

УДК 811.111

## “NIGHT & DAY” BY TOM STOPPARD: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

**Бондаренко Л.В.**

*Таврический национальный университет имени В.И. Вернадского, г. Симферополь, Украина,  
e-mail: lybond@mail.ru*

“Night & Day” is a play about journalism, which also features intellectual debate on the eternal issues of freedom, love and fidelity, based on binary opposition of characters and their views on the matters.

**Key words:** journalism, freedom, binary oppositions, close shop, fantasy scene.

Tom Stoppard’s desire to write about journalism stemmed from personal connections. A former journalist, Stoppard says, he reads “three newspapers a day as a minimum, five on Sunday” [1, 99]. He also claims that he once dreamed of being a great journalist: “My first ambition was to be lying on the floor of an African airport while machine-gun bullets zoomed over my typewriter” [2; 91]. Stoppard notes that “very few people think of journalism on the level of social philosophy or examine it for its importance” [3,137]. So “Night & Day” (1978) weds the author’s personal inclination for journalism with his desire to write a realistic love story.

**The problem.** Critics responded to Stoppard’s realist and in a way political play with both delight and despair. So John Barber from the “Daily Telegraph” felt that the play “makes all other Stoppard’s plays look like so many nursery games” [4, 281]. Whereas Bernard Levin of the “Sunday Times” found it a “deeply disappointing play” with some horribly clumsy preaching, stiff with caked earnestness” [4, 281]. “Night & Day”, however is far from pure naturalism, resembling a drawing room of Shavian’ comedy, it is a more narrative-based play than previous works of the author. “Stoppard modifies the tenets of realism as his narrative includes a dream sequence, an expressionistic fantasy, melodramatic plot points, dialectical debates and an aside-like “inner voice” for Ruth” [4, 139].

**Novelty.** We offer a new outlook on the play base on its text thematic analysis. Unlike “Travesties” and “Jumpers”, where the two main variant texts correspond to different productions, the two main published editions of “Night & Day” (1978 and 1979) are related to the same production. Some alterations in the narrative appear in the emended 1979 version.

**Importance.** The main focus of “Night & Day” is journalism, with its burning issues of freedom, independence, risk, corruption and others which are still very much up to day and widely discussed in the media. The play also engages with three different struggles for freedom. The central debate on the *freedom of the press* argues over the best way to operate newspapers. *Sexual and personal freedom* is what can give meaning and vitality to Ruth’s bored housewife life. The action of the play is set in amidst the backdrop of Kambawe, an imaginary African state in the midst of political calamity. Though Kambawe is independent and emergent, it is “*neither free from strife nor from the vested economic interests of the big powers*” [5, 124].

The perspective on journalism is provided through five characters with different relations to the press. In turn they all speak with the author's voice. Wagner is a seasoned veteran who considers union to be more important than the news, while the youthful anti-union Milne has idealistic view toward the privilege of journalism. Guthrie is a mixture of Wagner's experience and Milne's idealism, tempered with pragmatism, though placing top priority on delivering the news. Guthrie is the most laconic of the three, but his actions speak louder than his words as he is willing to work with Milne and he is genuinely surprised that Wagner tries to hinder Milne from publishing his story. Ruth provides a cynical perspective of someone who has been pursued by the tabloids and offers counterargument to all of them. Ruth apparently does not fit into the rest of the play, she is involved into significant debate with each of the three journalists. The fifth, most hush perspective is that of Mageeba, the political dictator opposed to the idea of a free press.

The first extended press discussion revolves around how much control should unions have. In 1977 Britain's National Union of Journalists (NUJ) sought a "closed shop", i.e. only the union members had the right to work for a newspaper. In "Night & Day" the anti-union Milne offers Stoppard's libertarian acclaim of unionist, leftist sympathizers. The implication is that the journalist union is dictatorial and oppressive to dissenters. In his speech Milne ridicules the catchphrases of the political Left, showing the tendency to express political views in clichéd phrases that elicit knee-jerk responses instead of informed debate. At the same time Stoppard does not supply Wagner with any pro-union argument. Thus the debate involving two journalists sounds much weaker than the discussion of journalism in scenes with Ruth participation. The idea of the closed shop reflects a conflict between the ideal and the real as part of it is to establish professional standards. As in "Jumpers", the characters who hold views in opposition to Stoppard's rarely speak for themselves, but rather have their views summarized. And Milne's view that there should be no limits on the press, being strong in theory, lacks the practical application.

Mageeba puts his own "spin" on the events. Like Milne, Mageeba perceives journalism as special, but for Mageeba its specialness means that it is to be controlled. Thus Mageeba makes a conclusion that "a free press is that edited by one of his relatives". Mageeba embodies Stoppard's concern that media control is a vital weapon of government repression and that prohibition of free speech is often accompanied by violent enforcement. The idea of totalitarianism whether it be the Left or the Right is absolutely unacceptable in democratic society according to Stoppard's political plays of 1970s.

Money and freedom of the press are other controversies. Pursuing the role money plays in the operation of the media, Ruth via the imaginary conversation with her son notes: "people don't buy rich men's papers because the men are rich: the men are rich because people buy their papers" and thus concludes: "Freedom is neutral" [6, 99). However the idea of freedom being a neutral matter is not developed in the play, which is based on binary controversies of the characters and views they voice. Neil Sammels argues that Stoppard is unwilling to accept that a "free-market society is the necessary index of a free one [press]" [4, 147]. But it is Ruth who champions the free-market system in the play, offering most severe argument against the divide between the ideal and the real, between the stated principles and the actual practice.

Together with profuse discussion of journalism, two events, carrying most consequences happen. The entry to the war zone, which results in Milne's death and Wagner's union protest that backfires and blocks his own scoop. Milne? In Stoppard's eyes, is a reporter of the truth thus his death has much significance. But in the play Milne dies because of lack of experience and not due to his bravery. He could have maintained his ideals and stayed alive, so it is not the death of a martyr but that of an inexperienced idealist.

Another thematic line in the play is "The Ruth", i.e. "Ruth" Love Line. While Ruth plays an active role in the journalism debate, her main part is to carry the love plot. While journalism discussion revolves around the nature and ethics of a free press, the love plot's central theme focuses on fidelity. On her recent trip to London Ruth had an affair with Wagner, about which her husband did not have a slightest idea. Ruth's inner voice takes over expressing her guilty conscience. The audience witness Ruth's internal debate explaining the stream of thoughts of a married woman faced with temptation. She rationalizes the affair, trying to maintain her self-respect.

This female character embodies Freud theory of split personality and Stoppard's favorite "A minus A" formula, i.e. binary oppositions. While "Ruth" expresses a variety of feelings, Ruth is seen to have no deep emotional links with anyone else, and she admits that she does not love her husband, but rather likes him a great deal more than others. Stoppard continues "Ruth"/Ruth device, and so the audience is led to believe they are privy to a seduction scene between Ruth and Milne. However the perception and objective observation do not correspond to each other as ultimately the scene appears to be a fantasy, an imaginary encounter between Ruth and the object of her passion. In essence the fantasy is the materialization of the subjective interior self, and thus the scene is really between "Ruth" and her construction of Milne as she wants him to be.

Within the fantasy scene, the author reveals ramifications of infidelity. The fantasized Milne talks about an imagined affair with Ruth that occurred in a "parallel world". In the fantasy scene Stoppard allows the double "Ruth" to materialize and pursue an "illusory love affair which is more impossible than ever she knows, since with heavy irony, Milne is by this time already dead" [4, 152]. In contrast, Ruth, though not particularly fascinated by Wagner, turns to him for solace on the edge of despair and exhaustion.

**Conclusion.** Indeed one of the recurring features of "Night & Day" is the insatiable tension between the ideal and the real and the way in which the ideal can be invoked as a mask for the real or the way in which the two are intertwined.

Though "Night & Day" is not in the upper echelon of Stoppard's canon, it contains statements which are still flourished. The playwright has changed his view on the play, saying in his interview to Mel Gussow in December 1994: "I don't know what I want now. I've arrived at a kind of defensive position, which is not entirely where I stand intellectually" [1, 97].

So, "Night & Day" is another intellectual play, in which Tom Stoppard brings forward some eternal issues for discussion, such as freedom as philosophical category, fidelity, journalism, and other minor topics. This work, though not the most prominent of Stoppard's has its place in the literary career of the writer and is definitely worth analyzing both the text and production.

### References

1. Gussow M. So Rude, So Complex, SO Like Oneself / Mel Gussow. – NY.: New York Times, 1998. – 125 p.
2. Bradshaw J. Tom Stoppard, Nonstop: Word Games with a Hit Playwright / Jon Bradshaw. – NY.: Michigan, 1993. – P. 89 – 99.
3. Berkvistr. This Time, Stoppard Plays It (Almost) Straight / Robert Berkvist. – NY.: University of Michigan Press, 1979. – P. 135 – 140.
4. Fleming J. Stoppard's Theatre / John Fleming. – Austin: University of Texas, 2001. – 325 p.
5. Billington M. Joker Above The Abyss / Michael Billington. – London: London Theatre Record. – No 5. – 288 p.
6. Stoppard T. Night and Day / Tom Stoppard. – L.: F&F. – 38 p.

**Бондаренко Л. В. «Ночь и День» Тома Стоппарда: тематический анализ текста / Л.В. Бондаренко // Ученые записки Таврического национального университета имени В. И. Вернадского. Серия «Филология. Социальные коммуникации». – 2012. – Т. 25 (64), № 3, ч. 1. – С. 175-178.**

“Ночь и день” – это пьеса о журнализме, в которой также представлены интеллектуальные дебаты на вечные темы свободы, любви, верности, построенные на бинарных оппозициях характеров и их мнений. Это одна из первых «реалистичных» пьес Стоппарда, которая по своим художественным достоинствам не уступает «Аркадии», «Изобретению любви», «Настоящей вещи» и другим признанным работам британского драматурга. Тематическое наполнение пьесы тесно связано с театральными эффектами постановки, подчеркивающими наиболее важные смысловые моменты текста.

**Ключевые слова:** журнализм, свобода, бинарные оппозиции, закрытое предприятие, сцена фэнтези.

**Бондаренко Л.В. «Ніч і День» Тома Стоппарда: тематичний аналіз тексту / Л.В. Бондаренко // Вчені записки Таврійського національного університету імені В. І. Вернадського. Серія «Філологія. Соціальні комунікації». – 2012. – Т. 25 (64), № 3, ч. 1. – С. 175-178.**

“Ніч та день” є п'єса на тему журналізму, що також містить засноване на бінарних протиставленнях характерів та їх поглядів, обговорювання таких вічних питань філолофії як свобода, любов, вірність.

**Ключові слова:** журналізм, свобода, бінарні протиставлення, закрите підприємство, сцена фентазі.

*Поступила в редакцію 03.09.2012 г.*