evident:

JERRY: But you betrayed her for years, didn't you?
ROBERT: Oh yes.
JERRY: And she never knew about it. Did she?
ROBERT: Didn't she?
Pause
JERRY: I didn't.
ROBERT: No, you didn't know very much about anything, really, did you?
Pause
JERRY: No.
ROBERT: Yes you did.
JERRY: Yes I did. I lived with her.
ROBERT: Yes. In the afternoons.
JERRY: Sometimes very long ones. For seven years.

ROBERT: Yes, you certainly knew all there was to know about that. About seven years of afternoons. I don't know anything about that. (Pinter, 1978:42-43)

This passage simultaneously illustrates and thwarts the idea of community between two individuals. Jerry and Emma's clandestine affair created an insulated community which excludes Robert and anybody else. Yet the preceding dialogue indicates that Jerry was also excluded from Robert and Emma's community in which they shared knowledge about the other's affairs.

For Almansi and Henderson (1983:12), the lack of community between characters in Pinter's plays is so pronounced that words and language do not function as conduits between two individuals, but rather as "barbs to protect the wired enclosure of the self." Therefore communication among the characters in *Betrayal* occurs in indirect ways, through a discussion on squash, the success of the authors that they represent, and their children's lives (Roof, 1993:80). But these means of mediation still isolate the characters and resist community.

According to Esslin (1992:189), the isolation of the characters in *Betrayal* extends also to their memory and pasts: "the passage of time changes our perception of what the past was like and what we were like – *who* we were – in the past." A character is thus not only cut off from other characters, but also from past versions of him- or herself. The perception of certain past events undergoes a transformation, according to Esslin (1992:189).

Betrayal accordingly sketches a situation where a sense of community is created between characters, but this community is subsequently betrayed, resulting in a resistance to community by these characters. Therefore, the title of the play refers to the idea of betrayal, rather than one specific betrayal, or it might possibly have been called "The Betrayal" (Scolnicov, 2012:107). Ben-Zvi (1980:228) seems to agree, when she points out that "the parameters of the topic are broad enough to subsume almost every facet of contemporary experience. The subject is not betrayal, but existence in society."

According to Billington (1996:259), there are four main betrayals in the text, which include "betrayal of self, betrayal of others, betrayal of art" (Leveaux in Billington, 1996:326): marital betrayal, the betrayal of lovers' trust, the male friendship bond and literary idealism. Marital betrayal is the most obvious of the betrayals in the play, since all three on-stage characters and most of the off-stage characters possibly commit adultery, or suggest that

they are doing so. Emma not only betrays Robert with Jerry, but later on also with Casey, an author whom Jerry represents and Robert publishes. According to Robert, he has repeatedly cheated on Emma, although there is no confirmation for this, other than Robert's own words.¹⁵ Jerry betrays his wife, Judith, with Emma, and the possibility that Judith is having an affair with a colleague is mentioned. Even so, marriage is not the only community the characters create and then betray.

As Robert's remark about Jerry's afternoons with Emma in the excerpt quoted above indicates, the characters also form a community in their extramarital affairs. Ben-Zvi (1980:229) believes Emma betrays Jerry when she conceives a child with her husband. In an affair such as theirs, however, where none of the parties consider dissolving their marriages to marry each other, it is debatable whether or not this constitutes a break in lovers' trust. Nonetheless Emma does betray Jerry when she fails to inform him that Robert has found out about the affair. Esslin (1992:193) describes this situation as follows:

This amounts to Robert *and* Emma jointly betraying Jerry by leaving him in a fool's paradise, thinking that he is betraying Robert and basking in the – as it now turns out – spurious feeling of superiority that comes from knowing something important that another person does not.

The secret that Robert and Emma thus keep from Jerry also betrays the bond of male friendship between the two men. This betrayal is serious enough for Ben-Zvi (1980:231) to assert that the reason that Jerry is upset about Robert's knowledge of the affair is that it taints their friendship. I am, however, inclined to concur with Esslin (1992:193) that it is, rather, the fact that he was left in a "fool's paradise," excluded from the community between Robert and Emma, who shared this secret.

Yet Esslin (1992:193) also believes that it is the breaking of the male bond that most upsets Robert when he finds out about the affair, but, based on Peter Hall's idea of veiling in Pinter's plays discussed above and the way that the characters continually establish communities with each other only to betray these communities, I shall argue – throughout this chapter – that Robert's repeated reference to his and Jerry's friendship when he learns of the

¹⁵ Although the majority of critics take it for granted that Robert did betray Emma with other women, this is not confirmed anywhere in the play. According to Almansi and Henderson (1983:71) a critic should guard against taking a character's words as fact: "all we know is that there are characters making these statements: not that these statements are valid."

affair is designed to re-establish his community with Jerry, in order to exclude Emma and hide the fact that he was also living in a “fool’s paradise.”

It is, however, justifiable that Esslin (1992:190) regards the community between the two males as Emma’s motivation to yield to Jerry’s advances. Emma seems to resist Jerry’s attempts at seduction up to the point where Robert enters and appears indifferent to Jerry’s behaviour towards Emma, which is clearly inappropriate: “Emma has yielded to Jerry because she resents Robert’s physical intimacy with Jerry, because she is jealous of Jerry’s relationship with her husband.” All three characters thus seem to be in a constant battle with the others to form a community, and not be left isolated.

These various affairs, for Esslin (1992:197), appear to take up almost all of the characters’ time since they are largely preoccupied by them, although he does continue:

at the same time, these sexual relationships are shown, by Pinter, to be superficial in the extreme; far from being passionate involvements, elemental and irresistible, they seem casual and trivial, hardly more involving than the occasional drunken binge, a form of amusement that will pass the time and alleviate the boredom of an affluent and meaningless existence.

Esslin (1992:197) concludes that this behaviour betrays the characters’ lack of literary loyalty and demonstrates how literary middlemen and gallery managers are not committed to what they do. However, I perceive this as a rather harsh interpretation of the characters and their motivations which negates a few aspects of Pinter’s play referred to above. Firstly, Pinter shows us only some scenes in the characters’ lives, all of which concern their affairs. Emma did, after all, mention her hours at the gallery as one of the reasons she and Jerry could not meet more often. Secondly, to interpret the characters’ relationships as “casual and trivial” denies Peter Hall’s technique of veiling. Robert’s tirade at the publishing industry in Scene Seven is indeed a thinly veiled mask for his frustration over Jerry and Emma’s affair. Even Jerry seems sceptical about it, and interjects first with “What are you talking about?” (115) and later with “You must be pissed” (116).

The marital betrayal in the text is, as a result, shown to influence, as well as mirror, other aspects of the characters’ lives. Although the characters are all successful in their jobs, Robert and Jerry both betrayed their own literary idealism. They were both once poetry editors at Oxford and Cambridge but have now become an agent and a publisher, literary middlemen

to best-selling authors. According to Ben-Zvi (1980:232), the career of Casey, the author whom Jerry represents and Robert publishes, clearly connotes an increase in commercialism and decrease in artistic merit: from poet to promising but commercially unsuccessful novelist, to producing marketable writing and lastly considering a film contract with Hollywood. As Billington (1996:159) describes this: “behind the play’s action lies an aching awareness of the way the high ideals of youth are betrayed by the compromises of daily life.” The characters are in other words betraying their younger selves, or breaking up the community with earlier versions of themselves, as suggested above. This situation is also universal to an extent, as Billington (1996:259) avers elsewhere: “they are not only parasitic middlemen, but, by extension, symbols of all those who betray their youthful commitments for the sake of bland, middle-aged affluence.”

Pinter therefore, through the marital infidelity, progressively comments on various forms of betrayal, “until his original triangle has disappeared, leaving a void in the center of ever widening circles of human interaction. Hence he produces a dramatic equivalent to the Yeatsian absence of center and the subsequent loss of fixity in a constantly changing world” (Ben-Zvi, 1980:228).¹⁶ As the play raises existential issues about human interaction, the temporary establishment of community and the role that language plays in the mediation between individuals, it consequently also underscores Nietzsche’s notion of the loss of an essential truth.

3.3.2. Pinter’s veiled language

Throughout Pinter’s entire oeuvre, language remains a fundamental element (Almansi, 1981:79). Pinter is exceptionally particular about the use of language: Smith (2005:38), for example, agrees with Peter Hall that not a word should be altered in a Pinter text. Pinter himself has also admitted in an interview with Thompson (2005:46) to being obsessed with words and language. One of his oldest friends, Mick Goldstein (2005:115), describes Pinter’s attitude towards language as follows:

¹⁶ This of course refers to Yeats’ well known poem “The Second Coming” and specifically to the lines: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,” (1993:123).

I am still aware of how careful Harold is about language, and how a clumsy expression, which can distort what it is one wants to say, can turn him right off. In some ways the style of language – the words you choose – were as important as the meaning of what you wanted to say.

Yet, in Pinter's plays, characters rarely say what they mean, conforming to the poststructuralist theory discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, especially Derrida's (1998a:71-72) notion that language can obscure as well as reveal meaning. According to Almansi (1981:80), Pinter resists reflecting the inner world of the heart or mind perpendicularly through language. The audience instead perceives a skewed, distorted version of what a character thinks or feels. Elsewhere, Almansi (1981:89) describes the communication of Pinter's characters as "a perverse, deviant language to conceal or ignore the truth."

According to Billington (1996:391) Pinter's technique is an "undertow of brutality and savagery," covered with a decorous surface. This is evident even in "his overtly middle-class plays such as *Old Times*, *No Man's Land* and *Betrayal*." According to Billington (1996:322-323), Pinter believes that there is a reality behind our perception, but that we are too afraid to access it and therefore camouflage it with language. Even if the characters in this play have access to the content plane of what they want to say, they purposely distort this in the expression plane. For this reason Billington's views about Pinter's language are especially relevant to the veiling technique in performance, repeatedly referred to above, and are evident most clearly in Scene Five, when Robert confronts Emma about the affair, during their holiday in Venice.

Robert raises the subject by telling Emma that he had gone into American Express the day before and that there was a letter for Emma, which he did not take, since he disapproves of the unprofessional manner in which the clerk assumed that it would be appropriate to hand Robert Emma's mail on the grounds that they are married. Rather than confront her directly, he lapses into a rather lengthy monologue on the subject of the privacy of opening one's own mail. After this, Robert continues to delay the confrontation, while Emma confesses to their affair:

EMMA: Pretty inefficient bunch.
ROBERT: Only in a laughing Mediterranean way.
 Pause

EMMA: It was from Jerry.
ROBERT: Yes, I recognised the handwriting.
Pause
How is he?
EMMA: Okay.
ROBERT: Good. And Judith?
EMMA: Fine.
Pause
ROBERT: What about the kids?
EMMA: I don't think he mentioned them.
ROBERT: They're probably all right, then. If they were ill or something he'd have probably mentioned it.
Pause
(80-81)

The conversation continues in this vein, with Robert lapsing into monologues about his and Emma's first visit to Torcello and his and Jerry's days as poetry editors at Oxford and Cambridge. He does notice at one point that Emma is trembling and asks her if she is cold. She answers negatively, and when Robert asks her if she can remember when he introduced her to Jerry, she says that she cannot recall this:

ROBERT: You can't?
EMMA: No.
ROBERT: How odd.
Pause
He was best man at our wedding, was he?
EMMA: You know he was.
ROBERT: Ah yes. Well, that's probably when I introduced him to you.
Pause
Was there any message for me, in his letter?
Pause
I mean in the line of business, to do with the world of publishing. Has he discovered any new and original talent? He's quite talented at uncovering talent, old Jerry.
EMMA: No message.
ROBERT: No message. Not even his love?
Silence
EMMA: We're lovers.
ROBERT: Ah. Yes. I thought it might be something like that, something along those lines. (83-84)

Robert's dialogue might seem casual and indifferent at first glance but, according to Billington (1996:261), "what gives Scene Five a dramatic tension is Pinter's ability to convey

both Emma's guilt and Robert's pain through circuitous banter." In this scene the actors would thus be required to play against the line's surface, since "what is said is in direct opposition to what is felt" (Billington, 1996:262). Two reviewers have confirmed this with respect to two different productions of the play. In *The Observer*, Kellaway (1998) mentions how Imogen Stubbs (as Emma) in a revival at the National Theatre in 1998 pretends to read and visibly trembles as Anthony Calf (as Robert) patiently moves through his monologues. In *The Guardian*, Billington (2003) also describes how, in a 2003 revival at the Theatre Royal, Bath, Janie Dee (as Emma), played the moment that the affair is uncovered: "There's a heart-stopping moment in the pivotal Venetian scene when Dee stares fixedly at a novel, knowing that Robert has discovered her secret."

The discrepancy between the dialogue and its undercurrents is momentarily interrupted by Robert who is noticeably caught off guard when Emma tells him how long the affair has been going on:

ROBERT: How long?
EMMA: Some time.
ROBERT: Yes, but how long exactly?
EMMA: Five years.
ROBERT: *Five years?*
Pause
Ned is one year old.
Pause
Did you hear what I said?
EMMA: Yes. He's your son. Jerry was in America. For two months.
Silence (85-86)

After this silence, Robert recollects himself and continues the conversation in its masked way.

Robert's cool way of masking his emotions, which Cahn (1993:122) has described as a parody of male stoicism, continues when he and Emma return to London and, presumably, decide not to end their marriage. In Scene Four, when Jerry drops by Robert and Emma's house for a drink, Robert again acts in a cruelly cool manner towards Emma. (The members of the audience, however, only realise the significance of this scene after they have seen the confrontation in Scene Five.) In Scene Four, Robert and Emma conceal from Jerry the fact that Robert knows about the affair, while in Jerry's mind, he and Emma are concealing their relationship. By this time, the audience is aware that Robert possesses this knowledge,

because Robert informed Jerry in Scene Two that he had known ever since “a long time ago” (39). The characters talk about Casey and, after Robert explains what Casey’s last two novels were about, Emma and Jerry discuss the latest one. This does not continue for long, before Robert sneeringly interrupts:

JERRY: (to EMMA) Why didn’t you like it?
EMMA: I’ve told you actually.
JERRY: I think it’s the best thing he’s written.
EMMA: It may be the best thing he’s *written* but it’s still bloody dishonest.
JERRY: Dishonest? In what way dishonest?
EMMA: I’ve told you actually.
JERRY: Have you?
ROBERT: Yes, she has. Once when we were all having dinner, I remember, you, me Emma and Judith, where was it, Emma gave a dissertation over the pudding about dishonesty in Casey with reference to his last novel. ‘Drying Out.’ It was most stimulating. Judith had to leave unfortunately in the middle of it for her night shift at the hospital. How is Judith, by the way? (66-67)

After this, Robert takes control of the situation and deliberately excludes Emma by steering the conversation to the game of squash. When Jerry and Robert make a tentative plan to play a match in the near future and cannot decide who should take whom to lunch afterwards, Emma interjects, trying to re-enter Jerry and Robert’s community:

EMMA: Can I watch?
Pause
ROBERT: What?
EMMA: Why can’t I watch and then take you both to lunch?
ROBERT: Well, to be brutally honest, we wouldn’t actually want a woman around, would we, Jerry? I mean a game of squash isn’t simply a game of squash, it’s rather more than that. You see, first there’s the game. And then there’s the shower. And then there’s the pint. And then there’s lunch. After all, you’ve been at it. You’ve had your battle. What you want is your pint and your lunch. You really don’t want a woman buying you lunch. You don’t actually want a woman within a mile of the place, any of the places, really. You don’t want her in the squash court, you don’t want her in the shower, or the pub, or the restaurant. You see, at lunch you want to talk about squash, or cricket, or books, or even women, with your friend, and be able to warm to your theme without fear of improper interruption. That’s what it’s all about. What do you think, Jerry?
JERRY: I haven’t played squash for years.

Pause (69-70)

Like Scene Five, this exchange is conducted on multiple levels simultaneously. According to Scolnicov (2012:110), “all three play the traditional game of friendly chat while, at the same time, engaging in the game of hiding their complicity in, and their knowledge of, the betrayal (or rather, betrayals).” Or, as Wells (1983:23) put it, this is “a triangle of difficulty in which all know what is going on but must keep the information below the surface and feign ignorance if the smooth social structure is to be maintained.”

Scolnicov (2012:113), though, reads this behaviour as that of characters who manage their infidelities with ease in a postmodern world where religious and moral laws regarding adultery have been abolished: “theirs is a desire that is firmly under control, and it is perfectly played out, with enough financial resources to help it along.” Diamond (1985:202) concurs in asserting that the only thing that Robert mourns “is that Jerry’s love affair with Emma put an end to their squash game.”

Nevertheless, I concur with Burkman (1982:507) who finds Robert’s aloofness unconvincing. The above excerpt, on the contrary, reveals anguish, veiled with cruel self-control. Using Pinter’s (2008) own words out of context, Robert’s behaviour can be described as follows:

The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don’t hear. It is a necessary smoke screen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer to nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness.

Robert’s abusive (and misogynist) monologue, supposedly aimed at convincing Emma to stay away from his and Jerry’s squash game, is instead a smoke screen to cover his vulnerability in the face of Jerry and Emma’s obvious rapport. As Wells (1983:23) aptly remarks, “these modern, ultra-sophisticated characters fear disruption of the surface of things more than anything else.”

According to Cahn (1993:5) it furthermore becomes a power game to gain “supremacy over other people,” for it is only “when characters are secure in their authority” and able to control others that they are comfortable. In an interview with Aragay (2005:94), Pinter reveals that he believes men to be more brutal than women, reflected in the cruelty with which Robert launches his attack on Emma. Robert deploys the one attribute of Emma’s that marks her

involvement with Jerry and distinguishes her in the trio – her gender and sexuality – against her. Robert attempts to forcibly strengthen the male bond between him and Jerry while edging Emma out of the trio by objectifying and insulting her, as Scolnicov (2012:110) also remarks: these male rituals “are clearly meant to exclude women from what is perceived as exclusive male terrain.” Despite Scolnicov’s (2012:113) assertion that the characters have their infidelity under control, she concedes here that Robert’s monologue about squash “discloses a defensive attitude, an attempt to distance women so as to get rid of their sexually threatening presence” (Scolnicov, 2012:110). While Diamond (1985:202) sees the planned squash game as central to Robert’s motivation in this scene, it is, rather, a tool used to establish an exclusive community with Jerry. Ben-Zvi (1980:231) regards these forms of etiquette and convention as “handmaidens to the deception that passes for human communication.”

For Almansi and Henderson (1983:31), this “gentle trial of strength” and “battle of wits” replaces cruder competitions, such as a boxing match for Robert to retaliate against Jerry’s affair with his wife. Diamond (1985:204) also interprets the game of squash as functioning “as a Restoration masquerade in which emotions can be vented in a publicly acceptable way.” Squash is, in other words, a civilised version of more primitive displays of masculinity.

Nonetheless, it should be kept in mind that this remains a battle of words. Robert and Jerry never get round to playing squash, the reason most likely being that Robert’s squash games with other men cease when he realises that they are having affairs with his wife. This is most clearly suggested in Scene Two when Jerry first finds out that Robert has known about the affair for four years:

JERRY: But we’ve seen each other... a great deal... over the last four years.
 We’ve had lunch.
ROBERT: Never played squash though. (39)

Later in Scene Two, Robert again alludes to the fact that he does not play squash with men Emma conducts affairs with: “I bumped into old Casey the other day. I believe he’s having an affair with my wife. We haven’t played squash for years, Casey and me. We used to have a damn good game” (43). In Prentice’s (1994:238) words, “squash becomes a measure of the bond Robert extends to close friends or withdraws from his wife’s lovers.” Therefore,

Robert's insincere invitation to Jerry to play squash is a game in itself. He does not intend to follow it through, but uses his tainted bond with Jerry to exclude Emma.

However, it is not only Robert who upholds this smooth surface. As Almansi and Henderson (1983:23) point out, Robert's veiled dialogue can only take place if his interlocutors comply (and of course also construct their own masks). It is as much Robert, as Emma and Jerry, who prefer to hear only the surface language: "as long as we refuse to pay attention to the voices of other people, avoid any sympathy for them, distort what we hear, everything is fine. The real enemy is understanding: the appreciation of how horrible we/you/they are."

Consequently Pinter's characters essentially communicate through deceit. Almansi (1981:79) describes Pinter's "idiom" as "essentially human because it is an idiom of lies." Pinter thus does not create false dramatic worlds in which characters are truthful: "in twenty years of playwrighting he has never stooped to use the degraded and ultimately treacherous language of honesty, sincerity or innocence, which has contaminated the British theatre for so long" (Almansi & Henderson, 1983:13).

For this reason Pinter's lying characters may clearly be distinguished from the traditional liars in Western theatre who are introduced as if they were "merchants, seamen or carpenters." Every one of Pinter's characters lies, therefore; "the genuine liar no longer exists" (Almansi, 1981:83). Hence the characters all collaborate in creating the false surface of their existence – even if they are themselves penalised by it. Wells (1983:30) therefore interprets Robert's monologue about squash as follows:

The subject of honesty is repeated throughout the scene. On the surface, all of the characters are honest with each other, but previous scenes have already exposed the ironic use of the word, for they are all hiding something from the others. *Betrayal* demonstrates that the menace of autonomy prevents these characters from being really honest with each other, for they fear that honesty would mean the end of their fragile but essential social structures.

Although complicit in mediation, the characters' ambiguous attempts at it leave them in a "struggle for meaning in a fragmented, unfathomable world" (Cahn, 1993:2), as far as their interlocutors are concerned. According to Peter Hall (2005:151), Pinter is obsessed with "trying to pin down reality, trying to pin down memory, trying to pin down truth." This struggle consequently becomes a central theme in *Betrayal* – as Almansi and Henderson

(1983:72) suggest. The characters' uncertainty at how to interpret the other's words is clear in statements and questions such as "you didn't know for *certain*, did you? You didn't *know*!" (40), "what do you mean by that?" (53) and "What the hell are you talking about?" (77). Kroll (1978) aptly describes this situation as follows: "behind its smooth pastel surface is a haunting vision of a man as a creature trapped in an orbit of betrayal that sends him circling around the ideal without ever reaching it."

Especially in the triangle of marital betrayals portrayed in the play, where there are three central relationships which betray one another: the marriages of Robert and Emma, Jerry and Judith as well as Jerry and Emma's affair, the characters cannot have certainty about any of their relationships. Wells (1983:26) quotes Barthes' notion of the uncertainty of signs in this regard: "the amorous subject has no system of sure signs at his disposal." The characters can neither be sure of the signs that they interpret, nor of the signs that they unconsciously give. When reminiscing about their affair in Scene One, Emma says to Jerry: "I wonder. I wonder if everyone knew, all the time" (23). Jerry is, however, sure that nobody did know. In Scene Eight, when the affair is at its height, Emma asks Jerry if Judith would ever find out about the affair, he is positive that she would not:

EMMA: But what about clues? Isn't she interested... to follow clues?
JERRY: What clues?
EMMA: Well, there must be some... available to her... to pick up.
JERRY: There are none... available to her. (126)

And although Jerry feels certain that they have fooled their larger community, he does panic in Scene Six when he has misplaced Emma's letter and thinks that Judith might have found it. He is also incredulous that he did not notice Robert's supposed affairs, as he says to Emma, in Scene One:

We were such close friends, weren't we? Robert and me, even though I haven't seen him for a few months, but through all those years, all the drinks, all the lunches... we had together, I never even gleaned... I never suspected... that there was anyone else.... in his life but you. Never. For example, when you're with a fellow in a pub, or a restaurant, for example, from time to time he pops out for a piss, you see, who doesn't, but what I mean is, if he's making a crafty telephone call, you can sort of sense it, you see, you can sense the pip pip pips. Well, I never did that with Robert. He never made any pip pip telephone calls in any pub I was ever with him in. The funny

thing is that it was me who made the pip pip calls – to you, when I left him boozing at the bar. (26)

Jerry is, as a result, shown to be largely excluded from the mediation between the characters. He initially seems confident of his and Emma's ability to conceal their relationship as well as his own ability to see through others' masked affairs. This certainty, though, is shattered in the very first scene of the play. Although it is debatable whether or not Robert actually did conduct his own affairs, Jerry was ignorant of the fact that Robert did actually expose his and Emma's affair. Pinter thereby portrays a character who often misses in the game of mediation.

3.5.3. The narrative in memory

Since there is no way to recount the actual without fictionalising it, the surfaces through which the characters communicate in these games of mediation with other characters as well as past versions of themselves often become fictionalised – whether consciously or unconsciously. According to Rayner (1988:488), “narrative form gives the illusion of the closure of experience in the consonance of cause and effect that experience does not have.” Hence it is easier for the characters to make sense of their existence by fictionalising their experience.

For Pinter (2005:22), our first consideration, as human beings, is that “we are faced with the immense difficulty, if not the impossibility of verifying the past.” It therefore happens that Pinter's characters create, or rather, narrate, their own versions of the past, in which, as he illustrates in *The Collection* (1961), an “event has no independent existence outside the different versions of its story.” For the characters, as well as the audience, it is impossible to access an event in the past: “the past event cannot be touched in any sense; it can only be ‘objectified’ in the sense that a particular description of it is accepted – temporarily – as ‘the truth’” (Scolnicov, 2012:90).

Pinter therefore is already pointing out “the futility of trying to pin down the past event by relying on subjective reports of it” (Scolnicov, 2012:90). In addition, as Scolnicov (2012:90) argues, the storied event becomes as important, and real, experientially and morally, as the actual event.

In *Betrayal* an instance of the manner in which characters fictionalise their own experience is that of Jerry and Emma's memory of Jerry throwing Charlotte into the air. This

memory is recounted twice in Scene One, and again in Scene Six. In both scenes it aims to convince the characters how close Emma and Jerry's families were at one time, despite the fact that these characters were having an affair. The first time the audience hears the memory recalled occurs when Emma and Jerry enquire about each other's children in Scene One and talk about Emma's daughter, Charlotte:

EMMA: Do you remember that time... oh god it was... when you picked her up and threw her up and caught her?
JERRY: She was very light.
EMMA: She remembers that, you know.
JERRY: Really?
EMMA: Mmmn. Being thrown up.
JERRY: What a memory.
Pause
She doesn't know about us, does she?
EMMA: Of course not. She just remembers you, as an old friend.
JERRY: That's right.
Pause
Yes, everyone was there that day, standing around, your husband, my wife, all the kids, I remember.
EMMA: What day?
JERRY: When I threw her up. It was in your kitchen.
EMMA: It was in your kitchen. (19-20)

This first recollection serves mainly to indicate how Charlotte also shares this significant memory with Jerry and Emma, although it must have had a different significance for her. The second time it is brought up, Jerry wishes to emphasise how close he and Robert were, and how unsettling he finds the fact that Robert knows about his affair with Emma: "But he's my oldest friend... I mean, I picked his own daughter up in my own arms and threw her up and caught her, in my kitchen. He watched me do it" (29). Jerry now accepts Emma's version of the memory, where the event happened in his kitchen, rather than hers.

The audience again hears of this memory in Scene Six, which – for the characters – is in fact the earlier recollection. Jerry is anxious about being caught out by Judith in his affair with Emma; after a pause, he continues:

JERRY: Listen. Do you remember, when was it, a few years ago, we were all in your kitchen, must have been Christmas or something, do you remember, all the kids were running about and suddenly I picked

Charlotte up and lifted her high up, high up, and then down and up. Do you remember how she laughed?

EMMA: Everyone laughed.

JERRY: She was so light. And there was your husband and my wife and all the kids, all standing and laughing in your kitchen. I can't get rid of it.

EMMA: It was your kitchen, actually. (100-101)

The memory again serves to express how close the families are, and thus how complicated the affair – but this time the emphasis falls on Jerry's feelings of guilt. Again, there is uncertainty about where it happened: in Emma's kitchen or Jerry's, which indicates that there is no way of determining what exactly happened. The memory itself becomes a vague marker to illustrate the complicated entanglement of these two families in the present.

We again notice the way characters fictionalise events in the last scene of *Betrayal*, where Jerry first tries to seduce Emma. Being drunk, Jerry becomes rather poetic in his description of his memories. He reminisces about how he was best man at Robert and Emma's wedding and how his attraction to her was evident even then:

JERRY: I was best man at your wedding. I saw you in white. I watched you glide by in white.

EMMA: I wasn't in white.

JERRY: You know what should have happened?

EMMA: What?

JERRY: I should have had you, in your white, before the wedding. I should have blackened you, in your white wedding dress, blackened you in your bridal dress, before ushering you into your wedding, as your best man.

(135)

Burkman (1982:511) interprets the fact that Jerry recalls Emma's wedding dress as white, when it was not this colour, as a sign that he does not primarily desire Emma, since he "doesn't even recall the color of her dress properly." In the light of Pinter's characters' tendency to fictionalise their life experiences, I think it more plausible that Jerry is replacing actual events with more poetic versions of those events. Jerry is taking poetic licence in recalling Emma's wedding to portray her as the virginal bride, which fits his fantasy. Again, the memory itself is a vague marker for the more important, present goal of seduction.

3.5.4. The unoriginality of language

In *Betrayal*, characters do not only fictionalise their own past, but also sometimes borrow fictions from elsewhere if they are struggling to bring something into expression. Griffith (1992:98) associates this tendency with Bakhtin's concepts about the lack of originality in language:

Just as there is no such thing as "fresh air," since, if we think about it, every gulp of it is likely to have been in several pairs of lungs before our own, so there is for Bakhtin no such thing as "fresh speech," since all the words in it are likely to have been used already, and to carry with them traces of their previous usages.

The unoriginality of language is most clearly evident in *Betrayal*'s Scene Nine, when Jerry is unable to express himself satisfactorily. Prentice (1994:246) describes the scene as one in which emotion overwhelms expression. He tells Emma: "You're lovely. I'm crazy about you. All these words I'm using, don't you see, they've never been said before" (135). This line, which very obviously contradicts itself, actually points to the fact that while no utterance is original, each is also unique – since one context can never be identical to another (Bakhtin in Holquist, 1990:68).

Later, Jerry says to Emma "Nothing has ever happened. Nothing. This is the only thing that has ever happened" (136-137). That which Jerry so vaguely refers to as "this," is powerful enough to obliterate for him the history clinging to the words he uses. Therefore, a repetitive use of language is necessary for the characters to communicate.

Interestingly, it is not only Pinter's characters who borrow words to express themselves. Pinter himself also incorporates various texts intertextually to express certain things. According to Burton (2005:213), Scene Nine corresponds to how Cupid marries Psyche in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, in the sense that Emma is kept in the dark. The moment of bliss can only happen in the obfuscation of the dark, just as Psyche was not allowed to see that Cupid is a god.

The way in which the affair is discovered by Robert also corresponds to Dante's *Inferno*, according to Fehsenfeld (1993:127). In *Betrayal*, Spinks' book, the subject of which is possibly betrayal, leads to the confrontation about the infidelity. In *Inferno*, it is also "the

book of betrayal by Guinevere and Lancelot” that is not only central to the passion between the lovers but also the source of the discovery of their deception.

It is, furthermore, not a coincidence that Robert chooses to read Yeats on Torcello. According to Roche (2009:206), Yeats is the poet of sexual betrayal: “In the sexually more explicit poems Yeats wrote in the second half of his career, the encounter of a man and a woman in the act of love is likely to be troubled by the presence of a third: either a lover from a past life or the projection of an idealised counter-self to the beloved.” In *Betrayal*, the cast of three and their various groupings throughout the nine scenes also evoke the idea that “wherever two people are gathered in a room, there is always a third, unseen presence” (Billington, 1996:355).

Lastly, for Prentice (1994:234), Emma’s name is also reminiscent of Emma Bovary, foreshadowing certain ideas about the adulterous woman which the play either confirms or rejects. Clearly, as Bakhtin asserts above, as does Blau (in Carlson, 2004:149-150), no literary image can be pure and original. It already carries with it the baggage of past uses which can be put to use anew, such as Pinter has done with *Betrayal*.

3.6. Recycling and mimicry

The fashion in which the characters recycle utterances and create surfaces through which to communicate permeates their entire existence to the point that it brings the authenticity of that existence into question. An element of mimesis thus permeates the characters’ lives in that their words and actions are often not original, but mimicked. Ben-Zvi (1980:233) contrasts the three characters’ duplicitous lives with that of Spinks, the author of the book that Emma reads in Venice. Jerry describes Spinks as follows: “He’s a very thin bloke. About fifty. Wears dark glasses day and night. He lives alone, in a furnished room... He’s unfussed” (97). For Ben-Zvi (1980:233),

it is Spinks who appears least able to betray or be betrayed because he has cut all possibility of human contact. The only way, Pinter implies, that one can live without duplicity, is to live in a perpetual blackness without life. Spinks is heralded as the writer of the future, the artist who produces the new novel – untouched by human contact.

Spinks thus represents to Ben-Zvi a modicum of authenticity in his isolation. This image of the lonesome artist who renounces the world is, however, also a pretentious stereotype and therefore just as much, if not more, mimetic than the lives of Robert, Emma and Jerry.

In a manner similar to Spinks, Emma tends to create an image of what she thinks her life ought to be, and thereafter attempts to emulate that image in her daily life. This becomes evident in her attitude to the flat she and Jerry rent for the purposes of their affair. The audience first comes to know of the flat when Emma and Jerry refer to it in Act One. Emma describes how she had driven through Kilburn a few days before and passed “the house” (21). She stopped and went to look for her and Jerry’s fake surname on the bell – which, of course, had been replaced by the new occupants. Later, in Scene One the audience also learns that Jerry could not really afford the flat at the time, but rented it anyway and that Emma bought curtains for it. Three scenes are subsequently set in this flat: Scene Three which shows the affair being dissolved, Scene Six, when Emma and Jerry see each other for the first time since Emma and Robert went to Venice (where Robert discovers the affair), and Scene Eight, which reveals the peak of the affair.

Through these three scenes, Emma’s intention to make the flat a home is evident. When she and Jerry are terminating the affair, she remarks that they “haven’t spent many nights... in this flat” (53). She also recognises how her efforts in this regard fell short: “I mean the crockery and the curtains and the bedspread and everything. And the tablecloth I brought from Venice. (*Laughs.*) It’s ridiculous” (54). When she refers to the flat as a home, Jerry replies:

JERRY: It’s not a home.

Pause

I know... I know what you wanted... but it could never... actually be a home. You have a home. I have a home. With curtains, etcetera. And children. Two children in two homes. There are no children here, so it’s not the same kind of home.

EMMA: It was never intended to be the same kind of home. Was it?

Pause

You didn’t ever see it as a home, in any sense, did you?

JERRY: No, I saw it as a flat... you know.

EMMA: For fucking.

JERRY: No, for loving.

EMMA: Well, there’s not much of that left, is there?

Silence (55)

When they decide to give the flat up, Emma says: “I don’t want anything. Nowhere I can put it, you see. I have a home, with tablecloths and all the rest of it” (57). Emma clearly recognises that although she had tried to mimic a conventional marriage with Jerry in the flat, this was impossible, since they both already possessed families. The scene ends with Emma returning her key to the flat to Jerry and him handing her back the key ring after he had taken the key off it, the key and ring being a less romantic version of a wedding ring.

The next time the audience sees the flat, Emma is still optimistic about the possibility of turning the flat into a home. She remarks that it “needs Hoovering” (94), and while Jerry compares the flat to Spinks’ “furnished room” (97), Emma continues to “play house”:

EMMA: Furnished rooms suit him?
JERRY: Yes.
EMMA: They suit me too. And you? Do you still like it? Our home?
JERRY: It’s marvellous not to have a telephone.
EMMA: And marvellous to have me?
JERRY: You’re all right.
EMMA: I cook and slave for you.
JERRY: You do.
EMMA: I bought something in Venice – for the house.
 She opens the parcel, takes out a tablecloth. Puts it on the table. (98)

In Scene Eight, the audience sees the flat for the last time. The scene opens with a display of domesticity which borders on parody. Jerry arrives to find Emma cooking a stew in an apron, fulfilling a gender role starkly contrasting with what one would expect from two sophisticated, career-driven adulterers. By this time it is clear that the flat, as well as Jerry and Emma’s relationship, complete with the fake surname of “Green,” contain an element of make-believe or mimicry. Throughout these three scenes, the affair as a result seems to be an inauthentic relationship imitating a conventional marriage and contrasted with the characters’ “real” marriages and homes. It would be easy to interpret Emma and Jerry’s affair as a counterfeit, much like the painting in the Italian restaurant where Robert and Jerry lunch after Robert has found out about the affair. Ben-Zvi (1980:233) describes the painting that was used in the first production of *Betrayal* at the National Theatre as “crass, artificial, ugly,” and compares it to the relation of Spinks and Casey’s writing to that of the Modernist authors Robert and Jerry

admire: “poor imitations of some desired goal.” But the mere existence of the affair again calls the integrity of their marriages into question.

According to Sakellaridou (1988:184), the two relationships poison each other – and it is exactly because the characters have a sense of honesty that their “dishonest” relationships become tainted “with feelings of guilt or mortification.” Ben-Zvi (1980:236) points out that the cracks in the characters’ marriages are indeed very evident:

Throughout the play, Pinter has made clear that the actual homes in which Jerry and Emma live are not homes: Judith is absent, the children mere spectres. Both Emma and Jerry have voids in their lives which each hopes the affair between them will fill. But Pinter, in these exchanges, shows the impossibility.

Neither of Emma’s relationships, in other words, seems to be genuine. For Scolnicov (2012:109), the affair and marriage mimic each other since Emma “cooks and slaves” for her lover while she goes on a romantic vacation to Venice with her husband. In consequence, unlike the Italian restaurant where Jerry and Robert lunch in Scene Seven, which is a mimicry of Italy, complete with a painting of Venice against the wall, neither the affair nor the marriage can be compared as a fake to an original.

3.7. Metatheatrical implications in *Betrayal*

As is often the case with theatre, in *Betrayal*, the concerns about meaning and language illustrated by the play have significance not only within the fictional world of the characters, but also in the actual world of the audience. According to Burkman and Kundert-Gibbs (1993: xvii), Pinter’s writing

focuses with terrible honesty on personal and societal problems, forcing a primal, living, or immediate response as much as an aesthetic one. He confronts the audience with problems outside the bounds of art, breaking the so-called normal boundaries of film and stage in an attempt to find a reality so immediate that one cannot separate oneself from it.

Hence, the concerns of the characters in the fictional world become the concerns of the audience in the actual one. In neither the fictional world represented on stage, nor the audience’s actual perception of it, are either the present or the past able to be verified.

In *Betrayal*, this becomes evident, chiefly through the reverse chronology of the play. Roof (1993:82) explains how the epistemological concerns in the fictional world permeate the actual world in *Betrayal* as well as certain plays by Marguerite Duras:

Foregrounding the characters' consciousness of the untrustworthiness of language, the investigative method, even of the news media, the plays situate the substance of the drama not in a reenactment [*sic*] of the crime, nor even finally in any murder investigation, but rather, as in *Betrayal*, in the indirect examination of who knows what when and how. Focusing on the slippages, approximations, gaps, and misunderstandings by which knowing is conveyed and the works' consciousness of the uneasy relation between fact and medium brings into question any reliance upon original fact or text.

Roof (1993:80) proceeds to argue that because the audience already knows the "'central' fact" of betrayal, the apparent power granted by the dramatic irony as a result of the structure of the play is shown to be a red herring. *Betrayal* suggests "that the process – the desire, the looking – is more important than finding facts." Therefore, it exposes the "lure" of knowledge as merely a "lure" (Roof, 1993:79).

Roche (2009:207), on the other hand, links the reverse chronology to the intertextual author, Yeats, and his concept of "Dreaming Back." The latter is a process in which a person, upon death, repeatedly relives the moments in his or her life that moved him or her most. Although nothing new can be added to these events, they are experienced in a light, the brightness of which is determined by the "intensity of the passion" which accompanied the events. Diamond (1985:198) agrees that the characters relive their past in *Betrayal*. Yet, there is no indication in the play that the scenes following Scene One are flashbacks, rather than the characters' lives shown with a rearranged chronology. I am of the same mind as Rayner (1988:484) who regards the past, not as rendered through the memory of one of the characters in *Betrayal*, but as taking place in front of the audience.

Thus, although the reverse chronology might remind the audience of the concept of "Dreaming Back," this does not imply that the play shows the memory of one of the characters. Rather, the reversed timeline emphasises the fact that the author had tampered with the chronology of events. For Esslin (1992:198), the device of having the year displayed above each scene is distinctly Brechtian; Billington (1996:275) also remarks that the "conspicuous artifice" of the narrative that moves backwards strongly reminds one of the

author's presence. It therefore pushes the audience out of the fictional world into the actual in order to examine the play, as a sleuth might.

Pinter shows the audience just enough for it to know that the characters are sometimes lying. Emma's lie that she and Robert did not go to Torcello because the speedboats were on strike, when Robert had indeed gone alone, is, for instance, obvious. This indicates to the audience how an entire world of deception can be constructed in words, just to be shattered – again by words. This points not only to the precariousness of perception, but additionally, to how the entire play is indeed a world constructed through language. The reverse chronology is therefore a metatheatrical event (albeit an implicit, covert one), used to prompt the audience to consider the broader epistemological questions that the play asks.

This notion is underscored by the *mise en abymes* in the text. Within a play about the topic of betrayal, we find a character reading a novel which is possibly about the topic of betrayal when Emma reads Spinks' novel in Scene Five. Although this *mise en abyme* is not a play within a play, but a transmedial metareference, it does reflect on both the medium which it refers to (the novel) as well as the medium in which it occurs (the theatre), as suggested above by Hauthal (2009). It is consequently ironic when Robert remarks that there is “not much more to say on that subject, really, is there?” (78). Billington (1996:261) remarks that the idea of a Borgesian hall of mirrors is intensified when Emma says that she does not know the topic of the novel, since she has not finished reading it, while the audience has not finished watching the play about betrayal.

Casey's novels also form *mise en abymes* since they seem to be painstakingly autobiographical in the way that they attempt to fully disclose the circumstances of how the novel comes about, much like the performances of Spalding Gray, discussed above. The audience learns about Casey's novels when the characters discuss his whereabouts in Scene Four:

JERRY: He's left Susannah. He's living alone round the corner.
EMMA: Oh.
ROBERT: Writing a novel about a man who leaves his wife and three children and goes to live on the other side of London to write a novel about a man who leaves his wife and three children –
EMMA: I hope it's better than the last one.

ROBERT: The last one? Ah, the last one. Wasn't that the one about the man who lived in a big house in Hampstead with his wife and three children and is writing a novel about – ? (66)

Accordingly Casey's novels indeed lead to a poststructuralist hall of mirrors since they represent a narrative within an identical narrative within an identical narrative. Yet, Emma considers this device insincere, due to the fact that she considers the fictionalising of one's life or living out one's own fiction "bloody dishonest," according to Rayner (1988:488). Such a hall of mirrors emphasises the fact that reflecting surfaces merely continue to reflect each other and bring one no closer to any original substance, but remain a surface. Any assertion to the contrary would thus be insincere.

The irony of fictionalising one's own life is not lost if one considers that *Betrayal* is based on autobiographical events. According to Billington (1996:257), Pinter drew from his affair with journalist and television presenter, Joan Bakewell, for this play. This has also been corroborated by Lady Antonia Fraser (2010:81), Pinter's second wife.¹⁷ Bakewell (in Billington, 1996:264-265) has confirmed that Pinter did indeed throw her own daughter in the air while they were having an affair. The incident with the poste restante in Venice did also happen to her, although, instead of a tablecloth, she brought an hourglass back from Venice. Bakewell (in Billington, 1996:265) describes her reaction to this as follows:

But it's like a diary and so I was upset when I first read it. Harold kept saying, 'It's a play – it's a play.' I was upset, however, because it was called *Betrayal*. It's such a judgemental word. But we go on betraying, don't we? Here I am telling you about it. The irony is that the process never ends.

The boundary between fiction and reality in consequence breaks down, on yet a different level. The play reaches through the fictional world into the actual, suggesting that betrayal is also not limited to the fictional, but permeates the actual world.

Pinter therefore succeeds in using "banal" subject matter to cast light on profound epistemological issues. In *Betrayal*, the audience's seemingly privileged position is shown to be relative, despite the reverse chronology. The members of the audience may know the characters' future, but they do not know their past. The play exposes the audience's desire for knowledge (Roof, 1993:80) and how piecing the events of the past together brings its

¹⁷ According to Fraser (2010:81), "the play began with the image of Harold finding out from Michael Bakewell that he, Michael, had long known of Harold's affair with his wife Joan – from Joan herself."

members no closer to the truth (Roof, 1993:82). Metatheatrical implications ensue, since the experience of the characters mirrors the quest of the viewer to read through the surfaces of the play.

The characters also hold very definite opinions about literary texts – evident in their attitudes to their professions and Robert and Jerry’s betrayal of their literary idealism. Yeats and Ford Madox Ford are, for example, contrasted with the commercially successful Casey whose “art does seem to be falling away” (44), although it still sells well. This raises the point that despite the fact that in *Betrayal*, various texts seem to be deceitful, certain texts are represented as of higher value. The characters therefore make a distinction between “good” art and commercial art, corresponding to Eco’s (1999:20) assertion that certain interpretations are more valid than others. It is then left to the audience to establish if it finds *Betrayal* to be of higher value or not.

3.8. Conclusion

Betrayal consequently demonstrates how, if there exists such a thing as an authentic core or essence, it is never accessed by the characters or shown to the audience. Every bond, or community, formed between the characters is betrayed in this play as the characters even betray younger versions of themselves.

As Esslin (1992:227) suggests, Pinter’s greatest contribution to theatre is the manner in which he points out that people do not communicate through a code, but that language is used in a much more complex manner. His innovation lies in the way that he uses a traditional form to convey avant-garde ideas, and therefore it does not fit neatly into any dramatic category.

The manner in which the characters in *Betrayal* remain isolated, conforms to postmodern ideas about language, although Pinter (2008) maintains that his plays do not show the “failure of communication.” Nevertheless, *Betrayal* does portray characters for us who communicate, using language as a kaleidoscope: reflecting unoriginal fictions to create an image which may be smashed at any second. The characters create worlds using words and undo these same worlds, again through words.

Language becomes a weapon with which the characters obscure things and exclude each other. They reveal themselves to each other (as well as the audience) through veiled

speech: by saying one thing, while it is clear that they are meaning something else. Pinter conveys this veiled language to the audience by relying on the plurisignation of theatre – the actors are called upon to portray veiled language through veiled acting. The characters (and again, the audience too) as a result have only clues at their disposal with which to interpret what they experience: the “pip pip pips” (26), as Jerry refers to them. The idea of language as a screen or surface is reinforced by recycling and mimicry, both by the author in constructing the play as well as by the characters within the fictional world.

If the actual can be pitted against the fictional in terms of what the characters mean versus what they say, Pinter never indulges himself or his audience by showing the former directly. The actual thus remains an enigma: just as Jerry’s memory of throwing Charlotte in the air is only recounted and never shown on stage. Pinter furthermore undermines any binary between the original and an imitation in the characters’ relationships by making neither the affair nor the marriages more sincere – the relationships all mimic each other.

These concerns subsequently ripple out to the audience, through metatheatrical devices. As Hutcheon (1984:7) suggests, the audience is simultaneously pushed out of the fictional world of the play and pulled back into it by these devices. By displaying the year in which a scene takes place above the stage and showing the events in an altered chronology, the audience is made aware of the author’s hand in what is seen on stage. Its members are thereby invited to view the play in a detached manner. Yet, through the modality of the self-reference, in that it happens at the beginning of the play, the audience early on accepts the obvious fictionality of the play. The metareference in the play is furthermore mainly extracompositional and implicit, so that it can be accepted within the fictional world of the play.

The audience is thereafter drawn back into the fictional world of the play, sharing in the characters’ frustration in uncovering the “truth” of what is presented before them. If the characters are betrayed by and betray each other as well as their artistic ideals, what does this imply for the audience viewing a work of art? In this manner, the metareference in this play fulfils a recipient-centred function by having the audience members consider their own role as an audience.

Hence *Betrayal* uses fictio-metareference in mimicking the manner by which the characters communicate by using language as surfaces to cover up undercurrents of meaning:

like the characters' speech and Casey's novels, theatre (and this play) also function as a surface. The fact that none of the characters can – or are willing to – move beyond these surfaces, does not imply that their language (or the medium of theatre, for that matter) is somehow more or less authentic than any other language or medium. It merely emphasises that theatre functions, as all languages do, within the actual world.

By now, the way Pinter's characters speak through innuendoes and use language as a smoke screen has been copied and parodied numerous times, as happens with any established literary icon's work. Indeed, *Betrayal* has become a seminal text within the realm of drama, with adultery as its theme and a very probable inspiration for the next play to be analysed in this thesis, Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*.

CHAPTER 4:

TOM STOPPARD'S PERPLEXING HALL OF MIRRORS IN *THE REAL THING*

What would we do without the idea of the Real Thing, the 'real' relationship? We would have to compare everything with everything else. Monogamy saves us from – and, alas, saves us for – the madness of comparisons. It domesticates the infinite. – Adam Phillips, *Monogamy* (1996)

4.1. Introduction

As is evident from the preceding chapter, Pinter involves his audience through transmedial metareferences which are mostly covert, extracompositional and implicit. In other words, the audience might not necessarily perceive these metareferences. Stoppard, on the other hand, uses metatheatrical devices in an overt manner. *Mise en abymes* proliferate in *The Real Thing*, to the point that the characters and audience are indeed caught in “the madness of comparisons,” as Phillips (1996) suggests in the epigraph above.

After a brief contextualisation of Stoppard's place in the dramatic canon and *The Real Thing* within his oeuvre, I proceed to investigate how his play embodies the concepts of authenticity, language and mimesis discussed in Chapter Two, firstly by analysing the debates in the play about these subjects. Secondly, I consider the way mimicry infiltrates the lives of these characters within the fictional world; both in the formation of their identities and in the various *mise en abymes* included in the play. Lastly, I reflect on how the playwright includes the actual world in this play, through various metatheatrical devices.

4.2. Stoppard's place in the dramatic canon

Up until Harold Pinter's death in 2008, Tom Stoppard had been considered one of the greatest living British playwrights together with him. According to Rusinko (1986:7), Pinter led a first wave of new dramatists in the latter half of the twentieth century, while Stoppard led a second wave in the 1970s. Various scholars have compared the two playwrights and found that the differences between them are numerous, despite the fact that neither went to university, both

are passionate about cricket (Rusinko, 1986:7-8), and both use revolutionary stage language (Harty, 1987:130).

When one compares the typography of the published texts of *Betrayal* and *The Real Thing*, for example, the playwrights' contrasting approaches to language become clear. The words in Pinter's text are widely spaced and the turns of speech generally short, while Stoppard's text is densely printed with longer sentences that seem wordy. According to Gussow (1984:2-3), "Stoppard and Pinter are stylistic opposites. Stoppard's plays are expansive, verbose and filled with digressions. Pinter's are mysterious, parsimonious with words and filled with pauses." For Rusinko (1986:9), Pinter is the master of the unspoken word, and Stoppard the master of the spoken one. Even in their distinct approaches to the production of their plays, Pinter remains more reticent, whereas Stoppard is more forthcoming, as Jeremy Irons (in Delaney, 1994:5), who played Robert in the film version of *Betrayal* and Henry in the New York premiere of *The Real Thing*, notes: "Tom is just great. He's not like Pinter, who believes that you don't have to explain because the work is it, it's all in the writing. Tom explains."

In addition, Stoppard has also been compared to George Bernard Shaw because of the witty debate in his plays, the fact that his theatre is a theatre of ideas, and his "ambushing" of the audience (Crawford, 1993:108). Like most innovative British playwrights of his time, Stoppard is also influenced by Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and possibly John Osborne's *Look back in anger* (Delaney, 2001:1).

Nadel (2004:21) distinguishes three themes in Stoppard's life which consistently permeate his work. Firstly, the theme of displacement stems from Stoppard's history as a child refugee. According to Nadel (2004:21), "his status as refugee until his arrival in England in 1946 clearly shaped his early outlook while paradoxically driving him to secure his new identity by becoming more English than the English in his habits and subject matter."¹⁸ The second and third themes which Nadel (2004:22) discerns: that of a distrust of history and a double identity, stem from Stoppard's notion that the past is invented.

In his later work, Stoppard extends his concern with memory and uncertainty, focusing specifically on the consequences of "ethical conflict and intellectual doubt" (Kelly, 2001:10).

¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that unlike Conrad or Nabokov, Stoppard's first language was English, since the time he was a small child (Nadel, 2004:21).

His oeuvre is marked by a preoccupation with the past, a conservatism “with a small c” (Kelly. 2001:151), an emotional distance – or coldness – an emphasis on structure, flair for words, a playful self-consciousness and intertextuality.

According to Nadel (2004:19), Stoppard discovered that “one can invent but not reproduce the past” when he tried to recreate a photograph of his parents, taken decades before. Stoppard is thus well aware that mimicry inherently shows repetition to be impossible. Therefore, Stoppard treats biography as “a fiction more to be mistrusted than believed” in his plays, most notably, *Indian Ink* and *Arcadia* (Nadel, 2004:20).

And yet, Stoppard has a desire to protect – or conserve – the past and resists impulsive change. While this has caused him to be regarded as a conservative playwright, Stoppard (in Gussow, 1995:96), contends that what he prefers and does not prefer, cannot be divided into “things that the Conservative Party or the Labour Party does.” He thus aligns himself with a “wider moral and cultural definition of ‘conservatism’” than the specifics of any political party (Bull, 2001:138). Nevertheless, his supposed lack of commitment to a cause is one of the main critiques against him (Billington, 1987:145). Brustein (1984:28), for example, describes Stoppard as “tone deaf before the dissonant inflections of Western political protest,” although he acknowledges the latter’s involvement in the politics of Eastern Europe. Sammells (1988: ix) considers Stoppard’s conservatism as the root of the decline in his art, which he describes as moving from an aesthetics of engagement to a politics of disengagement, or “militant conservatism.” However, there are critics such as Chung (2005:689), who read Stoppard’s plays against the grain and regard him as revolutionary and subversive, despite his reputation as politically conservative.

Apart from his conservatism, the other major critique of Stoppard is that his plays are perceived as cold or unemotional (Billington, 1987:145) or “far too cerebral, too emotionally barren: all head and no heart” (Zeifman, 2001:185). According to Müller (2000:119), from his debut Stoppard has consistently “included theoretical views, statements and remarks in his plays”. A problem solving element invariably occurs in his plays, although he refuses to oversimplify the theory incorporated in them. Stoppard does not attempt to solve mysteries such as the wave versus particle controversy in the theory of light or the “irrationality of romantic love” (Zinman, 2001:121). Yet, for Cohn (1981), Stoppard does not succeed in creating a

marriage between farce and ideas in his plays. The comedy serves as light relief while the ideas weigh the play down.

Müller (2000:119), on the other hand, argues that Stoppard illustrates how literature, philosophy and literary theory are often inextricable. For Müller (2000:121) the strength of Stoppard's plays lies in his combination of a traditional dramatic form regarding character, dialogue and didascalia with ambivalent situations, contradictory dialogue, pastiche and intertextuality, logical paradoxes and parody. As a result, the theory in Stoppard's plays serves various functions, such as a parody and indirect criticism of the theory in which it takes on the "polyphonic openness of literature" (Müller, 2000:126).

It follows then that Stoppard's characters are highly intelligent and known for their immense vocabulary and complex sentence structure. They are rarely inarticulate or ungrammatical, to the point that they are necessarily "well-educated, ironical and quick-witted," and are "despicable" when they are not. Hence, according to Zinman (2001:120), there is a "quality of high Englishness" in his oeuvre.

Since Stoppard's plays are known to be exceptionally theatrical, the theory not only finds expression through the dialogue, but is also theatrically presented. For Zinman (2001:121), the structure of a Stoppard play is informed by a vision and functions as "dramatic architecture." Especially when his plays are concerned with the theory of play construction, aesthetics and style, as they often are, according to Fleming (2001:14), the structure proves to be crucial. In *Travesties* (1975), *Night and Day* (1978) and *The Real Thing* (1982), for example, Stoppard uses a "faux" opening scene which is subsequently doubled, tripled or quadrupled throughout the play. The set design also features prominently and mimics the structure (a point to which I shall return) as the audience needs to reassess what its members have seen as the play progresses (Zinman, 2001:121).

In this way, Stoppard's work is, despite its traditional form, characterised by an uncertainty and a refusal to present a reliable voice (Bull, 2001:138). According to Boireau (1997:136), "Stoppard plays his favourite game of ping-pong with layers of fictionality, deftly juggling with postmodern practices, therefore carefully avoiding fixed meanings and rigid categories," while a sense of doubling and mimicry permeates Stoppard's life and work (Kelly, 2001:11). He favours the play within a play technique, following René Magritte's statement that a representation of an apple on a canvas "is not an apple," but only an image of

an apple. Stoppard's plays therefore always advertise "that whatever is represented on stage looks like theatre and *is* first and foremost theatre" (Boireau, 1997:136).

While this makes Stoppard's work especially interesting in light of metatheatrical concerns over authenticity, it has also been the cause of criticism. Homan (1989:106) describes Stoppard as "a playwright so aware of his audience that, for some observers, his seeming violation of the stage's fourth wall amounts to a limitation: Stoppard is too playful, and too self-conscious of that playfulness, we are told, and as a consequence is not sufficiently concerned with the integrity, nor with the originality of his onstage world."

In light of Hornby's (1986), Homan's (1989) and Balme's (2008) positions, with regard to the authenticity of theatre discussed in Chapter Two, one could argue that Stoppard's full disclosure about the ontological status of the worlds depicted in his plays would rather seem to suggest integrity, as will be pointed out in the rest of this chapter. This disclosure furthermore extends to his use of intertextuality. Scolnicov (2012:174) contrasts Pinter with Stoppard on the grounds that Stoppard's work is more openly intertextual.

Stoppard often mines or recycles from the canon of Western art, presenting his audience with familiar images which are then made strange (Kelly, 2001:10-11). This clearly implies that he writes for a well-read audience whose members have known, since *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, that they should expect "texts behind the text" in a game of collaboration with Stoppard, recognising "major works of the western canon" (Kelly, 2001:11). Brater (2001:205) has also noted that although it may not be politically correct to point this out, Stoppard's plays are aimed at a literate and middle-class audience. Thereby, Stoppard involves his audience in his plays as his work not only comments on itself metatheatrically, but always points to something outside the play: "the interlacing of texts reaffirms for the audience the validity of literature within human experience" (Meyer, 1989:106).

The fact that Stoppard's oeuvre is characterised on the one hand by his conservatism and use of traditional forms, and on the other by his use of metatheatre and intertextuality, simultaneously suggests and resists positioning him as a postmodern dramatist. Fleming (2001:15) divides Stoppard's critics into three groups: firstly, those who focus mainly on *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), *Jumpers* (1972) and *Travesties* and view them as studies in existentialism, absurdism and "structure for structure's sake." Secondly,

those scholars who align themselves with Western liberal democracy and employ a traditional approach to Stoppard's plays; whereas, thirdly, postmodern and poststructuralist critics "elevate form to level of context," deprivileging dialogue when "they argue that Stoppard's plays accent the unknowability of the world, the elusiveness of true knowledge, the fallibility of human memory, and the relativity of almost all aspects of life."

Hence there is disagreement between scholars as to whether or not Stoppard's work should be approached from a postmodern perspective. Delaney (1990:1) asserts that Stoppard's distinct "vision of life" permeates all his plays and is opposed to the "currents of thought which prevail in his own day." Delaney (1990:1) perceives Stoppard as writing "of mankind as existing in a realm in which right and wrong are universal metaphysical absolutes." Furthermore, Zinman (2001:121) considers Stoppard's plays as distinctly not postmodern due to their concern with morality and honour.

Fleming (2001:14) regards Stoppard's work as a continuation of the experimentation of high modernism, with aesthetic expression: "Stoppard firmly believes in the values associated with Western, liberal humanism." Fleming (2001:14-15) therefore sets out to assess Stoppard's work, not within current discourses in literary theory, but from the vantage point that Stoppard's "artistic genius cannot be neatly explained by the sociopolitical context of the historical moment." I find this approach odd, however, since much of Stoppard's oeuvre, and *The Real Thing* in particular, is inextricably part of a larger postmodern discourse. Both Delaney's (1990) and Fleming's (2001) interpretations of Stoppard's oeuvre furthermore rely on the playwright's personal vision or values, which I consider problematic.

Although Stoppard is markedly uneasy "with polemical and pseudo-documentary playwriting," as is suggested in *The Real Thing* (Bull, 2001:148), his plays still express various postmodern notions. Hu (1989:4) contends that Stoppard's use of "excerpts from other dramatists' works" and stylistic devices from a variety "of theatrical and literary periods" reflects postmodern sensibilities while Innes (2006:224) describes his main effect "of multiplying intellectual complexity" as distinctly postmodern.

Vanden Heuvel (2001:213) additionally identifies the loss of sustaining cultural narratives, the waywardness of language, the fragmented nature of identity and the death of the author as postmodern concerns in Stoppard's work. The last concern is underscored by Stoppard (1999) himself when he remarks that "the theatre seems to me, on the whole, to be a

way of telling stories which are acted out for an audience and which mean pretty much what the audience thinks they mean.”

According to Vanden Heuvel (2001:217-218), “Stoppard has relentlessly pursued themes relevant to postmodernism’s obsession with textual openness and the free (wheeling) play of signification of meaning.” As a result, the epistemological aspects of Stoppard’s oeuvre in particular test the limits of postmodernism. Yet, Vanden Heuvel (2001:213) emphasises that “Stoppard and his plays will frustrate any attempt to impose an either/or logic in terms of their relationship to postmodern ideas and aesthetics.” According to Vanden Heuvel (2001:219), Stoppard’s morality keeps him from giving “himself completely over to” the ideas he writes about. Although Stoppard is keenly interested in “certain intellectual, aesthetic, and ideological positions associated with postmodern art and drama,” he is simultaneously opposed to “some of the more radical notions and claims of postmodern social theory and its image of the human subject” (Vanden Heuvel, 2001:213).

4.3. *The Real Thing* within Stoppard’s oeuvre

Although Stoppard consequently does not neatly fit into the category of postmodern playwright, I illustrate, in an analysis of *The Real Thing*, that a postmodern reading of the play will open up interesting avenues which Delaney’s (1985) restrictive emphasis on morality excludes.

According to Fleming (2001:175), “*The Real Thing* is Stoppard’s most realistic, most personal, and most accessible play.” It was also his most commercially successful to date. The play concerns a playwright-actress couple, Henry and Annie, and their experience of infidelity. The audience is introduced to the couple when Henry is still married to a different actress, Charlotte, who stars in one of his plays, opposite Max, Annie’s husband. By the end of the first act, Henry and Annie have divorced their spouses after their affair has been discovered, and married each other. In the second act, Annie has an affair with her co-actor in Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (1633), named Billy. Annie finally ends this affair and returns to Henry. Meanwhile, Annie is involved in the cause of Brodie, a political prisoner who is serving a sentence for setting a cenotaph on fire during an anti-missile demonstration. He writes a very poor play about his demonstration and subsequent incarceration, which Annie

persuades Henry to rewrite. The rewritten version is filmed with Annie and Billy in the lead roles.

The most interesting aspect of *The Real Thing* is its structure. The play functions on several fictional levels since Stoppard intersperses scenes from the characters' lives with scenes from plays they encounter in their occupations in the theatre. Therefore, Scene One is a scene from a play within a play titled "House of Cards," which is about infidelity and was written by Henry. Henry's first wife, Charlotte, and Annie's first husband, Max, play the lead roles in this scene, which shows a husband coolly confront his wife whom he suspects of adultery. The second scene shows Charlotte and Henry at their home, which presumably confuses the audience at first since it only gradually becomes clear that Scene One was in fact a play within a play and not part of the outer play. Max and Annie drop by, and the cracks in Henry and Charlotte's marriage, as well as the fact that Henry and Annie are conducting an affair, become clear. Scene Three depicts the confrontation between Max and Annie when he has discovered the affair – mirroring "House of Cards" in subject matter and blocking¹⁹ – while Scene Four shows Henry and Annie living together.

Scene Five, the first of Act Two, shows Henry and Annie two years later. They are living in a different house and argue about what constitutes "good writing" as Annie tries to persuade Henry to rewrite Brodie's play. Scene Six seems at first to be a scene from Brodie's play, but turns out to be an event in the outer play with Billy, a young actor, quoting from the play in order to tease Annie. They also read lines from *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and it is evident that the two actors are attracted to each other because Billy's reading becomes more sincere.

Scene Seven is a conversation between Henry, Charlotte and their seventeen year old daughter, Debbie. In this scene Henry doubts whether Annie is faithful to him while Debbie voices her views on infidelity. Scene Eight is a scene from *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* with Annie and Billy, in which the boundaries between the characters that they are acting and themselves blur markedly. Scene Nine offers another confrontation scene, this time between Henry and Annie about her affair with Billy, reminiscent of Scene One and Scene Three. She admits to the affair, but asks Henry to give her the opportunity to let it run its course without ending their marriage.

¹⁹ "Blocking" refers to the placement of actors on stage.

Brodie's play is filmed in Scene Ten while Henry and Annie discuss the status of their marriage and her affair in Scene Eleven. In the last scene, Brodie's play is broadcast on television; the audience finally sees Brodie himself as he watches it with Henry and Annie. In this scene Brodie is exposed as loutish and vulgar, and Annie reveals the real reason she remained involved in his cause: he had set the Cenotaph on fire in an attempt to impress her and she felt guilty about this. After asking Brodie to leave, Annie states that her affair is finally over and she and Henry are reunited – just as Max phones to tell them that he had just gotten engaged.²⁰

Scene number	Mise en abyme or outer play	Approximate time lapse	Scene synopsis	Structural mimicry
Act One				
Scene 1	Mise en abyme: "House of Cards."	--	"Max" confronts "Charlotte" about her perceived infidelity.	A.
Scene 2	Outer play.	One day.	Max and Annie visit Henry and Charlotte. It becomes evident that Henry and Annie are having an affair.	B.
Scene 3	Outer play.	A few days.	Max confronts Annie about her infidelity.	A.
Scene 4	Outer play.	Fifteen days.	Henry and Annie now live together. Henry reads for Annie as she learns her lines for <i>Miss Julie</i> and voices his dissatisfaction with his own inability to write romantic scenes.	B.
Act Two				
Scene 5	Outer play.	Two years.	Henry and Annie are now married. Annie tries to persuade Henry to rewrite Brodie's play; they argue about what constitutes good writing.	C.
Scene 6	Outer play.	A few weeks.	Billy and Annie meet on a train. They rehearse lines from <i>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</i> . It is clear that Billy is attracted to Annie.	D.
Scene 7	Outer play.	A few weeks.	Henry is at Charlotte's house to	B.

²⁰ There are various versions of this text. I have used the version reprinted with revisions in 1983, since this version corrected some of the difficulties experienced with the first London production of the play but remains relevant to most critics' interpretations of it.

			say goodbye to their daughter, Debbie, who is leaving for a road trip with her boyfriend. The three of them discuss love, sex, and fidelity.	
Scene 8	Mise en abyme: <i>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</i> .	A few weeks.	Annie and Billy rehearse for <i>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</i> .	E.
Scene 9	Outer play.	A few weeks.	Henry confronts Annie about her infidelity.	A.
Scene 10	Mise en abyme: Brodie's play.	A few weeks.	Annie and Billy film Brodie's play.	D.
Scene 11	Outer play.	A few weeks.	Henry and Annie discuss the future of their marriage.	F.
Scene 12	Outer play.	A few weeks or months.	Henry, Annie, and Brodie watch a filmed version of Brodie's play. Brodie is unmasked as a fraud, Henry and Annie reconcile.	G.

Figure 4: The sequence of events in *The Real Thing*, indicating the placement of mise en abymes and structural mimicry.

The structure of this play is consequently as important as its characters (Brassell, 1985:164). According to Thomson (1987:535), “the structure juxtaposes several love relationships, some more real than others, both theatrically and emotionally.” It is therefore a “mixture of broad naturalism and subversive artifice” (Brassell, 1985:257). Fleming (2001:179-180) points out how the different sets used in the London and New York productions emphasised different aspects of the play. Carl Tom’s set for the London premiere was stylised, incorporating moveable frames around certain scenes which were then removed, while Tony Walton’s design for the New York production was much more “naturalistic.” The two set designs illustrate that Stoppard’s play is elastic enough to encompass either a highly stylised production or a more realistic one.

Likewise, Billington (1987:146) acknowledges that *The Real Thing* “branches out from the subject of adultery to take on board so many other issues and to raise so many questions about the values by which we live.” Billington (1987:146) positions *The Real Thing* as part of a dramatic discourse about fidelity alongside other British plays about adultery such

as *Betrayal* and Peter Nichols' *Passion Play* (1981) and regards Stoppard's contribution as superior because it reaches beyond the confines of marital infidelity.

The title is blatantly borrowed from Henry James' (1984) short story first published in 1892 (Meyer, 1989:118). For Meyer (1989:118) this makes Stoppard's title simultaneously "real" and stolen. James' "*The Real Thing*" concerns a painter who takes pity on a couple who, although of noble birth, are now destitute. The painter hires them to model scenes from nobility but quickly becomes frustrated since they fail to represent these scenes adequately. The mere fact that they are noble by birth, does not mean that they can effectively represent nobility for the purposes of the artist. Hence the play presents the audience with the question of "realness" from the outset although, as Gamerman (2000) states, "realness is a highly loaded concept in Stoppard territory." *The Real Thing* thus extends the aesthetic debates of *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972), *Travesties*, *Jumpers*, *Professional Foul* (1977), and *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1977) (Smith, 1987:166-167). Gussow (1995) regards the principal subject of *The Real Thing* as "theatre-love," while for Zinman (2001:129) it deals with "art and politics". Thomson (1987:535) summarises the main theme of the play as:

The problem of relating subjective perceptions to objective realities [which] determines both the form and the content of *The Real Thing* – a clichéd phrase that not only deftly conveys the certainty of lovers but, more importantly captures the difficulty of expressing the feeling, the emotion of love, both in real life and in theatre.

Therefore *The Real Thing* asks questions, not only about the authenticity of romantic relationships, but also about politics, theatre and art in general.

Still, *The Real Thing* received mixed reviews when it first opened. Zinman (2001:129) states that it was not received very well by scholars such as Brassell (1985:258) who found that the characters never fully move the audience, Corballis (1984:147) for whom the language was "slick and trendy" rather than "genuinely clever," and Jenkins (1987:160-161) who objected to the implausible and inconsistently drawn female characters.

The London production was furthermore criticised for Stoppard's perceived political views expressed in the play. Stead (in Page, 1986:72-73), for example, asks what comfort there would be in attacking the language of a cause such as the anti-nuclear movement if that cause were proved to be correct. Stewart (in Page, 1986:73) accuses Stoppard of snobbery because he supposedly regards everything outside the English middle class as barbarous.

Morley (in Page, 1986:71-72), however, wrote a glowing review for *Shooting Stars* in which he positions *The Real Thing* in the discourse on infidelity and also suggests an element of autobiography:

It's a romantic comedy of a tragic nature, corresponding perhaps most closely to less successful attempts in this same field recently made by our other two leading British dramatists, Harold Pinter (in *Betrayal*) and Peter Nichols (in *Passion Play*). [...] *The Real Thing* is also love, and divorce, and jealousy, and innocence, and anguish, and in writing about all of that within the context of a marital drama about an actress and a playwright Mr. Stoppard has come up with the warmest and the most touching play he has ever written. In a purely artistic sense, this is also an autobiographical play since it is about a dramatist trying to write a play about indescribable love.

For these reasons Morley (in Page, 1986) praises Stoppard for the warmth with which he handles themes of love, marriage and divorce.

The first New York production, on the other hand, won various prizes: the 1984 Tony Award for Best Play, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, the Drama Desk Award, and the Outer Circle Critics' Circle Award (Hu, 1989:203). However, Brustein (1984:28) described it as "just another clever exercise" in which "all of the characters (the proletarian, Brodie excepted) share the same wit, artifice and ornamental diction." Brustein (1984:28-29) continues, criticising the way Stoppard presents his play as "the real thing" and argues that *The Real Thing* "comes no closer to reality than any of those other adultery plays recently exported from England – and it doesn't even possess the mordancy of Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* or the ingenuity of Peter Nichols' *Passion*."²¹

The critics' views on *The Real Thing* are therefore clearly in conflict. While Brassell (1985) and Corballis (1984) consider the play cold, unmoving and too clever, Morley (in Page, 1986) comments on its warmth. Brustein (1984) compares it to *Betrayal* and *Passion Play*, as Billington (1987) does, but unlike Billington, finds it compares poorly to those plays.

In conversation with Pinter's *Betrayal*, it takes certain themes and concerns, such as the role of language, recycling and mimicry in romantic relationships, further. Whereas Pinter suggests a recycling and mimicry in the characters' lives and relationships, Stoppard takes this idea to a new stylistic level. It is very difficult to isolate a scene, character or part of dialogue which is not recycled and mimicked in *The Real Thing*.

²¹ *Passion Play* was performed in the United States as *Passion*.

The dichotomy of the authentic versus the inauthentic is imposed on every aspect of the characters' lives, as is evident from the very first scene, "House of Cards," when "Max"²² debates the virtues of the analogue versus the digital watch, where the analogue is perceived as somehow more authentic and "real" than the digital, which operates purely on the principle of appearance. This notion is continued immediately when "Max" refers to "Charlotte's" gift to her mother of placemats with copies of Rembrandt paintings printed on them. He jokingly wonders if the "real" Rembrandts are also used as placemats elsewhere.

In the second scene, which represents the actual world of the characters as opposed to the fictional world of "House of Cards," Charlotte enters, telling Henry and Annie that Max is making a dip which is supposed to be served in a hollowed-out pineapple, but since Henry and Charlotte do not have any pineapples in their kitchen, Max will serve the dip in an empty pineapple tin. This once again reinforces the dichotomy between truth and artifice where the pineapple is regarded as authentic while the tin – used in this manner – is a mere mimicry. According to Zeifman (1983:140), certain "side acts" accordingly mirror the central theme in the play: "real" music is opposed to pop music, the real self is opposed to masks, real motivation behind political commitment to opportunism and real writing to commercial, or just plain "bad," writing.

4.4. The characters' debates about authenticity in art and life

4.4.1. Brodie's writing versus Henry's

Stoppard enquires in *The Real Thing* whether language – and literature or art – is able to authentically represent the actual world and, if so, which type of language or art is closer to actuality. Stoppard addresses these concerns primarily through the opposition between Henry, the established playwright and Brodie, the convict-turned-playwright. Various scholars have considered Brodie to be the play's major weakness. For Rusinko (1985:21), he remains a straw doll, a caricature whose only purpose is to serve as a foil to Henry; neither does Pochada (2000:34) find Brodie convincing, while Jenkins (1987:17) and Billington (1987:155)

²² Throughout this thesis I will distinguish the characters Max and Charlotte from the characters they portray in "House of Cards" in Scene One by putting the latter in inverted commas.

perceive the opposition between Henry and Brodie as unbalanced, with the latter describing it as a “false, too easy antithesis.” According to Fleming (2001:193), Stoppard sets up a false binary between the apolitical, skilled craftsman versus the opinionated, primitive, ham-fisted playwright and argues that the play seems to be favouring the former. Likewise, Corballis (1984:140) asserts that Stoppard comes to a clear cut decision: that Brodie’s cause is undeserving.

On the other hand, Meyer (1989:115) points out that the distinction between Brodie as a “bad” writer and Henry as a “good” one is not so clear cut. The play asks if Henry can indeed counter Brodie’s attempts. Stoppard takes care to reveal the character of Brodie very gradually to the audience. The characters first discuss him as representative of a political cause in Scene Two, and his merits as a playwright are later hotly debated by Henry and Annie, before we hear and see excerpts of his autobiographical play rehearsed and filmed, where he is represented by the actor, Billy. The character makes his first and only appearance in the very last scene of the play, delaying the audience’s confrontation with the “real” Brodie.

As a result, Brodie is first discussed purely in political terms. When an argument between Henry and Charlotte in Scene Two threatens to turn the atmosphere sour, Henry changes the subject by asking Annie to tell them about the Justice for Brodie Committee, on which she serves. Annie met Private Brodie on a train, travelling to London for an anti-missiles demonstration. As noted earlier, he subsequently set fire to a Cenotaph and was arrested. The Justice for Brodie Committee is attempting to free him from prison. Max seems to be very proud of Annie for being involved in the cause, while Charlotte remains detached; Henry voices his scepticism of political causes and tries to dismantle Max’s arguments by correcting his grammar:

MAX: But he got hammered by an emotional backlash.
HENRY: No, no, you *can’t* –
MAX: Yes, he bloody was!
HENRY: I mean ‘hammer’ and ‘backlash.’ You can’t *do it!*
MAX: Oh, for Christ’s sake. This is your house, and I’m drinking your wine, but if you don’t mind me saying so, Henry –
HENRY: *My saying, Max. (34)*

Although Henry is purposefully obstinate in this excerpt, his scepticism about the characters’ involvement in Brodie’s cause proves to be correct.

Henry describes people's motivations to join political causes as follows: "One of us is probably kicking his father, a policeman. Another is worried that his image is getting a bit too right-of-centre. Another is in love with a committee member and wishes to gain her approbation..." (33). When questioned about whether or not he will be attending the committee meeting, Max cites a squash appointment as an excuse, while it also becomes evident that Annie only took part in the anti-missiles demonstration because she and Max own property close to where the missiles are stored. Annie, whose praises have been sung for her involvement in the Brodie case, is finally discredited in her political involvement when it is revealed at the end of the scene that she is using the committee meetings as an alibi to cover up her affair with Henry. When they plan a rendezvous for that afternoon and Henry asks "What about Brodie?" Annie answers "Let him rot" (35).

As Fleming (2001:195) points out, all the characters involved in political causes actually do so for ulterior motives: to mask an affair or to protect private property. *The Real Thing* thus resists championing a cause. This has earned Stoppard sharp criticism, but it also refuses a clear-cut answer to his question of "how can we know what is real?" regarding political causes. Because Stoppard does not explicitly oppose the use of missiles by the United Kingdom, Sammells (1988:122) interprets *The Real Thing* as apologising for the "political status quo in Britain." I, however, disagree with Sammells (1988:141) who also argues that "Stoppard consigns dissent to nonsense." Stoppard merely avoids suggesting that any specific cause is "the real thing", simply on the grounds of its perceived ethical or moral validity.

While Henry remains cool and detached during the argument about Brodie's cause, the debate becomes more heated when the latter invades Henry's professional territory by attempting to write a television play. By Scene Five, Annie has asked Henry to rewrite Brodie's autobiographical television play. Henry reads an excerpt out loud. This excerpt will be repeated, in various guises, throughout the play as Brodie's play is eventually filmed. The excerpt itself is based on his first meeting with Annie on a train, which was described by her in Scene Two. From the first two lines that Henry reads, "'You're a strange boy, Billy. How old are you?' 'Twenty. But I've lived more than you'll ever live,'" (48) the audience can gather that the play is appallingly clichéd and sentimental.

Henry only reads a few lines before he interrupts himself, declaring the play poor. While Annie argues that although the play is not "literary," it has merits because it is based on

a convict's life, Henry contends that both the form and content of the play are flawed: "He's got something to say. It happens to be something extremely silly and bigoted. But leaving that aside, there is still the problem that he can't write. He can burn things down, but he can't write" (49). The argument becomes more intense when Annie immediately criticises Henry for having to invent things to write about, while Brodie has lived through the events in his play and is directly affected by them:

- ANNIE: He's not a writer. He's a convict. *You're* a writer. You write *because* you're a writer. Even when you write *about* something, you have to think up something to write about so you can keep writing. More well chosen words nicely put together. So what? Why should that be *it*? Who says?
- HENRY: Nobody says. It just works best.
- ANNIE: Of *course* it works. You teach a lot of people what to expect from good writing, and you end up with a lot of people saying you write well. Then somebody who isn't in on the game comes along, like Brodie, who really has something to write about, something real, and you can't get through it. Well, *he* couldn't get through *yours*, so where are you? To you, he can't write. To him, write is all you *can* do. (51)

Annie, in other words, clearly distinguishes between content and form. She furthermore sees merit in Brodie's content on the basis that it is autobiographical. Henry becomes frustrated with the argument; he fetches his cricket bat to illustrate an analogy and emphasise the importance of form in playwriting. He compares a play to a cricket bat which, if constructed well, will make a ball travel if hit by it, much as an idea will travel if "hit" with a carefully constructed play. If one uses just any piece of wood (or a poorly constructed play) to hit a ball (or idea), it will not travel and will burn one's hands. For Bull (2001:148), this illustrates "the importance of craft over ideology."

Henry, though, also argues that there is a fundamental difference between tangible objects and abstract concepts and asserts that Brodie does not know the difference, consequently treating abstract concepts such as "politics, justice, patriotism" (53) as tangible objects. According to Henry, "there's nothing real there separate from our perception of them" (53). At the end of Scene Five, Henry delivers one more monologue on the role of language, or words, in writing:

[Words] don't deserve that kind of malarkey. They're innocent, neutral, precise, standing for this, describing that, meaning the other, so if you look after them you can build bridges across incomprehension and chaos. But when they get their corners knocked off, they're no good any more, and Brodie knocks corners off without knowing he's doing it. So everything he builds is jerry-built. It's rubbish. An intelligent child could push it over. I don't think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little or make a poem which children will speak for you when you're dead. (54)

Henry accordingly continues to defend his point by declaring that words are sacred and that if they are used carefully by a wordsmith, they can do remarkable things. If used incorrectly, words are meaningless. His argument is, however, undercut when Annie turns to his typewriter, reading the dialogue he has written for a mediocre science fiction series.

Annie therefore believes that Brodie's play has merits because its content directly affects his life. His writing has, apparently, also improved over the two years since Annie has known him and he taught himself to write. He did not write his play to compete with established playwrights, but to be "heard." She accuses Henry of being prejudiced against those who have not benefited from the same educated background as himself, and are trying to keep playwriting an exclusive art form.

For Sandall (1995:73), Henry's cricket bat monologue means that *how* you express something is equal to *what* you express; thereby Brodie's ideas are as clichéd as his language. However, I beg to differ. Henry criticises Brodie's play for both its form and its content. He contends that no play can succeed if it is poorly written, no matter how compelling or important the subject matter is. As Meyer (1989:115) states, "Brodie's revolutionary monosyllables deny the creative presence behind autonomous discourse." Nonetheless, Brodie's content is also flawed since he cannot distinguish between abstract concepts and tangible objects. He disregards his own subjectivity; as a result his argument is weak.

Both Arndt (1997) and Delaney (1985) assert that Stoppard favours Henry's point of view in this argument. Arndt (1997:498) maintains that Stoppard sets up these arguments in *The Real Thing* to create the appearance of blurring the lines between the "real" and the "ersatz," only to affirm Henry's stance as "the real thing" in the end. For Delaney (1985:51), Stoppard reveals through Henry that "the world that is there to be nudged is real; a world in which people need to act with justice is inherently moral; and art, by faithfully reflecting the

real world, can enable people to see the real world and their own actions with greater precision.” Smith (1987:166), though, points out that the oppositions between Stoppard’s characters – such as this disagreement between Henry and Annie about writing – remind one of Chekhov in the sense that they remain suspended. Similarly, Kelly (1991:148) aptly points out that since the debate between Henry and Annie ends in a deadlock: “if *The Real Thing* attempts to present a ‘sacramental view of language,’” as Delaney (1985:49) suggests, “it does so ironically.”

I concur with Kelly (1991:148) that both Annie and Henry’s points of view in this argument are weak. Annie’s argument falls flat, since it becomes clear just how poorly written Brodie’s play is. In Scene Twelve, as mentioned, the audience is given the final glimpse of this play when Henry, Annie and Brodie watch a televised version of it. Brodie reveals that he was, supposedly, freed because of overcrowding in the prison, so that his play did not serve its intended purpose, which was to create enough awareness for him to be freed. Moreover, Brodie objects to Henry’s improvements to his play. He regards these as somehow inauthentic: “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 come along and wrote it clever” (81). His claim to authenticity is, nonetheless, immediately invalidated because, as noted above, Annie reveals, after Brodie crudely insults her, that he was not politically motivated when he set the Cenotaph on fire, but was merely trying to impress her. She felt guilty and therefore remained involved in his case, the political motivation of which became increasingly overblown. With Brodie unmasked as a fraud, his play has credibility neither of form nor content. The image of Brodie that was created throughout the play is thereby exposed as a phantom.

Henry’s argument is also deeply flawed, though. Meyer (1989:116) points out how he naively believes that words’ innocence can be kept intact, while “words, as most of the other characters in the play realize, can never be innocent and sacred, nor can they be neutral and precise.” Words, as indicated in Chapter Two, are not instruments with which to describe a fixed, external reality; as Hartman (1985: xii) states, “nothing can lift us out of language.” Scruton (1983:46) also points out how Max regards “Henry’s obsession with language” as “no more than a snobbish isolation from the ordinary conscience”; an issue Henry will become acutely aware of in his relationship with Annie, to be discussed below. Fleming (2001:192)

likewise interprets Henry as too rigid in his analogy of a play as a cricket bat, pointing out how his views are contradicted by his taste in music.

Pop records are among the various intertexts of which Stoppard makes use in *The Real Thing*. These records link some of the scenes and include Herman's Hermits' "I'm into Something Good," Righteous Brothers' "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'," Procul Harem's "A Whiter Shade of Pale," and The Monkees' "I'm a Believer." The last of these is given a prominent place within the play: it is played as the curtain falls. Interestingly, The Monkees is considered a rather controversial band as it was a spin-off act from a television series in which it was a fictional band, based on The Beatles. There are rumours that The Monkees did not play their own instruments and therefore were never an authentic band, but only posed as one (Rolling Stone, 2012).

The records which are heard during *The Real Thing* represent the music that Henry listens to at various points in the play, and are juxtaposed with the classical music of Bach and Verdi to which Annie listens. Although Martin (2000:12) claims that by the 1980s there was no longer a distinction between high art and low, Stoppard makes use of this distinction in music to elaborate Henry and Annie's argument, discussed above. Henry is ashamed of his taste in music and confesses he is moved by the latter although he regards it as superficial: "It *moves* me, the way people are supposed to be moved by *real* music" (25).

In Scene Two, Henry is about to be featured on a radio programme, Desert Island Disks, on which he is asked to list eight records that represent turning points in his life. He struggles to compile this list, since there is a discrepancy between his taste in music and his reputation as an "intellectual" playwright. This illustrates how Henry's public persona is very carefully constructed, a feature which Thomson (1987) also points out. Thomson (1987:541) interprets Henry as "wearing a deceptive mask" since the image he wishes to project clashes with his actual life. Thomson (1987) substantiates this claim by the fact that Henry wears a digital watch while the protagonist in his play, "House of Cards" denounces such a watch. I consider this unfair, however, since Henry cannot be held to his characters' convictions. Thomson's (1987) point is, nevertheless, illustrated in Henry's panic when he cannot come up with eight records he can relate to his own life which are not in some way banal or superficial.

Annie later does her best to educate Henry in classical music, with limited success. Henry can only recognise Bach's "Air on a G-String" because Procul Harum borrows it in "A

Whiter Shade of Pale.” He then jokes that Bach stole it from Procul Harum. His taste in music, as intimated, thus clearly contradicts his views on writing. Henry’s taste in music therefore suggests that people’s appreciation of art is not necessarily controlled by its aesthetic integrity or the merits of its content.

Furthermore, Henry’s own writing also seems to be mediocre. Charlotte criticises Henry’s writing precisely because she finds it to be inauthentic, or to fail in representing life realistically. She specifically refers to “Max’s” stoicism, which reminds one of Robert’s in *Betrayal*, when confronting his wife with her supposed infidelity. Charlotte describes the play’s problem as follows:

Having all the words to come back with just as you need them. That’s the difference between plays and real life – thinking time, time to get your bottle back. ‘Must say, I take my hat off to you, coming home with Rembrandt place mats for your mother.’ You don’t really think that if Henry caught me out with a lover, he’d sit around being witty about place mats? Like hell he would. He’d come apart like a pick-a-sticks. His sentence structure would go to pot, closely followed by his sphincter. (22)

While Brodie’s writing is consequently seen as poor because it is naively unoriginal, Henry’s is regarded as tedious because it is pretentiously unoriginal in its mimicry of other plays rather than reality.

Later, in Scene Four, Henry admits that he struggles to write realistic love scenes:

I don’t know how to write love. I try to write it properly, and it just comes out embarrassing. It’s either childish or it’s rude. And the rude bits are absolutely juvenile. I can’t use any of it. My credibility is already hanging by a thread after *Desert Island Disks*. Anyway, I’m too prudish. Perhaps I should write it completely artificial. Blank verse. Poetic imagery. Not so much of the ‘Will you still love me when my tits are droopy?’ ‘Of course I will, darling, it’s your bum I’m mad for,’ and more of the ‘By my troth, thy beauty makest the moon hide her radiance,’ do you think? (40)

Henry proceeds to declare that “loving and being loved is unliterary. It’s happiness expressed in banality and lust” (40). This excerpt indicates how he also has difficulty finding the right words to describe emotion and as a result cannot convey his experience through words. In addition, it demonstrates that Henry regards highly stylised language as less authentic than everyday language, although banal, or “rude,” language does not suffice in communicating the emotion of love, either. Annie advises that lust and banality are best expressed through a sub-text, suggesting that there are certain issues that cannot be conveyed through language, and

must be expressed non-verbally, such as the nuances in romantic relationships. The binary between “good” writing and “bad” writing, with regard to authenticity, is thereby dismantled. Although Brodie’s play is discredited on the grounds of both its form and content, Henry’s writing is apparently unconvincing.

4.4.2. The authentic versus the inauthentic in romantic relationships

Apart from establishing the indistinctness of the lines between authentic and inauthentic art, Stoppard simultaneously asks the same question of relationships: how can one know what is real in love? Stoppard again investigates this question primarily through the couple, Henry and Annie, while also voicing four different views on love: those of Henry, Annie, Charlotte and Debbie, Henry and Charlotte’s teenage daughter. Stoppard suggests that just as the distinction between genuine and fake writing becomes clouded, the lines between fiction and actuality also blur within the characters’ relationships.

Fleming (2001:185-188) describes how Henry’s views of love and sex contrast with those of his ex-wife, his current wife and his daughter. While Henry passionately champions the importance of fidelity, since “carnal knowledge” offers an exclusive, authentic view of a person which is not on offer to the public, Pochada (2000:34) points out how Henry’s view contrasts with views of authenticity in the current “confessional culture” and describes his point of view as “a rarefied definition of love in an age that encourages all cards on the table, all the time.” Debbie, on the other hand, perceives sex as a matter of mere biology. Charlotte does not regard commitment as binding, unless it is renewed daily, whereas Annie believes that infidelity cannot necessarily be laid at the door of the adulterous party.

Since Henry’s views on love differ from those held by the three most prominent women in his life, Rusinko (1985:18) interprets *The Real Thing* as the “emotional education” of Henry at the hands of Annie, Charlotte and Debbie. The play, however, does not endorse any one of these views. As with the arguments on the authenticity of writing, those about love in the play remain suspended. No one character is shown to be “correct” in his or her views. While Henry, for example, criticises Debbie for using a catchy slogan to summarise these views of her, he contradicts himself by adapting her slogan to summarise his own views.

Stoppard's reluctance to endorse any of the views in the play might be the reason why there has been a distinct divide between various critics' interpretations of the relationship between Henry and Annie. On the one hand, there are those who consider Henry as the victim of the play, being patronised and punished by the women in his life. Pochada (2000:34), for example, views the play as mapping Henry's swift downfall at the hand of the three anti-intellectual women characters: "The pace is still as brisk as the wit, making the rush toward Henry's undoing seem at first a cruel form of revenge on the tyranny of the exceptionally articulate."

Delaney (1985:57-58) similarly regards Henry as being Annie's victim. He sees Henry as emerging as victorious in the end, having convinced Annie of his point of view: "If the penultimate revelation of Brodie reaffirms all that Henry – as a playwright – has said about writing, the ultimate revelation of a transformation in Annie reaffirms what Henry – as a lover – has said about love." Delaney (1985:64-65) further dismisses Annie's arguments as "persuasive nonsense." I find this view of Annie to be too critical. Harbin (2010:30) justifiably remarks that "the infidelities of Stoppard's women characters generate more anxiety among critics than those of his male characters." While Delaney (1985) condemns Annie for having an affair with Billy, he downplays Henry's affair with Annie while he was still married to Charlotte.

On the other hand, there are those who understand Annie as the victim of a negligent, or even domineering, Henry. Like Delaney (1985), Arndt (1997) also interprets *The Real Thing* as coming to unequivocal conclusions, but unlike Delaney (1985), who denounces Annie, Charlotte and Debbie, Arndt (1997) demonises Henry. Arndt (1997:494), for example, regards the fact that Henry is a playwright as significant, since he also writes scripts for Charlotte and Annie. Her interpretation of the play is, however, biased and parochial.

In Scene Two, Annie enters while Henry is working and tries to attract his attention, using established theatrical conventions which tease the audience, such as flashing her robe open for his benefit:

ANNIE: I'm not here. Promise.

(She goes to the couch and carefully opens a newspaper. HENRY continues to write. ANNIE glances towards him once or twice. He takes no notice. She stands up and goes behind his chair, looking over his shoulder as he works. He takes no notice. She goes round the desk and stands in front of him. He takes no notice. She flashes open the

robe for his benefit. He takes no notice. She moves round behind him again and looks over his shoulder. He turns and grabs her with great suddenness, causing her to scream and laugh. The assault turns into a standing embrace.)

HENRY: You're a bloody nuisance.

ANNIE: Sorry, sorry, sorry. I'll be good. I'll sit and learn my script. (38)

Arndt (1997:494) interprets this excerpt as follows:

Henry's subtle attempts to now insert his new lover into his "scripts" of masculine domination permeate their dialogues. When Annie, for example, tries to get Henry's attention while he is writing, he tells her, "You're a bloody nuisance." Annie, giving in, apologizes: "Sorry, sorry, sorry. I'll be good. I'll sit and learn my *script*" (emphasis added) – an expression which refers to Strindberg's *Miss Julie* but can also be read as Henry's script of feminine subordination.

Arndt (1997:494) negates the teasing, playful rapport between Henry and Annie, and instead imposes a culprit/victim relationship on them. She criticises Jenkins (1987), Zeifman (1983) and Corballis' (1984) readings of the play since they do not acknowledge Henry's domineering presence, which permeates the entire play. She also disapproves of Thomson's (1987) interpretation that the play is a study in the difficulty of expressing visceral emotions in language. According to Arndt (1997:490), these interpretations negate the "inherent ideological underpinnings which elevate male subjectivity into universality and concomitantly assign woman to the position of the Other" in *The Real Thing*. Arndt (1997:491) thus perceives the play as having a closed structure which supports Henry's "impartial vision."

Fleming (2001:188) is not as sharp in his criticism against Henry, but also considers Annie as neglected, because Henry has taken their relationship for granted. Billington (1987:150) is likewise sympathetic toward Annie, finding the disconcerting fact of her going through Henry's things at the end of Scene Four as completely natural, showing that she has an interest in him and desires to know everything about him. And yet, it is exactly because Stoppard leaves the debates between the characters suspended that neither Henry nor Annie can be interpreted as the victim of the other. Stoppard shows the audience characters who both distrust each other at times, who both go through each other's things at different times in the play, and are both in search of greater clarity about who the other is.

As a result it is also difficult to determine whether or not the relationship between Henry and Annie is "the real thing." Arndt (1997:496) declares that neither of Henry's marriages can be "the real thing" since adultery occurred in both. Zinman (2001:132)

describes the love plot of *The Real Thing* as unconvincing and suggests that Stoppard, like Henry, cannot “write love.” He does, however, concede that the play proposes that what is “real” in terms of love, is not necessarily what is good or what is right. In addition, Thomson (1987:536) views the play as dramatizing “the growth of a love that is real: not perfect, but fallible, painful, and thus, recognisably human.”

However, Stoppard never gives a definite answer to this question. It is deceptively easy to establish that Henry and Charlotte’s marriage was not “the real thing.” Charlotte was unable to discern the false perception – that Henry was unfaithful – from reality. Henry, on his part, was unaware of this perception of Charlotte’s. Their marriage was therefore dissolved by their misunderstanding of each other, as Thomson (1987:545) suggests. But as Annie remarks, in Scene Two, in agreement with Waskul (2009), it is much easier to tell whether something is inauthentic than authentic when she chides Henry for being hesitant in making their relationship public: “you want to give it time – [...] ... time to go wrong, change, spoil. Then you’ll know it wasn’t the real thing” (27).

Knowing what is real, is complicated since “a facility with words,” as Thomson (1987:543) remarks, “can be a means of hiding rather than revealing feelings, and [...] our understanding of what words mean can change depending on our experience of the reality underlying them,” a point also illustrated in *Betrayal*. The fact that *The Real Thing* is intended to be performed as theatre further complicates this process since the reader’s experience of the text will necessarily differ from the audience’s. Just as Annie remarks that lust and banality are best conveyed through subtext in *Miss Julie* (40-41), this proves also to be the case in *The Real Thing*.

For Thomson (1987:537) the representations of how the characters encounter difficulty in expressing themselves are very realistic since they “rely on verbal shorthand and body language to say what specific words cannot.” Fleming (2001:184) also points out how Henry, for all his articulateness, never verbalises why he loves Annie; therefore “the bond between them must be enacted by the performers whose physical and vocal interactions play the subtext of lovers in love.” The genre of *The Real Thing* is thus vital in this regard. The vagueness of the title, as well as other clichéd lines such as “all right”, used throughout the play, intimates “the distance between deeply-felt emotion and the capacity of language” to express it. Subtext is thus absolutely imperative in a performance of *The Real Thing*

(Thomson, 1987:541). For Brantley (2000) this is fully justified and “the badinage feels natural precisely because directors and actors are so attentive to what bodies say that words don’t.” The fact that these characters are also actors results in further implications with regard to how their identities are constructed and conveyed to the audience, because they also sometimes portray roles in their everyday lives.

4.5. Mimicry

4.5.1. Mimicry in the characters’ behaviour

The characters’ desire to know everything about each other begs the question of whether this is even possible. For Thomson (1987:547) *The Real Thing* suggests that “self-revelations” and “mutual knowledge” are never complete, although these can be present to a degree, therefore assenting to Nietzsche’s ideas about identity. Sometimes they are purposefully masked. Henry, for example, declares himself in Scene Ten as not believing in acting aloof in the face of adultery, only to contradict himself later:

I don’t believe in behaving well. I don’t believe in debonair relationships. ‘How’s your lover today, Amanda?’ ‘In the pink, Charles. How’s yours?’ I believe in mess, tears, pain, self-abasement, loss of self-respect, nakedness. Not caring doesn’t seem much different from not loving. (72)

Yet, later in the play, he makes a definite decision not to be weak while Annie is conducting an affair with Billy:

Love me because I’m in pain. No good. Not in very good taste.
So.
Dignified cuckoldry is a difficult trick, but it can be done.
Think of it as a modern marriage. We have got beyond hypocrisy, you and I. Exclusive rights isn’t love, it’s colonization. (76-77)

In this last quotation, Henry is very obviously wearing a mask, as Billington (1987:154) also points out. When Henry pretends not to care about Annie’s affair, citing one of Debbie’s philosophies as justification, he is trying to align himself to an image he thinks would be more acceptable to Annie. Stoppard (in Delaney, 1994:5) states that he has “a feeling that almost

everybody today is more trying to match himself up with an external image he has of himself, almost as if he'd seen himself on a screen." Henry is attempting to match himself to an image, which contrasts with Max's pathetic behaviour when Annie left him. But this mask is an uncomfortable fit, to the point that Annie asks him to "Stop it – please stop it" (77). She apologises for hurting him, and declares:

I'm sorry for your pain but even your pain is the pain of letting go of something, some idea of me which was never true, an Annie who was complete in loving you and being loved back. (*With sad disdain*) Some Annie. (78)

What becomes evident is that just as in *Betrayal*, the characters consciously wear certain masks in order either to protect themselves or come across more acceptably, but they also perceive each other through a mask created by themselves – as Annie claims, Henry perceives her as an idea he created himself, illustrating Maturana and Varela's (1980:5) as well as Bakhtin's (in Hitchcock, 1998:92) ideas about the impossibility of knowing the Other.

Further complicating the masks that the characters wear, is the fact that in this metatheatrical play, Stoppard's characters act as doubles for each other. They seem like versions of one another throughout the play since life imitates art, and sometimes also life – within the fictional contexts represented in *The Real Thing*. Since four of the characters in the play are actors, the roles that they play are masks that they willingly – or unwillingly, in the case of Charlotte – wear. Hence, "Charlotte" is a version of Charlotte and vice versa. Charlotte complains in Scene Two that people assume "House of Cards" is based on the lives of her and Henry. Therefore, "Max" is also a version of Henry, which reminds one of the manner in which some reviewers gleefully pointed out that *Betrayal* is autobiographical. However, later in the play, Charlotte has a relationship with an architect, while in Scene Seven she tells Henry that she had to end the relationship because he was too jealous and went through her things when she was not at home to prove her infidelity. Her relationship thus echoes "Charlotte's" relationship with the architect, "Max," in Scene One.

Max also echoes "Max," when he is confronted with his spouse's infidelity. Max is described in the didascalia as "*nice, seldom assertive, conciliatory*" (15), while "Max" is described as not having "*to be physically impressive, but you wouldn't want him for an enemy*" (9). Although in consequence these two characters clearly differ, Max's initial reaction to Annie's adultery does echo "Max's" in "House of Cards." Being familiar with

“House of Cards”, Max is probably deliberately mimicking the character he portrays in that play in order to stay in control of his emotions. He does, nonetheless, become emotional soon after and sharply contrasts with “Max.”

As Henry is the playwright who created the role of “Max,” “Max” also represents a version of him. Scene Nine begins in the same way as Scene One and Scene Three, preparing the audience for another confrontation scene concerning infidelity. Like “Max,” Henry has also gone through Annie’s things. According to Rusinko (1985:19-20), “Henry, who describes himself ‘as an ironist in public though a prig in private,’ both writes about and becomes the suspicious husband.” Reminiscences of the characters thus cling to other characters because they are at times versions of each other and Henry is as a result shadowed by both “Max” and Max.

Billy is also a version of Brodie – even sharing his first name – and responsible for the image the audience forms of Brodie, until the “real” Brodie shatters that image in the last scene. Billy furthermore deliberately uses his shadows of Brodie and Giovanni to flirt with Annie in Scene Six. Annie would then be tempted to react as Mary or Annabella.²³

This doubling also continues into the outer play in *The Real Thing*. Annie is described in the didascalia of Scene Two as “*very much like the woman whom CHARLOTTE has ceased to be*” (15) while Henry later states: “I keep marrying people who suddenly lose a wheel” (77), referring to both Charlotte and Annie’s infidelities. A shadow of Charlotte consequently clings to Annie. This is emphasised in Scene Four, which mimics Scene Two, as is again suggested not only in a duplication of the disposition of door and furniture, but also in the actions of the characters. Annie enters in Henry’s robe, which is too big for her, just as Charlotte did in Scene Two. As Baudrillard (1994) suggests, mimicry is thus so deeply ingrained in the lives of these characters that it becomes impossible to distinguish the different versions of these characters from each other.

This doubling is also evident in the way the characters mimic each other in their philosophies on love. In the example cited above, Henry quotes Debbie’s philosophy of love as a way of masking his pain. Yet, earlier, when he broke down, declaring that he does not believe in “debonair relationships”, he is also mimicking Max who states in Scene Two:

²³ Interestingly, the character of Mary is based on Annie. Hence Mary is a version of Annie, which is then represented by Annie, confusing the mimesis, mimicry and doubling of characters even further.

“That’s what life’s about – messy bits of good and bad luck, and people caring and not necessarily having all the answers” (35). Max says these words in defence of Brodie’s cause which Henry has been dismissing. The shadows of both Max and Brodie consequently haunt Henry’s words in Scene Ten.

Henry tells Charlotte in Scene Seven that the reason he was never jealous in his marriage to her, or in his marriage to Annie, is that he believes that when a commitment has been made, it is final. He therefore does not feel the need to take care, in his words and actions towards his spouse, when a relationship has been secured in this way: “I use you because you love me. I love you so use me. Be indulgent, negligent, preoccupied, premenstrual... your credit is infinite, I’m yours, I’m committed...” (67). These words prove to be bitterly ironic when Annie later explains why she does not abruptly end her affair with Billy: “This is the me who loves you, this me who won’t tell Billy to go and rot, and I know I’m yours so I’m not afraid for you – I have to choose who I hurt and I choose you because I’m yours” (78).

4.5.2. Mimicry in the mise en abymes and outer play

A reminder of mimesis, in the form of mimicry also infiltrates the lives of the characters, since the mise en abymes mimic the outer play and vice versa. The situation in “House of Cards” is, for example, duplicated twice, in Scene Three and Scene Nine, both of which should correspond to Scene One, according to the didascalia: “*The disposition of furniture and doors makes the scene immediately reminiscent of the beginning of Scene 1*” (35) and “*It’s like the beginning of Scene 1 and Scene 3*” (68). For the characters, the repetition of Scene One is, of course, not fictional, and therefore clearly sets Scene One (“House of Cards”) apart from Scene Three and Scene Nine (Özdemir, 2004:433). In contrast to “Max,” Max breaks down completely when confronted with Annie’s infidelity. Henry is more articulate than Max in Scene Nine, but much less stoic and collected than “Max.”

Apart from these, albeit confusing, juxtapositions of events in the mise en abymes and the outer play and the mimicry between the mise en abymes and the outer play, Stoppard also represents the liminal space between the outer play and the play within a play during Annie and Billy’s rehearsal of *'Tis Pity She’s a Whore* in Scene Eight. They are kissing and

embracing, two acts which have to be actually performed to be represented on stage, according to States (1985). The scene, however, ends as follows:

ANNIE: O, you're wanton!
Tell on't you're best; do.
BILLY: Thou wilt chide me, then.
Kiss me: -
(*He kisses her lightly.*)
ANNIE: (*Quietly*) Billy...
(*She returns the kiss in earnest.*) (67-68)

Billy and Annie's affair thus begins as a fictional romance which becomes real. Although Annie discouraged Billy's advances when she sensed that they were no longer fictional in Scene Six, by Scene Eight the fictional has become a convenient excuse to indulge a real attraction. The affair also evolves from one that is simulated and suggested into a physical one, albeit off stage.

Distinguishing the authentic from the inauthentic, as well as the play within a play from the outer play, as a result becomes almost impossible. Although it is possible to distinguish the lives of the characters from the various plays-within-plays such as "House of Cards," *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, and Brodie's play, as Delaney (1985:47) suggests, the shadowing and mimicry of the characters in these plays and each other inevitably blur any clear cut distinction. Stoppard's play therefore does not assume "that reality exists, that life is meaningful, that the universe is not random or chaotic, that the difference between the real and the unreal, between the genuine and the artificial is knowable and that the real thing can be recognised" (Delaney, 1985:47). Hence this blurring of the distinction between *mise en abymes* and the outer play also extends to the actual world of the audience through Stoppard's use of metatheatrical devices.

4.6. Metatheatrical implications of the various *mise en abymes* in *The Real Thing*

While the juxtaposition of various plays-within-plays and the outer play in *The Real Thing* might seem bewildering, it is, like all fiction, carefully controlled by the author. The first overt *mise en abyme* encountered in the text, "House of Cards," parodies English realism and is reminiscent of the confrontation scene (Scene Five) in *Betrayal*, which Rusinko (1986:136)

also points out. As Esslin (1987) suggests, various critics have also compared “House of Cards,” – the first inner play – to *The Real Thing*, or outer play. For Zeifman (1983:140), “House of Cards” is unmistakably Stoppard in its allusiveness and pattern, comic devices, witty puns, elegant jokes, and comic misunderstandings. In other words Henry is, like Stoppard, witty, intellectual and clever. For these reasons, Özdemir (2004:432), regards “House of Cards” as more realistic than *The Real Thing*. For Özdemir (2004), the second scene, although supposedly more “real” within the context of the play, seems more artificial than the first, since the first is “artistically superior” on grounds of its dialogue. Özdemir (2004:433) therefore agrees with Zeifman (1983) when he claims that “House of Cards” contains the Stoppardian humour and word games the audience has come to expect from the dramatist. Through this juxtaposition of the *mise en abyme* and the outer play, the audience is led into a “Jamesian paradox,” by preferring the false to the real.

Some critics, however, interpret “House of Cards” as unrealistic and very obviously artificial. For Hu (1989:205), as for Charlotte, “Max’s” reaction to his wife’s perceived adultery is nonchalant and “unrealistically devoid of emotion” – perhaps as an allusion to Robert’s stoic reaction to Emma’s deception in *Betrayal*. Andretta (1992:323) also agrees with Charlotte when she critiques “House of Cards” for failing to capture the authenticity and spontaneity of the actual world and describes “Max’s” dialogue and actions as “hardly credible.” This “sparklingly artificial fluency” in the dialogue of “House of Cards,” in the face of emotional disturbance, may alert the audience to the possibility that this is a parody or play within a play even before the metareference is explicitly exposed in the dialogue of Scene Two, as Smith (1987:105) aptly observes. Through parodying *Betrayal*, down to “Max’s” statement that he will not slap “Charlotte” since he “abhor[s] cliché” (14), “House of Cards” is a clear *mise en abyme* – although this is perhaps especially clear within the context of a postmodern study, as Limoges’ (2009) conditions for the perceptibility of metareference suggest.

Furthermore, the interplay between these *mise en abymes* and the outer play “is often combined with a parodic appropriation of other works or genres” (Özdemir, 2004:417). As a result these extracompositional metareferences foreground the procedure of writing, or dramatise “the principle of iteration inherent in *mimesis*”, since the play “repeats literary history in repeating itself” (Boireau, 1997:136). *The Real Thing*, in consequence, becomes

“the mask that signals itself as a mask generating other masks” (Boireau, 1997:142). The intertexts in *The Real Thing* are numerous and mostly drawn from texts ranking high in the Western canon: Keats’ “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” (1816), Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* (1888), Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1603), Noel Coward’s *Private Lives* (1930) and Henry James’ “The Real Thing” (1892).

Meyer (1989:114) points out how each intertext in Stoppard’s play serves to emphasise the main theme, the way in which words can be tied to human action. *Miss Julie*, for instance, investigates the “levels of discourse in language of sexual attraction,” while *Othello* explores the “role of language in the attractions and blindness of power,” and *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* connects the erotic and the political “in the convoluted language of palace intrigue.” The metareference in *The Real Thing* is therefore author-centred since it strengthens Stoppard’s treatment of the theme of language.

When Max and Annie’s cottage in Norfolk is alluded to in Scene Two, Stoppard acknowledges the reference to Noel Coward’s *Private Lives* in which the character Amanda remarks that Norfolk is “very flat” (1947:17), by causing Henry almost to trick Annie into saying “Norfolk is flat.” This, as well as having Max discovering Henry and Annie’s affair by finding Henry’s soiled handkerchief in his and Annie’s car – reminiscent of Desdemona’s scarf in *Othello* – underscores the fact that *The Real Thing* is positioned among various other texts about marital betrayal. These metareferences are thus also recipient-centred, since they rely on the audience to grasp the references to other texts.

As was the case with the comparisons between *The Real Thing* as outer play and “House of Cards” as inner play, the intertexts furthermore create accepted fictional texts with which one may compare the other levels of fictionality in the text (both the texts written by the characters, as well as the lives of the characters). Sammells (1988:139) regards these intertexts as flattering “the audience’s belief that it can distinguish between ‘good stuff and rubbish,’” and as therefore being recipient-centred. In addition he asserts that Stoppard uses these intertexts as a shield to hide behind: if his own art does not measure up to Ford, Strindberg, and Shakespeare, he can argue that it was intended as irony. Sammells (1988:139-140) consequently interprets the various plays-within-the-play as a lack of confidence by the author in his own work.

Nonetheless I believe that the *mise en abymes* serve a different function, concurring with Zeifman (1983:147) who argues that an easy distinction between the “real” and “fictional” planes in the play is deceptive. Although the structural similarities between the “real” and “fictional” in *The Real Thing* appear to ironically emphasise “the disparity in emotional truth between theatre and life,” they, paradoxically, rather cloud the distinction between the real and the artificial than clarify it. Jenkins (1987:162) also emphasises a blurring, rather than sharpening, of the lines between the real and the actual in *The Real Thing*: “In mirroring scene against scene, Stoppard not only aims to point up the odd falsity of ‘real’ life when compared with art’s convincing fable; but he also surveys a no man’s land between the two, where genuine and pictured feeling coalesce.”

Although *The Real Thing* represents a situation where the fictional world (in the *mise en abymes*) imitates the actual world (or outer play) and vice versa, it remains a play. The fictional therefore actually imitates the fictional. Stoppard intimates the fictionality of the outer play in *The Real Thing* through its *deus ex machina*-like ending which can be interpreted as a covert metareference. Thomson (1987:547) considers the ending of *The Real Thing* as “theatrically self-referential to the point that it “verges on parody,” so that it is a fictio-metareference intended to destabilise the illusion, to point to the fact that neither the fictional worlds in the *mise en abymes* or the outer play are actual. After Brodie has left in Scene Twelve, Annie declares that her affair is a thing of the past and the phone rings. Henry is then shown holding the following conversation with him:

(Suddenly relaxes.) Well, that’s fantastic Max!
(To ANNIE.) It’s your ex. He’s getting married.
(To phone.) Congratulations. Who is she?
(HENRY ferries this over to ANNIE with an expressive look, which she returns. ANNIE moves to HENRY and embraces his shoulders from behind. She leans on him tiredly while he deals with the phone.)
Oh, I think you’re very wise. To marry one actress is unfortunate, to marry two is simply asking for it.
(ANNIE kisses him. He covers the mouthpiece with his hand.)
(To ANNIE.) You all right?
(She nods.)
(Into phone) Really? Across a crowded room, eh? (83)

Henry impatiently finishes the phone conversation with Max while Annie switches off all the lights except for that coming from the bedroom. Still speaking to Max, Henry absentmindedly

switches on the radio which plays The Monkees' "I'm a Believer," which ends the play. Scene Twelve thus deploys the conventions of the romantic comedy in that the lovers are "out of the woods," and their marriage renewed and strengthened by the rejection of the outsider, Brodie. Max's engagement also ensures a happy ending for all the characters. Thomson (1987:547) continues:

While Henry speaks to Max [at the very end of Scene Twelve], Stoppard's overt use of the structural, verbal, and visual clichés of romantic comedy to emphasise the fundamental meaning, or reality, that they embody reaches its climax, creating a subtext which confirms that this is as real as theatrical representation can get.

Although the perception is thereby created that the *mise en abymes* in the text are one step further removed from the actual world than the outer play, both possess the same ontological status. Stoppard is, above all, concerned with the conventions of stage adultery, and with emphasising the fact that it is fictional (Billington, 1987:147).

In addition he underscores the fictionality of *The Real Thing* by repeatedly teasing the audience in incidents that are almost metaleptic without actually breaking the fictional illusion. Özdemir (2004:432) points out that Stoppard creates ambiguity between fictionality and actuality in employing a realist method, unlike some of his plays such as *The Real Inspector Hound* which contain metalepsis. Instead, in *The Real Thing*, Stoppard uses a technique where he shows incidents which seem to be metaleptic, but then explains them immediately afterward. So, for example, the "pop record" which seems to be a bridge between Scene One and Scene Two, and therefore very definitely a theatrical device, turns out to be playing in Henry and Charlotte's living room at the start of Scene Two.

Later in Scene Two, when Max asks after Debbie, Henry and Charlotte's daughter, Charlotte replies:

CHARLOTTE: Who?
MAX: Debbie.
CHARLOTTE: (*Baffled.*) Debbie?
MAX: Your daughter.
CHARLOTTE: Daughter? Daughter? Must be some mistake. No place for children. Smart talk, that's the thing. Children are so unsmart. Before you know where you are, the chat is all about the price of sandals. Henry couldn't do that. He doesn't like research.
(21)

While Charlotte is saying these words to criticise Henry's play, "House of Cards," her speech also mocks the convention of avoiding children, clocks and animals on stage (States, 1985:377-378). It could refer to plays such as Peter Nichols' *Passion Play* and *Betrayal*, within which *The Real Thing* has been situated and where the children are conveniently off stage. Just as Max conveniently cuts his finger off stage, Debbie also turns out to be seventeen when she is shown, and can therefore be represented by an adult actress. When Max refers to his and Annie's marriage as an example of a childless one, "Lots of people don't have children, in real life. Me and Annie..." (22) the statement is ironic since Max and Annie are also fictitious characters; this last statement can thus be taken to be covert intracompositional self-reference.

Just as *The Real Thing* is the reality outside "House of Cards," there is an actual world outside *The Real Thing*. Stoppard alludes to this by, for instance, borrowing the title of "House of Cards" from a film by John Guillermin and J. Arthur Rank, just as the title of *The Real Thing* was taken from James' short story (Hu, 1989:213). The outer play and play within a play consequently also mimic each other in their author's approach. This has led various critics to speculate on the autobiographical aspects of *The Real Thing*, as if Henry is Stoppard's mouthpiece.

As mentioned, Delaney (1985:50), Arndt (1997:490) and Teachout (2013) interpret Henry as voicing Stoppard's own views on both art and infidelity, describing him as "Stoppard's own fictional alter ego" (Teachout, 2013). Fleming (2001:176) identifies various similarities between Stoppard and Henry, such as that both are successful playwrights, intellectual rather than emotional, like fly-fishing and cricket, and like pop music while their wives try unsuccessfully to educate them in classical music.²⁴

It may, however, be more valid to regard Henry as "a sort of in-joke version of Stoppard-according-to-his-critics," a possibility which Jenkins (1987:163) suggests. When Charlotte complains of the weak parts Henry writes for women, consisting of "drinks and

²⁴ In an interview with Gussow (1995:89) Stoppard said: "I like music. I like pop music, certain kinds of jazz. There's no music that I dislike, but there's very little music I listen to with any degree of understanding or recognition. You know, Miriam [Stoppard's wife at the time he wrote *The Real Thing*] is a great opera fan. I used to go to lots of operas with her. I would say, 'Have I seen this one?' 'Of course you have.' I would say 'What did it look like?' I'd remember them visually, not aurally. I'd remember the one that had a crosshatch design by David Hockney. I'm really a shameful object when it comes to 'proper music.'"

feeds” (21), this does indeed resemble Findlater’s (in Page, 1986:70) criticism of *The Real Thing* and therefore becomes an unintended intracompositional self-reference: “Stoppard is still, it seems, unable to create a leading woman character who is a fully convincing human being, although he has shown on occasions that he can give good actresses interesting things to do and amusing lines to speak.” Fleming (2001:191-192) has also remarked that the criticism expressed by the characters in *The Real Thing* against “House of Cards,” that it contains lengthy, intricate and irrelevant speeches, unrealistic situations and linguistic craftsmanship to a fault, has also been used against Stoppard.

Nonetheless, Thomson (1987:537), proposes that Stoppard should not be conflated with Henry, since, unlike Henry who struggles to “write love,” Stoppard has succeeded in doing so with *The Real Thing*. Corballis (1984:139) also remarks that Stoppard is much more involved in social causes (such as Charter 77) than Henry. Stoppard (in Delaney, 1985:48) admits that he shares with Henry certain notions about writing, but resists the idea that the play is autobiographical. Elsewhere, Stoppard (in O’Connor, 1994:229) avers:

Because *The Real Thing* had an English playwright editorialising about writing and love and marriage and all that, it was perfectly obvious that when he was waving his prejudices around, he was pretty much speaking for me. But then so are the people (in the play) who contradict him. That’s what playmaking is; you have to take everybody’s side.

Therefore, although *The Real Thing* should not be interpreted as an autobiographical play, it does point to a reality outside itself. *The Real Thing* “as a commentary on something else in life affirms that the real thing in life, love, and art and its various verbal and written realizations are inseparable” (Meyer, 1989:112).

Since an audience is in attendance when *The Real Thing* is performed, the actual world outside the fictional world represented on stage is also present. As Kelly (2001b:11) points out, the audience is drawn into the dramatic process and needs to collaborate in order to create meaning. Amid the various theatrical ambushes in *The Real Thing*, Thomson (1987:538) suggests that the audience is encouraged, by the recipient-centred metareferential repetition of scenes and words, to compare and distinguish the *mise en abymes* from the outer play. Zeifman (1983:141) points out how the ambushes encountered by the audience are comic as

well as disconcerting, since these highlight the fact that it can never be sure when it is being conned. Therefore, its members experience the central debates in the play viscerally.

The confusion that they experience in Scene Two, when they need to fathom that Scene One was in fact a *mise en abyme* written by Henry, and thus have to re-examine their interpretation of that scene, points up how – as in *Betrayal* – a world can be created, or smashed, through words. In the second scene, the first scene “collapses like the house of cards Henry is building,” as Boireau (1997:138) puts it. The modality of this metareference, in that it is first encountered at the start of the play, should warn the audience to be prepared for repeated illusion breaking. Even so, Stoppard still manages to ambush the audience by setting up scenes that appear to be a *mise en abyme* yet turn out to be part of the outer play, adding to the levels of fictionality in the entire play.

For Özdemir (2004:417), this “complex manipulation of dramatic, linguistic and visual context and perspective” creates an interaction between the fictional and actual. This questions the demarcation between the “play” and “reality” since they are shown to fuse at times within *The Real Thing*. Stoppard’s drama therefore “deconstructs the mechanism of play as well as our own constructions of reality.” The implication of the games of ambush that Stoppard thereby plays with the audience is that their actual world is also inextricable from the fictional.

4.7. Conclusion

Despite the criticism of Stoppard’s work in general as well as specifically of *The Real Thing* mentioned above, I do not consider this play to be conservative, emotionally cold, or weighed down by theoretical ideas. In *The Real Thing*, Stoppard utilises the form of the play as well as various debates between the characters to express interlinked ideas about authenticity, language, art, and theatre, which correspond with postmodern and poststructuralist theory in this regard, as discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. As was the case in Pinter’s *Betrayal*, Stoppard’s form encompasses the realist and the metatheatrical with ease.

The play, in other words, presents authenticity as something that cannot be established with certainty, although its inverse may be. This is illustrated through various debates in the play on the authenticity of writing, music appreciation, and political causes. Rather than

forcing any of these debates into a specific direction, Stoppard suspends them in a Chekhovian manner.

While it is, for example, possible to establish that Brodie's writing is inferior, since it relies on insincere political ideals and is written in a naively clichéd way, it is not so easy to determine whether Henry's, or for that matter Stoppard's, writing is. Likewise, the relationship between Henry and Annie seems to be authentic and yet the reader or audience of the play can only speculate about this – it is never confirmed in the play itself.

The above debates are complicated by the way that Stoppard presents these characters to the audience. Every character represents, apart from him- or herself, some aspect of another character too. In this way, the characters become versions of each other. In the fictional world of *The Real Thing*, we can therefore agree with Nietzsche who perceives every identity as “haunted by a series of masks and simulacra” (Durham, 1998:11).

From Annie who wears the masks of her various roles as actress in her own life and is a less cynical version of Charlotte, to Henry's carefully constructed public persona, it becomes difficult for the audience to distinguish between the characters and their masks. In the scenes between Billy and Annie, where their rehearsal of a *mise en abyme* becomes part of the outer play, a grey area between the fictional and the “actual” world of the characters is revealed. This situation is complicated by the fact that many facets of the play's romantic relationships must be conveyed through body language and the chemistry between actors. Hence there are no clear cut answers to pin down the identity of the characters or their relationships with each other.

This is also the case with Stoppard's presentation of the fictional worlds in his play. The *mise en abymes* mimic the outer play and vice versa, to the point that each scene carries the shadow of previous scenes. Consequently it also becomes difficult to distinguish scenes functioning on different fictional levels from each other. Furthermore, Stoppard does not reserve literary cliché for *mise en abymes*. By causing the last scene – which forms part of the outer play – to verge on the brink of parody in its depiction of Brodie and its *deus ex machina*-like ending, Stoppard implies, firstly, that the audience should keep in mind that the outer play remains fictional, despite its representing the actual world of the characters. Secondly, he could also, paradoxically, be implying that actual and fictional worlds mimic each other continuously, and therefore that the actual world of the audience in some ways also mimics

fictional worlds, as a perplexing hall of mirrors. Stoppard remains, nonetheless, trapped in the fictional as he makes this point.

Although the audience is thus acutely aware of the fictionality of *The Real Thing* through the modality of the first overt metareference (the first *mise en abyme*, “House of Cards”), its members are pulled back into the fictional world(s) of the play since they share the characters’ inability to navigate through the various fictional levels in the play. The fact that many of the metareferences in *The Real Thing* also point outward to the actual world prompts the audience members to evaluate their actual world accordingly.

Although most of the metareference in this play is overt and explicit, it remains extracompositional for the most part. Through a mostly realist play that incorporates a proliferation of mimicking images, Stoppard consequently manages to pose self-reflexive questions about the line between the actual and the fictional.

Theatre is in this fashion demonstrated to be just one of many fictional media. In *The Real Thing*, Stoppard uses the medium as a convenient platform for the actual and the fictional to become blurred, with the implication that such muddling continues off stage. These concerns remained relevant to British audiences; Patrick Marber returned to them fifteen years later in his play, *Closer*, which is analysed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5:

THE CHARACTER AS MIRAGE

IN PATRICK MARBER'S *CLOSER*

Being misrepresented is simply being presented with a version of ourselves – an invention – that we cannot agree with. But we are daunted by other people making us up, by the number of people we seem to be. We become frantic trying to keep the numbers down, trying to keep the true story of who we really are in circulation. This, perhaps more than anything else, drives us into the arms of one special partner. Monogamy is a way of getting the versions of ourselves down to a minimum. And, of course, a way of convincing ourselves that some versions are truer than others – that some *are* special. – Adam Phillips, *Monogamy* (1996)

5.1. Introduction

After two dramatists as notable as Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard had associated the ideas of marital betrayal and the uncertainty of knowing, Patrick Marber also wrote on this topic. Set in the London of the 1990s, his version is, however, much more explicit, forming part of the in-yer-face aesthetic which was popular at the time. Marber's characters attempt to navigate their romantic lives in a context that is presented as mediated, to the extent that the characters are not sure which versions of each other they can trust. They make use of different strategies to break through the artifice of mediation, without success. These characters remain spectres to each other, invented by their interlocutors, as Phillips (1996) suggests in the epigraph above.

In this chapter I shall investigate the theme of the body versus the mind, the use of mediation, the recycling and mimicry of surfaces, and the metatheatrical effect of *Closer* on the audience.

5.2. Cool Britannia and the inspiration for *Closer*

Patrick Marber is a London born playwright, actor and director. Like Pinter and Stoppard, he is also Jewish (Sierz, 2000:191). After his work as comic actor and writer in television shows such as "On the Hour" and "The Day Today," Marber wrote his first play, *Dealer's Choice* (1995), concerning the power relationships in an all-male poker game. He followed his second

play, *Closer*, with *Howard Katz* (2001), which deals with an actors' agent's failures and loneliness (Rebellato, 2005). His most recent play, *Don Juan in Soho* (2007) is a modern take on Moliere's classic text.

Marber wrote *Closer* after visiting a lap dancing club while on tour in Atlanta with *Dealer's Choice*. In *Closer*, he combines his exploration of the "extraordinary bacchanalian whirlpool of complex power relationships" in the sex industry with his desire to write a play "true to love" as he "and others felt it" (Marber in Sierz, 2000:191). Being written in a time when feminism and gender studies had already altered sexual politics to a great extent (Sierz, 2000:191) and in a political climate in which sound bites were preferred to rigorous discussion, *Closer* is frank about sexual politics but concerned with trivial images (Karwowski, 2005:165).

Marber's play, crude and shocking at times, is about four characters who continually betray each other with one another. The relationships between these characters break up and are patched back together repeatedly as they attract and repel each other like the balls on a Newton's cradle – which is not only the image on the cover of the edition of the play that I studied – but also one of the props used in the play. *Closer* is structured in two acts, with six scenes each. Sierz (2000) and Rosenthal (2007) compare the structure to a dance. For Rosenthal (2007: xxvi), the elegant structure contrasts with the "rawness of the language and behaviour" of the characters in *Closer*, and lends the play its power. Sierz (2000:187) points out how the four characters are never in the same fictional space. The scenes are usually confrontations between two characters, which strengthen the interpretation of the play as a square dance. According to Marber (in Sierz, 2000:191), he wanted to "write about big ugly emotions contained within some formally beautiful structure: which makes it crueller."

Closer has an episodic structure because Marber (in Rosenthal, 2007: xxv) wrote a commencement, development and conclusion for each scene, rather than for the play as a whole. Within this structure, the characters construct an image of each other in every scene, only to have it shattered in the next. These images are therefore arbitrarily constructed and compared to literary or photographic interpretations of identity. As the title in the comparative degree implies, the characters continually yearn to come closer to one another but are never able to reach the core identity of each other.

The play opens with Dan and Alice, waiting to see a doctor after Alice has been run over. The exposition reveals that this occurred when the two characters, being complete strangers, made eye contact while walking in the streets of London just as Alice stepped in front of a taxi. They are instantly attracted to each other, although Dan is in a relationship with an off-stage character, Ruth. The second scene is set eighteen months later when Anna is to take Dan's photograph for the dust jacket of the novel he wrote based on Alice's life. We learn that Dan and Alice are now living together; Alice is a waitress, having given up her job as a stripper. However, Dan flirts with Anna. Alice arrives and asks Anna to take her portrait, sending Dan out to wait for her in a pub around the corner. She confronts Anna, having overheard the conversation between her and Dan. Just as Alice realises that Dan might pursue an affair with Anna, her photograph is taken.

Scene Three is set in an internet chat room. Dan and Larry, a dermatologist, are shown at their respective desks with a large screen above them. On this screen their online conversation is shown. The chat room in which this conversation takes place is called "LONDON FUCK" and Dan is seducing Larry by pretending to be Anna, or some pornography inspired version of her. He persuades Larry to meet "Anna" at the aquarium the next day, a place he knows Anna frequents, to play a prank on her. This backfires because Larry and Anna meet at the aquarium and, after realising that Dan has played a trick on them, hit it off.

By Scene Five, Larry and Anna are in a relationship; the four characters all attend the opening of Anna's exhibition. The portrait that Anna took of Alice in Scene Two is on display. We first see Dan and Alice where Alice voices her fear that Dan is about to leave her. Dan then leaves for his father's funeral, insisting on attending without Alice. Larry now appears on stage, and as he and Alice make small talk, she discovers that he is Anna's boyfriend. After a mild flirtation between the two, they both exit separately while Dan and Anna enter. Dan does his best to persuade Anna to go with him to his father's funeral. She resists his advances, although it is clear that there is a strong attraction between the characters.

Scene Six, set a year later, depicts the dissolution of Dan and Alice's as well as Larry and Anna's relationships. The stage is split in two, and all four characters are on stage for this scene, although not in the same fictional space. It becomes clear that Dan and Anna had been conducting an affair since the previous scene, despite the fact that Larry and Anna had

married each other. Scene Six ends where Alice leaves the flat she and Dan share without saying goodbye to Dan.

The second act starts in a lap dancing club where Alice is now working, again as a stripper. Larry has hired a private suite, where Alice strips for him. They flirt with each other, but Larry becomes frustrated with her when she tells him that her name is Jane Jones, and denies being called Alice. Scene Eight is set in a restaurant. We first observe Dan and Anna who meet there after Anna had met with Larry so that he could sign their divorce papers. When Dan leaves for the bathroom, the action of the play moves back in time as Larry enters, and the audience watches the meeting between him and Anna. He sets her an ultimatum for signing the divorce papers: he asks her to sleep with him one more time in return for his signature on the papers. Larry exits to go to the bar, as Dan re-enters, indicating another temporal shift. Anna confesses to having slept with Larry. Dan struggles to process this information, although they decide to remain together. The scene ends as Larry re-enters and signs the divorce papers.

One month later, in Scene Nine, Larry meets Alice at a museum and the audience learns that they are now in a relationship. Anna soon arrives and it is apparent that Alice had arranged this meeting. She leaves Larry and Anna alone. After Larry has departed, Alice and Anna discuss their relationships with the two men and Alice asks Anna to go back to Larry so that she and Dan can resume their relationship.

Scene Ten is again set one month later in Larry's consulting rooms. Dan is begging him to leave Anna, presuming that she will then go back to him (Dan). After a confrontation between the two men, Larry reveals that he knows where Dan can find Alice and gives him the address of the lap dancing club where Alice works. In Scene Eleven, Alice and Dan are back together, about to depart on a vacation to celebrate their anniversary. Dan, however, continues to interrogate Alice about her relationship with Larry. She finally confesses to having slept with him, and declares that her relationship with Dan is now over. Dan slaps Alice across the face and the scene ends. The last scene is set six months later. Dan had asked Anna and Larry to meet him in Postman's Park. Alice had died, having been hit by a car in New York and Dan is on his way there to identify her body. We learn that Alice's real name was Jane Jones and that Anna and Larry are no longer together. Larry is dating a nurse named Polly and Anna is single. The play ends as each of the remaining characters go their own way.

Scene number	Romantic links between characters	Approximate time lapse	Scene synopsis
Act One			
Scene 1	Dan + Ruth Alice = single Larry = single Anna = separated	--	Dan and Alice wait for a doctor at the hospital. Alice was run over by a taxicab and Dan brought her to the hospital.
Scene 2	Dan + Alice Larry = single Anna = separated	Eighteen months.	Anna takes Dan's photograph for the dust jacket of his novel. The characters are clearly attracted to each other.
Scene 3	Dan + Alice Larry = single Anna = separated	Six months.	Dan and Larry interact in an internet chat room. Dan pretends to be Anna and arranges to meet Larry at an aquarium.
Scene 4	Dan + Alice Larry = single Anna = separated	One day.	Larry and Anna meet at the aquarium. They are attracted to each other.
Scene 5	Dan + Alice Larry + Anna	Six months.	The characters all attend the opening of Anna's exhibition. A photograph of Alice which Anna took in Scene Two is exhibited.
Scene 6	Dan + Alice Larry + Anna Dan + Anna (affair)	One year.	Dan and Anna end their respective relationships with Alice and Larry. Alice runs away.
Act Two			
Scene 7	Dan + Anna Alice = single Larry = single	Three months.	Larry finds Alice in a lap dancing club. She strips for him and he tries to persuade her to go home with him.
Scene 8	Dan + Anna Larry + Alice	One month.	Dan and Anna meet at a restaurant. A flashback shows how Anna and Larry met earlier at the same restaurant to sign their divorce papers. He persuades her to sleep with him in exchange for his signature.
Scene 9	Dan + Anna Larry + Alice	One month.	Alice and Larry meet at a museum. Anna arrives and she and Larry discuss their respective relationships. Later Alice and Anna discuss Larry and Dan.
Scene 10	Dan = single Alice = single Larry + Anna	One month.	Dan begs Larry to leave Anna. Larry gives Dan Alice's work address and reveals that he had slept with her.
Scene 11	Dan + Alice Larry + Anna	One month.	Dan and Alice are about to depart on a vacation. At Dan's insistence, Alice confesses to have slept with Larry and ends their relationship. Dan slaps Alice

			across the face.
Scene 12	Larry + Polly Dan = single Anna = single Alice = dead	Six months.	The characters meet in Postman's Park. Alice had died and Dan is on his way to New York to identify her body. Larry and Anna are divorced and Larry is dating a nurse named Polly.

Figure 5: The sequence of events in *Closer*, showing the romantic links between characters, adapted from Rosenthal (2007: xxiv).

Closer therefore forms part of a discussion about infidelity, truth, and art, taking some of the concerns raised in *Betrayal* and *The Real Thing* further. Marber also cites his influences as Pinter, Mamet, Miller, and Stoppard (Sierz, 2000:190). Echoes of Mamet's *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* are noted by some critics,²⁵ while Sierz (2000:192) mentions the influence of Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, a version of which Marber directed for BBC2, as well as *The Real Thing*, on his handling of jealousy and sexual betrayal in *Closer*. With regard to the impact of technology on sexuality, Marber was also influenced by Steven Soderbergh's film *Sex, lies and videotape* (1989) (Rosenthal, 2007: xxi).

The most obvious influence on *Closer* is, however, *Betrayal*. Several critics have noticed the link between the two plays,²⁶ both exploring the subject matter of love and deceit. Both plays are set in middle-class London, and consist of an episodic scene structure skipping months or years at a time (Shaw, 2008:112). *Closer*'s last scene, in which ex-lovers meet months after their relationships have ended, is reminiscent of *Betrayal*'s first, while its last scene, in which two characters are on the brink of an affair, reminds one of *Betrayal*'s last (Rosenthal, 2007: xxvii). In addition, *Closer*'s Scene Eight, which is set in a restaurant shortly after Anna has betrayed Dan, is reminiscent of *Betrayal*'s restaurant scene (Scene Seven) (Shaw, 2008:112).²⁷ For Shaw (2008:119), the strongest link between the plays is, however, the way in which neither Marber nor Pinter consider their characters as having stable identities. Pinter's characters "never reach a state of completion," whereas Marber's remain constructed, partially fictional, and unstable. For Macaulay (1997:675), the rhythm of the

²⁵ See Benedict (1997), Sierz (2000) and Rosenthal (2007).

²⁶ See Edwardes (1998), Benedict (1997) and Macaulay (1997).

²⁷ Since Marber played the role of Robert in *Betrayal* in a university production, this is no coincidence (Shaw, 2008:115).

dialogue, as well as the exposure of layers of guilt and complicity in *Closer*, reminds him of *Betrayal*.

Yet, being written almost two decades after *Betrayal*, *Closer* also departs significantly from Pinter's play. Unlike *Betrayal*, *Closer* contains shocking language and sexual situations. According to Shaw (2008:6), it is more "sexy" and "glittering." *Closer* is therefore a rejuvenation of Pinter's original subject matter, adapted for a cynical audience, and constitutes part of various discourses in the politics, popular culture and arts scene of the 1990s.

Like the Angry Young Men of Pinter's age, the playwrights of Marber's generation also stood on the threshold between one era and a next (Shaw, 2008:4). In the mid-1990s, London was considered the urban capital of cool. Under the governance of Tony Blair and New Labour, Britain was managed as a brand, shaking off its image as "a backwards-looking island of stodgy tea parties and frumpy monarchs" (Urban, 2004:356). Cool Britannia was a cultural renaissance focused on promoting certain "lifestyles" and "creative industries." Its most important exports in visual art, music and fashion were the works of Damien Hirst, the "Brit-pop" music of Oasis, Blur, and the Spice Girls, and the designs of Alexander McQueen (Urban, 2004:355).

In the field of theatre there emerged what Kenyan (in Urban, 2004:354) – agent and mentor to playwrights Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill – refers to as "an historical moment." She alludes to the 1990s as "a time of fragmentation" and "complete uncertainty." As a result, a sensibility, later to be known as in-yer-face theatre, developed. As discussed in Chapter Two, the younger audiences of this theatre did not want a clear answer or thesis play when attending a performance. They were cynical and hardened (Shaw, 2008:99) and in consequence resonated with the sensibility of this form of theatre, known for its aggressive, confrontational and provocative style (Law, 2011:254).

As stated above, in-yer-face theatre depicts sexual relationships with unprecedented frankness (Sierz, 2000:205). Despite the notions of Girl Power, post feminism and "ladettes," popular in the 1990s, the relationships between men and women were represented as problematic (Sierz, 2000:178). According to Sierz (2000:179), "the sex act was often seen less as an exploration of liberating eroticism than of a desperate attempt to communicate." Within the aloofness of Cool Britannia, a nervousness exists.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the explicitly violent scenes of in-yer-face theatre therefore ripple the smooth surface of the hip cultural renaissance in Britain, while being inextricably part of it. *Closer*, with its unvarnished look at sexual relationships, clearly fits the bill of the in-yer-face sensibility and, together with Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995), Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) and Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* (1995), forms part of a group of plays that have been canonised (Sierz, 2000:245).

According to Marber (in Rosenthal, 2007: xxiii), he "stole" the title of his play from the English rock band, Joy Division's, album "Closer" (1980). Exploring issues of truth, trust, and betrayal, the album's title was also "the best possible title for the play because the play is always aspiring to get closer to some kind of definitive truth about things but knows it can't." In addition, the play's title also evokes the industrial rock band, Nine Inch Nails', song "Closer" (1994), which contemplates isolation and dark, sexual obsession. The song caused controversy, not only because of its explicit lyrics, but also due to the disturbing images in its music video.

Falling within these uncomfortable discourses of desperation and sexual betrayal, it follows that *Closer* was received with mixed reviews. As mentioned in Chapter One, Dominic Dromgoole (2000:194) regards *Closer* as highly entertaining, but "not art." His strongest point of critique is the bleak outlook on relationships that the play suggests. Gross (1997:675) criticises the play for being a soap opera with unbelievable characters. According to Benedict (1997:674) the audience loses faith in the characters as they repeatedly swap partners.

However, De Jongh (1998:418) describes *Closer* as "far more disturbing and raw than" a mere "blow by blow comedy of sexual exchange" while Spencer (1998:419) views it as technically and emotionally mature. Despite the above mentioned claims that *Closer* is unconvincing, Gore-Langton (1998:418) regards Marber's greatest strength as a playwright as his ability to depict the dissolution of romantic relationships in "hellishly truthful detail." For Macaulay (1998:420), the play is, simultaneously, naturalistically contemporary in its references to technology and vocabulary and "far from naturalistic" in the way that it is polished, witty and rhythmic.

According to De Jongh (1998:418) and Butler (1997:676) *Closer* is concerned with the "drama of truth-telling." Butler (1997:677) declares that "in Marber's fierce play, the desire for truth and intimacy appears to be as strong and reckless as the desire for sex." Gore-

Langton (1998:418), Macaulay (1998), Benedict (1997), Brown (1997), and Butler (1997) all interpret the play's central theme as loneliness, isolation, and the fact that communication is unable to breach this divide. Macaulay (1998:420) points out how the play "charts some of the most ambiguous areas of emotional dependence and independence, and of the human need both to be known and to be knowable." The contradictory need for both privacy and intimacy therefore causes an unresolvable conflict. Brown (1997:674) explains that "no matter how close love ties you to someone else, our lives, especially our love lives – are lived alone."

There exists a gap, according to Benedict (1997:674), between "what the characters are saying and what they actually mean," thereby contributing to their eternal isolation. Unlike Pinter's characters who protect themselves at all costs, these characters never cease to stop trying to break out of their isolation through language, leading to great discomfort for themselves as well as the audience.

Most critics thus agree that watching *Closer* is an intensely uncomfortable experience. It is a play to which audiences react, in Gross' (1998:419) words, "very strongly." According to Marlowe (1998:420), audiences "wince in recognition" of *Closer*'s portrayal of romantic and sexual experiences. Chunn (1998:422) recounts the anecdote of an audience member who had to be removed from the auditorium by a sympathetic friend due to her uncontrollably loud sobbing.

The strong reaction to the play is, however, evoked not by nudity or "simulated sex, but something much stronger: language, raw, obscene, shocking, like a kick in the groin or a spit in the face" (Spencer, 1998:419), illustrating De Kock's (2008) notion that a verbal insult can be experienced like a blow in the guts. Nathan (1998:418) describes *Closer*'s dialogue as "full frontal language likely to shock the shockable."

In discussing these features and elements of soap opera, shock-factors, isolation, and deception Brown (1997:674) identifies the main themes of the play as the unreliability of surfaces, the relationship between truth and lies, as well as the soul and the body. Of the binary pairs that Sierz (2000:6) lists (discussed in Chapter Two) which in-her-face theatre generally challenges, the binary pairs of the real versus the unreal and art versus life resonate most strongly with *Closer*. Hence I shall begin my discussion with an investigation of how the binary of the body versus the mind is compared to the real versus the unreal in this play.

5.3. The body versus the mind

The dialectic between the body and the mind is probably most clearly illustrated through the occupations of the characters in *Closer*. Anna is a photographer while Dan is an obituarist and a failed novelist. Larry, on the other hand, is a dermatologist; Alice is a stripper. Although Anna and Dan are in more intellectual occupations than the more practical Larry and Alice, Rosenthal (2007: xl) points out how all four of the characters have only superficial contact with their subjects, patients, or customers.

Larry seems to be the most practical character, having described himself as “A FUCKING CAVEMAN” (61). He is a doctor of the skin, or the “human surface,” as Rosenthal (2007: xli) refers to it. Both in his working day and in his sex life he is concerned with the body, or the “flesh.” Alice, on the other hand, uses her body, or “flesh” to enact what she perceives to be a basic male sexual fantasy for clients who visit a lap dancing club for a few hours a night. Dan is only concerned with a few key details with which to summarise a person’s life when writing obituaries, but as a failed novelist, he places a high premium on the intellectual and convinces Anna that Larry will bore her, being too superficial to understand her artistic occupation (44). However, Anna is also preoccupied with appearances in her work as a photographer; as Rosenthal (2007:xli) puts it, she “takes pictures of strangers whom she need never meet again – the photographic equivalent of one-night stands.” It is clear that Anna prefers to work this way, since she titles the portrait that she takes of Alice anonymously as “Young woman, London,” although she knows Alice.

Although it might be tempting to judge the characters as superficial in their negation of their “authentic selves,” *Closer* illustrates that it is not as easy as it may seem to draw a line between the body and the mind, as the locus of a character’s authentic self. Anna, for example, regards emotional attachment as being more authentic than physical interaction. When Dan confronts her about having slept with Larry in return for his signature on the divorce papers, she denies that this necessarily affects her relationship with Dan:

ANNA: Dan, I did what he wanted and now he will leave us alone.
I love *you*, I didn’t give him anything.
DAN: Your body?
DAN reaches for his cigarettes.

ANNA: If Alice came to you... *desperate*... with all that love still between you and she said she needed you to want her so that she could get over you, you would do it. I wouldn't like it either but I would forgive you because it's... a mercy fuck – a *sympathy* fuck. Moral rape, everyone does it. It's... *kindness*.
[...]

ANNA: It was only sex. (77-79)

Anna therefore does her best to separate the bodily from the emotional and sees the body as something that can be commodified and given away in an act of kindness, which leaves the giver unaffected. For her, the emotional is therefore the locus of authenticity. Nevertheless Dan cannot accept Anna's explanation, so that this argument eventually ends their relationship.

Larry, with his practical outlook on life, on the other hand, perceives the body as central to a romantic relationship. As a doctor, it could be argued, Larry interprets an event as "real" when it manifests in the body. In Scene Ten, Dan comes to Larry's consultation room and confronts him about the way he had manipulated Anna into having sex with him:

DAN: You're an animal.
LARRY: Yes. What are you?
DAN: You think love is simple? You think the heart is like a diagram?
LARRY: Ever *seen* a human heart? It looks like a fist wrapped in blood. GO FUCK YOURSELF... you WRITER. You LIAR. Go check a few facts while I get my hands dirty.
DAN: She hates your hands. She hates your simplicity. (94)

Larry is clearly prejudiced against Dan's ephemeral concerns as a novelist. His bias is based on the nature/culture divide between medicine and writing as occupations. He thinks that Dan unnecessarily complicates things and sees writing as dishonest.

Despite Larry's scorn of the intellectual as inauthentic, he is not necessarily superficial, since his preoccupation with the body sometimes leads him "to probe as deeply as a psychiatrist" (Rosenthal, 2007: xli). This is illustrated when Larry confronts Dan about his treatment of Alice and explains that he thinks that the scar on Alice's leg, discussed in greater detail below, is the result of a self-inflicted wound. He tells Dan: "You were so busy feeling your grand artistic '*feelings*' you couldn't see what was in front of you. The girl is fragile and tender. She didn't want to be put in a book, she wanted to be *loved*" (95). He is therefore "also

concerned with the innermost workings of the human heart and mind” because “the source of skin diseases may be hidden far beneath the surface,” as Rosenthal (2007: xli) points out.

In Scene Seven, when Larry encounters Alice at the lap dancing club, he also disputes the idea that the body can be commodified, reminiscent of Henry’s views in *The Real Thing*. When Alice tells Larry that the lap dancing club’s policy prescribes that the customer must pay the stripper, Larry replies:

LARRY: And what do we get in return?
ALICE: We’re nice to you.
LARRY: ‘And We Get To See You Naked.’
ALICE: It’s beautiful.
LARRY: Except... you think you haven’t given us anything of yourselves. You think because you don’t love us or desire us or even like us you think you’ve won.
ALICE: It’s not a war.
LARRY laughs for some time.
LARRY: But you do give us something of yourselves: you give us... *imagery*... and we do with that what we will. (71-72)

Stripping is consequently, as Rosenthal (2007: xliv) suggests, not simply an “enjoyable empowering means to an end for Alice [...], with no negative side effects on plain Jane Jones’s more vulnerable personality,” a point to which I shall return.

As discussed above, for Bakhtin (in Hitchcock, 1998:92) the body isolates individuals from each other. It is impossible ever to physically feel another’s pain; as a result we are all confined to our own bodies. *Closer* illustrates this, in Scene Three. When convincing Larry to meet “Anna” at the aquarium, Dan types: “We liv as we dream,ALONE” (29).²⁸ This idea is once more emphasised when it becomes clear that Anna perceives arousal and sexual gratification as intensely personal, not even completely shared with an intimate partner. When Dan wants to know if Anna has ever faked an orgasm with him, she replies: “*Occasionally*... I have faked it. / It’s not important, you don’t *make* me come. I come... you’re... ‘in the area’... providing valiant assistance” (78). Only Anna can ever know if she has reached a sexual climax and although she can fake this for Dan’s benefit, she cannot fake it for her own. A clear line can, in other words, be drawn between a real orgasm and a fake one, which seems to suggest that the body is, after all, the locus of authenticity in human relationships.

²⁸ Since the dialogue in Scene Three is not spoken, but projected on a screen in order to simulate an exchange in a virtual chat room, the text includes typos and informal abbreviations.

Real arousal can, however, follow a fake stimulus. In Scene Three, Larry becomes aroused by Dan's fictitious portrayal of "Anna." When Anna tells Larry that Dan was behind the internet prank, Larry protests, on the grounds of his arousal:

LARRY: No, I was talking to a woman.

ANNA: How do you know?

LARRY: Because... believe me, she was a woman, I got a *huge*... She was a woman. (33)

Although a character may experience certainty about whether he or she is aroused or not, arousal cannot testify to the authenticity, or gender, of its source. Marber suspends this debate throughout the play; as a result the audience never receives an answer to the question of whether the body or the mind is the locus of what constitutes a character's authentic identity, despite the different ways the characters argue for one side or the other.

There is, however, a different level on which the body, and its ability to be wounded or scarred, can be interpreted as the locus of existence. When Larry boasts that he would be able to beat Dan in a fist fight, "If it came to it" (46), he yet again reveals his bias towards nature rather than culture. Dan might be cleverer than him, or a better intellectual match for Anna, but, according to Larry, the fact that he would be able to physically overpower Dan more than compensates for this. Ironically, it is Dan who crosses the boundary of physical violence when he slaps Alice across the face in Scene Eleven.

This event foreshadows Alice's death, which irrefutably ends her life. Although the body cannot conclusively be demonstrated to be the locus of a person's identity, he or she ceases to exist if his or her body expires. In Scene One Marber repeatedly refers to death and mortality. The scene is set in a hospital, where various references are made to smoking as well as the fact that Dan's mother died of some disease related to her smoking. Dan's occupation as an obituarist also evokes death, as do the carcasses that are unloaded at the meat market where Alice had been going before she was hit by a taxi. By ending the play with Alice's death, Marber therefore fulfils a suggestion which is raised in Scene One.

The body is thus, although not the locus of a person's identity, integral to it. However, Larry's bias against writing, on the basis that it is less "real," should be investigated.

5.4. Mediation failing as authentic representation of the actual world

5.4.1. Calling a spade a spade

In the characters' attempts to navigate to an imagined core "reality," or "real thing," they approach different ways of mediation as bringing them either closer to or further from this "reality." The brutal vocabulary, used by Larry especially, is one of the ways in which *Closer* attempts to break through artifice. In line with Maturana (in De Kock, 2008:92), Sierz (2000:7) points out how "words often seem to cause more offence than the acts to which they refer," since "humans are language animals." Certain taboo words cause offence only because they are assigned that power by convention. According to Sierz (2000:30), those which cause the strongest offence are "cunt," "motherfucker," and "fuck," ample examples of which may be found in *Closer*.

Larry interprets the discomfort that these words cause as proof of their authenticity. He does not shy away from them and uses them to uncover explicit details about Dan and Anna's sex life. When Anna confesses to her affair with Dan in Scene Six, Larry demands to know the detail of this affair in the most non-euphemistic terms possible:

LARRY: Did you come?
ANNA: Why are you doing this?
LARRY: Because I want to know.
Beat.
ANNA: (*softly*) Yes... I came.
LARRY: How many times?
ANNA: Twice.
LARRY: How?
ANNA: First he went down on me and then we fucked.
Beat.
LARRY: Who was where?
ANNA: (*tough*) I was on top and then he fucked me from behind.
LARRY: And that's when you came the second time?
ANNA: Why is the sex so important?
LARRY: BECAUSE I'M A FUCKING CAVEMAN. (60-61)

When Larry discovers that he had been deceived by Anna, he demands these explicit details for three reasons. Firstly, he wants to humiliate her by confronting her with these intimate

details of her life. Secondly, this enables Larry to break the bond between Dan and Anna because he now shares in the knowledge of their intimate moments. This becomes evident again when Larry refers to some of the most secret details of Dan and Anna's relationship to convince Dan that Anna does not love him any longer and that he should give up on her:

LARRY: Listen... I've spent the whole week talking about *you*.

 Anna tells me you fucked her with your eyes closed.
 She tells me you wake in the night, crying for your dead mother.

 You mummy's boy.

 Shall we stop this?

 It's *over*. Accept it. (94)

Knowledge, in this sense, becomes a weapon. The more Larry knows about Dan's relationship with Anna, the more armour he acquires to use against Dan.

Thirdly, Larry aims to uncover the truth about Anna's affair. For Sierz (2000:193), Larry's insistence on graphic details is driven by his desire to know the truth as well as to "provoke Anna and go beyond the guilty politeness of her responses." In Scene Nine, when trying to convince Anna to go back to Larry, Alice similarly provokes her until she explodes with "JUST FUCKING STOP IT" (88), at which Alice replies: "Now we're talking" (88).

Both Alice and Larry thus consider crude language and explicit detail as conduits of authenticity, in a way reminiscent of Artaud's theatre of cruelty, since Larry thanks Anna at the end of Scene Six for her honesty when she complies in recounting the detail of her sex life with Dan:

LARRY: THAT's the *spirit*. Thank you. Thank you for your *honesty*.
 Now fuck off and die. You fucked-up slag. (61)

Larry indubitably uses the term "honesty" here with a hint of irony. Anna is honest in recounting the detail of acts about which she deceived Larry. Despite Larry's insistence on honesty being expressed in clear, direct terms, he also uses his rough vocabulary in a distinctly creative way. He may not be a writer like Dan, but Larry is fond of alliterating crude suggestions such as "fancy a friendly poke?" (50), or "we christen the patient's bed with our

final fuck” (76), making these catchy. This indicates how it becomes very difficult to regard some ways of speaking as more authentic since these are supposedly unstylised. Both Larry and Dan use poetic devices in their speech, whether their speech can be permitted in polite conversation or not.

5.4.2. The narrative in memory

While Larry aims for brutal honesty in the way he mediates his and the other characters’ acts and desires, Dan and Alice – like the characters in *Betrayal* – story themselves into being, or repeatedly recount and narrate key events in their relationship. As in *Betrayal*, the audience is not given direct access to the moment in which Dan and Alice met, but the incident is recounted by the characters throughout the play. This first occurs in Scene One, where the account functions not only to establish the characters’ intentions towards one another, but also as exposition in informing the audience of the events preceding the first scene:

ALICE: Thank you for scraping me off the road.
DAN: My pleasure.
ALICE: You *knight*.
DAN looks at her.
DAN: You *damsel*.
Why didn’t you look?
ALICE: I never look where I’m going.
DAN: We stood at the lights, I looked into your eyes and then you... stepped into the road.
ALICE: Then what?
DAN: You were lying on the ground, you focused on me, you said, ‘Hallo, stranger.’
ALICE: What a slut.
DAN: I noticed your leg was cut.
ALICE: Did you notice my *legs*?
DAN: Quite possibly.
ALICE: Then what?
DAN: The cabbie got out. He crossed himself. He said, ‘Thank fuck, I thought I’d killed her.’ I said, ‘Let’s get her to a hospital.’ He hesitated... (I think he thought there’d be paperwork and he’d be held ‘responsible’), so I said, with a slight sneer, ‘Please, just drop us at the hospital.’
ALICE: Show me the sneer.
DAN considers then sneers. (7-8)

It is clear that Dan has a way with words – he knows how to recount the events in an entertaining manner – a point which I shall return to below. By using terms such as “*knight*” and “*damsel*,” both Alice and Dan compare and liken their meeting to an old fashioned fairy tale. They mediate their circumstances and make sense of them in so doing.

It is interesting to note how Dan and Alice carefully consider which words best describe their meeting:

DAN: You were murmuring, ‘I’m very sorry for all the inconvenience.’ I had my arm around you... your head was on my shoulder.
ALICE: Was my head... *lolling*?
DAN: That’s exactly what it was doing. (8)

Dan and Alice therefore carefully construct “their” story and use it to strengthen their relationship and prove their commitment to each other. In Scene Eleven, for example, they quiz each other on the details of this story and/or the memory of their meeting:

DAN: What was on my sandwiches?
ALICE: Tuna.
DAN: What colour was my apple?
ALICE: Green.
DAN: It was *red*.
ALICE: It was *green* and it was horrible.
DAN: What were your first words to me?
ALICE: ‘Hallo, Stranger.’
DAN: What a slut.
 Beat.
ALICE: Where had I been?
DAN: ‘Clubbing’, then the meat market and then... the buried river.
 Beat.
ALICE: The what?
DAN: You went to Blackfriars Bridge to see where the Fleet river comes out... *the swimming pig*... all that.
ALICE: You’ve lost the plot, *Grandad*. (101)

This extract not only illustrates how Dan and Alice have made the recounting of their first meeting a game, to reinvigorate their commitment to each other, but also constitutes the first sign that all is not well in their relationship. Dan confuses the detail of his first meeting with Alice with his first meeting with *Anna*, who told him that the building which now houses her studio was built over a river, the estuary of which can still be seen from Blackfriars Bridge.

This is an easy mistake for him to make, since Alice had been walking from Blackfriars Bridge when she was hit by the taxi, but this confusion also points to Dan's ambivalence towards his relationship with Alice.

In Scene Twelve, Dan again mistakes a conversation that he had held with Alice to have been with Anna:

DAN: This is where we sat.
ANNA: Who?
DAN: Me and my father, didn't I tell you?
ANNA: No, wrong girl, you told Alice. (113)

Anna correctly guesses that Dan shared with Alice the memory of the day his mother died and is confusing the latter with Anna. Anna's slightly cynical correction of this detail also expresses her disillusionment with Dan and his inability to fully commit himself.

Although Alice eagerly engages in the retelling of the story of herself and Dan, there are points in the play when she is also uncomfortable with its retelling. In Scene Eleven they talk about the day that Dan found Alice, using Larry's directions, in the lap dancing club:

ALICE: Loads of men came to the club. *You* came to the club. The look on your face.
DAN: The look on *your* face.
What a face. What a *wig*.
He gazes at her.
I love your face... I saw this face... this... vision.
And then you stepped into the road.
It was the moment of my life.
ALICE: *This* is the moment of your life.
DAN: You were perfect.
ALICE: I still am. (104)

In this extract, Dan and Alice are heading towards an argument which the audience can assume has been recurring in their relationship ever since Dan found Alice in the club where Larry said she would be. Dan already knows that Alice had slept with Larry after the latter came to the club, but Alice, not knowing that Larry had told Dan, still denies it at this point in the play. Alice realises that Dan has idealised the moment that he first saw her, and that his recollection of this idealised version of her significantly steers him away from their argument.

She recognises that Dan had constructed an image of her in his mind, a mask which she cannot live up to. She does not, however, realise that she had done the same with him. In Scene Nine, Alice tells Anna that she had fallen in love with Dan because he cut the crusts off his sandwich: “I looked in his briefcase and I found this... *sandwich*... and I thought, ‘I will give all my love to this charming man who cuts off his crusts’” (89). Yet, in the final moments of the play, Dan reveals that his crust-less sandwich was a coincidence: “She told me that she fell in love with me because... I cut off my crusts... but it was just... it was only *that* day... because the bread... *broke* in my hands” (114).

Larry also misconstrues the facts about Dan available to him. When he sees Dan for the first time in Scene Five, Larry tells Anna:

LARRY: [...]
 He’s taller than his photo.
ANNA: The photo’s a head shot.
LARRY: Yeah, I know, but his head *implied* a short body... but in fact, his head
 is... deceptive.
ANNA: Deceptive?
LARRY: Yes, because he’s actually got a *long* body. He’s a stringy fucker.
(45-46)

Although Larry’s perception of Dan as short functions mostly as a joke, revealing Larry’s jealousy, it points to the manner in which characters construct images of each other based on arbitrary details. Dan’s perception of Anna as independent and, more specifically, not dependent on him is exposed to the audience as false. In Scene Six, Dan alludes to Anna’s independence as the reason he prefers her to Alice:

ALICE: Is it because she’s clever?
DAN: No, it’s because... she doesn’t need me. (51)

Yet, later in this same scene, when Larry questions Anna as to why she is leaving him for Dan, she replies: “I need him” (57). It is, however, unclear if Dan ever realises this, or if Anna knows that her independence is one of the reasons that Dan loved her.

Hence, while Larry’s seemingly straightforward vocabulary takes on a poetic turn, the narratives that Dan and Alice use to confirm their relationship, their intimacy, and their closeness to each other, are shown to be capricious. Language and communication do not, in fact, act as a conduit between the characters. However, the instances when the characters use

communication to consciously distance themselves from others turn out to be equally confusing.

5.4.3. Written and visual media

The internet – still somewhat novel to the average person in the 1990s – was a truly revolutionary technological advancement enabling completely anonymous social contact between people in the form of chat rooms. The anonymity of this medium has interesting paradoxical consequences. On the one hand it is a forum for deception – dramatised when Dan impersonates Anna in his chat with Larry. His impersonation is, as Shaw (2008:130) points out, a very obvious constructed copy, or mimicry, of Anna, adapted to be the “Sexual Ideal Woman,” or as Rosenthal (2007:xliv) puts it, “a porno version of Anna.”

On the other hand, the internet is, as Anna puts it, “the first great democratic medium” (34). Its anonymity presents the opportunity for strangers to be unusually frank with each other. In *Closer*, it offers Larry and Dan the chance to express their greatest sexual fantasies. For Sierz (2000:193), the honesty of this scene, is however, ironic since the truth is told in a deceptive context, because Dan is impersonating Anna. The internet thus brings the characters both closer to and further from an intimate connection with another human being. Although Larry is aroused by his encounter with Dan in the virtual chat room, the stimulus of this arousal turns out to be counterfeit – as discussed above.

But not only the technologically advanced media are unreliable. Dan is quite open about the fact that he is rather creative in the way he represents people when writing their obituaries. When describing his day to day duties as an obituarist to Alice, he confesses to using euphemisms to account for aspects of people’s lives that they would have preferred to stay private, referring to this as “polishing the prose.”

DAN: ‘He was a convivial fellow,’ meaning he was an alcoholic.
 ‘He valued his privacy’ – gay.
 ‘He *enjoyed* his privacy’... raging queen. (10)

Apart from subtly alluding to any addictions or hidden sexual orientations, these euphemisms also collapse a person’s entire life into a single paragraph – or even one word. This becomes clear when Alice asks Dan what her euphemism would be, and he replies “disarming,” while

his own is – at that point in the play – “reserved” (11). As these references to obituary writing make clear, while a paragraph with a few key facts about a person – albeit in some kind of code – may pay homage to a person, it is also a limited oversimplification.

Yet, the more artistic medium of the novel also fails in matching the expression plane to the content plane, since Dan’s novel about Alice proves to be no less distorting than an average obituary. When Anna learns in scene two that Dan’s novel is based on an actual person, she jokes that Dan had stolen Alice’s life to gain status as a novelist. Just as Alice resists Dan’s idealisation of her, she also rejects his novel about her life as an unsatisfactory mimicry, sharing Plato’s distrust of imitations. Alice and Larry discuss Dan’s novel in Scene Five, where Alice’s scepticism about its likeness to her actual life is clear:

LARRY: It’s about *you*, isn’t it?
ALICE: Some of me.
LARRY: Oh? What did he leave out?
 Beat.
ALICE: The truth. (39-40)

Shaw (2008:130) emphasises that Dan’s novel, “The Aquarium,” is his own creation, or version of Alice – just as his version of Anna in the internet chat room was his own construct.

However, as was noticed in the narratives that characters construct for themselves about their relationships, the play also suggests that interpretations and versions of people and events are as close as we can come to actual people and events. As Nietzsche (1998:83) theorises, these characters do not have access to the subjects or objects that they perceive, but only to their own perceptions. Dan’s novel is a commercial and critical failure and although this is not necessarily testimony to its merits, he summarises the significance of its reception aptly when he tells Anna: “It’s *perceived* to be [a failure], therefore it is” (42). Perception, no matter how skewed it may be, remains the closest one can come to actuality.

Dan is, however, not the only character to create an artistic version of Alice. Anna’s photographic portrait of her plays an equally central role in the play and is equally scrutinised by Alice. Just like Dan, Anna uses Alice’s image to build her career and make money. The well-known belief in some cultures that a photographer steals the soul of his or her subject is repeatedly evoked in *Closer*. In Scene Two when Dan is flirting with Alice, he jokes that Anna does so – as she joked that he stole Alice’s life with his novel. When Alice enters, she

also refers to this belief by asking Anna if she had stolen Dan's soul, before requesting Anna to take her own portrait.

This photograph is significant since it is shot at the moment when Alice realises that Dan's interest in her is waning and he might pursue Anna:

ALICE: [...]
 She stares at ANNA.
 When he let me in... downstairs, he had... this... 'look'.
 I just listened to your... *conversation.*
 Silence.

ANNA: I don't know what to say.

ALICE: (*gently*) Take my picture.
 Pause.

ANNA: I'm not a thief, Alice.
 She looks down the lens.
 Head up...
 Alice raises her head, she is in tears.

ANNA: You look beautiful. Turn to me...
 She takes her shots. They look at each other.
 Good.
 Blackout. (24-25)

Although the resulting photograph is poignant, Alice still rejects the idea that it represents some version of her, just as René Magritte proclaimed that "this is not a pipe" (Kleiner, Mamiya & Tansey, 2001:1040). When Dan and Alice look at the portrait that Anna took of her at Anna's exhibition in Scene Five, the following exchange takes place:

DAN: Cheers.
 She turns. They drink. DAN admires the photo.
 You're the belle of the bullshit. You look beautiful.

ALICE: I'm *here.* (35-36)

Just as Alice rejects Dan's idealisation of her, she also dismisses this poignant image of her. She elaborates on her reasons for her disdain of art as representing reality while talking to Larry later in this scene. When Larry asks Alice what she thinks of the exhibition, her answer provides a key to how she views the distinction between life and art:

ALICE: It's a lie.

It's a bunch of sad strangers photographed beautifully and all the rich fuckers who appreciate *art* say it's beautiful because that's what they want to see.

But the people in the photos are sad and alone but the pictures make the world *seem* beautiful.

So, the exhibition is reassuring, which makes it a lie, and everyone loves a Big Fat Lie. (38)

Having her own portrait as part of the exhibition, Alice can talk from experience when she proclaims that the pictures artistically gloss over real human pain. She notices a distinct difference between her actual life and artistic representations of it, interpreting the latter not only as unsatisfactory but a blatant lie, used to placate the wealthy into ignorance.

Just as Larry argues that he looks “like a criminal in photos” (35), Alice also rejects Anna’s portrait as a valid representation of her. Mimesis cannot, after all, replicate an exact copy. It necessarily differs from that which it mimics (Melberg, 1995). Nonetheless, Larry repeatedly refers to Alice either as her portrait or vice versa. In Scene Six, Larry informs Anna: “Hey, guess what, *Alice* was at the Paramount Hotel” (53), when he returns from a business trip to New York. Both Anna and the audience at first surmise that Larry encountered Alice in New York. Larry reveals that he is referring to Anna’s portrait of Alice, though, when he takes from his pocket a postcard with the photo printed on it. Later, upon meeting Alice at a museum in Scene Nine, Larry addresses her as “Young Woman, London” (82).

5.4.4. Performative media

Despite Alice’s (and Larry’s) scorn about artistic illusions, she cannot escape being interpreted either through Dan’s novel or Anna’s photograph of her. Yet, in her occupation as a stripper Alice also participates in the creation of illusions of herself. She does not resist the version of herself as a stripper, possibly because she considers it as a blatant lie which will not easily be mistaken for the truth. Stripping implies obvious dishonesty, as Alice admits when she explains to Dan in Scene One why she is an “exceptional” stripper: she knows “what men want” (14). Alice has a clear notion of this desire and enacts this when she strips.

However, it becomes evident in Scene Seven, when Larry visits a lap dancing club and finds Alice working there, that the strippers in the club are not merely selling a lie to customers, who willingly purchase it, but use these lies to protect themselves. As was noted

above when Larry points out how problematic it is to commodify the body, Alice (along with the other strippers in the club) utilises costumes, or “armour,” as he refers to it, to hide behind. He regards the fact that Alice asks him a question as a “chink” in her “armour” (66). When she protests that she is not wearing any armour, alluding to the fact that he can see her naked, he insists that she is, since she refuses to acknowledge that she does know him. When Larry questions the stage name she uses as a stripper, “Jane Jones,” Alice denies having any other name.

He interprets Alice’s aloof behaviour and alternative name as a protective mask, explaining to her: “All the girls in this hellhole; the pneumatic robots, the coked-up baby dolls – and you’re no different – you all use ‘stage names’ to con yourselves you’re someone else so that you don’t feel ashamed when you show your cunts and arseholes to Complete Fucking Strangers” (69). Larry, in other words, perceives Alice’s persona as a stripper to be a mask she wears, different from who she actually is, and begs her to talk to him “in real life,” telling her, “I know who you are.”

Nonetheless, here Larry disregards his own observation about Alice, in Scene Five, that she only seems open because “That’s how she *wants* to seem” (46). It is revealed later in the play that Alice, the character who appears most honest, reverses the moral code to which she apparently subscribes by having taken on a false identity. Alice’s name is indeed Jane Jones. The binary which Larry draws between Alice’s true identity and her persona as Jane Jones, the stripper, is thereby confused. In a manner similar to Dan, who expresses his sexual fantasies about Anna in the deceptive medium of an internet chat room, Alice is only honest about her true identity when she is in the deceptive milieu of a lap dancing club. Rosenthal (2007: xxxv-xxxvi) regards this as answering the central question asked negatively in the play:

The irony underpinning Alice’s truthfulness and rigid moral code is that the superficial definition of her identity – her name – is an invention: Alice Ayres was really plain Jane Jones after all. This final revelation of Alice’s ‘identity fraud’ presents the play’s most negative response to Marber’s question: ‘Can you ever fully know someone else?’ If you can share your life with a woman for years and not even know her real name, then the answer must be ‘no.’

Yet, for Karwowski (2005:166), Alice takes on a different persona to escape “humanity’s abiding susceptibility to illusion,” and in so doing resists giving in to artifice. Nonetheless, this disregards the fact that her persona is in itself an illusion, as Shaw (2008:134) argues: “we

discover that ‘Alice’ has been an act, a work of theatre herself, a life lived in quotation marks, and not just because of her stripper persona.” As Shaw (2008:134-135) aptly points out, Alice’s very obvious constructed identity points to the fact that all of the relationships in the play are constructed. Dan’s off-stage ex-girlfriend, Ruth, is revealed in the last scene of the play to have married a Spanish poet she met while translating his poems. Dan says that she “fell in love with a collection of poems” (114). Like Ruth, all of the characters have fallen in love with an image they created themselves.

5.4.5. Love versus honesty

It is perhaps because of this that the two men in the play place such a high premium on honesty, holding on to the comforting idea that it might, after all, be possible to know who another character actually is. Although Dan deceives Alice for a year about his affair with Anna, he does admit that it is cruel to do so when he eventually reveals the truth: “Deception is brutal, I’m not pretending otherwise” (52). In Scene Eleven, it is he who is demanding the truth about her relationship with Larry from Alice, telling her: “I just want the truth” (105); when she asks him why this is the case, he replies: “Because I’m addicted to it. Because without it we’re animals. Trust me, I love you” (105). Like Larry, Dan accordingly perceives Alice’s reluctance to confide in him about her relationship with Larry as self-protection.

Apart from wishing to hear the intimate details of Anna and Dan’s affair, and his insistence that Alice reveal her true identity to him, Larry is also shown to be vulnerable in his search for honesty. In the lap dancing club, he wants Alice to tell him if she desires him, and prefers to realise that she does not, to the lie that she does. When he confesses to Anna that he had been unfaithful to her with a sex worker in New York and she wonders why he did not keep this a secret, the following exchange occurs:

ANNA: Why did you tell me?
LARRY: I couldn’t lie to you.
ANNA: Why not?
LARRY: Because I love you. (56)

For Larry there remains a correlation between love and honesty, even if he uses honesty for other ends later in the same scene. But complete honesty is impossible, since language – just like artistic renderings of people – falls short in expressing actuality.

It is therefore not surprising that Alice dismisses language as easily as she does Anna's photographs. When she is leaving Dan in Scene Eleven and he tries to persuade her to stay, she voices her scepticism at his words:

DAN: *I love you.*
ALICE: Where?
DAN: What?
ALICE: *Show me. Where is this 'love'?*
 I can't see it, I can't *touch* it, I can't *feel* it.
 I can hear it, I can hear some words but I can't *do* anything with your
 easy words. (107)

For Alice, there is evidently a gap between Dan's words and his true emotions towards her. When Alice finally confesses that she did sleep with Larry, Dan, infuriated because she had lied to him, asks her "WHO ARE YOU" (108). Both characters are therefore frustrated by their inability to know each other, language being a screen that obscures the truth rather than revealing it, as in *Betrayal*.

Bramwell (1999) points out how, in *Closer*, truth and honesty do not lead to intimacy, but rather recrimination and revenge, asserting that the title is ironic. Karwowski (2005:166) aptly summarises the lack of intimacy as follows: "For *Closer* does not refer to any emotional warmth that may or may not be felt by the characters in the course of their seesaw attractions. In fact, it is a reference to a proximity to reality, in this case, to the reality of personal relationships."

Even when the characters perceive themselves as experiencing an authentic bond with each other, language still fails them. Dan, who supposedly has the best command of language of the characters, struggles to express himself when he tries to convince Anna to accompany him to his father's funeral. When Anna expresses her sympathy that Dan's father had passed away, he replies:

DAN: It's fine, I hated him – no, I didn't – I don't care, I *care* about THIS.
 Come with me, spend a weekend with me, then decide.
ANNA: I don't want to go to your father's funeral.

There's nothing to... decide.
 What about Alice?
 DAN: She'll survive.

I can't be her father any more.

Anna, you want to believe he's... 'the one' ... it's not *real*, you're
 scared of this.
 ANNA: There is no 'this.' I love him. (44)

When Dan is confronted by an emotion that he experiences as authentic, he cannot express it in language more specific than the word "this." A little while later, Dan acknowledges this in a line reminiscent of the last scene of *Betrayal*: "All the language is old, there are no new words... *I love you*" (44). The recycling of language is additionally emphasised in *Closer* by the way in which the characters are aware of the fact that they are using language as if in quotation marks, indicated in the text by single inverted commas. When Anna, for example, confesses to her affair with Dan, she tells Larry: "I'm... 'sorry'..." (77). The characters also sometimes quote themselves, as Alice does when she leaves Dan in Scene Eleven. After recounting the manner in which she had left her previous lover, with the words "'I don't love you any more, goodbye'" (13) in Scene One, Alice quotes herself again in Scene Eleven, only, this time, directing the words to Dan.

The way that the characters mimic and recycle their own and other's language is emulated in the manner Marber recycles and mimics various other images in *Closer*.

5.5. Recycling and mimicry of various images in *Closer*

As Aristotle (in Potolsky, 2006:37) suggests, mimicry is inherently ingrained in human existence. This is illustrated by the behaviour of the characters in *Closer*. Throughout the play, Marber emphasises a scar on Alice's leg. It is fittingly noticed first by Larry, the dermatologist. In Scene One, while Dan and Alice are waiting for a doctor to tend to Alice, Larry walks by and draws the audience's attention to the scar. Alice's explanation for it at the time is simply the words: "In America. A truck" (11). In Scene Five, when Larry sees Alice at Anna's exhibition, he asks about the scar again. This time Alice claims, "A mafia hit man broke my leg" (41), but Larry replies, in earnest, that the scar does not look like the result of a

break, but rather the result of a wound caused by something like a knife. Alice immediately offers the explanation that it was the result of a car crash she and her parents were involved in, which they did not survive.

Larry is, not surprisingly, much more interested in the scar than Dan. In fact, Alice informs Anna in Scene Nine that “Larry’s mad about” her scar and “licks it like a dog” (90). When Dan comes to Larry’s surgery to confront him about how the latter had lured Anna back to him, it is, on the contrary, Larry who confronts Dan about Alice. While Dan also offers the explanation of a car crash, Larry provides his own explanation:

There’s a condition called ‘*dermatitis artefacta*’. It’s a mental disorder manifested in the skin. The patient manufactures his or her very own skin disease. They pour bleach on themselves, gouge their skin, inject themselves with their own piss, sometimes their own shit. They create their own disease with the same diabolical attention to detail as the artist or the lover. It looks ‘real’ but its source is the deluded self. (95)

In other words, Larry interprets Alice’s scar as a mimicry of a “real” scar. It is interesting that he compares the process followed by the sufferer who has “*dermatitis artefacta*” to that employed by an artist or a lover. At this point Larry’s disdain of the arts is already clear to the audience as well as Dan; hence his use of the word “diabolical” to describe the process. However, in his explanation of this condition he not only compares a love relationship to a work of art, but also implies that there is a level of artifice or deceit in both. Just as Jane Jones created the persona, Alice Ayres, she likewise created her scar, according to Larry. Yet he also concedes that although this scar is manufactured, its source is the disturbed self, as he has mentioned.

When Dan confronts Alice about her scar in Scene Eleven, she offers yet another explanation for it: that she fell off her bicycle because she “refused to use stabilisers” (103), denying that the wound that caused the scar was self-inflicted. Although Marber (in Rosenthal, 2007: lii) supports Alice’s explanation that she did fall off her bicycle, there is no substantiation for either of these accounts in the text. According to Sierz (2000:193-194), the different explanations given for Alice’s scar suggest “both the endless mutability of the stories we tell about ourselves and the emotional scars we carry.” Therefore these explanations point to the instability of identity, while simultaneously alluding to Nietzsche’s (in Durham, 1998:7)

notion of the role of mimicry in the construction of identity, by means of Larry's hypothesis that Alice created the wound herself.

While Alice's possible use of mimicry is rooted in emotional trauma, Dan's is rooted in conformity. Within the first two pages of the play, it becomes clear that Dan prefers to fall back on social convention when unsure what to do. He asks Alice if he should put her leg up, and when she asks why he wants to do so, he answers: "That's what people do in these situations" (6). According to Rosenthal (2007: xxxiii), Dan is clearly one of these "people." His complacency is underscored by his preceding revelation that he had grown up in suburbia and his shocked response at learning Alice's occupation. According to her, his "little eyes" were "popping out" as if he was "a cartoon" (13).

Dan, clearly a conformist to the point of parody, therefore borrows and fictionalises Alice's identity to write his novel, "using her wealth of life experiences to make up for the poverty of his own," according to Rosenthal (2007: xxxiii). However, he also borrows her "'disarming' sexual confidence" not only when making advances to Anna (Rosenthal, 2007: xxxiii), but also when he is seducing Larry in the internet chat room. The line with which Dan finally persuades Larry to meet "Anna" at the aquarium, "I'll make u cum like a train" (29) is the same one Alice used to describe the ultimate male fantasy to Dan in Scene One. The line is also "recycled" from Mamet's *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. Marber (in Sierz, 2000:193) furthermore wanted *Closer* to be an update of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1602) where Viola pretends to be a boy, with whom Olivia then falls in love by having Larry fall "in lust" with Dan's impersonation of a woman.

Even when Dan is at his least complacent and slaps Alice across the face in Scene Eleven on hearing that she did have sex with Larry, his action is clichéd. It is this precise action that "Max" refuses to perform in "House of Cards," exactly because it would be too banal to slap "Charlotte" when he suspects her of cheating on him. Alice is therefore prompted to ask Dan, "Do you have a single original thought in your head?" (108) before the blackout that ends the scene.

Larry, despite his reluctance to rise in status, continually reminding Anna of his working class origins, also emulates the middle class in dress and address once he begins dating Anna. Rosenthal (2007: xxxviii) points out that "just as Alice changes Dan, so Anna takes Larry up the social scale in how he dresses and where he lives. If he's sleeping with an

acclaimed photographer, it's more natural to trade up to private practice, to become a 'sell-out.'”

At Anna's exhibition, Larry wears a new cashmere sweater and claims that he is “Cinderella at the ball” (46) since he had never worn this material previously. He is not entirely comfortable in the middle class setting of a photography exhibition. The sweater that Anna had bought him therefore remains a costume, in his view, and without qualms he gives it to Alice when they are in a relationship in Scene Nine.

Anna, on the other hand, also seems uncomfortable in London, preferring to roam the city guided by a book. On three occasions she is seen with a guide book: when she visits the aquarium at London Zoo in Scene Four, at the Victorian Museum in Scene Nine and in Postman's Park in Scene Twelve. Larry mocks her about this at the Victorian Museum: “You love your guide books, you look like a tourist” (86). The theme of tourism is interesting in the context of *Closer*, since it implies a neat or convenient “packaging” of a certain place or time for sightseers. Chaudhuri (1995:170) describes it as a “fraudulent mode of engaging otherness by reinscribing its terms of sameness.” In other words, tourism aims to downplay cultural difference which cannot be branded as exotic and is therefore regarded as corrupt and insincere, a palatable mimicry suited to a paying tourist's taste.

The Victorian Museum that the audience views in Scene Nine is therefore a simplified mediation, or mimicry, of actual Victorian life. Chaudhuri (1995:120) points out how exhibits that are found in museums belong either to a different time or to a different place. As a consequence the museum offers a simplified mimicry of that which has become inaccessible since it belongs to a different time. It is interesting, though, that Anna – who is not a tourist – uses guide books to try and understand her history and environment. Marber could be suggesting that she feels so daunted by her surroundings, experiencing them as inaccessible, that she needs a tourist's guide to navigate through them.

Unlike Anna, who attempts to comprehend her inaccessible environment, albeit in a superficial manner, Larry resists understanding his surroundings and especially the way in which London was changing in the 1990s. While meeting Anna at the restaurant in Scene Eight to sign their divorce papers, he voices his dissatisfaction with the recycling and mimicry of the spaces in his city, complaining about Anna's choice of restaurant:

LARRY: I hate this place.
ANNA: At least it's central.
LARRY: I hate central. The centre of London is a theme park. I hate 'retro' and I hate the future. Where does that leave me? (75)

According to Rosenthal (2007:1vi), a theme park, like a landmark repackaged in a tourist friendly way, "tries to offer all things to all people and none of its zones is real, so to Larry the city itself has no true identity." Larry's frustration with Anna's deceit is now vented on the city which is no longer the London of his youth but mimics other places and eras.

The lap dancing club that Larry visits in Scene Seven is also – like Anna's studio which used to be a refuge for fallen women – a recycled space. Larry remarks that the lap dancing club used to be a punk club that he had frequented twenty years earlier. But he cannot remember where the stage used to be, and gives up trying to guess, stating that "Everything is a Version of Something Else" (63). A punk club's becoming a lap dancing club is, of course, ironic. Punk, being a subculture which wished to resist the imitation of mainstream culture, has now been converted into a lap dancing club: a place known for its imitation of that which is desirable.

According to Rosenthal (2007: 1v) Marber consciously intended the setting of the play to mimic the deceit of the characters:

Thematically, the changing face of the capital in the mid-1990s preoccupied Marber, as he explained to Nicholas Wright in a Platform Talk at the Cottesloe in May 1997, a week after *Closer* had opened. 'There are a lot of deceptions in the play. The characters constantly lie to each other, deceive each other,' he said. 'I wanted the backdrop, the city itself, to be in some way as deceptive as the characters, so that the London of the play is not everything it seems.' This image of an older, rougher London transformed by 1990s money builds steadily through the play.

Unlike Larry who gives his cashmere sweater away and gives up private practice, London does not resist the economic change of the 1990s, even if it is superficial and dishonest.

It is within this confusing environment where the characters are surrounded by Baudrillard's (1994) postmodern simulacra without originals that the characters try to navigate not only their careers, but also their love lives. In *Closer*, even more so than in *The Real Thing*, it becomes impossible to tell which relationship is "the real thing."

5.6. Metatheatrical implications of form and metareference

The question of art, its authenticity, and its value recurs throughout *Closer* in various covert metatheatrical techniques. While Anna and Dan should obviously place a high value on art due to their occupations, they do tease each other when they first meet in Scene Two that the other is “stealing” the “lives” (17) of his or her subject(s). Despite Alice’s repetition of this joke when she asks Anna “Did you steal his soul?” (22), when she meets Dan at the studio, she and Larry hold very cynical views on art.

Alice regards art as representing life in an aesthetically improved way, idealising its subject, which then compares poorly to it. Larry’s views about Dan’s occupation have been discussed above, while his reluctance to be photographed because he looks “like a criminal in photos” (35) makes it clear that he also considers art as deceitful: a poor, distorted copy of reality. These views, being contained within a play, then beg, as critical metareferences, the audience members to consider if they agree with them or not. And if they do – what are the implications for *Closer* as a play? Is it also a poor, distorted representation of the actual world?

In considering these questions it is important to keep in mind that *Closer* is an in-yer-face play. One of the aims of such theatre is to break through the fourth wall of representation. And yet, in-yer-face theatre inevitably and paradoxically questions the conventions of theatre as it does this, a point discussed in Chapter Two. According to Sierz (2000:4), this theatre questions moral norms and “affronts the ruling ideas of what can or should be shown onstage.” Therefore “it also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating discomfort” (Sierz, 2000:4).

It consequently exploits the live quality of theatre which creates heightened awareness, increasing the potential of embarrassment which “can make the representation of private pain on a public stage almost unendurable” (Sierz, 2000:7). As is the case with *The Real Thing*, the chemistry between the actors also adds a further layer to *Closer*. Rosenthal (2007: xc) describes the potential of performance in *Closer* as follows:

In a good stage production [the space between the words] will be constantly animated, and at times electrified, by the body language and expressions of the actors, which, in conjunction with the dialogue, ensure that the audience senses what the characters are

thinking and feeling from moment to moment. [...] The intensification [of certain scenes] is conveyed as much by how the actors fill the gaps between the lines as by the words themselves.

The corporeality of the actors' bodies and the energy between the actors may therefore add to the audience's discomfort, as Hornby (1986) suggests. Judging from the reviews of *Closer* cited above, the play did make audiences uncomfortable and embarrassed by staging taboos and divulging the most intimate details of its characters' lives in the most unflattering and unadorned manner. Although the visceral experience of discomfort and mortification that the audience feels is authentic, the play simultaneously reminds its audience that it represents a manufactured fictional world. *Closer* thereby also draws the audience into the fictional world while simultaneously shoving them out of it, as Hutcheon (1984) argues is usually the case with metafiction.

The fictionality of *Closer* is underscored by three instances of covert metareference in the play. The audience may not always perceive these metareferences, but they do function as fictio-metareferences in destabilising the illusion of the play by reminding the audience of its fictionality. The first is encountered in Scene One (also quoted above), when Dan recounts to Alice – who was unconscious at the time – how she was hit by a taxi and what happened afterwards:

DAN: We stood at the lights, I looked into your eyes and then you... stepped into the road.
ALICE: Then what?
DAN: You were lying on the ground, you focused on me, you said, 'Hallo, stranger.'
ALICE: What a slut.
[...]
ALICE: Then what?
DAN: The cabbie got out. He crossed himself. He said, 'Thank fuck, I thought I'd killed her.' I said, 'Let's get her to a hospital.' He hesitated... (I think he thought there'd be paperwork and he'd be held 'responsible'), so I said, with a slight sneer, 'Please, just drop us at the hospital.'
ALICE: Show me the sneer.
DAN considers then sneers.
ALICE: Very good. *Buster.*
DAN: We put you in the cab and came here.
ALICE: What was I doing?
DAN: You were murmuring, 'I'm very sorry for all the inconvenience.' I had my arm round you... your head was on my shoulder.

ALICE: Was my head... *lolling*?
DAN: That's exactly what it was doing. (7-8)

The way that Dan re-enacts the events of the accident is a reminder of Brecht's (1968:86) suggestion that the actor should act with detachment, as an eyewitness recounting an accident that he or she saw. Dan's impersonation of both Alice and the taxi driver, along with Alice's interjections and evaluation of Dan's "performance", emphasise the distance between Dan and the events that he is re-enacting. As was the case with the plays-within-the-play in *The Real Thing*, this draws attention to the fact that Dan and Alice are also portrayed by actors as well as to the further point that there is a distance between these characters and the actors who portray them. This idea is emphasised when these events are retold in subsequent scenes as if perpetually rehearsed, like theatre which has no original or final product, according to Blau (in Carlson, 2004:149-150).

The second metareference is observed in Scene Two, when Dan and Anna discuss a novel about love and sex while they are characters in a play about love and sex, functioning as transmedial metareference:

DAN: You didn't find it obscene?
ANNA: What?
DAN: The book.
ANNA: No, I thought it was... *accurate*.
Shot.
DAN: About what?
ANNA: About sex. About love. (18)

This exchange within the fictional world of the play points outward towards the actual world of the audience, which is watching a play about love and sex. Its members might respond that the play is obscene – especially later in Anna's explicit descriptions of sex – or they may feel that it is an accurate representation of love and sex.

Scene Five starts with the third, quite blatant, transmedial metareference in *Closer*, opening with Alice "*looking at a huge photograph of herself*" (35). The audience is thus looking at Alice, framed within the metaphorical proscenium arch, viewing a photograph of herself. This emphasises the act of looking and, causing the audience to scrutinise that which is looked at, again invites its members to consider if they find *Closer* to be a polished lie, making "the world *seem* beautiful" (38).

Marber furthermore uses various distinctly theatrical devices, showing the author's hand in the play. The play's elegant structure, discussed above, makes it clear that the events as the audience sees them are carefully manipulated by the author, as was the case in *Betrayal*. Subtle repetitions within the structure, such as the situation of two strangers meeting and feeling an instant attraction to each other, repeated in Scenes One, Two, Four and Seven, emphasise the theme of mimicry in the play. This structure, with months elapsing between scenes, only portrays the beginnings and ends of the characters' relationships. According to Rosenthal (2007: xliii), the "honeymoon periods" of these relationships mostly occur off-stage, leaving the audience with only the brutal confrontations of love relationships turned sour. The result is that an impression emerges "of an apparently unbridgeable gulf between male and female attitudes to love and sex."

The lack of emotional connection between the characters is further emphasised by the quick tempo of the play, which, according to Sierz (2000:195), "frequently touches intimacy," but "never really lingers." The ample moments of comic relief in the play function as a further distancing device, while they give the play its rhythm and exciting tension (Sierz, 2000:194-195).

The metareference in this play is thus recipient-centred, with its audience left in a strange position. On the one hand it is viscerally drawn into the action of the play by the latter's frankness and breaking of taboos. On the other hand, it is continually reminded of the fictionality of the play through various theatrical devices. The play poses a few uncomfortable questions, not only about love and sex, but also about how the audience perceives the play and whether any version of events can ever be trusted to be authentic – or the original. Despite Karwowski's (2005:169) view, that *Closer* supports Alice's argument about love being a choice, I agree with Sierz (2000:194) that the audience is never given an answer about the irrationality of desire. *Closer* resists a binary categorisation of its characters into right and wrong. Alice's frankness and openness, which contrasts so sharply with her false identity, affords the clearest indication of this.

5.7. Conclusion

Despite Dromgoole's (2000) limited evaluation of *Closer*, I have demonstrated that it investigates epistemological issues regarding authenticity in a fashion comparable to Pinter's *Betrayal* and Stoppard's *The Real Thing*. *Closer* sets out to dismantle the binary oppositions between the real and the unreal, art and life, and high art and low art. Like *Betrayal* and *The Real Thing*, *Closer* depicts authenticity as something elusive. In a manner similar to that of Stoppard, Marber sets up various debates about the locus of authenticity between the characters, but leaves them suspended. Although the body might seem to be the locus of what is real in that it is inextricably linked to a character's emotional life, the body can also be manipulated. Though Alice's scar is proof that she suffered a wound, this could also have been inflicted by her, with the aim of mimicking a different wound.

Furthermore, Bakhtin (in Hitchcock, 1998:92) argues that we are also isolated within our own bodies, which makes complete identification with another impossible. Therefore, whatever a character may or may not physically experience, cannot be communicated to either the other characters or the audience. The images that characters form of each other remain invented mirages, or "expression planes." This is also the case with any representations of the characters in artistic media.

Furthermore, none of the ways in which the characters communicate seems to bring them closer to each other. Language is necessarily stylised and is either oversimplifying matters in conveying personal data or idealising them in novels and photographs. Mediation therefore does not seem to build bridges between characters, but instead appears to prevent them from moving closer to one another. It is accordingly understandable that Alice mistrusts mimicry on the grounds that the imitation of a subject always implies a diversion from the original (Potolsky, 2006). Nevertheless, Alice contradicts herself in her shunning of mimicry because she herself takes part in it. Within the proliferation of simulacra, mimicry is revealed to be inextricable from human existence, just as emotional experience is inextricable from the body. By these means, *Closer* dismantles the binaries between the real and the unreal as well as art and life.

Since honesty can be used in this play either to attempt intimacy with another or as a weapon, the binary between honesty and dishonesty is further dismantled. Marber relies on

bodily experience to engage the audience, using the form of in-yer-face theatre to shock theatregoers out of their detached roles as onlookers, much like Artaud. Maturana's (in De Kock, 2008:92) notion that language matters are as powerful as physical interactions is therefore embodied in this play. As observed in the reviews of *Closer*, the members of the audience do not leave a performance of this play unaffected. They experience great embarrassment, fits of hysterical crying and discomfort when watching it. They are thus pulled firmly into the fictional world of the play through their actual experience of the fictional events.

And yet, unlike the plays of Artaud, Marber's play drives the spectators back into the actual world by repeatedly reminding them, through covert metareference, that they are watching a play. This invites them to consider their own role in the interpretation of the play, suggesting that they created the play for themselves, just as the characters have created each other.

Unlike *The Real Thing* which is aimed at a middle class audience, *Closer* is aimed at a younger one. In-yer-face theatre aims to bypass the intellectual and affect the audience viscerally, yet *Closer* does prompt the audience to consider epistemological issues. Although the metareference in this play is mostly covert and perhaps more easily perceived within the context of a postmodern analysis, as Limoges (2009) suggests, it is definitely present and markedly strengthened by the interpretation of the romantic relationships in the play as a trope for how the audience interprets the play.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Like a groupie incognito
posing as a real singer
Life imitates art
– Lana Del Rey, “Gods and Monsters.” (2012)

In the preceding chapters, I set out to analyse Pinter’s *Betrayal*, Stoppard’s *The Real Thing*, and Marber’s *Closer* in terms of a theoretical framework drawing from postmodernism and poststructuralism, to investigate the epistemological question of “how can we trust what we know?” or, in other words, “how can we distinguish the actual from the fictional?” Since “nothing can lift us out of language,” as Hartman (1985: xii) points out, we live through language and create the world for ourselves through mediation. This includes a spectrum of communication ranging from everyday language to works of art. Through the research questions posed in Chapter One, I investigated how language and art function within these plays and the implications for the audience.

Authenticity is portrayed as elusive in all three of these plays. None of them aim to portray any authentic subject directly. Within the plots of the respective plays dealing with infidelity, the “authentic self,” or identity of a character, remains obscure. Therefore, these characters’ life companions become the Other, which Bakhtin (in Hitchcock, 1998:92) argues it is impossible to know. The characters either use language to cover up what they really think or feel, or unsuccessfully try to employ it to jolt sincerity from each other. Ultimately, though, they need to rely on mediation to attempt to access the supposedly authentic essence of each other and themselves.

In *Betrayal*, the on-stage characters use language as a protective barrier, as Pinter himself suggested when he described language as a stratagem to cover nakedness. Despite the personal turmoil that we can assume the characters each experience, they only indirectly refer to it, utilising language as an impenetrable screen between themselves and each other. When caught off guard, they sometimes accidentally drop this screen, but only for long enough to suggest to the audience that there is indeed a discrepancy between the characters’ unaffected appearance and their inner turmoil.

Even so, Pinter does not suggest that the characters have access even to their own pasts. Jerry and Emma disagree on certain details of events that happened in their pasts. Like language and art, memory thus also mediates. Not even recollections of certain events can therefore be directly accessed. Furthermore, the off-stage character, Casey, also fails in his attempts to fictionalise his life and reproduce it as authentically as possible. His novels contain never ending *mise en abymes* since he consistently includes himself as the author in his works of fiction. The poststructuralist hall of mirrors that he thereby creates, still functions within fiction and cannot break through the boundary to the actual.

In addition to suggesting the elusiveness of authenticity through their behaviour, the characters in *The Real Thing* also address it directly by debating issues of authenticity in language and art. Yet, in neither their behaviour nor debates is the authenticity of any character's identity or any piece of writing confirmed. Brodie's writing, which Annie initially claims is more authentic than Henry's because it is based on his own life experiences, turns out to be fraudulent. Additionally, Henry's play, "House of Cards" is judged by Charlotte to be unrealistic to the point where it becomes difficult for the actors and audience to buy into the fictional world. The audience, however, never learns if Henry succeeds in writing a play that resonates appropriately with reality. The question of whether or not this is possible is left open.

Similarly, although it is shown that Annie's affair with Billy was fleeting and based on flattery, the audience can only speculate on whether or not the relationship between Henry and Annie is authentic. Stoppard is also careful in not indulging the audience by claiming sincerity in any character's commitment to a political cause – indicating how allegiance to a cause cannot guarantee a sense of social responsibility. The characters in *The Real Thing* all support political causes for their own personal benefit.

Unlike the characters in *Betrayal*, who try at all costs to conceal themselves, Larry in *Closer* desperately does his best to access the essence of things in a context where he is surrounded by a proliferation of illusions and mimicry. He uses the least euphemistic language that he can to uncover the truth about Dan and Anna's affair. Yet, this language merely forms yet another screen or illusion.

Larry furthermore perceives the body as the locus of authenticity, interpreting bodily manifestations as confirmation. Even so, he does not reduce people to their bodies. Alice's

supposedly self-inflicted scar is, for example, proof to Larry that she is emotionally disturbed. As a result, he sees bodily manifestations as the proverbial tip of the iceberg in getting to know another character.

But, the body, like the mind, is still ultimately private and able to be manipulated. The play, firstly, never confirms how Alice acquired her scar. She is the only character who knows this. Even as a dermatologist, Larry can only offer possible theories as to how the scar came about. Secondly, even if he could argue that it is possible to access authenticity through the body, there is no way of knowing another's physical sensations, as Bakhtin (in Hitchcock, 1998:92) suggests. Anna, for example, sometimes succeeded in deceiving Dan about her experience of their sex life. Thirdly, Anna and Alice consider physical interaction as commodifiable: Anna sleeps with Larry in return for his signature on their divorce papers while Alice earns her income by stripping. Hence no single part of a human being can be regarded as the locus of his or her authentic self.

Even if a character possesses an authentic self or essence, it is consequently impossible to directly access it. It is, however, feasible to make reasonable assumptions about the Other, as Eco (1999) suggests. When these assumptions are proven wrong, they are replaced by new assumptions which may in turn, also be discredited. No assumption can, as a result, be interpreted as definitive or authentic.

Furthermore, elements of mimicry permeate the entire existence of the characters in these plays. In *The Real Thing* the outer play not only mimics the various mise en abymes in the text (and vice versa), but the characters who are actors (such as Charlotte, Annie, and Max) also mimic the roles that they portray in the mise en abymes. But this mimicry is not limited to the characters who are actors. Every character mimics other characters in some way – be it in the mise en abymes or in the outer play. Mimicry thus infiltrates through the entire fictional world depicted in the play.

This makes it evident that, firstly, although the inauthentic might be pointed out, it is not possible to guarantee the authenticity of matters such as identity, art, or loyalty to a political cause. Secondly, mimicry should not necessarily be perceived as in opposition to authenticity in identity or art since it is part of human existence.

In *Betrayal*, Jerry claims that his words to Emma, “You’re lovely. I’m crazy about you.” (135) have never been said before. This statement can be taken to be both ironic and

sincere. On the one hand, these words evoke Eco's (1983a:67) assertion that it is impossible to speak innocently. The words that Jerry uses have indeed been used in countless novels by, among others, Barbara Cartland. Jerry's words would therefore seem ironic. On the other hand, as Bakhtin (in Todorov, 1984) and Maturana (1978) assert, no utterance can ever be repeated, or copied exactly. Although Jerry's words have indeed been employed previously, they have never been used in that particular context. His statement is in consequence simultaneously ironic and sincere. Furthermore, by claiming that the words he is using have never been said before, Jerry implicitly offers the same kind of "disclaimer" as Eco's hypothetical postmodern man. Mimicry cannot therefore be regarded as the basis of inauthenticity; on the contrary, it is essential in postmodern times where communication takes place through irony, parody, and citation.

When watching these three plays, the audience shares with the characters the predicament of not having any certainty in knowing the Other. Like the characters, the spectators also need to interpret what is shown to them on stage "in the succession of things," in Calvino's (1981:61) words, due to the plurisignation of theatre. The events of the plays are presented before the audience as through a kaleidoscope, a hall of mirrors or a mirage. Not only does the audience struggle to interpret the characters in a play, but also each play itself. The audience stands in relation to each work as the characters stand in relation to each other. In all three plays, the audience is simultaneously drawn into the fictional world and thrust back into the actual world.

In *Betrayal*, the audience can identify with the disillusionment of the characters as one screen of illusion is moved away to reveal yet another, by which the onlookers are drawn into the fictional world. On the other hand, the audience is also invited to evaluate and judge the play before it in the same way that the characters evaluate and judge works by W.B. Yeats, Ford Madox Ford, and the fictional Spinks and Casey. This notion is emphasised by the clear presence of the author's hand in the play's reverse chronology, indicated through clarifying the time interstices by using a display above the stage, suggesting that the audience should view the play in a detached manner.

In *The Real Thing*, the audience has trouble distinguishing the *mise en abymes* from the outer play. If the play is regarded as a set of Chinese boxes, where levels of fictionality become confused, it could be argued that the actual world forms the outermost box. In this

way the audience is dragged into the play as its members need to navigate through a myriad of fictions in which their own actual frame is also implied. They are, however, also pushed out of the fictional world by being continually reminded of the author's presence through these very metatheatrical devices that pulled them into the fictional world in the first place.

Moreover, in *Closer* the audience is just as disillusioned by, for example, finding out that Alice's identity was a lie. This yanks them into the play, but the discussions about art – and especially Dan's novel and Anna's photograph – encourage the audience to view the play as a fiction. The metareference which is created when the audience looks at Alice while she is viewing a picture of herself emphasises the act of looking, in which the audience and the characters are engaged.

The way in which the characters thus make reasonable (temporary) assumptions about each other, as Eco (1999) suggests, extends to the manner in which the audience interprets these plays. Just as the characters' perceptions of each other can be invalidated and reformed, so the audience's interpretation of the play can be invalidated and replaced, much like Billington's (2001:129) initial reaction to *Betrayal*, which was revised (Billington, 1996:258). This suggests that there exists no such thing as a definitive interpretation – either of fictional characters, people in the actual world or literary texts.

These three plays therefore dismantle the binary between the authentic and the inauthentic with regard to the fictional and the actual. The fictional is revealed not to be inauthentic, but part of human existence, since authenticity cannot be accessed, only mediated. Therefore, theatre does not stand in opposition to the actual world (which could then be regarded as authentic), but functions within the actual world, despite the fact that it is necessarily fictional. The fact that these texts do not endeavour to hide their fictionality but take full advantage of theatre's limitations, as Sartre (1976) suggests, positions them in direct opposition to postdramatic plays and verbatim drama which rely on popular notions of authenticity.

Although *Betrayal* and *Closer* have been made into successful films, it is as stage plays that they take on a more pronounced metatheatrical significance. As a play, *Closer* in particular includes the audience in ways which are impossible in any other genre and in consequence emphasises the epistemological questions that the play poses. In all three plays, the implications of performance underscore the interaction between the fictional and the

actual. In *Betrayal* the techniques of “veiling” that the actors utilise illustrate the tension between the expression plane and the content plane in language. Stoppard’s characters have to portray subtext as they themselves discuss the importance of subtext in conveying emotion on stage. In *Closer*, the audience is made viscerally uncomfortable due to the explicitness of the play.

By furthermore investigating epistemological issues through the plot line of a romantic relationship, usually associated with books in the Mills and Boon series, the plays also dismantle the binary opposition of the intellectual as opposed to the authentic, or “real.” The question of “how can I trust what I know?” permeates intellectual discussions as well as the love lives of people of all classes.

Just as language is not innocent in this postmodern context and carries with it the shadow of previous uses, these texts are not innocent either. *Betrayal* is a clear intertext in both *The Real Thing* and *Closer*. The opening scene of *The Real Thing*, which turns out to be the play within the play, “House of Cards,” mimics *Betrayal*. *The Real Thing* engages with Pinter’s play by further developing debates about authenticity in art and proliferating images which mimic each other at a new level. In so doing, Stoppard’s play mocks and questions the supposed stoicism with which the characters in *Betrayal* are sometimes perceived to approach the uncovering of infidelity. *Closer*, on the other hand, displays characters who desperately attempt to counter this stoicism. Hence the plays elaborate on concerns raised in the previous texts.

As a result each of these plays revitalises the similarity between infidelity and epistemological uncertainty for its own time. It would therefore be worthwhile to investigate this similarity in subsequent texts, such as Sam Holcroft’s *Edgar and Annabel* (2011), in which the content plane and expression plane of the characters’ dialogue deviate even further, as they are required to communicate with each other using set scripts.

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