

Discussion questions for *Hapgood*, Tom Stoppard

1. Before the play starts, Stoppard quotes:

We choose to examine a phenomenon which is impossible, *absolutely* impossible, to explain in any classical way, and which has in it the heart of quantum mechanics. In reality it contains only mystery. . . Any other situation in quantum mechanics, it turns out, can always be explained by saying, 'You remember the case of the experiment with two holes? It's the same thing.'

Richard P. Feynman

'Lectures on Physics'/'The Character of Physical Law'

How does this quote apply to the play? What is the experiment with two holes?

2. Why is everyone calling her "Mother"? What is the intention of this?

3. Why is the "men" sign on the door reversed? And later put back straight at the end?

4. At the beginning of Scene 2, the stage direction it says:

KERNER has been brought by RIDLEY to the zoo. BLAIR, having checked the time on his watch, nods at RIDLEY to dismiss him.

RIDLEY moves out.

Perhaps we are looking at BLAIR and KERNER through the bars of a cage.

There could be a bench, there could be paper cups of coffee . . . The bars make hard-edged shadows. We need one particular and distinct demarcation of light and shadow on the floor, perhaps thrown by the edge of a wall.

In Scene 3, Act 2, BLAIR and KERNER meet at the zoo, again. Why the zoo? And what is the possible intention of this staging?

5. What kind of character is little Joe?

6. In scene 5, Act 1, we see that Hapgood and Ridley are each others alibi. They "betray" each other for their own goals. At the end of scene 5 of Act 2, Hapgood tells him to open the box. The scene ends with a kiss. What is the relationship between the two?

7. In scene 5, Act 1, between the conversation between Hapgood and Kerner (p.47), Kerner describes about a spy novel that he wants to write one day. He also says that they surprise him all in the same way. Which category does this play fall into? We know from the start that there are two Riddles. Did this ruin the fun?

8. In the same scene, Kerner also makes a speech about Einstein and God (p.49-50). What is your opinion about this and do you think this is Stoppard's view point?

9. In the 'inter-scene' between scene 1 and scene2 of Act 2, Ridley becomes a different Ridley, and the stage direction says, "It's like a quantum jump." What would a 'quantum jump change' look like?

10. In page 71-72 (scene 3, act 2), Kerner has a long monologue about him being the 'minus' man. Why do you think he is chosen to be a minus man? In the same dialogue, he says, "We're all doubles." What is the dual personality of Kerner? Of other characters? And what is similar/different from the characters in *Travesties* in this context?

11. Hapgood has three names: Elizabeth/Lilya Hapgood and Betty Newton. What do they possibly mean?

12. On her way out of scene 4 in act 2, Hapgood says "Queen to king one." Was there any other clear statement that allowed the reader to know that she is acting as a double?

13. At the end of scene 6, act 2, Hapgood says, "Who? Us and the KGB? The opposition! We're just keeping each other in business, we should send each other Christmas cards – oh, f-f-fuck it, Paul!" Like she mentioned, what do you think about the relationship of the spy game, Russia versus the Western Europe, and maybe even how the Russian revolution was dealt in *Travesties*? What is the politics in this play?

14. There seems to be a point when Hapgood changes or collapses. When do you think is the prime(haha) moment and what was the trigger?

15. In the play, there are many physics laws that were explained by Kerner: Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, the topological problem of the Seven Bridges of Konigsbergs, anti-matter/matter, double slit experiment, and wave-partical duality. Was his description easy to follow/do you agree with his way of its application to human behavior? Furthermore, what is the significance/intention/effect of using these principles?

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