



Universidade de Aveiro Departamento de Línguas e Culturas  
Ano 2013

**Susana Isabel  
Mendes de Matos**

**Música e subversão em *Rock 'N' Roll* de  
Tom Stoppard**

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*Rock 'N' Roll***



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Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Línguas, Literaturas e Culturas – Estudos Ingleses, realizada sob a orientação científica do Dr. Kenneth David Callahan, Professor Associado do Departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro.

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## **agradecimentos**

Ao Prof. Dr. David Callahan, pelo seu apoio, paciência e orientação, sem os quais teria sido impossível concretizar este trabalho. Pela sua simpatia e disponibilidade.

À minha família que sempre me apoiou e deu o alento necessário para a consecução deste desafio.

Aos meus amigos que sempre tiveram uma palavra de incentivo.

**palavras-chave**

Tom Stoppard, teatro, *Rock 'N' Roll*, música, subversão, Checoslováquia, Plastic People of the Universe

**resumo**

O presente trabalho propõe-se apresentar uma análise da música como forma de subversão na peça de teatro *Rock 'N' Roll* de Tom Stoppard. Após um breve resumo da carreira literária de Stoppard, são analisadas as bandas e músicas escolhidas pelo autor numa perspectiva de subversão contra a censura e regimes totalitaristas, relacionando-as com o enredo da peça. Foca-se ainda o caso específico da banda checa Plastic People of the Universe e a sua importância para a história da Checoslováquia entre 1968 e 1990.

**keywords**

Tom Stoppard, theatre, *Rock 'N' Roll*, music, subversion, Czechoslovakia, Plastic People of the Universe

**abstract**

This dissertation aims at analysing music as a form of subversion in Tom Stoppard's play *Rock 'N' Roll*. After a short summary of Stoppard's career, the bands and songs chosen by him are analysed from the perspective of subversion against censorship and totalitarian regimes, relating them to the plot. The dissertation also focuses on the specific case of the Czech band the Plastic People of the Universe and its importance to the history of Czechoslovakia between 1968 and 1990.

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## CHAPTER ONE:

### INTRODUCTION

“They tell me your luggage consisted entirely – I mean *entirely* – of socially negative music.”

Tom Stoppard, *Rock ‘N’ Roll* (12)

Tom Stoppard has been considered one of the best contemporary playwrights in English, his career now having lasted since the 1960s. Stoppard's career includes, most importantly, work for the stage, but he has also written a novel, translations and adaptations, and many film and television screenplays. He also does uncredited script-doctoring on Hollywood films. His importance to the world of contemporary theatre can be inferred from the hundreds of reviews, of interviews with and studies about Stoppard and his works. His work has been included in school and university syllabi. For many he is considered an indispensable part of the contemporary theatre. According to Tim Brassell, writing in 1985,

Stoppard's work, with its characteristic marriage of humour and seriousness and its flamboyant theatricality, is a valuable and unique asset to our contemporary theatre. (ix); Tom Stoppard is unquestionably a major power in the contemporary theatre both in this country and, increasingly, in America (1).

Jim Hunter, writing in 2000, considers that Stoppard's “writing shows a delight in English language and literature” (1) and *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, from 1989, edited by Ian Ousby, considers that “Stoppard's highly intelligent and quizzical investigation of artistic conventions and cultural assumptions is characteristic” (952) of some of his first plays. The same *Guide* also says that

[t]he pervasive mockery of the plays, however good-humoured, leaves Stoppard with little firm ground to stand on, and some of his later work suggests a greater engagement with social and political realities (953).



As will be seen, this is the case of the play *Rock 'N' Roll*. Jim Hunter, writing in 2000, says that

Stoppard's plays are generally better at moments than at development. ... this makes it difficult to reach an ending, let alone a natural *outcome*. Stoppard tends to finish his plays with a final excellent theatrical *moment*, rather than with a true resolution. (232)

Stoppard's importance is related to the theatricality mentioned by Hunter, as Brassell mentions:

Stoppard's plays ... are brimful of theatricality and are always concerned, in the first instance, with entertaining their audiences. To believe that such an approach necessarily implies frivolity and superficiality is as unenlightened and culturally snobbish as to believe, for instance, that television drama, by definition, cannot be worth watching (3).

That idea that entertaining the audience is very important for Stoppard but that it also leads them to think is reinforced by Hunter:

Stoppard's plays present a unique interplay between fun and the most basic and serious challenges to human understanding. He writes jokes and comic routines; but at the same time he is also writing about moral responsibility, about goodness, and about our scientific, mathematical or philosophical understanding of reality. (6)

Stoppard plays with language as a way of enriching his plays, so that sometimes there are long speeches and verbal contests, which are not mere entertainment but attempts to mediate intellectual themes, as Hunter writes:

As for the *intellectual frame of reference* in so many of his plays, it may be surprising from the man who quit school "totally bored" at seventeen. But he turns out to write about people involved in philosophy, advanced mathematics and physics, and Latin and Greek scholarship. His speciality is to flick this intellectual material into the air so spectacularly that it becomes entertainment. (5)

This frame of reference does not bring an easy task to the reader or the theatregoer because there are many subjects that Stoppard questions and examines from different angles. Harold Bloom, writing in 2003, states that:

Even from his earliest works, there are signature Stoppard elements that were to become his trademarks. Stoppard admits that his plays often don't make a single, clear statement, relying instead on what he describes as "firstly, A; secondly minus A." A statement may be made by one character that conflicts with the statement of another, setting up Stoppard's "infinite leapfrog." Critics also charged that his plays and characters were too steeped in intellectualism, another Stoppard trademark. Later in his career, critics noted that his characters became more fully developed and emotional. Stoppard has stated that as he grows older, he conceals himself less and his writing has become more a product of his true self. (14)

Stoppard's first play was written in 1960 and is entitled *A Walk on the Water*, later renamed as *Enter a Free Man*. According to Katherine E. Kelly, writing in 2001, this play became extremely important for Stoppard's career:

Although *A Walk on the Water* would eventually be televised, the play's greatest significance for Stoppard was that it brought him to the attention of Kenneth Ewing, who has continued as Stoppard's agent throughout his career. After sending Ewing his play, Stoppard received "one of those Hollywood-style telegrams that change struggling young artists' lives," though it would be three years before the play was produced. (28)

The play was first televised in 1963 and the stage version, with some additions and the new title *Enter a Free Man*, opened at St Martin's Theatre, London, on March 28<sup>th</sup> 1968. The play talks about someone chasing unrealistic dreams. The main character, George Riley, tries to follow his dreams that are completely unrealistic and he even has to borrow money from his daughter, but spends it in a pub. The play ends in the same way it began, meaning that we can't fight against these dreams in spite of the fact that everything stays the same.

Stoppard's real breakthrough was the 1966 play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, an absurdist, existentialist tragicomedy, first staged at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1966. After a Ronald Bryden review in the *Observer*, a script of the play was sent to the National Theatre. The play was staged in 1967 by the National Theatre, making Stoppard the youngest playwright to have a play performed by the troupe. Reviewing this staging of the play, Philip Hope-Wallace, writing in 1967, says:

Not everyone may think the work of a comparatively unknown 30-year-old playwright good enough for the National Theatre. Yet Tom Stoppard's play "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" won golden opinions at the Edinburgh Festival and now gets the full treatment at the Old Vic... (Hope-Wallace)

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* shows two characters of minor importance from the Shakespeare play *Hamlet*. It talks in an absurdist way of the inevitability of death, breakdown in communication and feeling, using the main characters of *Hamlet* as of minor importance and giving importance to the minor ones. Elinor Shaffer, in 1993, wrote that "Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is an example of an adaptation of Shakespeare that succeeds in being a play in its own right – indeed, the author's best play to date." (141) Kelly goes on to a wider analysis of the play:

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* contains, in the contrast between its two title characters, a sense of multiple possibilities of identity. "They both add up to me in many ways in the sense that they're carrying out a dialogue which I carry out to myself," Stoppard says. "One of them is fairly intellectual, fairly incisive; the other one is thicker, nicer in a curious way, more sympathetic. There's a leader and the led. Retrospectively, with all benefit of other people's comments and enthusiasms and so on, it just seems a classic case of self-revelation even though it isn't about this fellow who wrote his first novel." Given the benefit of Stoppard's canon to date, we may see a classic case of self-revelation in his recurrent concern with unidentical twins, his pervasive sense that inside any self may be some other self waiting to be revealed. (26)

The play was an overwhelming success and Stoppard won many awards in Britain and in the United States of America.

After this success, in 1972, another play became successful: *Jumpers*. It was first performed in 1972, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, at the Old Vic, London, by the National Theatre. This play won the *Evening Standard* and *Plays and Players Best Play* awards. Despite this success, the critics were concerned about the type of plays Stoppard was writing, as William Demastes, from 2013, states:

Both plays [*Jumpers* and *Travesties*] won major critical awards and were very successful at the box office. These works clearly dampened critical

concern that Stoppard was a one-hit wonder and went a long way to defining Stoppard's "Stoppardian" style. But critics tended now to express a growing disappointment at the passionlessness of these urbane, witty, intellectually challenging farce-comedies. Added to this complaint was the concern that his plays were distinctly non-political and unnervingly comically upbeat. (19)

The play explores and satirises academic philosophy, raising questions such as "What do we know?" and "Where do values come from?". The Jumpers are a team of acrobatic professors of philosophy, whose absurd gymnastic displays reflect a bewildering world where logic has confounded belief in moral absolutes.

If his first plays, Stoppard showed the importance of pleasing the audience; the following ones show a deeper concern about more directly political subject matters. This is confirmed in the *Cambridge Paperback Guide to Theatre*, from 1996: "Stoppard's political agnosticism and his sympathy with the underdog led to a concern for those imprisoned by totalitarian regimes" (355). Brassell also mentions similar ideas:

In the following year [1977], though, two new works appeared which indicated a marked, though not entirely unexpected shift of emphasis within his work. They were *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, a work for actors and orchestra jointly composed with André Previn and set in a psychiatric prison in Soviet Russia, and *Professional Foul*, a television play dealing with the harassment of a dissident student by the Czechoslovakian State authorities and dedicated to the imprisoned Czech playwright, Vaclav Havel, whom Stoppard met in June 1977 on his first return visit to the country of his birth (179).

In 1977, as stated in the last quote, Stoppard wrote another successful play called *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, with music by André Previn. It was given a single performance as part of the Queen's Silver Jubilee at the London Royal Festival Hall on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1977. This play talks about a dissident who is imprisoned in a Soviet mental hospital, from which he will not be released until he admits that his statements against the government were caused by a (non-existent) mental disorder. This was Stoppard's way of criticising the Soviet practice of treating political dissidence as a form of mental illness.

The set of this play had to do with the fact that Stoppard had become politically involved. Demastes states that Stoppard

was involved with numerous organizations... He visited Moscow and Leningrad in 1977 as part of Amnesty International's "Prisoner of Conscience" campaign for justice. He also returned to Czechoslovakia in June 1977 for the first time since his childhood, meeting the recently released Czech playwright and future president Václav Havel, whose theatre work and political activism Stoppard greatly admired. Out of this contact with these dissident communities, Stoppard wrote *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (July 1977). (19)

Among others, another play that became very successful was *Arcadia*, written in 1993, set between Regency England and today (1993), taking in discussions of romanticism, classicism and thermodynamics. The activities of two modern scholars and the house's current residents are juxtaposed with the lives of those who lived in the same country house 180 years earlier, blurring past and present. Critics considered this the best play so far in Stoppard's career. Vincent Canby, for example, writing in 1995, says:

THERE'S no doubt about it. "Arcadia" is Tom Stoppard's richest, most ravishing comedy to date, a play of wit, intellect, language, brio and, new for him, emotion. It's like a dream of levitation: you're instantaneously aloft, soaring, banking, doing loop-the-loops and then, when you think you're about to plummet to earth, swooping to a gentle touchdown of not easily described sweetness and sorrow. (Canby)

According to Hunter, the play *Arcadia* was what Stoppard's "fans" had been foreseeing:

With *Arcadia* itself, Stoppard won over many of his doubters, while to old fans like me it was what we had always been waiting for – in 1982 I wrote of my dream that Stoppard would some day write "like a modern Chekhov", and here he comes quite near to it. Written within its writer's middle-aged, conservative decorum, *Arcadia* maintains all that was best in the young Stoppard: theatrical surprise, word-play and a genuine concern for fundamental questions about existence and morality. (232-233)

By 2009 also, Lyn Gardner could say that

Arcadia is a supreme play of ideas, sealing its classic status. Chaos theory, poetry, ethics, the end of history: they're all in there, like a version of *Start the Week* in fancy dress. The play also has an aching emotional pull, but Arcadia's brilliance isn't just about the meshing of brain and heart. It's also about the way in which word and image work together, culminating in a wrenchingly beautiful final scene in which past and present-day couples waltz around each other, phantoms just a breath away from touch. Such moments are essentially theatrical because they bring everything together: brain and heart, yes, but also the social world, the stage environment, the questing psyche. (Gardner)

In 2002, Stoppard wrote another successful work: the trilogy *The Coast of Utopia* (*Voyage*, *Shipwreck*, and *Salvage*), set in Russia between 1833 and 1866. The trilogy premiered with *Voyage* on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2002 at the National Theatre. The openings of *Shipwreck* and *Salvage* followed on 8<sup>th</sup> July, and 19<sup>th</sup> July. Demastes sums up the plays in these terms:

Idealists throughout *The Coast of Utopia* plot paths to the distant shore of social justice, but their abstract enthusiasms lead at best to inaction and at worst to actual death and destruction. In the defence of an idea, people starve and die. (44)

Reviewers who talked about these plays returned once again to the supposed opposition in his work between engagement and entertainment. Stoppard's writing was structured and it proved some critics that Stoppard was more than a playwright who could write jokes. Michael Billington, writing in 2002, reports us the same idea:

For years Tom Stoppard was thought of as a formidable brainbox. But with *The Coast of Utopia* he proves he has passion as well as intellect. ... Stoppard's weakness as a dramatist actually lies in the area where he is thought to be strongest: the interplay of ideas. In *The Coast of Utopia*, he paints a moving picture of the pathos of exile and of the obsession of these romantic Russians with their native land. But by reducing Marx - admittedly a German - to the level of a walk-on caricature, he neglects a vital opportunity for dialectical argument. (Billington)

In 2006, Stoppard wrote another play which talks about a country oppressed by a Communist regime: *Rock 'N' Roll*. In this play, he was writing at

last about his birth country. Tom Stoppard was born Tomas Straussler on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1937, in Zlín, Czechoslovakia [now in the Czech Republic], the youngest of the two sons of Czech parents, Eugene and Martha Straussler. According to *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*,

Stoppard was taken to Singapore in infancy and then, in 1946, to England, where he completed his education at Pocklington School. He was a journalist in Bristol and then London, 1954-63, working freelance for the last three years while writing plays (952).

Hunter explains the importance of Stoppard's immigration to England:

The danger and crises of his early childhood were followed by a relatively fortunate upbringing, in peacetime and in a stable country. This sequence in Stoppard's life – repeated danger overlaid by apparent security – almost certainly contributed to his later personality and to the plays [he has written]. (1)

William Demastes, writing in 2013, states that Stoppard's

life as an outsider almost certainly has had an impact on his vision of the world as well as on his art, but how much of an impact is a matter of pure conjecture. Asked in 1998 about possible autobiographical elements in his world, Stoppard observed, "the area in which I feed off myself is really much more to do with thoughts I have had rather than days I have lived". What is absolutely certain is that Stoppard has led a full and memorable life. (14)

While the concerns of *Rock 'N' Roll* are consistent with Stoppard's several concerns, it seems clear that the situation in Czechoslovakia has been of special interest to him.

But Stoppard isn't just a playwright, as mentioned above. He has also had a long career adapting plays and books to the cinema and television such as, for example, *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), co-authored with Marc Norman. *Shakespeare in Love* is a film directed by John Madden and starring Gwyneth Paltrow, Joseph Fiennes and Geoffrey Rush. It tells the story of William Shakespeare, set in 1593. The young playwright struggles with a "writer's block". Viola, a young rich girl who is about to be married, dreams of becoming an actress and dresses up as a boy. She successfully auditions for the part of

Romeo and soon she and William are caught in a forbidden romance that provides rich inspiration for his play. The film won three Golden Globes including best screenplay and seven Academy Awards including best screenplay and best picture. Mark Lawson, writing in 2010, talks about Stoppard's screenplay:

He shared the Oscar for *Shakespeare in Love* with Marc Norman, but the script is reputed to have been an almost complete revision of Norman's starting draft and original idea. "I used to worry about it enormously," he [Stoppard] admits, "but it's a different culture. It's a moral issue, almost. A few years ago, I was invited to a film festival, as a freebie, because I'd done so much work on a movie that they said I should be there. And I said: 'I can't do that, because I'm not supposed to be on this film, and it's unfair to the chap whose name is on it.' But it just goes with the territory: these are the conditions one works under out there." (Lawson)

Stoppard's career as a scriptwriter started in 1975, and has continued at regular intervals. The latest is *Anna Karenina*, in 2012, based on Leo Tolstoy's novel. The film was directed by Joe Wright and the main actors are Keira Knightley, Jude Law and Aaron Taylor-Johnson.

Anna Karenina is a young and beautiful girl married to someone 20 years older, Mr Karenin. She meets the handsome Count Vronsky and they fall in love with each other. Anna is torn between her love to Count Vronsky, and her loveless marriage to Mr Karenin. The lovers are trying to escape from a society that does not accept their actions. Vronsky comes to a point where his personal career is compromised by his relationship with Anna and she becomes traumatized by the conflict between her new desires and her duties as a wife and a mother. Painful reality causes her a depression and suicidal thoughts. Anna loses interest in such a life and jumps under a train. About the film, Robert McCrum, in 2012, writes:

Tom Stoppard says his original approach to writing the screenplay for Joe Wright's new film adaptation of *Anna Karenina* was for a fast, modern movie about being in lust. Then wiser counsels – including his own – prevailed. (McCrum)

Stoppard's screenplay and Wright's film are risky and ambitious, as he took stylistic liberties concerning the original novel. This task wasn't an easy one due



to the length of the novel and to the several existing different film adaptations, so that it was hard to focus on what was really pivotal to Tolstoy. Terrence Rafferty, writing in 2012, states:

In his own, boldly theatrical “Anna Karenina” (opening Nov. 16), he said, “I [Wright] wanted to tell the story that Tolstoy was telling.” That’s more easily said than done, and Mr Wright, probably wisely, refrained from specifying what in his view that story is; adapting any novel as dense as “Anna Karenina” is largely a matter of settling on the right emotional tone. But the determination of Mr Wright and the screenwriter, Tom Stoppard, not to treat the tragic liaison of Anna (Keira Knightley) and her lover, Count Alexei Vronsky (Aaron Taylor-Johnson), as grand romance is a step in the right direction at least. (Rafferty)

But what was the real story told by Tolstoy about? It may have been about different kinds of love. McCrum states that

Stoppard's late fascination with the secret anatomy of love, a turning away from the argumentative verbal fireworks of plays such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Jumpers*, is braided into every line of *Anna Karenina*. He says he wanted to examine what happens to a married woman, Anna, who discovers sex for the first time, a theme possibly of greater relevance today than might generally be admitted. In quest of this, he gives Anna some wonderfully resonant lines. After her first experience of love-making with Vronsky, she murmurs, "You have murdered my happiness", a subtle and complicated sentiment that shortly becomes: "So this is love ... This!" (McCrum)

Stoppard's latest work, written in 2013 for BBC Radio 2, is the radio play *Dark Side*. It was written to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the release of *The Dark Side of the Moon*, the best-selling Pink Floyd album, the progressive rock record that deals with time and its passage. Dave Itzkoff, writing in 2013, states the following:

Describing Mr. Stoppard's radio play, called “Dark Side,” at its Web site, the BBC called it “a fantastical and psychedelic story based on themes from the seminal album” that incorporates “music from the album and a gripping story that takes listeners on a journey through their imaginations.” (So keep your black-light posters handy, apparently.) Mr. Stoppard, a self-

identified Pink Floyd fan, said in a statement that he had spent the past four decades contemplating this project but had "no idea for a long time what I would do." (Itzkoff)

After the play was finished, there was some controversial criticism concerning its quality. John Plunkett, writing in 2013, gives a positive review:

Jeff Smith, head of music for Radio 2 and 6 Music, added: "Radio 2 is proud to be the home of a very special hour where you can hear an amazing new script by Sir Tom Stoppard framed and inspired by the music of Pink Floyd. *Dark Side* pays tribute to the album *The Dark Side of the Moon* with a dramatic examination of themes including conflict, greed and madness. A combination of Sir Tom's brilliance, an iconic album and an outstanding cast ensures this production will be unmissable." (Plunkett)

Some other reviews weren't as complimentary as Plunkett's. For example, Nosheen Iqbal, writing in 2013, mentions that

[i]f it made no sense that Tom Stoppard's massively hyped new play, a philosophical interpretation of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*, would premiere here then the next hour would be an even bigger bag of weird. *Darkside* opens with a train full of passengers saved from crashing by Ethics Man (Rufus Sewell), who diverts the carriages on to another track, killing a boy who was playing on them. Ethics Man later tells us that he is a utilitarian consequentialist – the ends justified the means, and so he'd achieved the greatest good for the greatest number. It's the first and last bit of concrete rationality you can pin on Stoppard's acid-tinted, Wizard of Oz take on Floyd. (Iqbal)

Whatever the assessment of the play's success, however, it indicates one more of the many streams that have gone into his work: that of popular music, particularly that considered progressive.

In conclusion, throughout his career, Tom Stoppard has managed to be significant over five decades. Demastes gives this opinion about Stoppard's work:

Anyone who has come in contact with any of the above works will surely agree that Stoppard is a consummate entertainer. But the entertainment is always enriched with an element of intellectual probing that challenges

audiences in ways unique to his theatre. When at his best, Stoppard manages to draw from the minimalist likes of Samuel Beckett while making sure our eyes and ears are treated to sights and sounds that at times rival even Disney Productions, Inc. (2)

This evolution is clear when we compare his first plays to the latest: love and direct politics are now present in his work, something that in the 1960s Stoppard was accused of ignoring in his work. Kelly also shows the evolution in Stoppard's oeuvre:

The Stoppard style in 2000 is recognizable but fundamentally changed from his self-conscious dandyism of the 1960s and early 1970s. As Stoppard continued to write, his later work has not only extended his early preoccupation with memory, uncertainty, and ethics but also deepened the sense of human consequence growing from ethical conflict and intellectual doubt. In the past ten years, Stoppard has overcome the charge of emotional coldness, especially the claim that he failed to represent human love. In slowly dropping his emotional guard, he has imbued his writing with a depth of compassion hinted at the early work through his consistent appeals to humour. (10)

Stoppard is now 76 years old but he is still a prolific playwright who keeps astonishing his public and the critics with his mature work. There are some particular aspects of his work that have even led to a new word in the English language: "Stoppardianism". This phenomenon is explained by Demastes:

Stoppard's unique brand of theatre has led to the coining of the word "Stoppardian", putting him among the ranks of modernist and contemporary theatre innovators like Shaw (Shavian), Beckett (Beckettian), and Pinter (Pinteresque). Stoppardianism combines perplexing but undoubted rationalism with baroque linguistic precision to create comic plots filled with paradoxical uncertainties that somehow generate complex but logically satisfying results. Furthermore Stoppard's theatre integrates challenging intellectual concepts with high theatricality, so that, for example, an acrobatics routine becomes an illustration of agile minds at work; creating a deceptively realistic play-within-a-play rocks our notion of what is "the real thing" in theatre or anywhere else; and having one character morph into two characters gives us the chance to think about

the multiple roles we all play in real life. Using the entertaining illusion of theatre to reflect upon the serious matters of life – that is Stoppardianism. (3)

This idea that Stoppard has some special features in his work that have even led to the creation of a new word validates his general significance to the contemporary English theatre. The specific reputation of the relatively recent *Rock 'N' Roll*, however, is still in process of being formed.

*Rock 'N' Roll* opened on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2006 at the Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Royal Court Theatre, in London. In New York, it premiered at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

The play is set between two different places, Cambridge, England, and Prague, Czechoslovakia and spans between 1968 and 1990. It concentrates on events surrounding Czechoslovakia's history (the Communist regime and the Velvet Revolution).

In the introductory notes to the 2008 edition, Stoppard talks about his first draft of the play, where he considered that the main character's name should be Tomas, like himself, as some of the parts of this main character's life are similar to his own life, lived between Czechoslovakia, his birthplace, and England, where Stoppard found an adoptive family and changed his surname. Despite these autobiographical details, Stoppard advises the readers not to consider the parallels between their lives, as these don't go very far:

[t]his is not to say that the parallels between Jan's life and mine go very far. He was born where I was born, in Zlín, and left Czechoslovakia for the same reason (Hitler) at much the same time. But Jan came directly to England as a baby, and returned to Czechoslovakia in 1948, two years after I arrived in England having spent the war years in the Far East. (ix)

Stoppard eventually decided to change the main character's name to Jan, also because he had a different idea in mind: the character Tomas in Milan Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. In some parts of the play, the writer was inspired by this character, although superficially they do not have many things in common. Stoppard's Jan is an exiled Czech in Cambridge who returns to Prague in 1968, at the time of the Soviet takeover, and who, although primarily a rock-loving non-combatant, finds himself inexorably drawn into

dissidence and Charter 77. Kundera's Tomas is a surgeon and a womanizer who lives for his work, in Prague. So, what do they have in common? The prevailing feature of both characters is the historical background: the communist-run Czechoslovakia between 1968 and the early 1980s, in the case of Kundera, and in 1990 in the case of *Rock 'N' Roll*. Stoppard explains the similar features of the two characters in the introduction to the 2008 edition of the play:

In that book [*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*] there is a scene where Tomas refuses to sign a petition on behalf of political prisoners gaoled by Husák's "government of normalisation", which followed the invasion by the Warsaw Pact armies. In the play, when Jan is asked to sign what is essentially the same petition at the same juncture, his response is taken directly from Kundera's Tomas, in distillation... (ix-x)

Both characters refuse to sign the petition because they think it won't help the people involved but it is merely "moral exhibitionism".

Pursuing the analysis of Stoppard's introduction, he mentions that some parts were inspired by the writings exchanged between Havel and Kundera. He also mentions the exchange of essays between Havel and the novelist Ludvík Vaculík, which inspired a conversation between Ferdinand and Jan. "Notes of Courage", by Vaculík, gave Stoppard Jan's idea about heroism. Ludvík Vaculík is a prominent Czech writer and journalist who was born in 1926. His most noticeable work is the "Two Thousand Words" manifesto written in 1968. He was said to have been heavily involved in the circulation of *samizdat* material, which was the key form of dissident activity across the Soviet bloc. People copied censored publications by hand and passed the documents to other people. This practice to evade censorship was filled with danger as ruthless punishments were inflicted on people caught owning or reproducing censored materials. Vaculík is important for Stoppard because he uses some of his ideas through Jan. Stoppard states the similarities in the introduction:

Vaculík, like Jan, says he is afraid of prison. He is looking for a 'decent middle ground', and, like Jan, sees himself as a 'normal person'. 'Normal people are not "heroes".' Echoing Vaculík, Jan complains to Ferdinand that heroism isn't honest work, the kind that keeps the world going round... (xii)

Stoppard also mentions another *samizdat* essay by Petr Pithart which led to Havel's reply, which Stoppard, in the introduction of *Rock 'N' Roll*, calls "deeply felt exchanges between intellectuals and friends living under pressures hardly imaginable by writers in the West" (xii).

Stoppard explains the choice of the name Ferdinand for one of his characters because Havel has a "Ferdinand Vanek" in three of his plays. Moreover, Ferdinand is a character partly inspired by Havel's life: Stoppard's Ferdinand is the character who takes Havel's viewpoint in the dialectic. In the second act, the characters' ideas change and it is Jan who takes that role and he is the one to defend Havel. Stoppard says that "[t]he most important sources for the 'Czech arguments' in this play are the essays, articles and letters written by Havel between 1968 and the 1990s" (xiv).

But why is Václav Havel so important for Tom Stoppard? Being of Czech origin, a playwright and a person concerned about politics to a certain point, Stoppard admires Havel and dedicated his play *Rock 'N' Roll* to him, as he had done with other plays before, because he admired his life's devotion to his country and people. Havel's essays, commentaries and letters from 1965 to 1990 and beyond were a continual inspiration in the writing of the play. Stoppard even states that when he read Havel's writings, he "was left with an overwhelming sense of humility and pride in having a friend of such bravery, humanity and clear-sighted moral intelligence" (xv). Remarkably, Havel attended the opening night of the play (along with Mick Jagger, the lead singer for the Rolling Stones).

Václav Havel (Prague, 1936 - Hrádeček, 2011) is mentioned several times in the play and his importance in it is due in part specifically to Charter 77, the informal civic initiative in communist Czechoslovakia motivated in part by the arrest of members of the band Plastic People of the Universe. The list of Havel's works is extensive, including plays, poetry, non-fictional books and even a fictional book. According to the *Cambridge Paperback Guide to Theatre*, Havel was

[a] dramaturge and resident playwright at the Balustrade Theatre, for which he wrote all his plays until 1968. In his best-known works Havel focused on

deformations in patterns of thinking (ideological and bureaucratic power stratagems run amok or become sclerotic) (163).

Being one of the founding signatories of Charter 77, Havel demanded that the Communist government of Czechoslovakia recognized some basic human rights. Not many people had the courage to sign Charter 77, less than two thousand signatures were gathered, and most of them signed in 1989 when the Communist regime was almost collapsing. James Satterwhite, writing in 2002, talks about the ideology behind Charter 77:

Although the environment within which they operated defined every activity as political, the Charter 77 dissidents thought of themselves as apolitical for a variety of reasons. One reason for this apolitical self-definition had to do with the fact that, for years, in Czechoslovakia, the only political philosophy had been Marxism, and after 1968 Marxism – even in its “humanist” and “reform” versions – was discredited. (Satterwhite)

The government persecuted the Charter signers; they were isolated and ostracized, followed, interrogated, forced to work at menial jobs, or put in jail. That is Havel's case: he was imprisoned, under government surveillance and was questioned by the secret police many times. His longest stay in prison was from May 1979 to February 1983. But, according to Petr Oslzlý, writing in 1990, this persecution went on and

[i]n January 1989 Havel was arrested again-this time while laying a wreath in memory of Jan Palach. A petition demanding his release was signed by a great many theatre people and other writers and artists-this time not only from the gray zone but from official artistic circles too. (Oslzlý)

Havel suspended his playwriting career when, in 1990, he became the interim president of Czechoslovakia and, in 1993, the first president of the Czech Republic. Havel was a brave man who fought for Czechoslovakia, even under a regime of censorship and repression. His ideas and actions were subversive and eventually helped shape the liberal democracy that would take over from the Communist regime.

Another rather interesting point mentioned by Stoppard in the introduction of *Rock 'N' Roll* is that much of Havel's prose writings were translated by Paul Wilson, a member of the rock band Plastic People of the

Universe between 1970 and 1972. He also explains the importance of the rock 'n' roll band, "a nonconformist rock group that was at the centre of this society" (xvii). This band unwittingly participated in the social movements that changed the history of Czechoslovakia and is referred to several times throughout the play.

In this play, Stoppard shows a deep concern about politics, something that was not noticeable in his first plays but gradually began appearing in his work. In this case, the characters in the play have different ideas and discuss different points of view. Stoppard had done that before according to Anthony Jenkins, writing in 1990:

the isolation of *New-Found-Land's* two characters from each other and from *Dirty Linen's* sexual shenanigans exemplifies the way Stoppard's characters passionately maintain a personal vision which occasionally accords, but more usually conflicts with, someone else's. (126).

Stoppard also shows his concern about his birth country, about music, freedom, journalism and about lots of other different realities. *Rock 'n Roll* talks about a multitude of themes, being about so many different things, that it is hard to acknowledge all of them. According to Michael C. O'Neill, writing in 2007,

Stoppard, who left his native Czechoslovakia in 1938 while still an infant and has often referred to himself as a "bounced Czech," addresses a myriad of topics in *Rock 'N' Roll*, united by his usual facility with complex ideas and an unusual degree of warmth. Eleanor, dying of cancer, conducts tutorials on Sappho's poetry. Esme and her daughter, alarmed at Max's increasing senility, move back to Cambridge to care for him and to renew one another. The communist government's persecution of Plastic People of the Universe, the apolitical avant-garde Czech rock band, leads to the contagious outrage and international attention of Charter 77, signed by 240 dissidents protesting the arrests of the band and their fans as violations of human rights. Such occasions allow Stoppard to shape *Rock 'N' Roll*, like the ancient lyric poetry of the exiled Sappho, with deep, almost erotic, feeling and without compromising his wit and intelligence. (O'Neill)

As stated by O'Neill, the multitude of themes is enormous. In the next chapter these themes will be analysed, focusing on the plot of the play, the



bands and their music chosen by Stoppard and the historical background that aids understanding many events in the play.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### PLOT, MUSIC AND HISTORY

*Rock 'N' Roll* is divided into two acts and has smaller sections that are divided according to different times and places. When Stoppard sets the play in a different period of time and/or place, he suggests songs by different groups/bands to sound over the blackouts. He even suggests that the director might use projections of photos of one of the bands, instead of using a song (16). Specifically the suggestion concerns the song "All Over Now", by the Plastic People of the Universe, along with photos of the group. Music is extremely important for Stoppard's play and there is a diversity of bands and songs that, of course, are famous rock 'n' roll bands. This use of music makes the play more dynamic and synaesthetic, as Ben Brantley states in "On London Stages, It's Only Passion 'n' Politics (but They Like It)", writing in 2006:

In recordings by Pink Floyd, the Velvet Underground, the Grateful Dead and (but of course) the Rolling Stones, among others, Mr. Stoppard locates the very rhythm of life, a pulse that remains steady if sometimes faint through the vagaries of the histories of nations and governments. "It's only rock 'n' roll," a phrase quoted inevitably and to devastating effect, is here the most monumental of understatements. (Brantley)

Music is used, not only for the purpose of dividing the scenes and giving the play movement, but to suggest aspects of Stoppard's thinking, as Brantley says in "Going to Prague in 1968, but Not Without His Vinyl", 2007:

This being a work by Mr. Stoppard, the mind expresses itself in many, often polysyllabic words. But its presence is perhaps most purely felt in the electrically amplified songs that throb throughout the show. (Brantley)

It may be that music is used to express or imply people's freedom and even subversion of norms, of going against political regimes that don't allow freedom of speech. Although the songs don't have a directly political sense in their lyrics, they evoke political sentiments and ideas. According to Jon Pareles, in "Rock 'n' Revolution" from 2007,

[t]hroughout "Rock 'n' Roll" music is never mere entertainment. It's not propaganda, either; there are no political or protest songs. (The Plastics have recorded only one directly political song during their career.) Instead music is variously a refuge, a cry from the heart, a flag of defiance and a token of freedom. "The play perhaps could be called 'It's Not Only Rock 'n' Roll,'" Mr. Stoppard said. "Because it's not." (Pareles)

The first scene of Act One of the play is set in Cambridge 1968, at night, with the characters Esme, Jan, Max and Eleanor and it begins with a song, which is Syd Barrett's "Golden Hair", lyrics from a poem by James Joyce. The Piper, a character that Jan doesn't believe exists, starts singing and playing it to Esme, who is described as a sixteen-year-old girl with long golden hair. This strange character will be filled in to some extent later.

The song belongs to the album *The Madcap Laughs* and the event gives the play a surreal ambience to begin with: "The Piper" is singing and playing a pan-pipe to Esme and later on the play the theatregoers find out that "The Piper" is Syd Barrett. He is mentioned in the play, but at the same time, he isn't one of the characters used by Stoppard. About Barrett, Brantley states in "Going to Prague in 1968, but Not Without His Vinyl", that

I should mention another male character who shows up only briefly but whose spirit imbues the whole play. That's the Piper ..., who is probably Syd Barrett, the musician and former Pink Floyd member, who here becomes the avatar of Pan, the sylvan god of revelry and life at its most irrepressible. (Brantley)

The surreal ambience of the Piper takes the audience back to 1968. Although the song was only released in 1969, the recording of the album started in 1968, which is accurate in matters the setting of the play. The song "Golden Hair" talks about a girl with "golden hair" (and Esme is described as having golden hair) who is singing and is encouraged to lean out the window; the person hearing her is "hypnotised" by her singing and closes the book he is reading and leaves his room; she is singing through the gloom. These lyrics give the play an ethereal setting, together with the fact that it is night and there isn't much light on the set. Also the fact that "The Piper" is playing a pan-pipe brings non-

realistic symbolism to the beginning of the play. According to Michael Ferber, 2000, the pipe was widely used in ancient literature:

The Greeks and Romans had many kinds of wind instruments, made of many different materials, and played on many different occasions. ... Plato and Aristotle thought it could send listeners into a religious frenzy, though others praised its calming, meditative effect. (Pipes in the Bible are used for both mourning and rejoicing.) ... The panpipes are the most distinctive rustic or pastoral instrument, but by the time of Theocritus at least all the pipes became assimilated into one another in the pastoral world. (155)

In this specific situation, the pipe brings a sense of calmness and meditation that is quickly interrupted by the arrival of another character in the play, Jan, who thinks it is impossible that a piper was there and asks Esme if she had some left, meaning that she should be under the effect of some drug.

This "Piper", Syd Barrett, is the musician who was living in Cambridge by that period. He was born Roger Keith Barrett on January 16<sup>th</sup> 1946 in Cambridge, England. According to Colin Larkin in *The Guinness Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, writing in 1993, he was "[o]ne of English pop's most enigmatic talents [and] Barrett embraced music in the early 60s" (104). He was a member of different bands (Geoff Mutt And The Mottoes, a local group modelled on Cliff Richard and The Shadows, the Hollering Blues, an R&B act) and, also according to Larkin,

[i]n 1965, he joined three architectural students in a group he initially named the Pink Floyd Sound, but quickly dropped its superfluous suffix. He became the unit's undisputed leader, composing their early hit singles ... An impulsive, impressionistic guitarist, his unconventional use of feedback, slide and echo did much to transfer the mystery and imagery of Pink Floyd's live sound into a studio equivalent. However, the strain of this position was too great for a psyche dogged by instability and an indulgence in hallucinogenic drugs. Barrett's behaviour grew increasingly erratic and in April 1968 he withdrew from the line-up. (104)

Barrett's first solo work was called *The Madcap Laughs*, from which the song "Golden Hair" is drawn. Again, Larkin states about this song that "[t]he end

result was a hypnotic, ethereal set on which Barrett's fragile performances were left basically unadorned ..." (104). His later solo albums were *Barrett* (1970), *Opel* (1988) and *Crazy Diamond* (1993). His album *Opel* is also referred to later, and when Alice and Esme mention it, it contains a new version of the song "Golden Hair". Syd Barrett died on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2006, at the age of 60, of pancreatic cancer. However, as Brantley adds in "Going to Prague in 1968, but Not Without His Vinyl",

Mr. Barrett died shortly after "Rock 'N' Roll" opened in London last year. So it feels particularly poignant when, in the concluding scene, characters translating some Plutarch reiterate the words "Pan is dead." On the evidence of "Rock 'N' Roll" I'd say that — gods be praised — Pan is very much alive. (Brantley)

According to Pareles in the 2012 article "Syd Barrett, a Founder of Pink Floyd, Dies at 60",

[f]or someone with such a brief career, Mr. Barrett has never been forgotten. Indie-rockers have long tried to emulate his twisted craftsmanship, paying tribute in songs like Television Personalities' "I Know Where Syd Barrett Lives." Sir Tom Stoppard's new play, "Rock 'N' Roll," invokes him as a lost free spirit. (Pareles)

Syd Barrett's awkwardness and mystical presence are both suggested in the play. This awkwardness was exacerbated by the fact that Syd Barrett was a drug addict whose addiction increasingly took control of him, something that helped the band Pink Floyd to decide to continue without him. In the same article, Pareles also says that

[b]and members have said Mr. Barrett was unstable even before he began extensive drug use, and he developed a reputation for odd behavior. For one show, he tried to slick down his hair with a combination of Brylcreem and crushed Mandrax tranquilizer pills, which were melted by stage lights and started to ooze down his face as he played. Playing the Fillmore West on Pink Floyd's 1967 American tour, Mr. Barrett stood staring into space and detuning the strings on his guitar. The band cut short its American tour. (Pareles)

Barrett's music was considered odd and one of his trademarks was playing his guitar through an old echo box while sliding a Zippo lighter up and down to create the mysterious sounds. His experimental and eccentric inventiveness remain influential, even legendary, as Barry Walters summed up in 2006,

Barrett's psychedelia was as particularly English as Harry Potter, and similarly magical. A lover of eyeliner and whimsy, the singer spewed some of the era's most savage guitar noise over and around his deceptively childlike lyrics: The BBC-banned first Floyd single "Arnold Layne" dared to celebrate a mischievous cross-dresser who stole his drag from washing lines, while the enchanting follow-up hit, "See Emily Play"—as well as "The Gnome," "Scarecrow," and other tracks from Floyd's first album, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*—similarly mixed innocence and subversion. (Walters)

But why did Stoppard use Barrett in his play? There is not a simple answer. According to Neal Ascherson, writing in 2006, Barrett is central:

the play has one extra character who never comes on stage, yet haunts the imagination of the other characters. This is Syd Barrett, once the marvellous young leader and songwriter of Pink Floyd, who was dumped by the band for being unmanageable, went back to his mother's semi in Cambridge, and fell silent. Today an elderly balding man whom nobody recognises, he lives as a recluse. It's not clear if he knows that someone has written a play about him. I asked Stoppard why he used Syd. "I wanted to write about somebody who had simply "got off the train". A friend lent me some books about him. Those deceptively simple songs! Some said he was a genius, others that there was nothing in them ..." But it's about more than the songs. It's about other things which are prowling through the play behind its philosophical sparkle: beauty, death, transience. Stoppard says: "I found the pictures in those books very moving. There's a photograph of him like a dark archangel." Syd, in *Rock 'N' Roll*, is made into the shadow of the lost god Pan. One woman, bewitched by him a quarter-century ago, remembers him as "the guarantee of beauty". But Tom Stoppard's play is saying that in politics, in families, in physical existence, there are no guarantees. (Ascherson)

In the play, after the appearance of Syd Barrett, the first dialogue is between Esme and Jan. He is talking about his departure to Prague,

Czechoslovakia, and says that he is leaving everything but his records in Cambridge, meaning that he is taking with him the most important thing to him: rock 'n' roll, his records, showing not simply his love of music and British and American bands, but an implied connection between such music and freedom of expression. Concerning Jan's music, Brantley adds the following in "Going to Prague in 1968, but Not Without His Vinyl":

Still, his greatest love lies in the grooved vinyl of the only possessions he takes with him: a collection of records by groups like the Rolling Stones, the Velvet Underground, the Fugs and especially Pink Floyd. And while his socially conscious contemporaries protest governmental tyranny and censorship, what gets Jan in trouble is his attachment to a (real) Czech rock band, the Plastic People of the Universe. (Brantley)

This information is crucial to the rest of the play because Jan's records represent his way of rebelling, of subversion, the reality of which is proven when they are also used to punish him, when policemen smash his records.

The next character, Max Morrow, Esme's father, is described as "nearly fifty-one, a bruiser" (5). He is a Communist and an English professor at Cambridge University. He has an argument with Jan, who is his student born in Czechoslovakia but educated in England, about the alliance, which refers to the relations between the former states of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union that began with a treaty signed in 1935. Max says that the Prague bloody Spring "was never about the workers" (6) and accuses Jan of running at the first flutter of a Czech flag, as he is going back to his birthplace. Jan wants to live freely but is caught in a culture of censorship and oppression. Max's statement may be an accusation: the Prague Spring's goal was to democratise the nation and lessen the monopoly Moscow had on the nation's affairs. By democratising Czechoslovakia, the government was alienating some of the basic ideas of Communism and Max could be accusing Jan of not being a true communist.

This scene finishes with a blackout: "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight" by Bob Dylan. Dylan is very important in the history of popular music and particularly of protest music. The song belongs to the album *John Wesley Harding* (1968). The name of this album recollects an American outlaw, gunfighter, and controversial folk icon of the Old West from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. "I'll Be Your Baby

Tonight" is a very different song from those by Syd Barrett, starting with a harmonica in the register of a country song. It changes the ambience left by the first song. It is apparently a "love" song that talks about fears. When Dylan sings "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight" he is saying that the person he is singing to doesn't have to worry about anything; with a bottle and the moon in the sky, everything will be good. It may refer to a one-night stand mixed with drugs and alcohol, but on the surface the song seems sweet and innocent.

Bob Dylan was born Robert Allen Zimmerman, on May 24<sup>th</sup> 1941, in Duluth, Minnesota. His music has been very significant throughout its different styles. Larkin states that he is "Unquestionably one of the most influential figures in the history of popular music" (404). He is considered to be a pioneer in many ways, as Stephen Thomas Erlewine, writing in 2013, states:

Bob Dylan's influence on popular music is incalculable. As a songwriter, he pioneered several different schools of pop songwriting, from confessional singer/songwriter to winding, hallucinatory, stream-of-consciousness narratives. As a vocalist, he broke down the notion that a singer must have a conventionally good voice in order to perform, thereby redefining the vocalist's role in popular music. As a musician, he sparked several genres of pop music, including electrified folk-rock and country-rock. And that just touches on the tip of his achievements. Dylan's force was evident during his height of popularity in the '60s -- the Beatles' shift toward introspective songwriting in the mid-'60s never would have happened without him -- but his influence echoed throughout several subsequent generations, as many of his songs became popular standards and his best albums became undisputed classics of the rock & roll canon. (Erlewine)

Larkin talks about *John Wesley Harding* album and the song "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight", referring to

the release of *John Wesley Harding*, a stark but brilliant work, which challenged and effectively reversed the pseudo-poeticism and psychedelic excesses prevalent in rock during the previous year. Moving away from the convoluted imagery that had characterized his previous work, Dylan chose sharp aphorisms and used quasi-allegorical figures such as John Wesley Harding, St. Augustine and Tom Paine to express his search for fulfilment. ... Not for the first time, Dylan ended the album with



a hint of his future direction in "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight". A seemingly unambiguous love song, it suggested a new Dylan, contents, demon free and uncharacteristically mellow. (405-406)

Bob Dylan was so important to popular music because he did things differently from the rest of the bands at that time. Kevin J. H. Dettmar, writing in 2009, enunciates that

Dylan from an early age boasted the voice of seemingly old man – seemingly the very voice... In an era when pop (and even folk) stars were, as today, meant to sing like the nightingale, Dylan instead sang as the crow. But that croak, it seemed, contained a depth of feeling and passion and anger and joy and wisdom and disillusionment not hinted at by the songbirds; it came as a revelation. And it sounded like the voice of Truth. (1-2)

This was Dylan's subversive way of being different and notorious, helping to make him the voice of social protest and commentary for many young people.

The second scene is set in the same place and date (Cambridge, 1968) during the day and we can now find the characters Eleanor, Max and Esme. Eleanor is presented as in her late forties; she is Esme's mother and Max's wife. Eleanor tells Max that a man called Milan appeared at their house saying that Jan wouldn't come back from Czechoslovakia and had asked for his things. Milan had stared at her because she only has one breast due to cancer. Through this conversation we find out that Eleanor studied Greek and wants to continue working although she is on sick leave. Esme appears with faint music in the background: the Rolling Stones' album *High Tide and Green Grass*. This is the first official compilation album by The Rolling Stones and was released in 1966. It includes the next song mentioned, "It's All Over Now". According to the stage directions, this album should be played as faint music while the characters continue their dialogue.

Eleanor says that Max isn't going to do anything about Czechoslovakia, just as he did when "they" occupied Hungary: "Ate shit and shut up." (9), accusing him of being numb and not living according to his own words. Later, Gillian, a student, appears to work with Eleanor and they start analysing Sappho's writings.

In this scene the most important idea is connected to women and their bodies. When Eleanor says that Milan was staring at her, this might have given her the idea that she was losing herself to cancer. It may lead to the interpretation that when a woman loses her "body" to a disease, to age, she loses a part of her as if mind and body were inseparable. The pressure in women to see themselves in terms of their bodies is immense, after all. Time brings wrinkles and body changes but, at the same time, it brings experience, changed values and new ways of seeing the world. When we are younger, our body image greatly affects who we are and, although beauty does not last forever, we need to deal with the changes and learn how to live with them. It is also very important that Stoppard chose Sappho as the poet they were analysing. Sappho's importance has to do in part with the fact that she represents a woman who can be seen as having opposed the standard options of her time and thus a symbol of independence and freedom. She was born on the island of Lesbos, Greece, probably about 620 B.C. and became well-known through her poems and her non-standard sexual orientation. Her death was also involved in mystery and it was not proven that she killed herself by jumping off a cliff. According to Margaret Reynolds, writing in 2001,

[t]he fact that that body is mutilated, in pieces – both actually, in terms of the fragmented works, and metaphorically, in terms of her legendary death, broken on the rocks of the sea – makes Sappho all the more seductive. (6)

As Eleanor feels broken by the disease, Sappho was "broken" too, and maybe that is why Stoppard chose Sappho. Reynolds also states that

Sappho functions as an attractive metaphor. Her work is in fragments, just as her body is broken, and since the eighteenth century our culture has entertained a pervading fascination with anything imperfect, destroyed, failed, lost. (7)

Stoppard apparently tries to induce the audience to reflect upon these subjects, about the representation of women, and he does that by having Eleanor as a Greek teacher who is translating Sappho with her student.

This second scene finishes with a blackout by the Rolling Stones, "It's All Over Now" (1964) from the album *12 X 5*, also included in the compilation *High*

*Tide and Green Grass*. Although this song was originally released by The Valentinos featuring Bobby Womack, the composer of the song, the most well-known version is easily that by the Rolling Stones. Larkin states that “the Stones released a decisive cover of the Valentinos’ “It’s All Over Now”, which gave them their first number 1” (959). It is also a love song but a sad one concerning the lyrics. It is about separation, misconduct and betrayal. Regardless of the lyrics, the song is cheerful in terms of melody and prepares theatregoers for the comic scene that follows: the meeting of Jan with an Interrogator. The song also separates a scene set in Cambridge from a scene set in Prague, as if Stoppard was saying that Jan’s life is over, as he is going to Czechoslovakia where he will have trouble with the system, and his freedom to listen to music will disappear or be threatened.

The Rolling Stones are a band from the 60s originally formed by Mick Jagger, Keith Richard, Bill Wyman, Brian Jones and Ian Stewart. They were seen as rebellious and the “Anti-Beatles”. According to Larkin,

[t]he early months of 1964 saw the Stones catapulted to fame amid outrage and controversy about the surliness of their demeanour and the length of their hair. This was still a world in which the older members of the community were barely coming to terms with the Beatles neatly-groomed mop tops. While newspapers asked “Would you let your daughter marry a Rolling Stone?”, the quintet engaged in a flurry of recording activity. (959)

The band grew in reputation and the effect it had on the fans was, according to Larkin, astonishing when

a national tour escalated into a series of near riots with scenes of hysteria wherever they played. There was an ugly strain to the Stones’ appeal which easily translated into violence. At the Winter Gardens Blackpool the group hosted the most astonishing rock riot yet witnessed on British soil. Frenzied fans displayed their feelings for the group by smashing chandeliers and demolishing a Steinway grand piano. ... Other concerts were terminated within minutes of the group appearing on-stage and the hysteria continued throughout Europe. (959)

The Stones continued and became more ambitious, releasing even more complex and successful albums. The song "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" first brought the band success in the USA but they continued to be badly seen by many people because of their behaviour. Larkin states the following:

There was also some well documented bad boy controversy when Jagger, Jones and Wyman were arrested and charged with urinating on the wall of an East London petrol station. Such scandalous behaviour merely reinforced the public's already ingrained view of the Stones as juvenile degenerates. (959)

The group continued having trouble with justice because of drug offenses, receiving heavy fines and even prison sentences. Later, some of their work focused on sex and death, the band's fascination challenge to the authorities shown, for example, in the name and the sleeve of their album *Sticky Fingers*, designed by Andy Warhol, which showed a man's figure from the waist down in denim, showing the zipper and the famous tongue that became the Stones' symbol. By 1977, however, the Rolling Stones had lost their centrality and were considered passé. The band responded to the critics by continuing to release new material, such as *Some Girls* (1978) and *Emotional Rescue* (1980) and during the 80s, installed themselves as above all a live band. According to Larkin,

[o]ne of the Stones' cleverest devices throughout the 80s was their ability to compensate for average work by occasional flashes of excellence. ... After nearly 30 years in existence, the Rolling Stones began the 90s with the biggest grossing international tour of all time, and ended speculation about their future by reiterating their intention of playing on indefinitely. The world's greatest rock band is a title that is likely to stick ... (961)

By 2013, according to Michael Hann,

[t]he Stones may no longer be "the greatest rock 'n' roll band in the world" (is anyone?), but their muscle memory and catalogue mean they are still a fearsome force once they're in full flow. "Gimme Shelter" has the unstoppable, lumbering force of a supertanker; "Paint It Black", an eternal monument to the point in time when blues fans started dropping acid, still sounds like it was written by some sinister, alternate consciousness, then

gifted to the band – the nihilism of the lyric may be cartoonish, but the attack of the music isn't. (Hann)

For someone belonging to a different and younger generation, the Rolling Stones represent the forerunners for many bands that we listen to nowadays. They represent what for many is the true rock 'n' roll and some of their songs have become immortal, being known even by young people nowadays.

The next scene is set in Prague, still in 1968, and we find Jan with an Interrogator. He is being questioned by the interrogator who is surprised that Jan's luggage "consisted entirely – I mean *entirely* – of socially negative music." (12). Jan tries to excuse himself saying that he was thinking of writing an article on socially negative music. Jan is being ironic because, in his perspective, the music he listens to is a state of freedom and it is considered socially negative only by the government. The interrogator says that when their allies came for fraternal assistance to save socialism, many decided to stay. However, Jan, who was asked to stay in Cambridge for Max Morrow's "summer teach-in", came back to save socialism. The audience hears a bit of backstory about Jan, which Stoppard reveals in the introduction to the printed version of the script is derived from his own early life. This is a comic scene because Jan is being sarcastic when answering the questions. Because Jan left Czechoslovakia before the Nazi Occupation, the interrogator assumes he is Jewish and the scene continues with a ridiculous conversation about a biscuit that the Interrogator wants Jan to taste. Stoppard tries in this scene to mock censorship and police repression.

It is when this scene finishes that the Plastic People of the Universe, a Czech psychedelic rock group, are first mentioned in the play, and used as a blackout. This is the most important band for the story of the play. After Jan is interrogated, Stoppard uses the song "All Over Now" by the Czech band. He also gives the director the choice between just playing this song or also projecting photos of the group. The importance of this band will be explained further on in this analysis.

There is then a smash cut to Prague, April 1969. A smash cut is a technique that is most commonly used in films and it is an abrupt cut from one

scene to another. Stoppard chose to use songs to do this cut, which helps to bring impetus to the play. This smash cut is done with the song "Venus in Furs" by the Velvet Underground, a song released in 1967 and that belongs to their debut album *The Velvet Underground & Nico*. It is possible to notice a gradation between the songs used so far. They are all about love, but they range between tender to violent love. This song talks about sexual themes of sadomasochism, bondage and submission and is based on a novel of the same name by the Austrian author Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (published in 1870). In Sacher-Masoch's book, the narrator begins the book with a dream of a Venus wearing furs and when he wakes up, he meets his friend Severin and tells him his dream. According to Supervert, 2008,

[I]n one episode Severin writes a poem called "Venus in Furs". When Wanda takes the manuscript away from him, he can't keep working on it because he can only remember the first stanza. Can't you see that that's what the author really wants from you? He wants to be punished, and the way to punish a writer is to gag him. (iv)

*Venus in Furs* shows the representation of the male masochistic fantasy, as Rita Felski, writing in 1991, said:

in *Venus in Furs*, for example, the hero, Severin, defines himself as "nothing but a dilettante... an amateur in life"... Renouncing the struggle for active self-realization in the world, the aesthete displays traits the dominant ideologies of his day identified with women: passivity, languidness, vanity, hypersensitivity, a love of fashion and ornamentation. Spending much of his time in an interior, private space codified as feminine rather than in the public sphere of work and politics, he devotes himself to the cultivation of style and to the appreciation of life as an aesthetic phenomenon. (1095)

The Velvet Underground song also mentions Severin and it is an annoying song for the listener because of its sounds, as there is a violin repeating the same irritating sound over and over again. It is also provocative in its lyrics as it recalls Sacher-Masoch's masochism. Oddly, Jan says that the album containing this song was given to him by a girl in Cambridge, which may refer to the increasing power of women, perhaps a connection between women's increasing freedom with respect to their bodies. Although "Venus in Furs" is a male fantasy, perhaps this could also be a female fantasy, which shows the growing

awareness of women's own bodies and an increasing lack of repression. The woman in the lyrics wears leather boots and a whip after all.

It is also important that, in the play, Jan talks about rock and roll with his friend Ferdinand and is saying that the regime was allowing new music, although he doesn't understand the extent of his freedom. He says that he went back to Prague to save rock 'n' roll and this song is mentioned when Jan says "I was in the Music F Club where they had this amateur rock competition. The Plastic People of the Universe played "Venus in Furs" from Velvet Underground, and I knew everything was basically okay" (19).

Jan and Ferdinand talk about a concert by the Beach Boys. Ferdinand went to the concert in Lucerne and is saying that the band dedicated the song "Break Away" to Dubček, who was in the audience. When they are talking, "Jan takes off the record and puts it reverently into its sleeve, which has a picture of a banana" (16). The use of the word "reverently" is extremely important, showing how important music is in his life, as if his records were deities to him. After the conversation about the Beach Boys concert, Jan and Ferdinand cheer lots of different bands, toasting the Beach Boys, the Mothers of Invention and the Rolling Stones. At first, Stoppard's choice of including the Beach Boys may seem strange when compared to the other bands because, until "Good Vibrations", the band composed songs only about the beach, sun and surf. This was very different from the counter-cultural songs of the other groups until *Pet Sounds* was released, as will be explained further on in this analysis.

Ferdinand is collecting signatures and shows his concern about Dubček but Jan doesn't seem to bother. Jan is a university lecturer who writes articles and Ferdinand says he is a journalist, so he should be concerned about what is happening in Czechoslovakia, given the level of censorship. Jan is listening to the Doors and explains that he is concerned, that he "came back to save rock 'n' roll" (19) and his mother. To "save" popular music is to save important ideals of the opposition to the regime. Still debating with Ferdinand over the petition he is trying to get Jan to sign, Jan says that Czechoslovakia has "progressive rock" (20) and therefore it can't be totally repressive. This seems to question the idea that popular music represents freedom. The regime allowed a lot of

popular music but was still repressive because not everyone could play and not every band could be heard without being considered an act of subversion. The idea here is that people could listen to music but only the music chosen by the regime.

This conversation between Jan and Ferdinand sets a part of the historical background of the play. In January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1968, the Czech first-secretary Novotny resigned and Alexander Dubček was elected the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Dubček started the Prague Spring reforms that tried to give the citizens of Czechoslovakia additional rights. The rights included fewer restrictions on the media, speech and travel. In May, Moscow moved the Soviet troops to the Czechoslovak border, alarmed by Dubček's ideas. In July, the Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders met to resolve their differences over the "Prague Spring". On August 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>, Czechoslovakia was invaded by armies of the USSR, Poland, Hungary and GDR and Dubček was sent to gaol. This invasion didn't face local resistance according to Stéphane Courtois, writing in 1998:

Não houve guerra local e a resistência à invasão foi pacífica, não houve conflito armado, o que não impediu que os invasores tivessem morto 90 pessoas, sobretudo em Praga. Mais de 300 checos e eslovacos ficaram gravemente feridos e mais de 500 sofreram ferimentos ligeiros.  
(499-500)

On August 27<sup>th</sup>, after four days of discussions in Moscow, the Czechoslovak politicians, including Dubček, who had been released, promised the normalisation of Czechoslovakia, including censorship. On October 16<sup>th</sup>, the Czechoslovak government accepted the "temporary" placement of Warsaw Pact troops. Still according to Courtois, the repression in Czechoslovakia was carried out by the Czechoslovaks themselves: "A repressão na Checoslováquia depressa revestiu traços originais: foi executada pela polícia e pelo exército nacionais, depois de 'normalizados'" (500). On January 1969, just before the time this scene is set, the Czechoslovak journalists agreed to self-censorship to end their conflict with the government and on the 16<sup>th</sup>, Jan Palach, a student in the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague set himself on fire in the middle of a square in Prague, trying to bring attention to the inertia of the



Czechoslovak people about the invasion. In April 17<sup>th</sup>, Dubček was forced to resign and Gustáv Husák became First Secretary. On September 27<sup>th</sup>, Dubček was excluded from the Central Committee of the Czech Communist Party and on June 26<sup>th</sup> 1970, he was finally expelled from the Party.

Jan and Ferdinand are now experiencing this lack of freedom and Ferdinand tells Jan "It's not destiny, you moron, it's the neighbours worrying about *their* slaves revolting if they get away with it" (19). He mentions that they closed down Jan's paper, although it is publishing again but under certain conditions established by censorship.

The end of this scene is also signalled by the sound of the Velvet Underground, namely the song "Waiting for the Man", written by Lou Reed. This song belongs to the same album *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, released in 1967. The song talks about someone who is going to buy drugs, twenty six dollars of heroin, in Harlem, New York City, and is waiting for the man, who is the drug dealer. When he gets the drugs, he feels good but only until the next day, showing that he is a drug addict. This song is different from the previous ones chosen by Stoppard because it doesn't talk about rough love but about addiction. Perhaps Jan and Ferdinand are waiting for "their man", are waiting for someone who can take them out of censorship and the Communist regime. The song can relate to the cycle of expectation and disappointment of an addict: the drug addict gets "high" and when that feeling is finished, he comes back to disappointment and the expectation of a new "high" moment; Jan and Ferdinand (and Czechoslovaks in general) were waiting with expectation for that "high" moment when a leader would lead them to freedom and, when they got disappointed, the cycle continued.

The Velvet Underground was a band from New York whose best-known members were Lou Reed (American) and John Cale (a Welshman). Their work was rejected by some companies that feared the controversial songs and their length. When the band met Andy Warhol, he invited them to join the Exploding Plastic Inevitable and suggested adding the singer Nico to the group. According to Jon Stratton, writing in 2005,

[i]t was Paul Morrissey with Andy Warhol who wanted to place Nico in the band. Warhol, the visual artist, was always concerned with the effect of an

image. ... Nico was not a natural blonde. She started dying her hair after she moved to Paris when she was seventeen. It made her look even more Aryan. In photographs of the Velvet Underground when she sang with them, Reed and Nico as the two singers would stand on either side of the stage, she in white, the rest of the band in black. He had his curly black hair and conventionally Jewish looks, her with her blonde hair and Germanic looks and, aurally, her German accent. It was a very powerful, but not at that time a marketable, image. (93)

Andy Warhol also designed the sleeve of the band's album *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, featuring a peeled banana. This information is mentioned in the play by Jan. The types of songs played by the group were very controversial, especially the ones mentioned in the play. According to Larkin,

[Reed's] finely-honed understanding of R&B enhanced a graphic lyricism whereby songs about drugs ('I'm Waiting For The Man'/'Heroin'), sado-masochism ('Venus in Furs') or sublimation ('I'll Be Your Mirror') were not only memorable for their subjects, but also as vibrant pop compositions. (1147)

Later, the band separated from Nico and Andy Warhol and continued playing, releasing one more album. John Cale was removed from the group and their next album was different because it was more subtle. They split but are still considered one of the most influential rock bands, indeed with a legendary status. Velvet Underground albums include *The Velvet Underground & Nico* (1967), *White Light/White Heat* (1968), *The Velvet Underground* (1969), *Loaded* (1970) and *Squeeze* (1972). According to Adrian Ribola, this band was subversive and dark:

The Velvet Underground have always been a group who turned as many stomachs as they blew minds: not everyone can groove on them. Their attraction (or repulsion) lies in the extreme areas in which they operate: insistent, relentless rhythms ... hysterical organ and guitar ... wrecked vocals. ... Their music is always unsettling and disturbing: their heads adrift in Burroughsland, a sickly sweet rotten smell in the air ... songs of Strange Pleasures, subversive and corrupt. (107)

Stoppard may have chosen the Velvet Underground due to the band's importance to underground popular music history and also because they were

inspirational for the Plastic People of the Universe. The Plastics played Velvet Underground's covers and admired them.

The following scene is now set in February 1971, in Prague, and Jan and Max meet. Jan talks about the Plastic People of the Universe. This band was forbidden to play and lost their professional licence because of undesirable elements. Jan says "their songs are morbid, they dress weird, they look like they're on drugs, and one time they sacrificed a chicken on stage." (21). But their artistic director, Jirous, to circumvent the ban, decided to "illustrate" a lecture on Andy Warhol. This strange idea is explained by Jan saying that Jirous "booked the Music F Club for a lecture on Andy Warhol, but – (He plays air-guitar.) – illustrated." (22).

Ivan Martin Jirous was born in 1944 and died in 2011. Even though he was a Czech poet, he was best known for being the artistic director of the Plastic People of the Universe. During the Communist regime, he participated in the Czechoslovak underground as he was a member of the dissident subculture. Jirous believed that expressing oneself through art could ultimately undermine the totalitarian system. He, together with Vaclav Havel, were prominent figures of different groups of dissidents. Paul Wilson in "Ivan Jirous obituary", 2011, states that

Jirous represented the raw, emotional power of a ballooning underground music scene; Havel represented the intellectual community of banned writers and academics who already enjoyed international recognition. When the two met for a night of drinking and conversation, they forged an alliance that helped pave the way for the Velvet Revolution of 1989. It also inspired the 2006 hit play *Rock 'N' Roll* by Tom Stoppard, who was fascinated by the convergence of these two approaches to dissent. He called Jirous – who is a key offstage character in the play – one of the most interesting personalities in the country's modern history. (Wilson)

The dialogue in the play continues and they talk about Eleanor, whose cancer was back, and Esme, who is "[n]ineteen and pregnant, and living in a commune." (22). They continue talking about Jan's job and saying that Husák had made a fool of Jan. He had his own column and because he was a "critic of the future", which he claims was his "socialist right" (23), he was demoted

from journalist to kitchen porter. The conversation then changes its course and they mention Syd Barrett's *The Madcap Laughs*, going back to the first song of the play. Jan says he was offered a job in Frankfurt but he doesn't like German rock bands, so he refuses. Afterwards, Max gives his opinion about politics, mentioning that he got mad when he saw a hammer and sickle and a swastika joined by an equals sign on a urinal wall. He hates to see his Communist ideas mixed with a Nazi symbol. He states he is Communist and accordingly he is seen as a "last white rhino" (25), as if he is an endangered species. Max tells Jan that he is pathetic because he wants to proclaim his socialism separately from that of the USSR, but if it weren't for the Soviets, Czechoslovakia would be a province of Germany. Jan rebuts by pointing out that "Stalin killed more Russians than Hitler" (25) and that "Marx knew we couldn't be trusted. First the dictatorship, till we learned to be good, then the utopia where a man can be a baker in the morning, a lawmaker in the afternoon and poet in the evening" (25). This dialogue is of extreme importance because it shows the different perspectives concerning politics, not only of these two characters, but it also encapsulates opposing perspectives on socialism in general. There is also a very interesting dialogue comparing English society, where people are free to move and to be unemployed, and Czechoslovak society, where people are not free to go anywhere they want but when a man loses his leg he is allowed to move and live with his sister, showing "how Communism looks after its war heroes" (26). Jan loves England, but he shows he cares about his country too saying "If I was English I wouldn't care if Communism in Czechoslovakia reformed itself into a pile of pig shit" (27) and Max accuses him of being someone cut off from reality: "For you, freedom means "leave me alone". For the masses it means, "Give me a chance"." (28). While they are having this argument, they are listening again to "Golden Hair" by Syd Barrett. The fact that they are listening to this song may be related to the fact that Barrett was accused of being cut off from reality too, although they are talking about politics and Barrett's problem was related to drug abuse.

During the blackout at the end of this scene, it is possible to listen to "Astronomy Domine" by Pink Floyd. This strange song was written and composed by Syd Barrett and is the first track on the Pink Floyd's debut album *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* from 1967. "Domine" means "Lord" in Latin and

perhaps the title of the song refers to the space race between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics at that time. The song has several references to planets and moons and has also a reference to Dan Dare, a British science fiction comic hero created by illustrator Frank Hampson, which was set in space with Dan Dare as the chief pilot of the Interplanet Space Fleet. This song gives the play a certain ambience of progress and strangeness. Generally, space was connoted to progress but also with something mysterious, as David Bowie showed in his song "Space Oddity". About Pink Floyd's song, Rob Chapman, writing in 2010, states that

[o]n "Astronomy Domine", Syd the imagist poet comes to the fore for the first time and the meaning of the lyrics is almost wholly subservient to the shapes they make. The song is built on layers of internal rhyme, onomatopoeia and alliteration (one of the few occasions that Syd resorted to the device) as Syd revels in wordplay for its own sake. The imagery conveys a strong sense of synaesthesia (a condition which some have suggested that Syd experienced), as if designed to replicate the sensations of a light show, with colours colliding ... (156).

The next scene is set in the summer of the following year, 1972, and Jan, Magda and Ferdinand are in Prague. Historically, on March 1972, the Union of Czechoslovak journalists had announced that 40 per cent of journalists had been fired since August 1968 for not following the government line. Jan came back from the police station where he had been a witness for Jirous, who had been arrested for being drunk outside a party. Magda, a new character in the play, is trying to make Jan sign a petition for an amnesty. He refuses to sign it because "first ... it won't help Hubl and the others, but mainly because helping them is not the real purpose" (30). Here Jan points out that Ferdinand and his friends are signing the petition just to draw some attention to themselves, they are being selfish because, according to Jan's point of view, the petition will not fulfil its primary goal.

Jan's attention is drawn away because he gets mad: Ferdinand took his Syd Barrett records to tape them and didn't ask for permission. Ferdinand appears and gives the records back, while they discuss the fact that Syd Barrett no longer plays with Pink Floyd. "Pink Floyd without Syd Barrett, and Syd Barrett without Pink Floyd" (31), and they continue saying that "the Floyd dumped

Barrett" (32). This scene continues showing Jan and Ferdinand's love for rock 'n' roll, as they show their concern about the bands they listen to. Moreover, the fact that Jan gets mad when someone touches his records without permission prepares theatregoers to imagine Jan's shock when his records are smashed by the police.

As the characters are talking about the band, the next blackout is also by Pink Floyd: "Jugband Blues". This song belongs to their second album *A Saucerful of Secrets* (1968) and was also written by Syd Barrett. It was his only compositional contribution to the album, as well as his last song recorded by the band. This strange song talks about Syd Barrett calling people's attention, not because he was losing his mind, but because he wanted the people around him to stop accusing him: he says "It's awfully considerate of you to think of me here" and sarcastically, "I'm wondering who could be writing this song" and showing that he knew he was being driven away from the band. The peculiar sounds of the song continue the ambience of strangeness. It tries to imitate the sound of the jug bands that were very common in the 1920s, and in spite of the fact that Pink Floyd could never sound like a jugband, there is a certain similarity in an instrument used in the Pink Floyd song but composed as a calmer "blues" song.

Pink Floyd is one of the most celebrated rock bands of all time. The band was founded in 1965 and the original group was comprised of Syd Barrett, Roger Waters, Nick Mason and Rick Wright. According to Mark Blake, writing in 2008, Cambridge is important for the band:

The shared history of Pink Floyd's three chief protagonists – Barrett, Gilmour and Waters – is irrevocably tied to the city of their youth. Cambridge's reputation as a seat of learning began as early as the thirteenth century. With the striking architecture of its colleges and the River Cam winding its way through the city, it retains a traditional English quality. Yet as a counterpoint to any quaintness, the landscape around the city comprises rugged fenland. The atmosphere seeped into Pink Floyd's music from the start. (12)

On account of Barrett's disintegration, the rest of the band brought in David Gilmour, a friend of Barrett's, and Barrett left the band. Tom Stoppard explains

what happened to Syd Barrett in an interview with Michael Riedel and Susan Haskins, in the American programme *Theater Talk*, n.d.:

There were four members of Pink Floyd and Syd became rather volatile and unreliable. And David Gilmour was brought in to work as a cover for him. For a brief period there were five of them with Gilmour and Syd Barrett playing. It didn't last long and, you know, they had this big Rolls Royce or a Rolls Bentley, a big car, which they used to go to their gigs and pick each other up on the way. There were four of them in the car and they were heading for a gig on the south coast somewhere and they were passing, they were in Notting Hill, and they were on their way to pick up the last member, who was Syd, who'd actually been pretty much out of it for several concerts. Somebody, they never quite decided who said it, but somebody said "Are we gonna pick up Syd?" and somebody said "No". They went off without him and that was it. (Riedel, Haskins)

They released several albums that were considered vanguard progressive rock. Their concerts were very successful, gathering thousands of fans. One of their biggest hits was the album *Dark Side Of The Moon* (1973). David MacGregor Johnston, writing in 2007, states:

In its own way, Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* also challenges the very definition of music. As early champions of synthesizers and tape loops, Pink Floyd was derided by critics as talentless button-pushers. But it was precisely this unconventional use of musical technology that made *The Dark Side of the Moon* the masterpiece that it is. By technologically altering the recorded music and lyrics and by adding decidedly non-musical elements such as ringing clocks, station announcements, and interview responses, *Dark Side* moves away from our usual categories of musical analysis. (136)

After rumours of a break up, they released another popular album *The Wall* (1979). This was directed against the educational system. The album was later performed in a mythical concert by the remains of the Berlin Wall in Germany in 1990.

Advancing two years, the following scene is set in the spring of 1974 and again we find Jan and Ferdinand in Prague discussing music and politics. Jan has a petition about the Plastic People of the Universe he wants Ferdinand and

his friends to sign. At that time, many concerts were underground and in secret places but while young people found those places, so did the police. Jan describes the police ending those concerts and hitting and arresting people. Joseph Yanosik, writing in 1996, states what had happened two years before:

In June of 1972, a concert in downtown Prague featuring the Plastic People was cancelled after drunken militia began scuffling with fans. The Plastics were banned from playing in Prague and retreated into the countryside. (Yanosik)

In the play, they mention that Jirous is in gaol for free expression and Jan explains that as he has long hair, someone called him a girl in a pub and then Jirous called him a "bald-headed Bolshevik" (34) and he turned out to be state security. This lack of freedom of speech is shown in the next part of the dialogue between the two friends. They fight and again their different political ideas arise. Ferdinand calls Jan a "political imbecile" (35) and insists that he won't sign the petition because although Ferdinand says they are putting themselves "on the line for a society where the Plastics can play their music" (36), this is the only aspect of what Ferdinand says that Jan assent to. This shows the fear that people had to go against the regime. If he signed that petition he could be designated as a friend of the dissident movement. Wilson mentions this same episode:

By this time, Jirous's wicked tongue, prodigious thirst for alcohol, and aggressive demeanour (his nickname, "Magor", means "a crazy man") led to frequent clashes with the authorities. He was first imprisoned in 1973 for 12 months for causing a disturbance in a bar. While he was inside, the underground kept on growing, undeterred. When he got out in 1974, he wrote a manifesto defining this phenomenon as a "second culture" and those who lived in it as wishing to "live in truth". (Wilson)

Ferdinand also mentions that Havel wrote an open letter talking about things that had gone wrong in Czechoslovakia but Jan insists that music, the Plastics, are more important. They even compare Havel to Jirous, but Havel cares about his country and writes things about it, while Jirous apparently doesn't care about anything. According to Jan, he doesn't even bother to cut his hair, and the policeman are more scared by people who don't really care



than by the ones who do, people who care enough to keep their thoughts to themselves and, in this way, are coerced. Thus, Jan compares the Plastics to those who don't care, "they are unbribable" (37). That is, they only cared about their music. Even though they had an important role in the history of Czechoslovakia, the Plastics only cared about their music and their songs don't even have political lyrics but it was Vaclav Havel who made them important. The power of his interpretation transformed a group of socially alienated rock 'n' rollers into a dramatic embodiment of the desire for freedom, clashing with the Communist regime of censorship.

At the end of this scene, Stoppard suggests the next blackout, again by the Rolling Stones, "It's Only Rock 'n' Roll". This song talks about rock 'n' roll but, at the same time, refers to performing for the public as if it were suicide on stage: "If I could stick my pen in my heart/Spill it all over the stage/Would it satisfy you?", the song says. While it appears that there is also the idea that the song is only about that type of music and it doesn't matter what people think about it, if it is good or bad, "I said I know it's only rock 'n' roll but I like it", in fact it can be seen to articulate a desire for musical freedom, for the freedom to enjoy whatever music one likes, and by extension the freedom to choose one's pleasures. This song was released as a single in 1974 and Larkin states that

1974's "It's Only Rock 'n' Roll" proved a better song title than a single, while the undistinguished album of the same name saw the group reverting to Tamla Motown for the Temptations' "Ain't Too Proud To Beg". (961)

In the play, as the song follows the dialogue between Jan and Ferdinand about the Plastic People of the Universe, perhaps we can relate both ideas. The Plastics only cared about their music in the same way the Stones tell us that it is only rock 'n' roll. That is, on one level it is "only" rock 'n' roll, but on other level it represents a desire for individual freedom that makes it a political statement, whatever the Rolling Stones or the Plastics believe.

Set in the autumn of 1975, the next scene shows two policemen that are in Jan's house looking at his record collection. After they leave, Ferdinand says he is being followed everywhere by the two policemen but that they usually stay outside, as this was a normal procedure. Here there is a twist in the way the

characters feel and think about their country's politics. Jan and Ferdinand talk about prison and Jan says he is afraid of it, accusing Ferdinand of going to prison for reasons Jan has forgotten before he even gets out, saying that he is heroic but stupid. Ferdinand mentions that he met Jirous in gaol which was an inspiration. Ferdinand also reflects about the importance of the Plastics, saying that other bands have better musicians but "they are the band safe from the desire of recognition. In the alternative culture, success is failure." (39).

Perhaps this sentence can be related to the band chosen by Stoppard to finish the scene and the following blackout: "Chinatown Shuffle" by the Grateful Dead. This song never made it to disk but there are some recordings of it. It is a lively song that seems very traditional. It talks about the lack of support, meaning that people need to rely on themselves and be prepared to face the consequences for their actions. The lyrics say that "if you fall in my direction/don't expect no help at all", and perhaps mean that if someone has problems, he/she has to rely just on him/herself, and shouldn't expect to be helped after the actions are done, which could be a comment on Jan's attempt to stand outside political action. On the other hand, "relying on yourself" is a right-wing mantra, opposed to the ideals of Communism in which the community takes care of its members, so there may be social critique in the words: a bitter denunciation of individualistic American society.

The original line-up of the Grateful Dead from 1965 comprised Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir, Phil Lesh, Ron McKernan and Bill Kreutzmann. This American rock band was connected to Acid Rock and experimented legal LSD. Larkin states that

[t]heir music, which started out as straightforward rock and R&B, germinated into a hybrid of styles, but has the distinction of being long, wandering and improvisational. By the time their first album was released in 1967 they were already a huge cult band. (520)

Their concerts became longer and longer, using the same songs. The fans even suggested a marathon concert and both the fans and the band were under the effect of drugs. Some of the members of the band died of complications due to drug and alcohol abuse: Ron "Pigpen" McKernan (liver failure), Jerry Garcia (heart attack after drug rehabilitation). According to Brad E. Lucas, in

his article "Bakhtinian Carnival, Corporate Capital, and the Last Decade of the Dead",

[t]he performances of the Grateful Dead can ... be considered carnivals—traveling cultural celebrations that continued for twenty-five years, only to decline to spectacle in the last years before the end of the band in 1995. (79-80)

Although the Grateful Dead faced many difficulties in their long career, they are still considered one of the most important American bands in rock history. Jason Palm, writing in 1999, explains this phenomenon:

the Grateful Dead developed a fascinating and realistic critique of the American Dream. Furthermore, this complex but implicit understanding gave the band the artistic foundation for creating and developing an intelligent and interesting body of work. By rejecting the simple stance of other sixties bands, it discovered a path into the heart of the American psyche that has been unrivalled in rock ensemble work, especially over the long haul. (149)

The Grateful Dead may be connected to Pink Floyd considering the fact that both bands had a strong drug culture and their music was psychedelic.

Set back in Cambridge, May 1976, new characters are presented in the next scene. Nigel, who is thirty, is Esme's husband (and they have a daughter called Alice) and he asks Max if he still is a member of the Communist Party: Max answers "yes". Nigel asks him if with Communism the newspaper he works for wouldn't be allowed to criticise the government. After, there is a dialogue between Max and Lenka, a friend of Jan who stayed in England because she is studying Philology and Classical Studies.

Lenka is studying Sappho with Eleanor and they have a long argument about Sappho's view on love. They are discussing the best way of translating some of the stanzas. Eleanor says that for Sappho, "[e]xperiencing love is different from experiencing a bee sting" (45) but Lenka argues that "[t]he paradox ... is that Sappho is describing her own consciousness from outside itself, she describes the feeling of love objectively as she might describe being stung by a bee" (45). They continue discussing the concept of love and Max

tries to argue with them but Eleanor isn't pleased, sensing something unusual between her husband and Lenka. After the discussion, Lenka tells Max that Jan is in prison in Czechoslovakia, arrested with the Plastic People of the Universe. Max understands at that moment that he could be in the same position if he had signed the letter/petition Jan had given him when he was in Czechoslovakia. Max sees Esme and tells her that Jan is in prison. Esme is really upset, maybe because she has feelings for Jan. Max asks Eleanor what the problem was and she tells him that on Jan's last night in England, Esme had asked him "to take her virginity" (49) but he didn't do it and took one of her records instead. This passage refers to most of the important themes included by Stoppard: Sappho and feminism, Communism and political clashes, music. The fact that Lenka is studying Sappho is crucial to the end of the play, because she continues Eleanor's work of translating Sappho's fragmented poems and, thus, continuing to study the role of women and femininity in society. The reflection about Communism between two different generations shows that, although with different perspectives, communist ideas will endure. Finally, music continues related to repression and the fact that Jan takes Esme's records instead of making love to her shows how much he respects and may have feelings for her.

Max thinks about what it is to be a Communist, remembering things from his youth that were different.

The Party is losing confidence in its creed. If capitalism can be destroyed by anti-racism, feminism, gay rights, ecological good practice and every special interest already covered by the Social Democrats, is there a lot of point in being a Communist? – to spend one's life explaining: no, Stalin wasn't it, either? Why do people go on as if there's a danger we might forget Communism's crimes, when the danger is we'll forget its achievements? (50).

He questions whether he should get out of the Party but Eleanor doesn't care. She is only concerned about the way Max sees her, because she has lost parts of her body to cancer (breasts, ovaries, womb ...). What matters, she feels, is the soul and not the body and biological mind, as she tells Max:

I don't want your 'mind' which you can make out of beer cans. Don't bring it to my funeral. I want your grieving soul or nothing. I don't want your amazing biological machine – I want what you love me with." (51).

This statement almost at the end of the scene may be connected to the song that is used during the blackout: "Welcome to the Machine" by Pink Floyd, the longest blackout suggested by Stoppard, three minutes and fifty seconds, in spite of the fact that the song is longer than that. According to Stoppard's suggestion, all the music fragments should last thirty to sixty seconds. The song belongs to the 1975 album *Wish You Were Here* and contains heavily processed synthesizers, acoustic guitars and tape effects. The song describes the band's disillusionment due to the importance of earning money, the machine, rather than using music as a way of expressing one's feelings. As Blake states,

Waters wrote two new songs on his own, "Welcome to the Machine", "Have a Cigar" ... "Welcome to the Machine" was a unyielding bleak dissertation on the human condition, and, more personally, those – a rock 'n' roll band, maybe – who spent their lives in search of a dream, only to find that the machine runs on dreams and very little else. "People are very vulnerable to their own blindness, their own greed, their own need to be loved," explained Waters. "Success has to be a real need. And the dream is that when you are successful, when you're a star, you'll be fine, everything will go wonderfully well. That's the dream and everybody knows it's an empty one. The song is about the business situation which I find myself in. One's encouraged to be absent because one's not encouraged to pay attention to reality." (225)

The song, like Eleanor, is only interested in the love and not something mechanical, including the rigidity of a political creed. The lyrics of the song say that it is compulsory to do what the machine wants, it controls you: "What did you dream? It's alright we told you what to dream". According to Blake, even the live concerts gave that idea:

Gerald Scarfe's animations were also employed on "Shine On Your Crazy Diamond" and "Welcome to the Machine". "Now that we finally had the music to work with, the animators were able to do even better than they had on the last tour", recalls Scarfe. The visual extravaganza of severed

heads, robotic reptiles and seas of blood matched the brutal mood of the music. (250)

The use of all this paraphernalia on stage and the content of Pink Floyd's song gave the band an aura of progress and of machinery. In contrast, Eleanor just wants to feel human warmth, she doesn't want a love related to machinery and progress but only a tender and gentle love which will give her the human contact she needs at that stage of her disease. This opposition is subtle but important in a way that Stoppard encourages us to think about men vs. machines.

The next scene is set in Prague, in November 1976, and all of Jan's records have been smashed and scattered among torn-up album covers. This is one of the most powerful scenes in the entire play concerning the strength of censorship. The theatregoer has been exposed to the importance of Jan's records from the beginning of the play. Ferdinand is stunned at the debris. He is carrying one of Jan's records (the Beach Boys) he had taken when Jan was in prison. Then, Jan explains that he was arrested at "Jirous wedding", where there was a concert by the Plastics and the police arrested everybody. This is a historical reference: in 1976, members of the rock 'n' roll underground were sent to gaol for spreading anti-socialist ideas. Yanosik mentions that

The Plastics held a Second Music Festival of the Second Culture, also known as "Magor [Jirous]'s Wedding", in the small town of Bojanovice on February 21, 1976. In response to this festival, on March 17, 1976, the Secret Police arrested 27 musicians and their friends including all the Plastic People. In addition, over 100 fans were interrogated. The band's homemade equipment was seized, their homes were searched and tapes, films and notebooks were confiscated. Paul Wilson was expelled from the country soon after and returned to Canada. (Yanosik)

In the play, Jan thanks Ferdinand and others for getting him out of prison; he knew that they were on radio and TV in America. After, they talk about the typed document that Ferdinand carries. He is collecting signatures for Charter 77.

In the same scene of the play there is a change of time, which is set in the following year, 1977, during summer, but still in Prague. Milan, who had

appeared before in the play, is now someone important. Max says that he is now a "big fish", meaning that he has an important job, but Milan answers that it is only medium size, with a desk. Max is in Prague because he was invited to speak at a conference at the Philosophy Faculty but Milan warns him that he skipped an important dinner and that there was pressure to withdraw his invitation to the conference. During this conversation, Max says he left the Party but didn't go public and we discover that Eleanor has died. Max wants Milan to help Jan, who is in a difficult position: "Anyone who gives him a job gets a visit next day and he loses the job. I'm told he's sleeping on friends' floors, living as a beggar." (55). But Milan doesn't want to help. He says "Your friend is so unimportant, I'd be ashamed to notice his existence." (55). Max has nothing to offer and Milan asks him to let him know when he has. This passage shows us the corruption inside the government because Milan will only help Jan if that gets him something in return and he prefers to let Jan live poorly than to smudge his own name. Max and Milan also argue about Chartists and human rights and Milan says "All this 'human rights' is foreigners thinking they're better than us" (56). They split up and leave and again we find Jan and Ferdinand together. Jan finishes reading Charter 77 and Ferdinand says they have two hundred signatures and that he is going to post it to Husák and copies to the foreign press. Jan signs it while listening to the Beach Boys, the only record still in good condition, and Ferdinand says that he will tape all the others for him. Jan finishes saying "Hey, Ferdo, it's only rock 'n' roll" (57), picking up broken records. The sentence gives a sense of abandonment, as if Jan was giving up because his records were smashed, but reminds us once again that it never is "only rock 'n' roll after all, whatever Jan insists.

The song "Wouldn't It Be Nice" by the Beach Boys is the last song of Act One. Stoppard may have chosen this group because, when Jan's records are all smashed, the only record that isn't smashed is by the Beach Boys, because Ferdinand had borrowed it. As the song talks about frustrations of youth and the characters were discussing Charter 77, Stoppard may have seen here an opportunity to show the audience that Chartists wanted something but had to wait for it, just like a teenager waits to fulfil his dreams. The song belongs to the 1966 album *Pet Sounds*, the album that elevated the Beach Boys to serious musicians who finally received approval from the counter-culture.

The Beach Boys, compared to all the other bands mentioned in the play, may be considered the “odd” ones, because they didn’t apparently go against the norm. Their lyrics reflected a superficial Southern California youth culture of surfing, cars, and light romance. They became the most famous band associated with this sub-culture because they used quite advanced forms of studio recordings with both a distinctive sound and quite elegant harmonies. According to Robert G. Anstey, writing in 2004,

The Beach Boys became an American tradition and they typified the “All-American” band. They were clean cut and spoke of everything that American parents would want in young men. (1)

The Beach Boys were created in 1961 by Brian Wilson, Carl Wilson, Dennis Wilson, Al Jardine and Mike Love, three brothers, one cousin and a school friend. Larkin states that “they unconsciously created one of the longest running, compulsively fascinating and bitterly tragic sagas in popular music” (115). Brian Wilson, the elder brother, was the first to get interested in composing songs for the band and became obsessed with harmonics and melody and one of the first songs was “Surfin’” (because one of them loved surfing) and so they adopted the name “Beach Boys”. Murray Wilson, the three boys’ father, became their manager and got a recording contract in 1962. In 1963 they had a hit in the United Kingdom and after that they released eight albums in just over two years. Brian kept writing and his songs were technically more complex than their appeared. Until in *Pet Sounds* he tried to compete with The Beatles. Again Larkin adds that

[w]hile their instrumental prowess was average, the immaculate combination of each member’s voice, delivered a sound that was unmistakable. Both Carl and Brian had perfect pitch, even though Brian was deaf in one ear (reputedly caused through his father’s beatings). (115)

Their masterpiece, *Pet Sounds*, released in 1966, got outstanding reviews but didn’t sell much. Anstey states that

The album [*Pet Sounds*] was so unique and creative that it has become a classic over the years but didn’t really become a best-seller for The Beach Boys because it wasn’t really a commercial album. It was an experimental



studio album that took advantage of some great ideas, technology and creative genius by Brian. One listen to this album and it soon becomes obvious that it is Brian's masterpiece and very much a product of his own personal feelings at the time. (51)

Life wasn't easy and Brian Wilson had two nervous breakdowns and began depending on barbiturates. The band started having trouble among the members and the manager but they continued playing. There were conflicts between Brian Wilson and the rest of the band because he was writing songs that were too different from the usual ones. Brian retreated to bed, where he stayed for many years. Dennis Wilson began writing songs but got involved with a mass murderer and lost his money and home. After that, the band was able to regain their success in the USA and in 1971 they had an album which became their renaissance. However some of their later albums didn't do well. In 1974, a compilation of their songs called *Endless Summer* rocketed to the top of the US charts for 71 weeks. In 1977 the band signed a record contract with CBS and continued releasing albums, but Dennis was now using cocaine. He released a solo album but Carl also fell victim to cocaine. Larkin states that

[i]n 1993 the band continue to tour, although their present show is merely an oldies package. Their career has been rolling, like the tide their great songs evoked, constantly in and out, reaching incredible highs and extraordinary troughs. Through all the appalling experiences however they still reign supreme as the most successful American group in pop history. (117)

The band still tours nowadays with Beach Boys related shows.

Act Two returns to Cambridge, ten years later, in the summer of 1987. Many important events had happened in these ten years. On January 1977, in Czechoslovakia, hundreds of people signed Charter 77, accusing the Czechoslovak government of violating human rights which they had agreed upon, as mentioned above. In England, on May 5<sup>th</sup> 1979, Margaret Thatcher became the British Prime Minister and, in the same month in Czechoslovakia, eleven leading "Chartists", who had signed Charter 77, were arrested, including Václav Havel (one of the first Spokesmen for Charter 77). In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became the Soviet leader and in January 1987, he announced

*perestroika* but the Czechoslovak leadership refused to publish Gorbachev's speech. In April, Gorbachev visited Prague and in December Husák resigned from the Czechoslovak party but retained his presidency. According to Jeff Checkel, writing in 1993, Gorbachev's importance was related to his

revolution in foreign and security affairs represented a triumph of knowledge and reason over dogmatic Leninist ideology. Underlying this simple statement of fact (for it is indeed true) is the even more basic realization that "ideas" and new knowledge played a key role in bringing about the monumental changes in Soviet international behavior during the Gorbachev era. (271)

In the beginning of this Act a song by U2 is suggested, "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" from the album *The Joshua Tree* released in 1987. Again, Stoppard chose a song released in the same year the scene is set. This song could be either a love song or a religious song. The lyrics say "I have climbed the highest mountain/I have run through the fields/Only to be with you", meaning that the singer has searched for what he wants everywhere but he still hasn't found what he is looking for, whether he is looking for love or for God. About this song, Visnja Cogan, writing in 2007, states that

[a]nother song that has become very famous is "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For". The Edge describes it as a Gospel song. It is a song about uncertainty and the crisis of faith ... But the most interesting event in the history of the song is when it was appropriated by a Harlem gospel choir, the New Voices of Freedom. (82)

U2 are an Irish rock band formed in 1977. Its members are the famous Bono Vox (Paul David Hewson), The Edge (David Howell Evans), Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen. They started using the name *Feedback*, playing Rolling Stones and The Beach Boys cover versions. Afterwards, they became *Hype* and finally settled with the name *U2* in 1978. After a few years without great success, *Boy* (1980), the band's first album, became successful. Their album *War* (1983) was very controversial, according to Larkin:

The album's theme covered both religious and political conflicts, especially in the key track "Sunday Bloody Sunday", which had already emerged as one of the group's most startling and moving live songs. (1131)

Subsequently, they continued their ascension to global success: Bono had a duet with Bob Dylan and the group later established their own record company. They also became famous for their attention to humanitarian causes. According to Larkin, the album *The Joshua Tree* developed an expansive sound which was especially suited to the ambition of their themes:

The familiar themes of spiritual salvation permeated the work and the quest motif was particularly evident on both "With or Without You" and "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For", which both reached number 1 in the US charts. (1131)

This band was subversive in many different ways. Their songs talk about human rights and world problems, as Cogan states,

[t]wo songs that were recorded for *The Joshua Tree* album came out of that South American experience. The first one is "Mothers of the Disappeared", which describes the unbearable wait of mothers whose children have vanished, generally they have been abducted by government forces for airing political views and fighting against the regime, and were then murdered and buried in unmarked graves. The second song is "Bullet the Blue Sky". Bono was witness to the fighter planes flying overhead and U2 tried to render that sound and feeling in the music. (125)

In general, U2 are committed to using music in the service of social concerns, as Matthew Perpetua states in his 2011 article,

U2 will be providing five million euros – roughly \$7.2 million dollars – through 2015 to fund music schooling for Irish children. The donation will mainly be put toward musical equipment and salaries for music teachers. An additional two million euros (\$2.9 million) will be given to Ireland Funds, another charitable group supported by people of Irish ancestry around the globe.

U2's donation comes soon after major cuts to Irish education spending in the government's attempt at an economic bailout. The band's donation is designed so that by the end of the five-year term, the government can take over funding for the programs. (Perpetua)

U2 continue to be a cohesive and consistent band that still has fans all over the world, their most recent album, *No Line on the Horizon*, having appeared in 2009.

In the play, Alice is now sixteen years old and is talking to her mother, Esme, about the Piper. Esme recalls that he "is a beautiful boy as old as music, half-goat and half-god." (58). Alice questions her mother because she only saw "an old baldy on a bike" (59). Esme reckons the times she met the Piper, they "were all beautiful then, blazing with beauty" (59), comparing him to the Great God Pan, a reference which takes him outside immediate social issues to a more elemental and metaphysical realm. Max appears and tells Esme he is considering voting for Thatcher, a shocking admission for the play's traditional communist, but conversation reverts to the memory of the Piper, who, it is revealed, was a real figure: "he was quite famous, with wild black hair ... he looked like a rock star, but he blew his mind and the band sort of dropped him" (66). Because this once more evokes Syd Barrett, the blackout of this scene is again with a Pink Floyd song: "Wish You Were Here".

The song "Wish You Were Here" belongs to the 1975 album of the same name. It refers to Syd Barrett, his breakdown, and his alienation from other people. Blake, talking about a concert in 2005, says about this song that

[i]n the context of today's performance, "Wish You Were Here" sounds like what it is: a simple love song to a departed friend. ... The song is short, simple and rapturously received. Its inspiration and meaning is not lost on this audience. It is a song partly about the one member of the original Pink Floyd not on stage tonight. (8)

In the play it looks back to a time when the contribution of popular music to a sense of the possibility of social change was more pronounced. Barrett becomes a symbol of hope wasted, of the disjunction between the personal and eccentric and the disappointment at the way society and politics have developed, both in Britain and in Czechoslovakia.

The next scene is set in Prague, 1987, where Jan and Nigel meet. Nigel says that he is trying to find a story about dissidents and that means trying to interview Havel. They find themselves in front of "The John Lennon wall" and

they start talking about music. This monument contains an image of Lennon which was painted on a wall in a secluded square opposite the French Embassy after John Lennon's murder on 8 December 1980. He became a pacifist hero for many young Czechoslovaks. Despite repeated coats of whitewash, the secret police never managed to keep it clean for long, and the Lennon Wall became a political focus for Prague youth.

Nigel gives Jan a handful of cassettes sent by Esme and Jan also wants to send a record to her by the Plastic People of the Universe, but it is an illegal one and Nigel might get into trouble if he is found with one. Then they start talking about the Plastics and Jan explains the band's story: the band was persecuted by the police, after their last concert the building was burnt down, then emigration, prison. This is a reference to the band's last concert when its members were arrested for disturbing the peace. This event will be explained further on in this analysis. Jan also mentions the *Rockfest* and says that "Even a Communist government wants to be popular. Rock 'n' roll costs nothing so we have a rock festival at the Palace of Culture." (72). According to Roman Lipcik, writing in 1990, this was also a way of state control:

The second half of the Eighties brought about an illusory improvement. Responsibility for rock music fell to the Communist-controlled Socialist Union of Youth. The government's tactic was clear: If we don't provide rock to young people, they will revolt, so let's give it to them but control it with an iron hand. Rock under state supervision — that was the name of the game in the late Eighties. (Lipcik)

The Plastics were invited to play there but they had to change their name to PPU and they got a female singer, but the police found out and cut off the electricity. Finally they were invited to play in Brno and they were mentioned as "A Band from Prague" and this turned into a big crisis inside the group and they split. "There is no Plastics now, after twenty years, it's over." (73). As Nigel finds out that this happened the day before, he thinks this might be the story he is looking for. This situation related to the Plastics is a return to an idea present throughout the play that is the selling out of our convictions. If we believe in something, how far should we compromise? The Plastics didn't compromise their beliefs and that led to their break up. Although they were given the option

of giving in to the regime and continuing playing, they did not compromise their integrity.

As expected, the blackout is through John Lennon's "Bring It on Home". This is a 1962 soul song, written and recorded by R&B singer-songwriter Sam Cooke. John Lennon recorded it on his 1975 album *Rock 'N' Roll* but Stoppard suggests the version from the *Anthology* box set. The song talks about a man trying to get his woman to come back home, saying that he will give everything to her: "I'll give you jewelry and money too", although it ends quite unhopeful ("You know I'll always be your slave/Till I'm dead and buried in my grave"). It can also be a declaration of faithfulness to someone/something we love or believe in. In a world where people often aren't faithful, this song is going against the world by saying that the singer believes people can rely on him, whether we are talking about a partner, a political cause, a group or a band.

Besides being a member of The Beatles, John Lennon had also a very important symbolic role in peace movements and peace discourses, according to Larkin:

Together with his wife Yoko Ono, he attempted to transform the world through non-musical means. To many they appeared as naïve crackpots, Yoko in particular has been victim of some appalling insults in the press. ... Their bed-in in Amsterdam and Montreal, their black bag appearances on stage, their innocent flirting with political activists and radicals, all received massive media attention. These events were in search of world peace, which regrettably was unachievable. (701)

In Lennon's solo career, he became famous when his first album showed him and Yoko naked on the cover. This image showed how faithful and dedicated Lennon was to Yoko, showing his vulnerability through this statement of love. The cover became more famous than the music itself. He continued releasing albums and fighting for what he considered to be right with his anti-war movements. His most important and well-known song, although very simple musically, is "Imagine", which was released in October 1971. His songs often showed angry lyrics with melodic songs. He also sang about women's rights and showed his marital problems openly. After some drug and alcohol abuse, he reunited with Yoko and they had a son. John Lennon was brutally murdered by

a gunman in New York in 1980, outside his apartment in Manhattan. According to Larkin, the fans reacted:

Almost from the moment that John's heart stopped in the Roosevelt Hospital the whole world reacted in unprecedented mourning. His records were re-released and experienced similar sales and chart position to that of the Beatles' heyday. (702)

These albums were: *Unfinished Music No1 – Two Virgins* (1968), *The Plastic Ono Band; Live Peace In Toronto 1969* (1970), *Rock 'n' Roll* (1975), *Double Fantasy* (1980) and *Milk and Honey* (1984).

After Lennon's song, there is a jump in time to 1990 but, historically, 1989 was a very important year in history because two important facts occurred: the Berlin Wall fell and the Czech Communist leadership resigned. In Czechoslovakia, the so called Velvet Revolution began spontaneously with a student march on November 17<sup>th</sup> 1989 that turned into an anti-government protest with students uttering anti-Communist slogans. Despite the fact that it was a peaceful protest, some students were beaten by the police. Following the student protest, mass protests were held throughout Czechoslovakia and political strategies were discussed by many actors and playwrights who belonged to the dissident movement. A collection of spokespeople of the democratic movement was established and the group demanded the resignation of the Communist government, the release of prisoners and investigations into police action. On December 10<sup>th</sup>, the first non-Communist Czech government, the first in 41 years, was sworn in by Husák, who resigned immediately afterwards. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, the Federal Assembly unanimously elected Václav Havel as President of the Republic. Finally, in February 1990, Havel met Gorbachev in Moscow to agree on the immediate withdrawal of the soviet troops from Czechoslovakia. According to Tony Mitchell, writing in 1992,

One of the main symbols of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia was the inversion of the year 1989 into 1968, evoking the Prague Spring and a return to the democratic principles of the Dubček government. Re-creating the output of a suppressed past where freedom of expression was possible has become the main sustaining force of Czech culture since 1989: theatres are full of formerly banned plays by Havel and other dissident playwrights,

while art galleries exhibit previously censored artists and political cartoonists. Pop musicians can now perform covers of Beatles and Rolling Stones songs on the streets, and there is even a flourishing bluegrass and country and western movement with an estimated 200 bands in Prague alone. (191)

These changes allowed, finally, freedom in broad sense and these are the historical settings that allowed Czech Republic to become what it is and represents today.

The next scene is set in Cambridge immediately after that period: the summer of 1990. A special lunch is about to happen: Alice's father is coming to lunch and she will meet her new stepmother but Max is also going to have a visit, someone from Prague and they need two extra seats on the table. After being asked about the visitors, Max says "[h]e teaches philosophy at Charles University... ex-dissident – he was in prison briefly." (79). Max and Stephen argue about the Communist Party: Stephen belongs to it and Max left it some years ago; he explains how the political scenery is by that time:

The tankies... How the years roll by. Dubcek is back. Russia agrees to withdraw its garrisons. Czechoslovakia takes her knickers off to welcome capitalism. And all that remains of August '68 is a derisive nickname for the only real Communists left in the Communist Party. I'm exactly as old as the October Revolution..." (79).

Once again the different political perspectives lead to long dialogues between two different generations. This comment seems ironic because, although Czechoslovaks had been fighting against a Communist regime, the idea that capitalism is entering the country does not seem to please Max. It seems that capitalism will erase the efforts of dissidents when fighting Communism.

After this long argument about politics, Stephen tells Esme the newspaper has an article on Syd Barrett and it describes "him as a vegetable with the wild staring eyes of a frightened animal" (82) and "[a] drug-crazed zombie who barks like a dog" (83). Alice mentions a new Barrett album with a different take on "Golden Hair". Through Jan and Esme's conversation, it is finally revealed that the Piper, the strange character, is Syd Barrett. Barrett is "the Great God Pan" mentioned at times in the play. All the references which appeared before only gave us a faint idea. This passage shows us once more



the importance of Syd Barrett to Stoppard. He is seen as a mythical character and Stoppard, in his 2007 article "Here's Looking at You, Syd", explains his fascination with Barrett:

Barrett died, 60 years old, a month after my play opened, 5 years after that photograph of him cycling home with his shopping from the supermarket. When I first saw the photo—in Willis's book—I found myself staring at it for minutes, at the thickset body supporting the heavy, shaven potato head, comparing it with images of Barrett in his "dark angel" days ..., to a snatched photo of a burly bloke with Colgate and Super Soft toilet paper in his bicycle basket... Perhaps it was because Barrett dropped out of sight for decades that time seemed not merely to connect the two images in the usual commonplace way (he used to look like this, then later he looked like that, so what?), but also to sever them. A person's identity is no mystery to itself. We are each conscious of ourselves and there is only one person in there: the difference between this photo of me and that one is unmysterious. But everyone else's identity we construct from observable evidence, and the reason I was so fascinated by Barrett on his bicycle was that for a mind-wrenching moment, he was—literally—a different person. (Stoppard)

After the dialogue about Barrett, Jan and Max talk about different subjects and Jan says that he had a purpose when he was in Cambridge years ago being Max's pupil: he was supposed to do "a character study on Max Morrow". But he also says that he didn't care because he was at Cambridge: "They thought they were using me, but I was using them." (92). Cambridge was considered a place of knowledge and as having one of the best universities in the world. That is why Jan was so happy that he had the opportunity to go to Cambridge. Jan was supposed to make himself indispensable but he didn't and went back home; that is why they took all of his records. Then

I got them back and in return I told them things they already knew. Who was friend of who, you know. They think they're using you, but really you're using them. But finally, in '76, they reminded me who was using who. They smashed up my records. Because, in the end, there are two realities, yours and theirs (93).

The scene ends with Jan apologising to Max and they hug each other.

The blackout occurs with the song "Don't Cry" by Guns 'n' Roses. This is a power ballad that has two versions that were released on different albums: the version with the original lyrics is the fourth track on *Use Your Illusion I*, while the version with the alternate lyrics is the thirteenth track on *Use Your Illusion II*, both from 1991. According to the information given by the lead singer of the band during interviews, the song is about a woman leaving a man. A member of the band had a girlfriend and Axl Rose was also attracted to her. When the couple split, because she considered that the relationship wasn't going to work, Axl helped his friend by telling him not to cry and they wrote the song together. But why did Stoppard choose this song? Maybe because the scene ends with two men (Max and Jan) hugging and sharing old sorrows, the same way Axl Rose helped his friend. The choice of this band seems odd because Guns 'n' Roses belong do a different era of music; it is the most recent band of all the ones chosen by Stoppard. Although they are a rock 'n' roll band, they don't have the same historical significance either to popular music or to social events as all the other groups mentioned.

Guns 'n' Roses started playing in the late 80s. The band is formed of Axl Rose (an anagram of Oral Sex) (Bruce Bailey), Slash (Saul Hudson), Izzy Stradlin, Duff McKagan and Steven Adler. Although the band didn't start with all these members and names, in 1986 the band got the critics and record companies' attention. They toured intensively before releasing their first album. According to Larkin,

[t]he group's regular live shows in the US and Europe brought frequent controversy, notably when two fans died during crowd disturbances at the Monsters of Rock show in England in 1988. (531)

Their career was full of incidents involving drugs, alcohol and public disturbances. They popularised Dylan's "Knockin' On Heaven's Door" and still give concerts nowadays. According to Paul Stenning, writing in 2005,

Guns N' Roses was the first band other than perhaps Motley Crue who truly epitomised the rock n' roll idiom that so many pretenders sang about and proclaimed to be "living" in the glam rock period of the 80s. Other bands had brainless lyrics, ridiculous images and seldom lasted more than a couple of albums. (10)

Their albums include, for example, *Appetite for Destruction* (1987), *Use Your Illusion I* (1991), *Use Your Illusion II* (1991) and *Chinese Democracy* (2008).

Going back to the play, the next scene is set in the same place and time, during the lunch mentioned in the previous scene. Jan is speaking to Lenka in Czech, Nigel, Alice and Stephen are having a conversation and a third conversation is going on between Candida, Max and Esme. They talk about the sixties and Max says "I was embarrassed by the sixties. It was like opening the wrong door in a highly specialised brothel." (95) and "... young people started off with more liberty than they knew what to do with... but – regrettably – confused it with sexual liberation and the freedom to get high... so it all went to waste." (95). These comments show us the perspective of older people who have a sense of idealism betrayed. I believe that the sixties were a major boost to what we consider normal nowadays. Through the liberty people gained during that period it was possible to evolve to a more modern and open-minded society. Every era brings something new and, as happened with all the other eras, some people took it too far but others did it just right to allow the next generation to live better.

Afterwards, Max tells Jan that he has asked Lenka to stay with him but Lenka wants to know if Esme agrees. This scene is a preparation for the end of the play because Max and Lenka end up together, with Lenka continuing Eleanor's role (both as Greek teacher and Max's companion). Jan says he was thinking about coming back to England, even emigrating, but Lenka tells him not to because

[t]hey put something in the water since you were here. It's a democracy of obedience. They're frightened to use their minds in case their minds tell them heresy. They apologise for history. They apologise for good manners. They apologise for difference. It's a contest of apology (102-103).

This is a strong criticism because it may mean that England has lost its vivid sense of subversion and people have become indifferent to what goes on around them. Indeed, this happens nowadays a bit everywhere. People appear to have become too selfish to really care about the world around them and a large part of the population seems numb and disconnected from what is

happening, whether we talk about political crisis, humanitarian causes or even the next door neighbour. Luckily, not everyone acts like this and there are still many idealistic people who work for a change in the world.

Esme comes back holding the record *Opel* by Syd Barrett and gives it to Jan. Jan leaves but comes back and asks Esme to go to Czechoslovakia with him. She says "yes" and goes to get her passport. Here we once again see something that will prepare the theatregoer for the end of the play.

The blackout is again by Pink Floyd, maybe because Syd Barrett was mentioned again in this scene. The song is called "Vera" and Stoppard says it should be played in its entirety. This song belongs to the 1979 album *The Wall* and is a reference to Vera Lynn. According to Vanessa Thorpe, writing in 2009, Vera Lynn was "[f]amous for stirring songs such as "We'll Meet Again" and "The White Cliffs of Dover", the woman who became known as the "Forces' sweetheart" at the age of 21" (Thorpe). She symbolised the wishful thinking and optimism that was necessary to keep people's spirits up, especially that of the troops. Thorpe also states that

[s]he was so determined to do the right thing for the troops that she wrote personal messages by hand on thousands of portrait photographs for her fans on active service in Europe and the Far East, men who had no other contact with life back in "Blighty". Many of the wives and girlfriends of soldiers who later received them could not believe the singer would have been so kind to a stranger, so she was regularly accused of having affairs with men she had not actually met. (Thorpe)

The reference in the song by Pink Floyd is ironic. Roger Waters lost his father in the World War II and didn't even meet him. Vera Lynn, who promised "We'll Meet Again" with her well-known song, also vanished and didn't keep her promise, showing that wishful thinking was not enough in people's lives, soldiers died anyway and families were torn apart by despair and the death of their loved ones.

The final scene is set in Prague, by the Lennon Wall, in 1990. Jan and Esme are together, kissing, while offstage plays the song "Rock and Roll Music" by The Beatles. Ferdinand arrives and talks about his new job in President Havel's office. Jan introduces Esme to Ferdinand and says "Ferda saw a friend

from Plastic People. Now he is in a new band. *Pulnoc*. It means "midnight". They're going to America." (107). Magda arrives and they go to a café to eat before going to a concert. Esme, Jan, Ferdinand and Magda end up in the Rolling Stones live concert: "The first guitar chords slash through the crowd noise. The Rolling Stones are seen on the scrim, playing Prague in August 1990." (109). That's the end of the play.

It is suggested that the director uses the noise on the first track of the band's album *No Security* in order to simulate the sound of the audience at a real concert. This album was only released in 1998 and was recorded over the course of the *Bridges to Babylon Tour*, although it was not the concert mentioned in the play.

The concert really happened on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 1990 in Prague, in Strahov Stadium. The band was presenting their album *Steel Wheels* and they called that the "Urban Jungle Tour". The tour was an enormous financial success, cementing The Rolling Stones' return to full commercial power. According to Lipcik, this was the announcement of the concert in Czechoslovakia:

Speaking with what to Czechs sounded like an Arabic accent, Mick Jagger appeared on Czechoslovak state TV in early August to make the announcement: The Stones are rolling into Prague. And, on posters plastered throughout the city, there was another slogan: The tanks are rolling out. The statements were more than a symbolic allusion: On August 18th, three days before the twenty-second anniversary of the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, this country was to experience something that would have been impossible just nine months ago. The grandest rock concert in Czechoslovak history: the Rolling Stones and their Urban Jungle Tour. (Lipcik)

Czechoslovakia was already free of the Communist regime and Havel was President. Due to his admiration of the arts, especially rock 'n' roll, Havel and his office contacted the Rolling Stones for a concert in Prague. The first contact was in April and Havel stated, according to Lipcik,

"For me, the Rolling Stones have always been a sort of counterweight to the more amiable, more lyrical and often more easygoing Beatles," President

Havel said a few days before the concert. "I used to listen to their music often. Songs like 'Satisfaction' can hardly be forgotten. If their concerts are half as good as people write and talk about them, I can't wait to see the Rolling Stones with my own eyes." (Lipcik)

The Stones agreed to abdicate their fee for the show, although most of their expenses were covered. All income should be donated to the *Goodwill Committee*, a group established by Olga Havel, First Lady, to serve various charities. The band landed in Prague the day before the concert on President Havel's plane, a privilege previously reserved for officials of friendly foreign governments. On the afternoon of the concert, the band and Havel met. Finally at the concert, the first part was played by a Czech band that had suffered through the past regime. And, according to Lipcik,

[t]hen, at 9:30 p.m., a thundering overture and fireworks announced the arrival onstage of the Rolling Stones, playing "Start Me Up." After 135 minutes — during which spectators managed to get wet from the rain and then dry again from the heat of the crowd — the show was over. The Rolling Stones had played a great concert, keeping a promise Keith Richards had made earlier. "We really care about this concert," he'd said. "We'll try to play the best we can." (Lipcik)

This concert was a symbol of freedom, and it was the dream come true of three generations of Czech music fans. Lipcik also states that

[t]he message he [Havel] relayed to the Stones said that as he was listening to them, he realized that their music deals with many of the same things that he's been fighting for, with his life and his work. And that, perhaps, was the best critique of the night. (Lipcik)

Havel's statement shows exactly how important this concert was. As rock first began to develop in the 1970s when Czechoslovak society was immersed in apathy, young people wanted to be rebellious and annoy the previous generation. So, in 1990, the idea that you could freely attend a rock concert without having to worry about it was a victory that had Havel as a prominent figure. Mitchell extends that

some of the Czech youth who flocked to see the Stones were no longer very young, and their gratitude was immense, if the testimony of the forty-

three-year- old drummer of the Czech band who supported the Stones is any indication: "It's a dream come true, something I never hoped to see in my life". (190)

The fact that a major band like the Rolling Stones could play in Prague was the way of stating Czech people's freedom. They could now listen to any kind of music without being censored. Accordingly, the rebelliousness of this concert was seen even through posters, as Burton Bollag wrote in 1990:

As if to underline irreverently the country's break with the past, a giant cut-out poster of the band's logo - a tongue sticking out of a mouth - was put up on a hill overlooking the historic old section of Prague. Giant portraits of Stalin had stood there in the past. (Bollag)

As seen throughout this chapter, specific music was a symbol of many things: subversion, ideas about society, freedom and relationships and even just to show someone's uncensored thoughts. *Rock 'N' Roll* is so prolific in using different bands and songs that it is impossible not to draw conclusions concerning its symbolism of rebellion against repression and also the symbol of democracy. Despite Lenka's negative comments that suggest that the ideals of both democracy and Communism were not achieved, popular music did play a socially subversive role, especially in Czechoslovakia. In the next chapter these ideas of subversion and music will be briefly examined through the specific case study of the Plastic People of the Universe.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### THE CASE OF THE PLASTIC PEOPLE OF THE UNIVERSE

The Czech band the Plastic People of the Universe is almost unknown to the public in general. The band is far better known to human-rights groups and historians than to rock fans. Before the play by Stoppard, the band was only known by people who were born in Czechoslovakia and people who were interested in the history of that country. Not many foreigners knew the Plastic People of the Universe. Nowadays, they still play and in spite of the fact that their career was difficult, the PPU or the Plastics, as many people call the band, were of some importance to the history of Czechoslovakia. This importance was brought to the public eye by Stoppard when he wrote *Rock 'N' Roll*, the play which in part tells their story and the story of dissidents who listened to their music. According to Jon Pareles's article "Rock 'n' Roll Revolution" written in 2007,

[c]ountless rock bands have sung about rebellion. One of the few that can claim it spurred a revolution is the Plastic People of the Universe, who — starting with no political agenda — catalyzed democracy in Czechoslovakia. The story of the Plastics (as fans call the band) is central to Tom Stoppard's play "Rock 'N' Roll," although it is told from the sidelines by fictional characters. It's a story not of activism but of whimsy treated as sedition, stubbornness met by brutality and a regime unknowingly consolidating its opposition. Repression amplified the band's impact, though at serious personal cost to the musicians. (Pareles)

The band was formed in 1968 by the bassist Milan Hlavsa and was influenced by such musicians as Frank Zappa and the Velvet Underground. The name of the band comes from a song by Zappa and the Mothers of Invention called "Plastic People". According to Tony Mitchell, writing in 1992,

[f]ar more than a merely symbolic representation of freedom of expression, the Plastic People were an embodiment of Havel's notion of 'living in truth'. The group borrowed its name from a song by Frank Zappa about phonies and hypocrites which lampooned the President of the USA [Johnson], but their unconcern about being identified with the song's targets is indicative



of the strong musical influence which Zappa exerted on avant-garde and underground rock throughout the USSR and eastern Europe. (189)

The song by Frank Zappa, released in 1967, is a strange and ironic song that refers to Lyndon Johnson, president of the United States of America between 1963 and 1969. The song appears to parody people who were phonies and accepted unpopular policies from the government. This idea could be related to the way the Plastics saw Czechoslovak governmental unpopular policies and censorship.

The band was initially formed by Milan Hlavsa, Jan Brabec, Ivan Bierhanzl, Pavel Zeman and Ludvík "Eman" Kandi; their artistic director was Ivan Jirous. Two years later, Paul Wilson, a Canadian teacher working in Prague, also became a member of the band. Wilson explains how he joined the band in a 2005 interview by Jan Velinger:

I met the band through Ivan Jirous when he invited me to a party at his place and band members were there and we sat around talking about music and playing and listening to the Fugs and the Velvet Underground. And, a little while later Jirous got this crazy idea of inviting me to the band as a singer! Not that I have a great voice and I'm certainly not a great guitarist, but I could strum the guitar and I was also useful for transcribing the lyrics of Velvet Underground songs from this scratchy old tape that they had. I joined the band in 1970 and the rest is history I guess. (Velinger)

Jirous invited Paul Wilson to join the band because he presupposed that English was the most important language of rock music. Wilson became the lead singer and translated the lyrics of the English songs the Plastics played and also translated the original Czech songs into English. In the same interview by Velinger, Wilson states:

I remember having arguments with Jirous about whether or not we should be translating these songs and at least singing them in Czech so that the audience would know what the words were, but for Jirous and for the band too it was important that we sing in English and give the audience something like the experience the audience would have listening to the Velvet Underground. But, it wasn't just cover. In Jirous' terms it was bringing a different kind of "spirit" to the Czech music scene. We also sang songs that

they composed themselves but we sang them in English, I translated the lyrics. That was a weird thing. (Velinger)

Wilson insisted that the band should use their native language in order to allow people to understand and they began singing their lyrics in Czech. At the moment, according to what I have found out, all the songs available by the Plastic People of the Universe on the Internet are in Czech, which makes it hard for people who do not speak the language to understand the lyrics. We can just experience the melodies and the songs in general. However, the use of their native language can be considered a statement of support for local traditions and cultural issues. They could show the world what could be done using their own language. In their lyrics, for example, they sometimes used poems by Czech writers as inspiration for their lyrics, underlining their interest not just in a global English but also in their own cultural heritage.

For a long time, the band's professional status was oppressed because the government considered they would have a negative social impact. The government was concerned that the Plastics could be spreading subversive ideas and opening people's minds to music in the West, which was considered subversive enough to concern the Communist regime. Thus, the Plastics had to play in the Bohemian countryside and at friends' weddings, as these were considered private occasions. Curiously, a couple that was divorced agreed to get remarried just to allow the Plastics to have a gig. The locations of many gigs were secret and just the day before a performance friends would tell friends its location. People would travel and walk for miles in order to attend the band's private concerts.

But why were the Plastic People of the Universe so important to their country? The band did not have an agenda of subversion against the Communist regime, they only wanted to play their rock music, as Stoppard states in the introduction of *Rock 'N' Roll*: "[t]he band was not interested in bringing down Communism, only in finding a free space for itself inside the Communist society" (xviii). Nevertheless, their role in the history of the dissident movement in Czechoslovakia was of extreme importance, even if that was not their goal. Richie Unterberger, writing in 1998, states that

[a]ccording to the bassist and founding member Milan Hlavsa, who would write much of the band's material, "The Plastic People emerged just as dozens and hundreds of other bands – we just loved rock 'n' roll and wanted to be famous. We were too young to have a clear artistic ambition. All we did was pure intuition: no political notions or ambitions at all". (191)

This fact that their goal wasn't to be subversive was perceived differently by Václav Havel, for whom rock music was a significant manifestation of cultural energy. Havel listened to and was a fan of Frank Zappa and the Velvet Underground, especially Lou Reed, the main singer and songwriter. He was also a fan of jazz. He became interested in the Plastic People of the Universe and befriended Ivan Jirous, their manager, Milan Hlavsa and Paul Wilson, who later became Havel's English translator and biographer. When Havel first met the band, they looked awful but he responded to their music. Stoppard quotes Havel's own feelings when he first met the band, saying

[t]here was disturbing magic in the music, and a kind of inner warning. Here was something serious and genuine... Suddenly I realised that, regardless of how many vulgar words these people used or how long their hair was, truth was on their side; ... in their music was an experience of metaphysical sorrow and a longing for salvation. (xvii)

When the members of the band were arrested and put on trial along with other people by the Communist government to make an example in 1976, Havel took a deep interest in the trial and went to observe it. Paul Wilson was deported, although he had not belonged to the band since 1972. On his return to Canada, Wilson was active in promoting the work of dissident writers and musicians during the remaining years of totalitarianism. The restrictions against rock music were part of the normalisation process undertaken by the regime, which involved expelling 400,000 people from the Czech Communist Party and purging schools and universities. Due to the trial, the remaining members of the band were convicted for "organised disturbance of the peace", along with other members of the underground music scene. There are some problems with the accuracy of this information however. According to Jonathan Bolton, writing in 2012, Czech and English sources alike commonly refer to "the trial of the Plastic People" but he considers, in fact, that there was no such thing. He explains that of the four defendants, only one – Vratislav Brabenec, the

saxophonist – actually played for the band. The second, Ivan Martin Jirous, was not a musician at all; he was the Plastic People's artistic director. A third defendant, Pavel Zajíček, belonged to another band, DG 307. DG 307 shared a member with the Plastics, Milan Hlavsa. But Hlavsa was not put on trial. The fourth defendant, Svatopluk Karásek, was associated with the music underground but was not a member of any band – he was a Protestant minister and folksinger in his own right, whose spiritual “Say No to the Devil” had given the underground one of its songs. According to this information, the trial was more a “dissidents trial” than “the Plastics trial”.

Havel tried to get support for the prisoners, along with important writers, artists, philosophers, and other opposition intellectuals. According to Velinger,

[i]t was up to writers to stop living this protected existence and start defending these people like the Plastic People and other bands, who were being repressed with no protection whatsoever. So, that sort of spirit and that observation led to the creation of Charter 77, which involved members of the underground signing it, and people from the literary and philosophical communities all signing this document. What was significant was that the Plastic People of the Universe were the catalyst that brought these elements together. I'm not saying that there wouldn't have been a human rights movement in Czechoslovakia without the Plastics, but they became the first sort of “cause celebre”. (Velinger)

Charter 77, as mentioned before, was the document that asked the government to respect human rights: the right to freedom of expression, the right to education, the right to freedom of religious confession, the right to civic rights, among other ideas. This document put pressure on the government to enable all citizens of Czechoslovakia to work and live as free people without experiencing censorship and repression.

According to Greg Gaut, writing in 1991, all these historical events show the importance of the Plastics to history:

Vaclav Havel recalls that Charter 77, the organisation which led the rebellion against the Stalinist regime, was born in the campaign to support the Plastics, of which he was a major leader. There may be no better

evidence of the political significance of rock than this testimony of the President of Czechoslovakia. (249-250)

Curiously, historians see this connection between the Plastic People of the Universe and the fight against the Communist regime, but the members of the band are very cautious and unpretentious when referring to their importance. According to Unterberger,

Hlavsa is cautious not to attach undue significance of the Plastics' political influence. "Historians see the Plastics' arrest and sentence in direct relation to the origins of Charter 77. Of course I also see the relations, but only in that the trial brought together people concerned about the fate of our country. Vaclav Havel was the engine of the efforts. The band itself had no political ambition and we did not intend to destroy communism by our music, but if we helped we are only glad". (194)

After Charter 77, Havel let the band use his country house to record their music and even helped Wilson, who was back in Canada, to get the recordings of the Plastics through diplomatic channels, allowing these recordings to be spread throughout North America and Europe.

Despite the fact that Charter 77 was signed, the government continued to ignore many basic human rights. After people had signed the Charter, the government stuck back, according to Miloš Jůzl, writing in 1996,

Anyone who signed or publicly approved of this Charter was declared an enemy of the people and dealt with accordingly. Under great pressure, almost all musicians and music theoreticians signed the so-called Anti-Charter. (47)

Jůzl himself signed the Anti-Charter. He explains he worked at the Philosophical Faculty and he was under heavy pressure to sign the document and he decided to sign it, although he felt terrible as he feared repression. The repression felt was on many levels. The Communist regime didn't allow, for example, people to gather, except according to its own agenda and priorities, as Alain Besançon, writing in 1999, states:

As pessoas, privadas do direito de associação, de agregação espontânea, de representação, reduzidas à condição de átomos, são empurradas para

um novo enquadramento, modelado por aquele que vigoraria se o socialismo existisse como sociedade. Adota então o nome de soviets, de uniões, de comunas. Como o socialismo só existe virtualmente, este enquadramento só pode existir como imposição. (68)

Still according to Besançon, one of the Communist political priorities was the annihilation of everything that would allow the people to revolt against the regime, and one of their biggest concerns were the creative people whose high profile could encourage dissent. Hence, the government attempted to suppress them:

Primeiro, a destruição do adversário político. Depois, a destruição das resistências sociais, reais ou potenciais: corpos organizados, partidos, exército, sindicatos, cooperativas; corpos culturais, universidade, escola, academia, igreja, edição, imprensa. (76)

As a result of these hindrances, the Plastic People of the Universe became even more important, and also due to the fact that music is indeed one of the best ways to spread subversive ideas or a subversive mood. In the Plastics' case, their songs were not political but their lifestyle, look and relationships were subversive in the sense that they represented not only oppressed musicians and artists forbidden to perform their art, but the idea of oppression more widely. Mitchell states that, in general,

rock music has represented probably the most widespread vehicle of youth rebellion, resistance and independence behind the Iron Curtain, both in terms of providing an enhanced political context for the often banned sounds of British and American rock, and in the development of home-grown musics built on western foundations but resonating within their own highly charged political contexts. (187)

But why was rock music so important? For young people in particular, Rock music was not just a symbol of subversion and resistance but *the* symbol of these things. As seen before, many rock bands had been subversive in their own way and the Plastics were no different. They were interpreted inside their underground movements in terms of the unification of rock music and alternative political philosophies and lifestyles to those supported by the regime. In the specific case of Czechoslovakia, the dissidents were fighting but

there was a lack of political visible or viable opposition, as stated, again, by Mitchell:

This rhetorical portrayal of Czech rock as a surrogate form of countercultural dissident activity compensating for the lack of other outlets for oppositional political activity underestimates the passion with which rock music is pursued as a cultural practice in its own right by young people in eastern Europe, where distinctions between high culture and popular culture have been eroded due to the support for rock music expressed by artists, writers and philosophers, who are in some cases the authors of its lyrics. (190)

This idea of rock music being a part of subversion has also to do with the fact that young people tend to be different from previous generations and, over the last century music has performed a central function in expressing this difference. Music channels young people's energies and, in the Czechoslovakian case, the desire for freedom. Angela McRobbie, writing in 1999, explains that

[o]ne way of understanding might be to suggest that it is in musical forms, particularly those associated with youth cultures, that an avant-garde of ideas emerges. Or at least since music is the most pervasive and noticeable of youth cultural forms then perhaps it is not surprising that it is here that statements are made, positions and identities stake out. ... Just think how "rock" in the past has so urgently and anthemically proclaimed the entitlement of youth to a place in the nation state. (115)

Specifically in the play *Rock 'N' Roll* by Stoppard, the Plastic People of the Universe assume a significant role as the play refers to the history of Czechoslovakia, among many other subjects. As the Plastics are tied to their country's history, Stoppard gives the world their story as it is told by the characters in the play. According to Ascherson,

Stoppard is fascinated by the Plastic People, by the idea that the most devastating response to tyranny might be the simple wish to be left alone. In Prague he met and talked to Ivan Jirous, their founder, whose long hair enraged the authorities. "I always loved rock 'n' roll," Stoppard says. "And what was so intriguing about the Plastic People was that they never set out to be symbols of resistance, although the outside world thought of them that way. They said: "People never write about our music!" In the West, rock

bands liked to be thought of for their protest, rather than their music. But Jirous didn't try to turn the Plastic People into anything; he just saw that they were saying, "We don't care, leave us alone!" Jirous insisted that they were actually better off than musicians in the West because there was no seduction going on. There was nothing the regime wanted from them, and nothing they wanted from the regime." (Ascherson)

As Stoppard presented the Plastic People of the Universe to the wider world through his play, he has made it possible for more people to become intrigued enough to listen to their songs and try to understand their role in Czechoslovakian history. *Rock 'N' Roll* awakened my interest not only in older rock music but also the Plastics. When listening to some of their songs, although their lyrics are in Czech and impossible to understand for an outsider, one can get a sense of awkwardness through the melodies. The use of the viola gives a different approach from what people are used to in a classical sense. The guitar is also a very important instrument for the melodies and the voice of the singer is rough and throaty. The saxophone raves while the drums go wild. In addition, their appearance is not very pleasing at first: curly long hair (or even bald now), long beards and round glasses; this aspect is also something to think about. Like all the other bands mentioned in the play, the way the band looks like is part of the show and of the entourage. They are still touring, although without some of the original members, and are now inspiring younger people to believe they can, through music, play a role in history. Before a concert in Taiwan, the Plastic People of the Universe were interviewed and, according to Ron Brownlow, writing in 2008,

Ko Ren-jian, singer for indie-rock band LTK Commune, said he was impressed by how the Plastics sang about Communist politicians being afraid of artists. "Bands in Taiwan are a little bit tired about the [domestic political] situation," he said. "The politicians here are not afraid of the bands. They're not afraid of anything. I think it's hard for us to make a change. That's just my personal thought about the difference between [your country] and Taiwan." (Brownlow)

The Plastics' appearances in Taiwan have been meant to draw the attention of young people to the pro-independence movement on that island and they try to establish parallels between the role of the Plastics against the Communist



regime in Czechoslovakia and the frustration of these Taiwanese movements that fight against their government. This means that the Plastics are still showing how to be subversive and their role in history continues to serve as an example.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, an attempt has been made to analyse rock and popular music as a theme in *Rock 'N' Roll* by Tom Stoppard. The main objective was to understand how this type of music could be seen as a way of subversion against someone or something, whether we are talking about mentalities or a totalitarian regime, in the latter case particularly with respect to the Czech band the Plastic People of the Universe.

First of all, it was essential to understand Stoppard's importance in contemporary English drama and some of the main features of his work as assessed by critical history, along with a brief reflection on the relation between Stoppard's Czech ancestry and *Rock 'N' Roll*. Stoppard, throughout his career, is perceived as having evolved from intellectual and witty plays to plays focused more on political and emotional issues. Indeed, his most recent award was, in 2013, the PEN Pinter Prize for "determination to tell things as they are" in the United Kingdom. About the themes Stoppard writes about, in 1977, Gabriele Scott Robinson wrote that

[t]he subjects of Tom Stoppard's theatre are familiar to much of contemporary literature. He writes of the anxiety and confusion of life, of the helplessness of the individual caught up in forces impervious to reason, of the loss of identity and faith. He discusses in philosophical terms the lack of absolute values, the problem of freedom, the uncertainty of all knowledge and perception. Stoppard's world is implausible and irrational and also full of cruelty and pain. His characters are the victims of accidental calamities which threaten and occasionally destroy them. (37)

If in 1977 Robinson highlighted the obscurity of Stoppard's writing, in 2011, William Demastes enumerated the profusion of themes and theatrical strategies undertaken by Stoppard:

Mix vaudevillian slapstick with crisp, witty language. Add a song or two in the style of Gilbert and Sullivan. Try doing a whole scene in limericks. How about a shell game using humans popping in and out of shower stalls? Maybe add some really funny Communist-bloc shenanigans. Set it on a verandah in India or in the secret byways of Hamlet's Elsinore Castle. Why not open eyes with a striptease act dangling from a trapeze? Maybe

parody the work of Agatha Christie, or play fast and loose with Oscar Wilde. Or how about taking on Shakespeare himself? How about a play about a rather minor, uncharismatic English academic? And make it about love. Maybe re-create a ferry-ride across the River Styx, and figure out a way to get the Greek god Pan into the modern world, using classic rock to do it. In a nutshell, that's the theater of Tom Stoppard. (229)

In 2013, Demastes has outlined how Stoppard's themes have changed from the ones mentioned above by Robinson:

As may be expected from a playwright whose works typically engage multiple topics simultaneously, love surfaces in numerous Stoppard plays ..., *Jumpers*, *Night and Day*, *Arcadia*, *The Coast of Utopia*, and *Rock 'N' Roll* certainly included. In fact, though Stoppard has often been condemned for being a too coldly analytical playwright, many of his works include genuine moments of emotional poignancy. (92)

This evolution has allowed Stoppard to write a profusion of challenging plays, as he writes in a way that is intended to lead to reflection on deep matters and not simply to provide light entertainment. It is also possible to see he is deeply concerned about the use of the English language. According to Gerald Lee Ratliff, writing in 1983,

Stoppard's consistent use of non-traditional literary techniques, like verbal gymnastics, obscure puns, "in" jokes, deprecating irony, topical allusions and episodic plot structure often adds to the general difficulty of accurately assessing or even comprehending his dramatic thought; which has very often been misconstrued by a too literalistic interpretation of essentially ironical or paradoxical utterances. (137)

His concern for the proper use of the English language is reflected not only in his work but also in his personal life, according to Mark Lawson,

[u]ntil recently, he [Stoppard] confesses, he routinely wrote to newspapers complaining about the misuse of "who" for "whom" – "It still goes through me like a spear" – although he is coming to the conclusion that journalists no longer care. "I'm like the crank in the bus queue now. Who for whom spread from articles to headlines, and then headlines with ever bigger letters." (Lawson)

Ira B. Nadel, writing in 2004, when writing about Stoppard's life, tries to explain this importance of the English language for him:

[H]is mastery of the language and his Wildean wit displayed how well he could fit in. Indeed, words became his weapon of assimilation which validated his English identity while he repeatedly disengaged himself from such writers as Conrad or Nabokov because their encounter with English was secondary. Stoppard's first language was always English. (21)

This importance that is given to language makes Stoppard's plays, incidentally, a challenge and a source of stimulation to students of the English language.

Besides these linguistic aspects, *Rock 'N' Roll*, as with any of Stoppard's plays, is full of absorbing subjects that could separately lead to extensive studies. As mentioned above, the play talks about so many different themes that the choice was made to deal with them through a focus on what appears to be just one of them, but which, as might be expected from the title, touches on all of them in some way: rock music. Throughout the play, several bands are mentioned and their music used, so that an attempt has been made to suggest why Stoppard chose these bands and the specific songs included in the play. Ranging from Pink Floyd's Syd Barrett to the more recent, if not exactly contemporary, U2 and Guns n' Roses, there are a number of aspects to consider: the bands themselves, the songs chosen by Stoppard and the way in which they were subversive, and what, if anything, made those groups different from the rest of their contemporaries. The task consisted of being able to find not simply information about the groups but contextualizations that explained something of their symbolic value. The diversity of musicality in the play is extensive and that is one of the aspects that makes the play so interesting. All the bands mentioned were significant for popular music history, albeit some much more than others, either because they were pioneers in using different sounds or because they dressed and acted against the norm in some other way.

However, the most intriguing aspect of music in the play is definitely the case of the Plastic People of the Universe. The idea of a group that only wanted to play and turned out to be a key that triggered the fight against the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia may lead us to conclude that sometimes

our own personal story can be somehow related to the history of a country, that we are not simply cogs to be used in a machine. The Plastics, through their weird melodies and determination to play the music they wanted to, achieved a place in history. Even close to the end of the totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia in the late 1980s, the twenty-year-old music of the Plastics was still being listened to by young people, as Jonathan Bolton, writing in 2012, mentions:

An environmental movement gained strength, and a new generation of youth culture took shape, one that still listened to the Velvets and the Plastics, but also exchanged bootleg cassette tapes of punk and New Wave music. The underground continued to evolve, developing its own samizdat press ... and existing in a sometimes uneasy alliance with the Charter. (266-267)

The Plastic People of the Universe thus became central to the play because the band's history is interconnected with the characters' story throughout the play.

*Rock 'N' Roll* is also a love story. We find love represented or implied throughout the play and, by the end of it, the people who had been in love for so many years got together. Jefferson Hunter, in 2010, states that

[a]t other moments, *Rock 'N' Roll* presents more conventional and handkerchief-worthy feelings, as in the developing love between Jan and Esme, Max and Eleanor's daughter. It is at Esme's insistence that her father pulls strings to get Jan released from a Czech prison; almost at the end of the play, in a Cambridge garden, amid nostalgic memories of marijuana and Syd Barrett, the one-time lead singer of Pink Floyd, Jan commits himself to the lost and now found again love of his life. (129)

Concerning the perception of love in the play and when asked by Michael Riedel about the idea of continuing the play beyond 1990, Stoppard answered:

I was coming by my hotel yesterday and a man stopped me on the street. He said "I saw your play last night and at the end, when Jan and Esme got together, I was in tears. I turned to my wife and said, you see, every story is a love story" and that man had it right. There is a love story in the play and whatever I felt about it, the narrative should include all the stuff I have been talking about, once the two lovers were together, the play refused to go on, the story was over. ... Actually, whatever I thought it was, it is really a

love story with a big socio-political context; but it is a love story. (Riedel, Haskins)

The critique of Stoppard's work that complained because it lacked "passion" has now been supplanted by approval of his incorporation of supposedly more "human" themes. As Jefferson Hunter notes, these were some of the comments after the premieres of *Rock 'N' Roll* in London and in New York:

In notices, the word passion supplanted or at least supplemented the word intellectual; Nicholas De Jongh found in *Rock 'N' Roll* "the Stoppardian romantic heart," Charles Spencer "passages of unbuttoned emotion"; writing in *The New York Times*, Ben Brantley counselled playgoers to get out their handkerchiefs for this "triumphantly sentimental" new work. Undeniably, *Rock 'N' Roll* dramatizes a range of human passions. (128)

Even if spectators do not know anything or care about the history of Czechoslovakia, they are apparently able to connect with *Rock 'N' Roll* in terms of such daily subjects as the struggle against illness, love disillusionment, different points of view when it comes to politics and certainly through something that everyone can relate to: music preferences. While these preferences might be seen as being restricted to someone of Stoppard's age, even an exercise in nostalgia, it can also be said that by tying the music to a particular historical period this was the type of music that needed to be represented. However, from within the vast number and range of possible examples (no Tamla-Motown, no Punk, no women), Stoppard's choices represent ideological preferences that this dissertation has attempted a first analysis of.



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