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TOM STOPPARD'S "AFTER MAGRITTE": THE WORLD OF UNCERTAINTY

The focus of this study is the discussion of the techniques employed by Tom Stoppard to permeate his one-act play *After Magritte* with epistemological scepticism. The play pivots on the author's attempts to discredit the confidence we place on reason to lead us to the objective and verifiable truth. Using manifold devices, Stoppard attacks conceit inherent in our relying on one single perspective. Instead, he constructs the play as if to embrace the multiplicity of subjective points of view and introduces to it an element of uncertainty and doubt. The author considers it a necessary requirement if we want to approach the world.

One of the most cunning authorial strategies implemented in *After Magritte* is playing with the convention of the detective fiction. The detective story was born on the pages of "Graham's Magazine" in 1841 with the publication of a short story, *The Murder in the Rue Morgue*, by Edgar Allan Poe. With Poe's story, which is said to constitute "in itself almost a complete manual of detective theory and practice"[1], the detective fiction started to flourish commanding a large readership up to the present day. Interestingly, since its very inception the genre has followed its basic principles and canons with great diligence[2]. The nucleus of the story is coherent and dynamic action, developing alongside the step-by-step investigation, leading finally to the solution of a crime. Another indispensable element is a detective whose superior mind and great powers of observation guarantee an unexpected denouement revealing the identity of the culprit. It is the detective who sets in motion the intellectual mechanism of the detective story, interprets the clues, builds a hypothesis and combines seemingly unconnected pieces of a puzzle into a logical whole. Taking it into consideration, Stoppard, who is

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[1] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, gen. ed. W. E. Peece, vol. 15. Chicago 1973, p. 1126.

[2] For the thorough analysis of the compositional model of the detective story see among others: J. G. Cawelti: *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*. Chicago UP, London 1976; *Detective Fiction*, ed. R. W. Winks. Englewood Cliffs 1980, NJ; R. Caillos: *Powieść kryminalna*. In: *Odpowiedzialność i styl*. Warszawa, PIW 1967.

preoccupied with exploring the question whether knowing the truth lies in the realm of our possibilities, uses the convention deliberately to challenge its world model based on reason and calculation and brings on the stage the figure of the detective, Inspector Foot.

Hence when Inspector Foot makes his appearance on the stage he also has a mystery to be solved. An eyewitness account of an elderly lady living nearby Ponsoby Place who saw a minstrel with a broken crutch and two "tell-tale" coins on the pavement triggered off the whole investigation. Inspector Foot, living in the same street, associates her report with a casual glimpse of a car he caught through his window and builds on this basis an elaborate theory of what must have happened. The detective assumes that the doyen of the Victoria Palace Happy Minstrel Troupe committed a robbery and was driven off by his accomplices. The parking ticket paid by the Harrises sets him on their trail and makes them chief suspects in Foot's investigation. Suspecting them of the participation in the crime and needing further evidence, he sends his assistant, Constable Holmes, to their house to keep it under constant police surveillance. The bizarre spectacle that the Constable saw peeping through the window, mainly an old woman covered with a white towel, lying on an ironing board, convinces him the Harrises are highly suspicious types. Alarmed and eager to verify his hypothesis, Holmes brings the Inspector straight to the house in order to begin full-length interrogation.

Seemingly, the play complies with the requirements of the genre: there is an unsolved crime and a detective who wants to ferret out tangible evidence to move towards the elucidation of the mystery. From the beginning, however, Stoppard constructs his text as if to destabilise the convention and for example intersperses the lines of the play with many comic elements. Humour itself is not a thing unlikely to occur in a traditional detective story, even if the ripple of laughter is caused by the detective himself. In conventional crime stories, however, the target of mockery focuses generally on an ineffective and sluggish police officer who is contrasted with an intellectually superior, even if a bit eccentric, detective-amateur. This is the case with for instance Sherlock Holmes and Hercules Poirot. Contrary to that, in *After Magritte* hopeless Inspector Foot and his assistant are left alone to sift the clues and unravel the mystery and the laughter they evoke undoubtedly undermines the authority of the crime solver and calls the seriousness of the procedure into question. The two guardians of law are endowed with names which immediately arouse a smile. When Inspector introduces himself:

> FOOT: I am Chief Inspector Foot.
> *(Harris rises to his feet with a broad enchanted smile.)* And asks in bewilderment:
> HARRIS: Not Foot of the Y-[3]

[3] T. Stoppard: *After Magritte*. London, Faber and Faber 1979, p. 25–26. Subsequent citations from the play will be given parenthetically in the text.

Harris recognises a well-known pun, which consists of the play on words "Foot" and "Yard", a smaller unit within a larger one, as an inspector in the ranks of the Scotland Yard. The word itself crops up in the dialogue in various contexts with constant intensity and its exaggerated accumulation leads to many comic situations reaching its climax in Harris's question:

> HARRIS: Is something the matter with your foot, Foot? Inspector Foot?
> [...] You wish to inspect your foot, Inspector? (p. 42-43)

Additionally many critics notice that the name Foot parodies Oedipus – "the name of the theatre's first great detective"[4] – whose success at finding the culprit is somehow weakened by the fact that it was him himself. Furthermore, the name Holmes refers to another fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, who has been widely recognised as a paragon of analytical thinking. Unfortunately, the Constable does not share his namesake supreme mental powers and his ineffectiveness stands in a striking opposition to the associations his name immediately evokes

Further comic elements appear the moment two policemen rush into the Harrises' and the Inspector is introduced. A classical detective story begins with the introduction of the detective through a minor demonstration of his skill; it is to be a prelude to his later success. For example Sherlock Holmes tells where Watson has been by examining the colour of mud on his trousers or Dupin reconstructs the flow of thoughts of his interlocutor on the basis of his close observation and deduction.[5] And here Stoppard subverses conventional expectations. The policemen are taken aback because the room is brought back to normality and the Inspector is not sure whether they have found the proper house. Next, it turns out he has lost his search warrant and Holmes looks for it on his hands and knees and it is not yet the end for Foot produces most nonsensical interpretation of the opening scene spied by his assistant. He warns them he has reasons to believe that they have performed an illegal operation of the amputation:

> FOOT: (without punctuation) I have reason to believe that within the last hour in this room you performed without anaesthetic an illegal operation on a bald nigger minstrel about five-foot-two or Pakistani and that is only the beginning! (p. 31)

The audience finds the accusations completely baffling for the transmission of information at the beginning of the play is arranged so as to enable them to learn what really happened at the Harrises'. Though the behaviour of Harris, Thelma and the mother was a bit awkward, it did not display any sign of a surgical operation, not mentioning an amputation! Stoppard manipulates with the level of dramatic irony and plays with the convention

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[4] B. M. Crossley: *An Investigation of Stoppard's "Hound" and "Foot"*. Modern Drama 20 Mar. (1977): 81.

[5] See J. G. Cawelti, p. 82.

deliberately to predict Foot's future futility and to show mercilessly that Inspector's accusations are based on nothing more, but circumstantial evidence tinged with flights of fancy. When Inspector interrogates the bewildered Harrises he takes the official tone and uses the professional jargon, but these feeble attempts cannot restore confidence in his abilities.

The further the interrogation progresses, the faster the audience loses the belief in his satisfactory settlement of the case. The dialogue brims with continuous misunderstandings which may be a splendid source of laughter, but which leave everybody at a loss. However, the Inspector himself remains absolutely unaware that he is becoming more and more ridiculous and that his authority has been questioned for he stubbornly believes in the validity of his interpretation. Hence he glorifies the virtues of "a copper on his beat" – the best tool of the Yard who neglects his kids and his wife, but tirelessly and methodically fulfils his professional duties. As if to bring him back to reality an eagle-eyed Constable Holmes confides shyly he does not know what a search warrant looks like. Inspector Foot does not set a good example to follow either for it is a lead slug from a 22 calibre pistol he jiggles obliviously in his hand and it is the slug found in the house of the suspects!

At this point, when the audience's trust in the detective's working methods has been seriously undermined, the line of questioning leads to a discussion about a mysterious figure the Harrises saw on their way back from an exhibition of Magritte paintings at the Tate Gallery on the day of the alleged robbery. In the opening scene Thelma and Harris have already quarrelled about it, but now when the person could provide them with a plausible alibi, the settlement of his identity has acquired the utmost importance. And here the interrogation comes to a deadlock for each of them has his/her own rival hypothesis. Thelma is filled with admiration for a one-legged footballer, in the West Bromwick Albion football shirt, carrying a football and an ivory cane with shaving foam on his face. Her mother-in law has been threatened by a cricket bat waved at her by a convict in a loose striped gabardine, in a surgical mask obliterating his face, playing hopscotch on the corner and carrying a supposedly stolen handbag. Harris, on the other hand, has seen neither a footballer nor a prisoner, but an old, one-legged man, wearing pyjamas and dark glasses, carrying a tortoise and hopping along in the rain. Harris recalls as well that the man was brandishing a white stick for he was blind. Each interpretation has its own internal logic and coherence with respect to the interpreting person's original assumptions and perception. Each of the family members is ready to fight ferociously for his/her interpretation and each of them is absolutely sure it must be him/her who knows the true identity of the person in question. The fact they have seen the man with their own eyes gives them absolute certainty about the credibility of their testimony and allows them to discredit the others' hypotheses. Each and every one of them insists on their correctness, which makes the rest agitated beyond endurance. It even leads Harris to offending his wife

and asking whether she had taken leave of her senses and the atmosphere of the quarrel is tensed almost to a breaking point.

Conventionally, at this point, when the parade of possible solutions obfuscated the mystery rather than moved it towards the clarification, it is time for the detective to step in. His reason and powers of observation enable him to present the solution when everybody else is in the state of confusion. With the efficiency of an algebraic equation, the detective restores clarity and order to the reality, which seemed so far illogical and chaotic. And once more Stoppard shows the convention in a distorting mirror: Foot is not only unable to account for their testimony, but is almost unconsciously drawn into the Harrises' preparations for a dancing competition and seeks for a lost needle on his hands and knees. Then, to crown it all, the telephone rings to announce his complete disaster as a detective – no robbery had taken place. It means that his hypothetical reconstruction of the crime, based on the accidental eyewitness report and the power of the logical association of facts, has proved false. He is a victim of his past success of deduction which, as he says: "has caused me finally to overreach myself in circumstances that could hardly be more humiliating". (p. 43)

Inspector Foot, a pathetic figure who a moment ago boasted it was a child's play for an experienced detective to unravel the mystery, sits with a bare foot and spins his tale about his most unfortunate day. And immediately it dawns on everyone except for him that he shares the fatal predicament of Oedipus to the end. He has been looking for himself; he is the mysterious figure seen by the orderly lady and the Harrises and interpreted in so many self-excluding ways. On the proceeding night he had left his car outside his house wrongly parked and next day when he saw the Harrises' car pulling away from the only space in the road, he dashed to the street to improve the public image of the police. Interrupted when shaving, he had only time to grab his wife's handbag to have change for the parking meter and her umbrella since it was raining. He was wearing sunglasses because of the splitting headache and in a hurry jammed both feet into the same leg of his pyjamas.

Eventually, after many twists of action and situations seemingly devoid of any rational explanation, the mystery is solved, but the man who came in order to unravel it remains ignorant that he is both the beginning and the end of it. Thanks to his playing with the convention, Stoppard creates under the disguise of Foot, Sherlock Holmes or Dupin – who went too far and began not only to interpret the clues, but overinterpret them, joining together facts having nothing in common and called into being a robbery that did not take place.

Apart from the detective's inefficiency throughout the interrogation and his final ignorance, the theme of a hopeless quest recurs in various contexts in the course of the play. For example, there appear many phrases in the text which are associated with the motif. In the first place, when Thelma drops the needle both the mother and the Inspector kneel on the floor and

seek for it head to head. Their arduous search recalls immediately a proverbial "looking for a needle in a haystack". And here the meagre chances of success are wrecked additionally by the comedy of the situation. Foot is down on his hands and knees in the suspects' house whereas Harris, the suspect himself, stands on the table in a sleeveless evening dress when his wife, in a bra and pants, repairs the hem of the dress.

Secondly, when Inspector Foot rushes into their house, Harris, assuming he knows the reason of his intrusion, says:

> HARRIS: All right! Can we call off this game of cat and mouse?! I haven't got a television licence – I kept meaning to get one but somehow...
> (Foot *turns to him*)
> FOOT: Then perhaps you have a diploma from the Royal College of Surgeons?
> HARRIS: (*taken aback*) I'm afraid not. I didn't realise they were compulsory. (p.31)

It is significant that Harris uses the idiomatic phrase of "playing cat and mouse with somebody" that means nearly catching somebody and then loosing him/her again. In the broader context of the play this phrase acquires some additional significance for it encapsulates the very quality of Foot's investigation. The mysterious figure from Ponsoby Place was especially difficult to catch because its interpreters endowed it with so many identities that he has gradually assumed more chameleon and elusive quality. Similarly to the first example the situation is highly humorous and its humour hinges on the misunderstanding between Harris and the Inspector. On the account of what Holmes saw in their house Foot has built a hypothetical reconstruction of the scene and, as it was already mentioned, accuses them of performing illegal surgical operations. Harris, having in mind his tv licence, is utterly at a loss hearing Foot's riposte.

Thirdly, the futility of the quest is emphasised when Thelma confuses two names: Magritte and Maigret. Jim Hunter notices that the confusion is not accidental for Maigret is a fictional, but successful French detective created by George Simenon[6]. Maigret's success at solving the mysteries may inevitably bring out Foot's inefficiency.

The quest for truth has often been linked with the quest for the light of knowledge. And throughout the play, from the opening to the final scene, there are some problems with light. The characters are busy changing bulbs, replacing them from one lamp to another. What is more, they perform many curious activities while doing it, blow on the bulbs and take off the socks to remove the hot ones. The lamps give light in a very whimsical, but planned way in reference to the action on the stage. The use of light corresponds closely to Foot's investigation. When the telephone, which was to confirm Foot's deductions rings, Thelma, who needs more light in her needle search, asks if she could have the top light on. Shaken and dumbstruck by the

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[6] J. Hunter: *Tom Stoppard's Plays*. London, Faber and Faber 1982, p. 218.

information he received, Foot fiddles, as if hypnotised, with his sock to change the bulb from the side lamp to the top one. When Thelma repeats her request, the detective, with his dark glasses on, reveals that his hypothesis is a trumped-up story. We can say that on the metaphorical level he also responded to her request and provided her with light for this revelation clears up a bit of the misunderstanding. But Foot, though the crime he deduced did not take place, continues the interrogation about their alibi. In this way he moves away the moment of grasping the truth, extracts the bulb and the stage is covered with complete darkness. In the dark Foot tells a story about his adventurous rush to the parking meter. And his story is the last missing part of the puzzle and provides a principal clue to decipher the mystery. So when he has finished, the mother shouts "Lights" for his story sheds enough light to solve the problem. And Thelma adds with relief "At last" for she has found the needle and, in the context of the quest theme, the story is a soothing piece of news. Only Foot seems to be unaware of the revelation and sits, still wearing dark glasses, as if shrouded in darkness, opposite of light, in ignorance. The fact that he has put his glasses on himself signifies not only his inability to see, but also his own contribution towards preventing himself from discerning the truth, from knowing the answers. He abused the trust in the power of reason and deduction, stubbornly refused to consider other possible solutions and blindly clung to his own hypothesis. And again we can find parallels between the Inspector and his ancient predecessor. At this moment Tiresias's voice could be heard to reveal the perverse truth that in spite of being blind he can see more than Oedipus mocking at him.

When the play closes, the Inspector sits with one bare foot, in sunglasses and eats a banana, the mother stands on her one healthy foot on the chair, which is on the table, and plays on the tuba with one hand clothed in a woollen sock. Harris, in turn, stands in the evening dress, with a cushion on his head, with his eyes closed, on one leg and counts, whereas his wife crawls in her underwear under the table, scans the floor and sniffs. According to Brian Crossley: "the end of the play is another version of the opening pose. Thus, there is a deliberate attempt to recreate in the audience the sense of »this is where we came in«. The circularity of design therefore denies in After Magritte the sense of an ending".[7]

The light plays a decisive role in emphasising the sense of circularity. The lampshade descends and finally when it touches the table the stage is covered with darkness. And since the interplay of light and darkness has been continually bringing out the element of knowing and unknowing, the final scene signifies the latter. This is the point when circularity meets ignorance. The combination of these two elements suggests the situation may be repeated, somebody may once again interpret "the bizarre spectacle" of the final scene and jump to mistaken conclusions. Somebody may repeat

[7] B. M. Crossley, p. 84.

the mistake of Constable Holmes and the Harrises who have mistaken their interpretation of the events for the real events. The play undermines severely the faith in our ability to account for we have seen. The sense of the continuum makes the conflict of appearances and reality a common predicament of men.

Another authorial strategy implemented in the play to convey the sense of uncertainty and doubt are direct allusions to the works of a surrealist painter Rene Magritte. The opening and the final tableau, clasping the whole play together, along with the description of the controversial figure, lacking however the visual power, display a surrealistic quality inasmuch as to suggest that the opening scene is modelled on Magritte's painting *L'Assassin Menace*.[8] The affinity between these two artists can be traced both in the shared philosophical concepts and similar methods of presentation. Magritte believed in a relativist universe following the direction of the subjective perception rather than the hegemony of the received opinion and rejected reason as the means of knowing the reality.[9] Hence in the world of Magritte's paintings all the images are fully recognisable, painted with minute precision, almost realistically, but the whole makes no rational sense. It happens because the objects are removed from their normal context and placed within an odd, shocking framework. The painter, for example, depicted a human eye staring out of the centre of ham lying on the plate. It was to induce in the viewer questions about its meaning and since the reason cannot provide one with any, the desirable reaction is puzzlement and uneasiness. The viewer was to acknowledge the sense of irrational and logically inexplicable. This, in turn, puts in doubt our ability to understand the reality and the ability of our senses and our reason to inform us about it.

Stoppard also designs the opening tableau of *After Magritte* so as to make it such a composition of erratic parts. In a bare room all the furniture is piled up against the door in a sort of a barricade. An old woman is lying on the ironing board and resting her foot on an iron. She is covered from ankle to chin in a white bath towel, she is wearing a black cap on her head and partly on her face and is keeping a bowler hat on her stomach. A young woman in a ballgown is crawling on the floor, and a man is standing on the chair and blowing at the bulb. He is half-naked and is wearing rubber-fishing waders over his black evening trousers. The tableau is teeming with a repertoire of images which obsessively reappeared in Magritte's paintings: a tuba, a black bowler hat, a window with a dark menacing figure outside it. Likewise in Magritte, the recipient is puzzled and looks chaotically for an explanation of what they see.

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[8] T. Brassell: *Tom Stoppard. An Assessment*. London, The Macmillan Press 1985, p. 106.

[9] *International Dictionary of Art and Artists*, gen. ed. J. Vinson. Chicago, St. James Press 1990, p. 494.

Contrary to Magritte, however, Stoppard supplies us with answers we so much desire. What seemed absurd appears to be a result of the ordinary behaviour, "activities of a mundane and domestic nature bordering on cliché". The mother is on the ironing board because of her bad back, she is about to take a bath and it explains the towel and the cup. The girl is picking scattered lead slugs. Her husband's shirt is to be ironed and he is wearing waders to avoid electrocuting himself while changing a bulb. All the furniture is removed for they want to practice dancing before the competition and it explains her elaborate dress and his evening trousers. Yet still our sense of knowing the reality has been shaken, the world appears to be stranger than we might have expected. Moreover the play points at the fact that whenever we filter the reality through our "fervid and treacherous" imagination the conflict between appearances and reality gets more and more difficult to be solved. All the characters of *After Magritte* are endowed with such "fervid and treacherous" imagination, which have made them interpret the reality in their own way. They are prone to strain their interpretation to "what is more likely", to what suits better their version of the story. Inspector Foot does not realise the reality may fall victim to so many interpretations and he stands on the position that the identity of objects is objective and indisputable. When the Harrises quarrel whether it was a handbag or an instrument the figure was carrying, he shouts indignantly:

> FOOT: My wife has an alligator handbag and I defy anyone to mistake it for a musical instrument! (p. 40)

Ironically, it was his wife's handbag that was mistaken not only for a musical instrument, but also for a tortoise and for a football!

Stoppard constructs his text as if to make us realise this intriguing feature of the reality, which misleads people who aspire to interpret it. Additionally within the text the author makes attempts to warn us against mistakes we are so susceptible to make. Namely he uses three times the phrase "seems" and immediately refutes it adding "but is not". Seemingly the mother is dead, and her first words are vulgarity and Holmes might be a cut out figure in the window.

All these misinterpretations of what they "saw with their own eyes" are caused to a certain extend by our relying on our customary and consistent expectations. As Kuhn points out "What a man [or a woman] sees depends both upon what he [or she] looks at and also upon what his [or her] previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him [or her] to see."[10] We can trace the echo of this concept in the interview where Stoppard cites the background for the situation he described in *After Magritte*: "Somebody I know had a couple of peacocks in the garden, and one escaped while he was shaving. He chased it and he had to cross a main road to catch it, and he was

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[10] T. S. Kuhn: *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. Chicago 1962, p. 113.

standing in his pyjamas with shaving cream on his face holding a peacock when the traffic started going by. [...] When I tried the peacock anecdote on the members of a literary society at Eton College, it was received in bewildered silence. I soon realised why: They all had peacocks."[11]

To repeat, Magrittean "afterness" in the play does not resolve itself into a visual similarity, but refers to the shared epistemological convictions. Both artists believe a man is responsible for the conceptualisation of their world. Magritte himself put it this way:

> We see it (the world) as being outside ourselves, although it is only a mental representation of it that we experience inside ourselves. In the same way we sometimes situate in the past a thing which is happening in the present. Time and space thus lose that unrefined meaning which is the only one everyday experience takes into account.[12]

This belief is emblematised in many of Magritte's paintings for example in *Human Condition*. The painter uses there a motif of a window, which he treats as the eye in the body, the house, and which enables us to observe and experience the world. The picture presents an easel standing in front of the window; the easel, its legs, its nails and the painting on the easel are depicted with minute precision. The painting is a reflection of the landscape outside the window and what is obliterated by the easel may be easily deduced from the painting because they are identical; the boundaries between the picture and the landscape are inasmuch fused as to be difficult to discern. However we must remember that what we see is also a picture so it is an image of an image of an image. Together with the title it is a very definite statement about our perception of the reality: we are entrapped in our representation. The painting poses a disturbing question: do we ever perceive more than an image of the reality?

Another painting using this technique of a painting within a painting is his *The Two Mysteries* where he reworks his earlier painting *The Air and the Song*. Magritte juxtaposes there an iconic sign, a pipe, with a linguistic one and signs it: "This is not a pipe". In *Two Mysteries* he puts the earlier picture in a frame and outside he presents what might be taken as a "real" object, but it is not for it is also an image of an image and this visual joke may go on forever on end.

Keir Elam considers this picture as the best illustration of Magritte's semiotic interests focusing on the complex three-way relations among objects, iconic signs and linguistic signs. The painter persistently demonstrated the arbitrary nature of the sign. Magritte considered there is no logical link between what an object is and the name it had acquired in the course of

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[11] T. Stoppard in *Ambushes for the Audience*, Theatre Quarterly May-July (1974): 17.

[12] L. Scutenaire: *René Magritte*. Brussels, Brussels Librairie Selection 1947, p. 82, and A. Hammacher: *Magritte*. London, Thames and Hudson 1974, p. 84.

history. The name of an object could be any other word and the object may be replaced by a word. The possibility to replace and change signs undermined the credibility of the established signs. Today these are in short the standard theses of the twentieth century semiology. Keir Elam says that Magritte brings into Stoppard's play the status of the very referent and represented object which is the subject to the same laws of cultural meditation and epistemic instability[13]. "Object, image, and lexical unit", as Magritte would repeat after Charles Peirce, "stand as interpretants of one another and there is no way of breaking this interpretational chain or circle as to arrive finally at the chimerical »objet réel«".[14]

Keir Elam continues the thought and observes that as Magritte's world is presented as a mosaic of adjoining and interdefinig forms, there is also a lot of interaction between objects, images, and linguistic signs in *After Magritte*. The conflicting interpretations of the mysterious figure from Ponsoby Place, made by the Harrises, trigger off an interpretational chain: the tortoise is to the blind man is to the white stick, as the football is to the footballer is to the ivory cane. This is Magritte's mosaic where all "real" objects are the same as "represented" objects. The author of the above analogy notices, however, the difference for Stoppard provides us with the "real" object which is Inspector Foot himself. He came to the house to investigate, to interpret these who interpreted and appears to be "interpreted" himself [15].

To conclude, owing to the authorial strategies discussed above, the world of *After Magritte* is created as if to convey the sense of epistemological uncertainty on various levels. In the first place Stoppard thwarts generic expectations connected with the convention of the detective story and thus deprives us of the assurance brought by this genre when the detective arrives at the only right perspective, at the truth. Stoppard mocks the abuse of logic, undermines the authority of an eyewitness account and strains the trust we place on the infallibility of our senses. His experimentation with the convention becomes a vehicle for his disrespect for the world model based on rational analysis. Thus Stoppard joins Rene Magritte in his appeal to free our perception from the restrictions of reason and to reject our easy assumptions about the reality. Stoppard's play encourages us to cherish the subjectivity of our perception and to see the world in its astounding complexity, as if anew.

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[13] K. Elam: *After Magritte, After Carroll, After Wittgenstein: What Tom Stoppard's Tortoise Taught Us*. Modern Drama 27(1984): 472–473.

[14] Ch. S. Peirce: *Collected Papers*. Cambridge 1932, p. 1339, and K. Elam, p. 474.

[15] Ibidem, p. 475.