

**Intellectual Property and the Theft of Creativity
in Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*: An Interdisciplinary
Critical Analysis**

Prof.Dr. Ansam Riyadh Abdullah Almaarof
Tikrit University- College of Education for Women
- English Department

Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq

Assist.Inst. Mohammed Muneer Abdul-Al-Jabbar
AL-Mansour University College- English Department
Mohammed.mounir@muc.edu.iq

أ.د أنسام رياض عبد الله المعروف

جامعة تكريت - كلية التربية للبنات - قسم اللغة الانكليزية

م.م محمد منير عبد الجبار

كلية المنصور الجامعة - قسم اللغة الانكليزية



Intellectual Property and the Theft of Creativity in Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*: An interdisciplinary Critical Analysis

Abstract:

The paper claims Stoppard's *The Real Thing* is particularly nuanced in its exploration of the ethical and ideological stakes of intellectual property and creative ownership. Characterisation and narrative alludes to the notion of ownership of music: who owns it, how it is created and how it should be bought. These two elements of the creative process become intertwined as Stoppard centres on the power structures that govern artistic practice and challenges the fine line between personal experience and the material it creates. The paper seeks to give a close reading of Stoppard's treatment of intellectual property in the play. By exploring the ethics and ideology of creative ownership, this work identifies how they continually shape the characters and their relationships. It tries to answer these questions: How does Stoppard depict the nuances of property in mind? How does one draw the line between using personal relationships and experiences as material for one's creative work? What are some key themes or debates that emerge from these discussions, and how do they reflect larger societal tensions around the question of who owns and has the authority to control ideas and narratives? The paper is to analyse the play narrative structure, character interactions, and thematic content through a critical theoretical lens. It aims to investigate the power dynamics and ethical considerations involved with the creation of ideas, along with the larger conversations occurring in society around ownership and control of thoughts. For the play-within-the-play structure, Stoppard's play competes for creative material at the expense of human connection, and how the notion of intellectual property can be twisted to redefine interpersonal relationships based on the value of artistic work. A moving critique of the exploitative sensibilities woven into our creative endeavours, the play urges artists to be aware of the full ethical implications of their works: Who is the story really about? How much of any story is the author's story at all? More importantly, at what cost do we gain credibility through art, and how can one reconcile this with the human suffering it causes or perpetuates? This paper engages with the academic context surrounding intellectual property and ethics in storytelling, using these three theme lenses.

Keywords: Intellectual property, creative ownership, ethical implications, Tom Stoppard, *The Real Thing*, critical theory, artistic expression, personal relationships.

الملكية الفكرية وسرقة الإبداع في مسرحية "الشيء الحقيقي" لتوم ستوبارد:

تحليل نقدي متعدد التخصصات

الملخص

تدعي هذه الورقة أن مسرحية "الشيء الحقيقي" لتوم ستوبارد تتميز بمعالجتها الدقيقة للجوانب الأخلاقية والأيدولوجية للملكية الفكرية وحقوق الإبداع. تشير الشخصيات والسرد إلى مفهوم ملكية الموسيقى: من يمتلكها، وكيف يتم إنشاؤها، وكيف ينبغي شراؤها. هذان العنصران من العملية الإبداعية يصبحان متشابكين بينما يركز ستوبارد على الهياكل السلطوية التي تحكم الممارسة الفنية، متحديًا الخط الفاصل بين التجربة الشخصية والمادة الإبداعية التي تنتج عنها. تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم قراءة متعمقة لمعالجة ستوبارد لقضية الملكية الفكرية في المسرحية، من خلال استكشاف أخلاقيات وأيدولوجيات ملكية الإبداع، وتحديد كيفية تشكيل هذه المفاهيم للعلاقات بين الشخصيات. تحاول الدراسة الإجابة عن الأسئلة التالية: كيف يصور ستوبارد الفروق الدقيقة للملكية الفكرية؟ كيف يمكن رسم الخط الفاصل بين استخدام العلاقات الشخصية والتجارب كمادة إبداعية؟ ما هي بعض الموضوعات أو النقاشات الأساسية التي تنبثق من هذه القضايا، وكيف تعكس التوترات الاجتماعية الأوسع حول مسألة من يملك الأفكار ومن له الحق في التحكم في السرد؟ تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تحليل هيكل السرد في المسرحية، وتفاعلات الشخصيات، والمحتوى الموضوعي من خلال عدسة نقدية نظرية متداخلة ومتكاملة. كما تسعى إلى استكشاف ديناميكيات القوة والاعتبارات الأخلاقية المرتبطة بإنتاج الأفكار، إلى جانب الحوارات المجتمعية الأوسع حول مفهوم الملكية والسيطرة على الفكر. باستخدام بنية "المسرحية داخل المسرحية"، تظهر المسرحية كيف أن التنافس على المادة الإبداعية يأتي على حساب العلاقات الإنسانية، وكيف يمكن تحريف مفهوم الملكية الفكرية لإعادة تعريف العلاقات الشخصية بناءً على قيمة العمل الفني. باعتبارها نقدًا مؤثرًا للحساسيات الاستغلالية المتأصلة في جهودنا الإبداعية، تحث المسرحية الفنانين على إدراك العواقب الأخلاقية الكاملة لأعمالهم: من يروي القصة حقًا؟ إلى أي مدى تكون قصتي هي قصتي بالفعل؟ والأهم من ذلك، بأي ثمن نكتسب المصداقية من خلال الفن، وكيف يمكن التوفيق بين ذلك وبين المعاناة الإنسانية التي قد يسببها أو يعززها؟ تناقش هذه الورقة الخطاب الأكاديمي المحيط بالملكية الفكرية والأخلاقيات في السرد الفني، من خلال عدسة ثلاثة محاور موضوعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الملكية الفكرية، ملكية الإبداع، التداعيات الأخلاقية، توم ستوبارد، الشيء الحقيقي، التنافس، موت الكاتب، وظيفة الكاتب، التعبير الفني، العلاقات الشخصية.

Introduction

The theme of intellectual property and theft of creative work has always excited and divided both literary and the performing arts worlds. One insightful work that examines this intricate topic is Tom Stoppard's 1982 play *The Real Thing*. This is a bold, powerful play, one that speaks to the moral and ideological stakes of ownership, artistic and otherwise, especially with the dramatic structure of this one the turns can become betrayal. The audience, as pandering in ways all too familiar to every artist, they are waiting in line-editing blackouts. Stoppard explores the interplay between power and ethics that lies within the creative process, calling into question the traditional notions surrounding intellectual property while examining the subtle tensions between lived experience and literary output.

Instead, Stoppard's *The Real Thing* is a thought-provoking piece that invites the audience to question the nature of language, idea ownership, truth, and reality. The story centres on the life of Henry, a successful playwright, as he navigates life with his wife, Annie, and his ex-wife, Brooke, all set in modern-day London. Stoppard operates a narrative that is layered with a play-within-the-play structure, which allows him to engage with complexities of using personal experiences to mould creative work (Stoppard, 1982). This framework of such a journey is a means of investigating the ethics of artistic expression, in particular when those works leak into the lives and emotions of other beings. As such, its exploration of issues around intellectual property and creative ownership feels particularly relevant in today society, as the right and wrong of these topics are ongoing debates. Gary S. Becker & Kevin M. Murphy, *Social Dynamics* 82 (1990); Lawrence Lessig, in *The Future of Ideas* arguing that "intellectual property is a dynamic concept, shaped by cultural, legal, and technological contexts". (33, 2004) Stoppard seems to be on this side in *The Real Thing*, where the essence of ideas does not belong to any one half of a couple but belongs instead in some way to the couple as a whole and to the power relationships that exist between it and its opposition (Lessig, 2004).

In addition to addressing the personal impact of such a choice, the play expounds on the ethical implications of using personal relationships and experiences as fodder for creative work. Henry's substantially autobiographical play begs questions about the boundaries between the public and private spheres. There is added tension in the fact that Henry's work touches not only his own life, but the lives of those around him, especially his wife and ex-wife. As Martha Woodmansee (1994) and many other scholars have pointed out, the ethicality of creative work is usually neglected in intellectual property discussions. Stoppard's play reminds audience of the personal and relational toll of the artistic work that this oversight abets (Woodmansee, 1994).

In response to these motifs, this study interrogates the play through a critical theoretical lens, exploring the narrative and character dynamics, and the thematic content of the play. In this undertaking, the methodology consists of a close reading of the text accompanied by a handful of secondary sources that offer historical and critical context. Doing so, it allows readers to conduct an in-depth study of Stoppard's use of play-within-the-play to explore the dialectic between truth, authenticity, and the proprietary ownership of ideas.

This study's findings suggest that Stoppard challenges the idea of intellectual property, provoking ethical considerations surrounding the boundaries in which the artist remains an artist, through the creative work that affects one's relationship with their offspring or partner. The analysis will shed light on ongoing discussions regarding intellectual property and the ethical roles of storytelling. In the end, *The Real Thing* is that rarest of works whose bold exploration of the unseen machinery of artistic genius forces audience to examine one's place within the creation of art as a consumer as well as an artist within himself.

Literature Review

Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing* (1982) is a dense work that interrogates notions of authenticity, authorship, and the commodification of intellectual and artistic labour. The play's thematic investment in questions of intellectual property and ethical quandaries of artistic proprietorship has rendered it of interest to scholarship along a number of critical lines, including postmodernist, intertextual, and legal readings of the text. With the play as an object of focus, this literature review explores existing scholarship on intellectual property and creative theft to locate this study within the context of a wider discourse on artistic originality and cultural production.

For IP literature, everything is at stake: originality and intertextuality (Rose, 1993) are contentious issues in IP debate dating back to IP inception and continue to be, particularly for literary and artistic works. As Barthes (1977) explained, the idea of the 'author' as exclusive creator of meaning is a modern concept which implies that all texts are derivative. In a similar vein, Foucault (1984) complicates authorship, arguing that texts arise within a network of discursive formations. When understood within the framework of Stoppard's work, these theories elucidate the ways in which *The Real Thing* grapples with and critiques notions of artistic authenticity and appropriation.

Intellectual Property and the Theft of Creativity in Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*: An interdisciplinary Critical Analysis

Stoppard's plays have often been investigated for their relation to postmodernist ideas about intertextuality, pastiche, and the instability of meaning (Hutcheon, 1988). The play stands out for accurately being self-referential with these matters, presenting a playwright, Henry, who struggles with quandaries of literary merit as well as the moral questions of borrowing from other people's work. As Rabey (2001) notes, Stoppard's play places tension between originality and adaptation at its center, implying dialogue as the very medium of creativity.

In addition, through Henry's criticism of an adaptation by another artist, the motif of creative theft becomes dramatized, while at the same time, the commodification of art as well as the susceptibility of intellectual property, are called into question (Kelly, 2009). Henry's struggle echoes broader debates within literary studies about the ownership of ideas and the boundaries of legitimate artistic influence.

Interlinking legal and literary views on intellectual property has already been contemplated in the context of dramatic works and, especially, copyright law and artistic integrity (Ginsburg, 1990). Although copyright law is designed to safeguard original expression it becomes complex when applied to dramatic literature since playwrights frequently utilize previously existing works and cultural narratives. The play presents this tension between the original and the derivative, the personal and the counterfeit, and the legal and ethical conundrum for artists who are accused of theft from seeking out (Kastan, 2014).

The existing literature on *The Real Thing* has addressed its postmodernist critique of authorship, its meta-theatrical exploration of creativity, and its engagement with legal and ethical concerns surrounding intellectual property. Yet, still more work may be done to explore how Stoppard's play, in particular, interrogates the commodification of art as materialized in the context of IP law. This study contributes to the intersection of literature and law by presenting Gregory at work and Judith at home as a meditation on intellectual property theft.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This research is undertaken by using close reading and qualitative approach that is mixed with an interdisciplinary theoretical framework which is built on postmodernist literary theory, intertextuality, and discourses of law surrounding intellectual property. A key theoretical perspective is Roland Barthes' (1977) "death of the author", which exposes the ideological assumption of singular authorship. As Barthes suggests, "a text's unity does not reside in its origin but in its destination" (p. 148), thus meaning is constructed through interpretation rather than authorial intention. This is particularly relevant to *The Real Thing*, in which Stoppard deconstructs the notion of originality and reveals the intertextuality of creativity.

The study is also informed by Foucault's (1984) author-function theory, particularly the concept of "authors" being socio-historical constructs that concern ownership of ideas. For Foucault, "the author is an ideological product, a function of discourse rather than a stable being" (p. 113) Stoppard's depiction of Henry's struggles to lay claim to artistic legitimacy and ownership seems to echo film criticism's conflicted relationship toward him as a significantly troubled figure from the cultural landscape.

Linda Hutcheon's (1988) theory of postmodern pastiche and parody, for instance, proves valuable in helping to classify the ways in which *The Real Thing* negotiates the line between artistic borrowing and plagiarism. Hutcheon defines postmodern texts as those "not just reproducing the past but questioning it" (p. 89), a principle that manifests in Stoppard's meta approach to authorship and adaptation.

The final thematic approach comes from legal perspectives on rights in intellectual property (IP), particularly those of Ginsburg (1990) and Rose (1993), which offer a juridical frame for analysing the play's treatment of creative thievery. Copyright law attempts to draw a boundary between originality and infringement, but as Rose (1993) writes, "authorship is itself a historical invention, a product of economic and cultural forces rather than intrinsic creativity" (p. 17). This study synthesizes those legal approaches to interrogate the play's challenges to modern notions of intellectual property and artistic ownership.

Intellectual Property and the Theft of Creativity in Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*: An interdisciplinary Critical Analysis

Scholarly writing on the play has in the past considered its postmodernist challenge to authorship, its meta-theatrical examination of creativity, and its engagement with legal and ethical questions about intellectual property. There is room for a deeper investigation into how Stoppard's play critiques art's commodification in specific terms relative to the increasingly corporate frame of IP law. Unpacking the duality of power found both in literary analysis and legalistic wankery, this study traces the contours of *The Real Thing* as an acted-on meditation, one struggling over the lived implications of ideas about intellectual property and the theft of creativity.

Discussion

Intellectual property and the ethics of creative ownership have been prominent topics in literary and philosophical conversation for centuries. One can find a rich exploration of such themes, particularly regarding personal relationships and artistic expression, in Tom Stoppard's play *The Real Thing* (1982). The play is set in up-to-date London. It occurs primarily in the homes and offices of the main characters who are: Henry, who is the protagonist, a successful playwright who is married to Annie, Annie, in her turn, is Henry's wife, an actress who is also involved with Henry's friend, Max, and Annie's lover. Also there is Brooke who is Henry's ex-wife and mother of his daughter, Debbie who is Henry and Brooke's daughter.

The play is structured in three Acts; Act 1 in which the play begins with Henry and Annie discussing a play that Henry has written. The play-within-the-play follows a couple whose marriage is unravelling, echoing Henry and Annie's own relationship. Henry's play is quite a success, but it prompts doubts about the genuineness of their relationship and the "truth" of art. The character's restle with the notion that their real life experiences are being fodder for Henry's work. Henry says: "You can't write a play about a marriage that works." (Stoppard, Act I, P.23) This line alludes both to postmodernism as meaning being in flux and created as the writer and we construct the act of writing and then expression. Roland Barthes' theory of the "Death of the Author" states that the author is not the only determinant of meaning within a text. Meaning is created instead through the reader's own interpretation. The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author (Barthes, 1967, p. 148). This quote from "The Real Thing" registers with this idea; the process of writing as a touchstone of discovery, not just expression, not just putting onto the page what you have already sedimented in your thoughts. This, together with Henry's uncertainty about his thoughts until they are articulated, highlights the postmodernist view that meaning is fluid and context-dependent. This comes in accordance with Barthes' say: "Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (Barthes, 1967, p. 145).

While the second act develops characters in greater detail and complexity. Henry's get played by other characters is inspired by his own experiences partly including his affair with Annie. This play-within-a-play serves as a lens through which themes of truth, authenticity, and the ownership of ideas can be examined. At the first half of the play, these two characters wonder whether or not Henry's incorporation of their private lives is an act of thievery or if it's an artistic endeavour. Henry says: "You can't write a play about a marriage that works." (Stoppard, Act II, 47) This line in Act 2 draws attention to the intertextuality of Stoppard's work, as well as the postmodernist repudiation of grand narratives. Henry insinuates that marriage has become so normal and boring that it is no longer a topic for a play simply because of the absence of high stakes conflict. It meshes well with postmodernist scepticism with respect to the very existences and objectivity of universal truths along with the suggestion that reality is overly complex to be unified or simplified into one cohesive narrative. There is also a sense of intertextuality here, as Stoppard subverts classic drama conventions, and alludes to the idea that all stories are intertextual or derivative. It comes in agreement with Kristeva's opinion: "Every text is haunted by other texts" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 36).

In Act 3, the play reaches a crescendo when the characters grapple with the moral ramifications of Henry's labours. As the play within the play draws to an end, the characters find themselves grappling with the consequences of Henry's artistry on their individual lives. The last moments amplify the play's considerations of power, authority, and the ideological resonance of narrative. At the end, the characters wrestle with whether truth can be owned and if art can ever be fully authentic. Henry says: "The play is the thing." (Stoppard, Act III, P. 78) This line highlights how the postmodernist sensibility writes into the text the fact that reality is constructed and how art is shaped to interpret it. The "the play is the thing" line is a nod to "Hamlet," another play about playwriting, that really implicates Stoppard's intertextuality of his work and anyone's work, really, all narratives are built on a foundation of and tweaked by previous texts. This quote also represents the postmodernist idea that reality is a construct and art is a reflection and creator of our perceptions. To veer into Shakespeare, Stoppard also places his play in a broader literary continuum, a sense that no art makes art alone but rather in an ongoing conversation with what came before. It reflects Derrida's "Every text is a mosaic of quotations; every text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Derrida, 1976, p. 161).

Intellectual Property and the Theft of Creativity in Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*: An interdisciplinary Critical Analysis

The Real Thing is a thought-provoking guide to the contemporary question of the complexities of intellectual property; the niceties attending the ethical responsibilities of an artist. With Henry's journey, Stoppard delivers a thoughtful critique of the power dynamics involved in creative work, ultimately asking who owns ideas and the extent to which art affects the lives of individuals.

The title, *The Real Thing*, is extremely loaded, encapsulating the play's central preoccupations of authenticity, authorship, and the emotional truth. It functions on many levels such as "Authentic or imitated Art" is a core which the playwright, Henry, battles with what seems authentic literary craftsmanship and what seems at best a way to imitated. His critique of Brodie's writing illustrates the difference between technical ability and simple ideological sloganeering. Emotional and romantic authenticity are created as well. The title also alludes to the characters' quest for true love and fidelity. Meanwhile, as Henry and Annie ask each other whether their love is "the real thing" or just another chimera, in the same way that artistic originality is questioned. Intellectual property and ownership are also centred in the play's exploration of intellectual property to highlight the tension between original creation and adaptation. The title can be read as a meditation on what makes a work truly "original" in a world where influence and borrowing are practically unavoidable. Meta-theatrical significance is true to Stoppard's signature self-referential form, the title implies that the audience should at least consider whether theatre can ever show "the real thing" or if, in fact, all art is, at best, an illusion.

IP itself is a legal construct providing for exclusive ownership of an original work, copyrights, patents and trademarks. However, the idea of IP has evolved very much overtime, and it is also dependent on the values of society and the changes in technology. A notion of IP is not inevitable though, as Lawrence Lessig (2004) pointed out, IP is contingent on cultural, legal and technological contexts. This tension is exemplified in the work of Lessig, which highlights how the need to protect creative work turns into something that limits access to knowledge and ideas on a much broader cultural level (Lessig, 2004).

In the play, Stoppard interrogates the question of creative ownership through the personal relationships of his characters. The main character, Henry, is a playwright and quite a bit of his work is based on his life, chiefly his relationships with his wife, Annie, and his ex-wife, Brooke. These dynamics bring audience back directly to the ethical implications of taking personal experiences and interweaving them into creative works, allowing the interplay to inform each sphere.

Martha Woodmansee (1994), says that the ethical dimension of creative work has fallen prey to an obsession with intellectual property. Woodmansee most commonly involves the personal and relational implications of the artist's work (Woodmansee, 1994). The playwright extends this idea to expose the effect that Henry's work has on the people in his life—the most important of whom are his wife and ex-wife.

By focusing on the play-within-the-play dynamic throughout *The Real Thing*, Stoppard attempts to confront the difficulties of intellectual property and creative ownership in a complex and multifaceted manner. Framed in this way, the audience witnesses the interplay between the characters' personal lives and their creative output, provoking thought about the blurry boundaries between truth, authenticity and intellectual property. The play at its core addresses the ethical ramifications of using personal experiences as fodder for creative work. It asks whether artists have any obligation to the subjects of their work, and whether there is any danger in excavating personal experiences for the purposes of artistic expression. Intellectual honesty, this theme has been examined in depth by people like Patricia Schroeder (1996), who stressed that as creative persons, work demands to use private life experiences responsibly, without taking advantage of or exploiting other individuals.

Another major plotline in the play concerns the power dynamics that are built into the creative process. Instead, Stoppard's play lays bare the systems that dictate the terms of the work, sometimes at odds with the will of its creator. Scholars like Mark Poster (1995) have examined this theme, arguing that the creative process is fundamentally political, with the ownership of ideas influenced by power dynamics (Poster, 1995). Intellectual property and the notion of creative ownership, in this sense, are not so rigorous and can be subject to challenge and discussion. Literature about it weaves closely personal relationships, ethics and creative process. And Stoppard offers up an insightful critique of these hierarchies and the moral imperative of the artist, not to mention the sometimes prickly relationship between lived experience and aesthetic endeavour. Through its exploration of these themes, the play also engages with broader conversations surrounding intellectual property and the ethics of storytelling, providing insight into the current tensions between creative freedom and intellectual property rights.

Intellectual Property and the Theft of Creativity in Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*: An interdisciplinary Critical Analysis

It explores the tension between artistic originality and the debt to previous works through a meta-theatrical examination of intellectual property. The main character, Henry, a successful playwright, encapsulates the tension between high artistic integrity and the demands of commercial and derivative creativity. A key moment in the play that captures this argument comes when Henry critiques Brodie's political play, arguing that quality writing is more than having a message, but rather about craft: "It's a trick, it's writing. 'The idea is, if you put the right words in the right order, you can nudge the world a little' (Stoppard, 1982, p. 54). This remark echoes Barthes' (1977) contention that meaning is constructed through language, rather than reflecting an author's intent, thereby lending its own support to the postmodernist critique of authorship.

Henry's pushback against Brodie's work speaks to bigger anxieties around the commercialization of art and the reduction of literary craft to political sloganeering. As Foucault (1984) argues, authorship is a function of institutional discourse and not an inherent creative essence, and this tension is found in Henry's own struggles. Plus, the play raises ethical questions about artistic borrowing in the subplot about Charlotte and Max. Max's rage over Charlotte's infidelity echoes Henry's frustrations over creative theft, paralleling romantic and intellectual betrayal. When Max asserts that "It's all about knowing the real thing when you see it" (Stoppard, 1982, p. 78), the dialogue reiterates this connection by emphasizing the ambiguous lines between authenticity and appropriation in love and art.

Linda Hutcheon's (1988) theory of parody and pastiche is equally apparent in the intertextuality used by Stoppard. Henry's work stands in implicit opposition to Brodie's, the distinction foregrounding between substantial artistic re-envisioning and superficial mimicry. This supports Hutcheon's claim that postmodern texts "problematize representation itself rather than simply reproduce it" (p. 102), making the play a self-reflexive examination of the creative process.

The play ends in a way that is significant for at least a couple reasons because it encapsulates the play's themes of truth, authenticity and the complexities of relationships. It ties the main characters' arcs, especially Henry and Annie's, together. Zero to sixty (or whatever is a full circle): Henry as self-righteous playwright manoeuvres this time to introspection and vulnerability. His closing monologue illustrates his newfound awareness of how his work affects those around him, particularly Annie. This outcome stresses the play's ideas of personal development and the fallout of decisions made. The last moments of the play grapple with the nature of truth and realness, whether in art or in relationships. Henry's play-within-the-play, which reflects his experiences in the outside world, muddles fiction with reality. The conclusion implies that although art can achieve glimpses of truth, it also has the capacity

to misrepresent or distort lived experience. This commentary is key to understanding the play's larger themes. The end of the play suggests a more ethical approach, that is, not to use real-life relationships as fodder for creative work. Henry's final meeting with Annie grapples with how his work has shaped her story. This tension highlights the play's exploration of the ethical duties of artists, and the potential for harm in using personal experiences to create art.

The ending also speaks to the imbalance of power in the creative process. It's an exploration of artistic ownership and hierarchical systems by which art is created and owned; on an intimate and personal level it's an exploration of the power dynamic between an artist and their subject. Henry's closing monologue acknowledges these power dynamics and hints at an effort to reconcile with everyone he has impacted. The end of the play evokes a kind of bittersweet meditation on the idea of intellectual property. Through its exploration of authorship and the morality of creation, Stoppard subverts conventional perceptions of intellectual property. It suggests that while artists have a right to create, they also must account for the personal and relationship consequences of their work.

The last scenes of *The Real Thing* are loaded with symbolic meaning. But the play-within-a-play structure gives Stoppard latitude to examine the conflicts over truth, authenticity and ownership of ideas. The final moments provide a metaphor for the deeper currents of the play as a whole, a reminder that the quest for truth and authenticity is an active and complicated enterprise.

"It's just pretending to be me" the ending of the play offers the opportunity to sum up the arcs of the characters and discuss the implications of fraud vs. authenticity, artist's rights, and the nature of pretension in a discussion of power and intellectual property. Through exploring these themes, the work provides insightful commentary on the intricacies of human relationships, the burdens shouldered by artists, and the perennial struggles for individual freedom of creativity and the rights to intellectual property.

Conclusion

The existing bodies of literature on *The Real Thing* have noted its postmodernist critique of authorship as well as its meta-theatrical explorations of creativity and preoccupation with legal and ethical questions about intellectual property. But we still may have further to go in exploring how Stoppard's play critiques that commodification of art in terms of the IP law frame it offers. What this study intends to do is to serve as link between literary and legal worlds, preforming a deep literary analysis in terms of a broader meditation on the text the author has written — on the tensions between intellectual property, and the theft of creativity, through an examination of *The Real Thing*.

References

- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text* (S. Heath, Trans.). Hill and Wang.
- Foucault, M. (1984). What is an author? In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault reader* (pp. 101–120). Pantheon Books.
- Ginsburg, J. (1990). *Creation and commercial value: Copyright protection of works of information*. Columbia Law Review, 90(7), 1865–1938.
- Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A poetics of postmodernism: History, theory, fiction*. Routledge.
- Kastan, D. S. (2014). *Shakespeare and the book trade*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kelly, K. (2009). Tom Stoppard and the theater of self-reference. *Modern Drama*, 52(3), 310–332.
- Lessig, L. (2004). *Free culture: How big media uses technology and the law to lock down culture and control creativity*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Rabey, D. I. (2001). *Howard Barker: Politics and desire in the modern English drama*. Macmillan.
- Rose, M. (1993). *Authors and owners: The invention of copyright*. Harvard University Press.
- Schroeder, P. (1996). *Intellectual property and the wealth of nations: Toward a theory of the economic and ethical values of intellectual property*. Oxford University Press.

Woodmansee, M. (1994). *The genius and the copyright: Economic and legal conditions for the genesis of the “author”*. In M. Woodmansee & M. Jaszi (Eds.), *The romantic generation of American authors* (pp. 103–125). New York: Cambridge University Press.