



# The Real Thing

*Tom Stoppard*

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## **The Real Thing** Tom Stoppard

The play begins with Max and Charlotte, a couple whose marriage seems about to rupture. But nothing one sees on a stage is the real thing, and some things are less real than others. Charlotte is an actress who has been appearing in a play about marriage by her husband, Henry. Max, her leading man, is also married to an actress, Annie. Both marriages are at the point of rupture because Henry and Annie have fallen in love. But is it the real thing?

In *The Real Thing*, Tom Stoppard combines his characteristically brilliant wordplay and wit with flashes of insight that illuminate the nature--and the mystery--of love, creating a multi-toned play that challenges the mind while searching out the innermost secrets of the heart.

## **The Real Thing Details**

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# From Reader Review The Real Thing for online ebook

## Kitty says

Fun if you're in the mood for it. Love is not an easy topic to pick, but Stoppard delivers a fresh and "theatrical" look I'd love to see "in the flesh" so as to revel in the "about turns" and deceptions. Just what is this thing called love? called real thing? Who is acting what part?

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## Leslie says

Very enjoyable play about love (when is it "the real thing"?). The play centers around Henry (a playwright) and Annie (an actress); as often in Stoppard's plays, certain scenes & phrases repeat throughout the play with small variations. In this play one of the repeating scenes is of a wife returning home after a trip to a husband who thinks he has evidence of her infidelity -- sometimes the husband is mistaken, sometimes the wife has lied but not been unfaithful, sometimes he is correct. I found the different aspects of jealousy interesting, but some aspects of the play were a bit dated (a rant at the beginning about digital watches for example).

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## Laura says

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/01...>

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## H says

HENRY: I can't help somebody who thinks, or thinks he thinks, that editing a newspaper is censorship, or that throwing bricks is a demonstration hile building tower blocks is social violence, or that unpalatable statement is provocation while disrupting the speaker is the exercise of free speech . . . Words don't deserve that kind of malarkey. THeY're innocent, neutral, precise, standing for this, describing that, meaning the other, so if you look after them you can build bridges across incomprehension and chaos. But when they get their corners knocked off, they're no good any more, and Brodie knocks corners off without knowing he's doing it. So everything he builds is jerry-built. It's rubbish. An intelligent child could push it over. I don't think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little or make a poem which children will speak for you when you're dead.

(ACT TWO, Scene Five)

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## J.M. says

December of Drama 2015, day seventeen

*"If you want a lover,*

*I'll do anything you ask me to.  
And if you want another kind of love,  
I'll wear a mask for you."*  
--I'm Your Man, by Leonard Cohen

There are some who would call this "a fine play," and it is. There are others who will call it "a clever play," and it's that, too. But it's not just fine, nor merely clever. In fact there's a point where anybody watching (or reading) it may ask themselves whether what it's doing is anything more than cleverness... well, absolutely, it's more than that. The structure may be the most salient aspect (each subsequent scene being 'nested' in the previous one, and also seeming like its opposite) but the wit and the verbal acrobatics are what impressed me most. Sure it's essentially about love and marriage and relationships, but it's also about truth, and writing about truth, about experience and the depiction of experiences. Here's one memorable little passage:

"I don't think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little or make a poem which children will speak for you when you're dead."

Right? This is a great play for readers, writers, and lovers. So, just about everybody, then. I think I only withheld a five-star rating because I feel like I ought to be stingier with those. Great but not stop-your-heart amazing.

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## **Paul E. Morph says**

Don't be fooled by the title; this isn't a play about Coke or Faith No More's best album (you watch; I'll get an argument on that last one) but rather a searching character piece about LOVE.

To be more specific, it explores the nature of love and how it means different things to different people. It includes betrayal, devotion, sex, parental love and that old favourite, unrequited love.

It also includes a brief exploration of highbrow and lowbrow art which, I suspect, is meant to draw a parallel with the nature of love... but, Hell, what do I know? My English Literature A Level was over twenty years ago now.

This is Tom Stoppard so you're guaranteed that it's going to be very clever and very funny. I laughed out loud a few times and listening to this play on my drive home was a great way to wash away the working week. Highly recommended.

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## **Tony says**

Stoppard, Tom. THE REAL THING. (1984). \*\*\*\*\*. Written with Stoppard's patented wit, this play focuses on love – at first with comic wit, then with mordant wit. His characters are all actors, theater artists, or writers; the kinds of people who excel at clever and stylish deception. The play is built on layer after layer of appearances that seem to be truth, but turn out to be deception, or, maybe, different forms of truth. In the opening act, we meet Max and Charlotte, a married couple. Max is in his early forties and Charlotte is 35-ish. Charlotte, an employee of Southebys, has just returned from a trip to Switzerland – or has she? Max is waiting for her as she enters the room. He lets her know that she forgot to take her passport. He found it in

her dresser drawer. The truth has to come out. Charlotte is having an affair. Next we meet Henry and Annie. Henry is a writer and a playwright. Annie is an actress. Henry is probably a writer's writer. Although they are married, they have widely different tastes, none more apparent than in music. Annie is a classical music fan. Henry loves pop music, especially pop music from the 50s. This couple is having trouble with their marriage, too. When the four of them get together, the barbs begin to fly, but they're never nasty. But they are telling. In an attempt to learn about classical music, Henry begins listening to classical recordings. He is doing so as Annie comes into the room:

Annie: Well?

Henry: Oh – um – Strauss.

Annie: What?

Henry: Not Strauss.

Annie: (Scornfully) Strauss. How can it be Strauss? It's in Italian.

Henry: Is it? (He listens) So it is.

Italian opera.

One of the Italian operas.

Verdi.

Annie: Which one?

Henry: Giuseppe. (He judges from her expression that this is not the right answer.)

Monty?

Annie: I mean which opera?

Henry: Ah. (Confidently) Madama Butterfly.

Later, Annie and Henry get into a conversation about the different ways that they look at things in the world. It starts:

“Henry: There is, I suppose, a world of objects which have a certain form, like this coffee mug. I turn it and it has no handle. I tilt it and it has no cavity. But there is something real here which is always a mug with a handle. I suppose. But politics, justice, patriotism – they aren't even like coffee mugs. There's nothing real there separate from our perception of them. So if you try and change them as though there were something there to change, you'll get frustrated, and frustration will finally make you violent.”

So much for a scathing put-down of Annie's choice of topics.

Love isn't all it's cracked up to be. It might be if we were malleable creatures and could adapt to the other's needs – but we're not. Stoppard's views will make you stop and think, at least between grins at his ability with the language. Highly recommended.

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## Shelley says

taking a break between books to re-read this on the first warm day. I saw this produced as a play, with who? Roy Scheider doing a painful British Accent I'm googling around here... It says that Glen Close was in it but I seem to remember Blythe Danner. Jeremy Irons was the memorable one.

Why it became really really important to track down my copy and stop most things to read it right-this-minute: I've been working on a new painting, and the idea is there but the composition is iffy. The painting is not finding its borders yet, I remembered Jeremy Irons reading this long, convoluted monologue about

cricket:

HENRY: This thing here, which looks like a wooden club, is actually several pieces of particular wood cunningly put together in a certain way so the whole thing is sprung, like a dance floor. It's for hitting cricket balls with. If you get it right, the cricket ball will travel two hundred yards in four seconds, and all you've done is give it a knock like knocking the top off a bottle of stout, and it makes a noise like a trout taking a fly... (He clucks his tongue to make the noise) What we're trying to do is to write cricket bats, so that when we throw up an idea and give it a little knock, it might...travel... (He clucks his tongue again and picks up the script) Now, what we've got here is a lump of wood of roughly the same shape trying to be a cricket bat, and if you hit a ball with it, the ball will travel about ten feet and you will drop the bat and dance about shouting "Ouch!" with your hands stuck into your armpits. (Indicates the cricket bat) This isn't better because someone says it's better, or because there's a conspiracy by the MCC to keep cudgels out of Lords. It's better because it's better. You don't believe me, so I suggest you go out to bat with this (the script) and see how you get on.

and it took my breath away and I wanted to make a painting that could ....travel....

so I found the script and read it and sharpened my pencils and beaver'd on.

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## **A. says**

Review: *The Real Thing*, *Night and Day*, *Travesties* by Tom Stoppard

I recently hear a technically brilliant, world famous organist and composer play one of his more difficult works. As I expected, it was technically brilliant, and arid. It recalled many technically brilliant works for the piano written during, principally, the Romantic period: brilliant, but arid. Spoiler alert: if technical brilliance is your touchstone in valuing music and drama, skip this review.

"Henry : Or perhaps I'd realize where I'm standing. Or at least that I'm standing somewhere. There is, I suppose, a world of objects which have a certain form, like this coffee mug. I turn it, and it has no handle. I tilt it, and there is no cavity. But there is something real here which is always a mug with a handle. I suppose. But politics, justice, patriotism—they aren't even like coffee mugs. There's nothing real there separate from our perception of them. So if you try to change them as if there were something there to change, you'll get frustrated, and frustration will finally make you violent. If you know this and proceed with humility, you may perhaps alter people's perceptions so that they believe a little differently at that axis of behavior where we locate politics or justice; but if you don't know this, then you're acting on a mistake. Prejudice is the expression of a mistake." (*The Real Thing*, p. 52.)

"Ruth: How strange. I had no idea that it was the millionaires who were threatening your freedom to report, Dick [addressed to Dick Wagner, a reporter]. I thought it was a millionaire who was picking up the bill for your freedom to report. In fact, I was discussing this very thing with somebody only yesterday—who could it have been?—oh, yes, it was Alastair [her eight year old son]....(She smiles broadly at Wagner.)

"Wagner: (Sarcastically) Alastair, was it?

"Ruth: 'Alli,' I said, 'how are things in London with all those millionaires controlling your freedom to report?' 'I don't think I quite follow you, Mummy,' he said. 'The whole country is littered with papers pushing every political line from anarchy to Zen.' His theory—Alastair's theory—is that it's the very free-for-all which guarantees the freedom of each. 'You see, Mummy,' he said, 'you don't have to be a millionaire to contradict one. It isn't the millionaires who are going to stop you, it the Wagners who don't trust the public to choose the marked card.' Do you think he's got something, Dick?" (*Night and Day*, p. 83)

“Carr: No, no, no, no, my dear girl—Marx got it wrong. He got it wrong for good reasons but he got it wrong just the same. And twice over. In the first place he was the victim of an historical accident, and in the second place his materialism made a monkey out of him, and of his theory---

“Cecily (coldly): Mr. Tzara, you are insulting me and my comrades---

“Carr: —and especially of his comrades. The historical accident could have happened to anybody. By bad luck he encountered the capitalist system at its most deceptive period. The industrial revolution had crowded the people into slums and enslaved them in factories, but it had not yet begun to bring them the benefits of an industrialized society. Marx looked about him and saw that the system depended on a wretched army of wage slaves. He drew the lesson that the wealth of the capitalist was the counterpart to the poverty of the worker and had in fact been stolen from the worker in the form of unpaid labor. He thought that was how the whole thing worked. That false assumption was itself added to a false premise. This premise was that people were a sensational kind of material object and would behave predictably in a material world. Marx predicted that they would behave according to their class. But they didn’t. Deprived, self-interested, bitter or greedy as the case may be, they showed streaks of superior intelligence, superior strength, superior morality...[sic] Legislation, unions, share capital, consumer power—in all kinds of ways and for all kinds of reasons, the classes moved closer together instead of further apart. The critical moment never came. It receded. The tide must have turned about the time when *Das Kapital* after eighteen years of hard labour was finally coming off the press...” (Travesties, p.76 f)

This last, deeply flawed play has some of the best lines of the three:

“Carr: To be an artist in Zurich, in 1917, implies a degree of self-absorption that would have glazed over the eyes of Narcissus.” (Travesties p. 38)

“Carr: ...I had no idea that poets nowadays were interested in literature.” (p. 42)

“Carr: Unrelieved truthfulness can give a young girl a reputation for insincerity. I have known plain girls with nothing to hide captivate the London season purely by discriminate mendacity.” (p. 43)

Yes, I remember when dramatic tension and poetic expression ceded to intellectual pretention in plays. The hint of a “new” idea, including the idea that one watching a drama should think, stimulated hosannas from critics. Dramas turned into scripted essays, and finally led to the absurdity of “dramas” like *Waiting for Godot*.

Mr. Graziano is the author of *From the Cross to the Church: the Emergence of the Church from the Chaos of the Crucifixion*.

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## Indira says

I picked this up after reading *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, a play also written by Tom Stoppard. That play made me expect a lot from Stoppard. *The Real Thing* did have some witty wordplay, but I found the plot to be boring. It's about trying to discover what real love is, and how sometimes what seems like love isn't "the real thing." I should have known that I wouldn't enjoy a play all about love. The characters didn't make the play any more enjoyable, either; I really wanted to support and empathize with a character throughout the story, but couldn't find a single one in this play. I would have given this one star, but the play-within-a-play (along with the wordplay mentioned earlier) earned *The Real Thing* a second star. I didn't enjoy this play, but someone interested in its themes certainly would.

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## Leigh says

There's a reason that this play is one of my all-time favorites from Stoppard, and this is it:

*Words don't deserve that kind of malarkey. They're innocent, neutral, precise, standing for this, describing that, meaning the other, so if you look after them you can build bridges across incomprehension and chaos. But when they get their corners knocked off, they're no good any more.... I don't think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little or make a poem which children will speak for you when you're dead.*

If you don't get a lump in your throat just reading that, you have no soul.

For all that I love Stoppard's plays of pure intellectual inquiry, I love *The Real Thing* best. I love it for being at its heart just a play about *people*, in particular a protagonist who is brilliant and glib and witty, but who can't write his life as well as he would like to. Essentially, I love this play for being about the inarticulate--the utter unliterary triteness of love, the value of its experience over its expression--and, paradoxically, for articulating it so well. That's genius for you.

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## Katie says

It's not too hard a thing, to start reading plays. I'm glad it seems I'm able to start to read on my own a bit.

Stoppard. I hesitate to say I like any given author. It's the work, you see, that is more interesting. Authors can be fallible. They can create a masterpiece like EoE and then have...the rest. I thin I really want to say that I enjoy Stoppard. R&G? Quite innovative, funny, light and at the same time dark; cynical while optimistic. Arcadia, of course. I gush about it.

So where does the real thing fit in? I thought that I would like it. I mean, I could feel myself wanting to. Internally lauding the theatrical devices employed etc. Noticed the witty dialouge. Laughed aloud atimes -- only Stoppard really does that to me. And I dont' think this play has had me turn away from Stoppard. I am not disappointed, really. Well maybe a little, but only because I had such high expectations to begin with. The Real Thing is...about love? I...honestly feel like I didn't fully understand it. Or, only kind of did. The individual monologues, scenes -- even the reflections mirrors from a scene to the next (or one two scenes later) -- these all liked me well. The larger picture, the content of it, that is -- there I got lost. It's not even that it's not worth reading or anything. I'm just left mildly puzzled, slightly offput by my lack of thorough enjoyment. So 3 stars -- I liked it. I guess.

But as briefly mentioned, Stoppard as funny and intellectual and himself as can be, I think -- and though I have a collection of 5 plays of his in a book here, I am too cautious to read them all at once, lest one blend into the next (as with Ibesn, or even O'Neill to me). I will continue, then, warily, in my supposed enjoyment of, optimism for, the playwright...

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## Trevor says

I think this play has one of the best lines about enduring love and enduring through love. Even though the characters and incredibly flawed, I appreciated their vulnerability and desire to stay together despite the fact that their relationship was getting difficult. Stoppard does a great job portraying two characters who don't

want to stay together because of a buildup of tension and yet who still feel compelled to remain. It's not a simplistic portrayal either. The two characters are not so devoted to love and marriage that they seem naive and idealistic about love and marriage; in fact, if anything they seem jaded about the whole idea--their last marriages ended because of their affair and there is no real indication that they plan on this relationship lasting longer than it takes for the norepinephrine to dry up. But somehow--and they are surprised by this--they want to stay together despite all this. While watching and later reading the play, I kept trying to figure out how Stoppard portrayed the conflicting emotions so seamlessly. Stoppard is a genius, though, so I still don't know how he did it but I'm glad I can appreciate and enjoy his work both on the stage and in print. A word about the understandability of this play: In his work Stoppard is often engaged in metaphysics, chaos theory, erudite history, and loads of other obscure and hard to understand devices--that's part of his charm and intrigue. Perhaps this play has such devices too and I missed it, but I found this play to be very accessible without sacrificing depth.

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### **Paul Secor says**

A play that concerns love, lust, honesty, writing - what more could I want?

Soundtrack:

*Hot Violins* - Joe Venuti, Eddie South, Clifford Hayes, Emilio Cacaes, Stuff Smith, et. al.

Ornette Coleman: *Virgin Beauty*

*Mingus Plays Piano*

J.S. Bach: Cello Suites - Anner Bylsma (1992)

This probably sounds as pretentious as Henry's Desert Island Discs in the play, but we all are what we are.

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### **tomwrote says**

This play about fidelity and infidelity may be self serving, if Stoppard's private life is considered, but that doesn't stop it being sharp, clever, acid, insightful, witty, elegant, highly structured, and all the things that seem to be his hallmark.

The structure is tricky but so smoothly done as to be invisible without looking for it. Some of the diversions are brilliant - the cricket bat, though others less so - digital watches. Overall this is more accessible than other Stoppard plays in emotional terms and a little rawer.

The characters are not easy to like and none of them behave well (perhaps Max...) but that lends to the sense of people either fighting or yielding to their flaws in a relatively realistic fashion.

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### **Rachel C. says**

In a word: spectacular.

Stoppard uses the play-within-a-play structure to mess around with ideas of reality, honesty, fidelity and love. Characters include a playwright (Henry) and two actresses (Charlotte and Annie). Henry is married to first one, then the other: "To marry one actress is unfortunate, to marry two is simply asking for it."

Stoppard puts his gift for verbal gymnastics into Henry's mouth and we watch Henry struggle (eloquently) to articulate how he feels about the women in his life, his job, and the intersection of the two. His monologue with the cricket bat pretty much sums up how I feel about writing.

In 1999 I spent a summer in London taking a theatre course; I saw some 25 plays in a month. The best of those was the unforgettable Donmar Warehouse production of this play featuring Jennifer Ehle (of P&P fame) and Stephen Dillane, both of whom went on to win Tonys for their roles. Tom Stoppard is a genius and I'll read and watch anything with his name on it. "The Real Thing" shows him at the pinnacle of his craft.

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### **Rich Law says**

I'm not all that familiar with Stoppard's stuff (I saw and loved Arcadia a few years ago), but I'll certainly be reading more.

The Real Thing is all about love, and it tackles it with an intelligence, wit, and depth that I've rarely come across. The titular "real thing" is hard to pin down; there are a couple of plays within this play and all the characters are professional actors/writers who are constantly mixing their profession with their personal lives by constantly acting. This doesn't make for a particularly easy read.

The two central characters, Henry and Annie, are constantly professing their love for each other, but our understanding of what those three words mean is constantly changing throughout the play. Even though I couldn't pin down what Stoppard's vision of "The Real Thing" might be, I'm convinced this play has some of the most honest and true dialogue about love I've ever read, particularly the moment Annie tells Henry: "You have to find a part of yourself where I'm not important or you won't be worth loving."

That line alone has made me head straight away to the next Stoppard Play.

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### **Erisa Isak says**

Heart-wrenching!

So eh, I decided to give it an extra star . . . for the language in it. I came back to get a quote, and ended up reading the whole play. It's such a pleasure to read!

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### **Eric Norris says**

The idea that "Mirage and reality merge in love" finds its perfect theatrical portrayal here. Plays are performed within plays; lives are re-written as lies; and re-written as difficult and hard to swallow truths about the human heart; all the while love--the most intangible asset of them all--finds itself buried in bowl of vegetable dip--the comical mimetic counterpart of Chekhov's gun. A brilliant play on every level.

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## **Holly says**

Sometimes I forget how much I like reading plays.

Aside from the super awkward cover, which made me feel like I was reading something trashy, I really, really loved this book (play. screenplay.).

Stoppard is an incredibly gifted playwright. This story is basically a commentary on love and relationships and has so many poignant moments that I had to stop taking note of the quotes that I liked because there were simply too many of them. Each character has a vastly different idea of what love is and what a successful relationship looks like. They argue about jealousy, infidelity, passion, romance, etc. etc. etc.

Typical Stoppard, there isn't much happening plot-wise in the story. Rather, the audience just gets short glimpses into the lives of people as they laugh, cry, argue and love one another.

It's a beautiful, quick read.

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