



DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

V O L U M E

27

DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

Criticism of the Most Significant and Widely Studied
Dramatic Works from All the World's Literatures

VOLUME 27

Jelena O. Krstović
Project Editor

江苏工业学院图书馆
藏书章

THOMSON
GALE



Drama Criticism, Vol. 27

Project Editor

Jelena O. Krstović

Editorial

Jessica Bomarito, Kathy D. Darrow, Jeffrey W. Hunter, Michelle Lee, Rachelle Mucha, Thomas J. Schoenberg, Lawrence J. Trudeau, Russel Whitaker

Data Capture

Francis Monroe, Gwen Tucker

Indexing Services

Laurie Andriot

Rights Acquisitions and Management

Edna Hedblad, Jacqueline Key, Lisa Kincade, Kim Smilay

Imaging and Multimedia

Dean Dauphinais, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Lezlie Light, Mike Logusz, Dan Newell, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Denay Wilding, Robyn Young

Composition and Electronic Capture

Amy Darga

Manufacturing

Rhonda Williams

Product Manager

Marc Cormier

© 2006 Thomson Gale, a part of The Thomson Corporation. Thomson and Star Logo are trademarks and Gale is a registered trademark used herein under license.

For more information, contact

Thomson Gale

27500 Drake Rd.

Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Or you can visit our internet site at

<http://www.gale.com>

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution, or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

This publication is a creative work fully protected by all applicable copyright laws, as well as by misappropriation, trade secret, unfair competition, and other applicable laws. The authors and editors of this work have added value to the underlying factual material herein through one or more of the following: unique and original selection, coordination, expression, arrangement, and classification of the information.

For permission to use material from the product, submit your request via the Web at <http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions>, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department

Thomson Gale

27500 Drake Rd.

Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:

248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006

Fax 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, Thomson Gale neither guarantees the accuracy of the data contained herein nor assumes any responsibility for errors, omissions or discrepancies. Thomson Gale accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN 0-7876-8111-3

ISSN 1056-4349

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

Drama Criticism (DC) is principally intended for beginning students of literature and theater as well as the average playgoer. The series is therefore designed to introduce readers to the most frequently studied playwrights of all time periods and nationalities and to present discerning commentary on dramatic works of enduring interest. Furthermore, DC seeks to acquaint the reader with the uses and functions of criticism itself. Selected from a diverse body of commentary, the essays in DC offer insights into the authors and their works but do not require that the reader possess a wide background in literary studies. Where appropriate, reviews of important productions of the plays discussed are also included to give students a heightened awareness of drama as a dynamic art form, one that many claim is fully realized only in performance.

DC was created in response to suggestions by the staffs of high school, college, and public libraries. These librarians observed a need for a series that assembles critical commentary on the world's most renowned dramatists in the same manner as Thomson Gale's *Short Story Criticism* (SSC) and *Poetry Criticism* (PC), which present material on writers of short fiction and poetry. Although playwrights are covered in such Thomson Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (CMLC), DC directs more concentrated attention on individual dramatists than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries in these Thomson Gale series. Commentary on the works of William Shakespeare may be found in *Shakespearean Criticism* (SC).

Scope of the Series

By collecting and organizing commentary on dramatists, DC assists students in their efforts to gain insight into literature, achieve better understanding of the texts, and formulate ideas for papers and assignments. A variety of interpretations and assessments is offered, allowing students to pursue their own interests and promoting awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Approximately five to ten authors are included in each volume, and each entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that playwright's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Thomson Gale's literary criticism series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a DC volume.

Organization of the Book

A DC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** consists of the playwright's most commonly used name, followed by birth and death dates. If an author consistently wrote under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction are any name variations under which the dramatist wrote, including transliterated forms of the names of authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.

- The list of **Principal Works** is divided into two sections. The first section contains the author's dramatic pieces and is organized chronologically by date of first performance. If this has not been conclusively determined, the composition or publication date is used. The second section provides information on the author's major works in other genres.
- Essays offering **overviews and general studies of the dramatist's entire literary career** give the student broad perspectives on the writer's artistic development, themes, and concerns that recur in several of his or her works, the author's place in literary history, and other wide-ranging topics.
- **Criticism** of individual plays offers the reader in-depth discussions of a select number of the author's most important works. In some cases, the criticism is divided into two sections, each arranged chronologically. When a significant performance of a play can be identified (typically, the premier of a twentieth-century work), the first section of criticism will feature **production reviews** of this staging. Most entries include sections devoted to **critical commentary** that assesses the literary merit of the selected plays. When necessary, essays are carefully excerpted to focus on the work under consideration; often, however, essays and reviews are reprinted in their entirety. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographic Citation**, designed to help the interested reader locate the original essay or book, precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

Cumulative Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *DC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *DC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *DC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Title Index** lists in alphabetical order the individual plays discussed in the criticism contained in *DC*. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English-language translations of original foreign-language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

Citing Drama Criticism

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Morrison, Jago. "Narration and Unease in Ian McEwan's Later Fiction." *Critique* 42, no. 3 (spring 2001): 253-68. Reprinted in *Drama Criticism*. Vol. 20, edited by Janet Witalec, 212-20. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." In *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, edited by Charles Bernstein, 73-82. New York: Roof Books, 1990. Reprinted in *Drama Criticism*. Vol. 20, edited by Janet Witalec, 3-8. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 5th ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Morrison, Jago. "Narration and Unease in Ian McEwan's Later Fiction." *Critique* 42.3 (spring 2001): 253-68. Reprinted in *Drama Criticism*. Ed. Janet Witalec. Vol. 20. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 212-20.

Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Roof Books, 1990. 73-82. Reprinted in *Drama Criticism*. Ed. Janet Witalec. Vol. 20. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 3-8.

Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Product Manager:

Product Manager, Literary Criticism Series
Thomson Gale
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
1-800-347-4253 (GALE)
Fax: 248-699-8054

Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the excerpted criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. We are also grateful to the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, the Library of Congress, the University of Detroit Mercy Library, Wayne State University Purdy/Kresge Library Complex, and the University of Michigan Libraries for making their resources available to us. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *DC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *DC*, VOLUME 27, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:

American Scientist, v. 90, November-December, 2002. © 2002 by Sigma Xi, The Scientific Research Society, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—*American Theatre*, v. 12, March, 1995 for “The Muses of Terrence McNally: Music and Mortality are His Consuming Themes” by Toby Zinman; v. 15, December, 1998 for “The Last Temptation of MTC” by Charles McNulty. Copyright © 1995, 1998, Theatre Communications Group. All rights reserved. Both reproduced by permission of the respective authors.—*Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie*, v. 105, 1987 for “Captain Thomas Stukeley: The Man, the Theatrical Record, and the Origins of Tudor Biographical Drama” by Joseph Candido. Copyright © Max Niemeyer Tübingen 1987. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*ANQ*, v. 17, winter, 2004. Copyright © 2004 by Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Reproduced with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation, published by Heldref Publications, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1802.—*The Atlantic Monthly*, v. 280, October, 1997 for “Maria, Not Callas” by Matthew Gurewitsch. Copyright © 1997 by The Atlantic Monthly Company. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Cahiers Elisabethains*, April, 1983 for “Elizabethan Epideictic Drama: Praise and Blame in the Plays of Peele and Lyly” by R. Headlam Wells. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—*CLA Journal*, v. 30, June, 1987. Copyright, 1987 by The College Language Association. Used by permission of The College Language Association.—*Educational Theatre Journal*, v. 22, October, 1970. Copyright © 1970 The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reproduced by permission.—*ELH*, v. 47, fall, 1980. Copyright © 1980 The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reproduced by permission.—*The Explicator*, v. 48, fall, 1989; v. 61, summer, 2003. Copyright © 1989, 2003 by Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Both reproduced with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation, published by Heldref Publications, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1802.—*The French Review*, v. 32, April, 1959; v. 36, January, 1963; v. 40, October, 1966; v. 43, February, 1970; v. 52, April, 1979; v. 53, December, 1979; v. 58, May, 1985; v. 65, February, 1992. Copyright © 1959, 1963, 1966, 1970, 1979, 1985, 1992 by the American Association of Teachers of French. All reproduced by permission.—*Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, v. 6, spring, 2000. Copyright © by *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*. Reproduced by permission.—*Journal of American Folklore*, v. 94, October-December, 1981. Copyright © 1981 by the American Folklore Society. Republished with permission of the American Folklore Society, conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.—*Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, v. 2, 2002 for “The Scientist as Byronic Hero: Michael Frayn’s *Copenhagen*” by August W. Staub. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, v. 4, August, 1983. Copyright 1983 by the Institute for Evolutionary Psychology. Reproduced by permission.—*Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, v. 32, 1985. Copyright © 1985 by Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Reproduced with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation, published by Heldref Publications, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1802.—*The Massachusetts Review*, v. 42, summer, 2001. Copyright © 2001. Reprinted by permission from *The Massachusetts Review*.—*Modern Drama*, v. 36, December, 1993. Copyright © 1993 by the University of Toronto, Graduate Centre for Study of Drama. Reproduced by permission.—*Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, v. 20, fall-winter, 1991-1992; v. 31, spring-summer, 2003. Copyright © 1991-1992, 2003 by the University of Nebraska Press. Both reproduced by permission.—*Partisan Review*, v. 70, winter, 2003 for “‘Two Wings of the Same Breathing Creature’: Fictionalizing History” by Cushing Strout. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Philological Quarterly*, v. 65, winter, 1986. Copyright 1986 by The University of Iowa. Reproduced by permission.—*Physics World*, June, 1998. Reproduced by permission.—*PMLA*, v. 55, June, 1940. Copyright © 1940 by the Modern Language Association of America. Reprinted by permission of the Modern Language Association of America.—*Queen’s Quarterly*, v. 110, spring, 2003 for “The Uncertainty about Heisenberg” by Michael Posner. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Renaissance Drama*, v. 8, 1965; v. 1, 1968. Copyright © 1965, 1968 by Northwestern University Press. Both reproduced by permission.—*Romance Notes*, v. 24, fall, 1983; v. 28, spring, 1988; v. 38, fall, 1997; v. 44, fall, 2003. All reproduced by permission.—*Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, v. 11, 1979. Reproduced by permission.—*Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, v. 21, spring, 1981. Copyright © 1981

The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reproduced by permission.—*Theatre Journal*, v. 49, May, 1997; v. 51, May, 1999. Copyright © 1997, 1999 The Johns Hopkins University Press. Both reproduced by permission.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN DC, VOLUME 27, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:

Drukman, Steven. From "Terrance McNally," in *Speaking on Stage: Interviews with Contemporary American Playwrights*. Edited by Philip C. Kolin and Colby H. Kullman. The University of Alabama Press, 1996. Copyright © 1996 The University of Alabama Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Free, Mary G. From *Renaissance Papers 1983*. The Southeastern Renaissance Conference, 1984. Reproduced by permission.—Frontain, Raymond-Jean. From "'All Men Are Divine': Religious Mystery and Homosexual Identity in Terrence McNally's *Corpus Christi*," in *Reclaiming the Sacred: The Bible in Gay and Lesbian Culture*. Edited by Raymond-Jean Frontain. New York: Harrington Park Press, 2003. Copyright © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Gochberg, Herbert S. From *Stage of Dreams: The Dramatic Art of Alfred de Musset*. Librairie Droz S.A., 1967. © 1967 by Librairie Droz S.A. Reproduced by permission.—Harrell, Wade. From "When the Parody Parodies Itself: The Problem with Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*," in *From the Bard to Broadway*. Edited by Karelisa Hartigan. University Press of America, 1987. Copyright © 1987 by University Press of America, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Karelisa Hartigan.—MacInnes, John W. From "*Lorenzaccio* and the Drama of Narration," in *Text and Presentation: The University of Florida Department of Classics Comparative Drama Conference Papers, Volume VIII*. Edited by Karelisa Hartigan. University Press of America, 1988. Copyright © 1988 by University Press of America, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Karelisa Hartigan.—Mazer, Cary M. From "*Master Class* and the Paradox of the Diva," in *Modern Dramatists: A Casebook of Major British, Irish, and American Playwrights*. Edited by Kimball King. Routledge, 2001. Copyright © 2001 by Kimball King. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, and the author.—Román, David. From "Negative Identifications: HIV-Negative Gay Men in Representation and Performance," in *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures*. Edited by Martin Duberman. New York University Press, 1997. Copyright © 1997 by New York University. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Savran, David. From *The Playwright's Voice: American Dramatists on Memory, Writing, and the Politics of Culture*. Theatre Communications Group, 1999. Copyright © 1999, Theatre Communications Group. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Sices, David. From *Theater of Solitude: The Drama of Alfred de Musset*. The University Press of New England, 1974. © 1974 University Press of New England, Hanover, NH. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Soto-Morettini, Donna. From "'Disturbing the Spirits of the Past': The Uncertainty Principal in Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*," in *Crucible of Cultures: Anglophone Drama at the Dawn of a New Millennium*. Edited by Marc Maufort and Franca Ballarsi. P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2002. © P.I.E.-Peter Lang S.A. Reproduced by permission.—Whitney-Brown, Carolyn. From "'A Farre More Worthy Wombe': Reproduction Anxiety in Peele's *David and Bethsabe*," in *In Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama*. Edited by Dorothea Kehler and Susan Baker. The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1991. Copyright © 1991 by Scarecrow Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

PHOTOGRAPHS APPEARING IN DC, VOLUME 27, WERE RECEIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

de Musset, Alfred, engraving. The Library of Congress.—Frayn, Michael, holding the American Theatre Wing's 2000 Tony Award, photograph by Brad Rickerby. © Reuters NewMedia Inc./Corbis.—McNally, Terrence, photograph. Ron Galella/WireImage.com.

Thomson Gale Literature Product Advisory Board

The members of the Thomson Gale Literature Product Advisory Board—reference librarians from public and academic library systems—represent a cross-section of our customer base and offer a variety of informed perspectives on both the presentation and content of our literature products. Advisory board members assess and define such quality issues as the relevance, currency, and usefulness of the author coverage, critical content, and literary topics included in our series; evaluate the layout, presentation, and general quality of our printed volumes; provide feedback on the criteria used for selecting authors and topics covered in our series; provide suggestions for potential enhancements to our series; identify any gaps in our coverage of authors or literary topics, recommending authors or topics for inclusion; analyze the appropriateness of our content and presentation for various user audiences, such as high school students, undergraduates, graduate students, librarians, and educators; and offer feedback on any proposed changes/enhancements to our series. We wish to thank the following advisors for their advice throughout the year.

Barbara M. Bibel

Librarian
Oakland Public Library
Oakland, California

Dr. Toby Burrows

Principal Librarian
The Scholars' Centre
University of Western Australia Library
Nedlands, Western Australia

Celia C. Daniel

Associate Reference Librarian
Howard University Libraries
Washington, D.C.

David M. Durant

Reference Librarian
Joyner Library
East Carolina University
Greenville, North Carolina

Nancy T. Guidry

Librarian
Bakersfield Community College
Bakersfield, California

Heather Martin

Arts & Humanities Librarian
University of Alabama at Birmingham, Sterne Library
Birmingham, Alabama

Susan Mikula

Librarian
Indiana Free Library
Indiana, Pennsylvania

Thomas Nixon

Humanities Reference Librarian
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Davis
Library
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Mark Schumacher

Jackson Library
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Greensboro, North Carolina

Gwen Scott-Miller

Assistant Director
Sno-Isle Regional Library System
Marysville, Washington

Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

Michael Frayn 1933-	1
<i>English playwright, novelist, and translator</i>	
Terrence McNally 1939-	45
<i>American playwright</i>	
Alfred de Musset 1810-1857	104
<i>French playwright, poet, and novelist</i>	
George Peele 1556-1596	227
<i>English playwright and poet</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 357

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 463

DC Cumulative Nationality Index 475

DC Cumulative Title Index 477

Michael Frayn

1933-

English playwright, novelist, and translator.

INTRODUCTION

A prolific writer, Frayn has tackled novels, plays, nonfiction books, and screenplays during his lengthy career. To date, four of Frayn's plays have been filmed for British television and two plays have been made into motion pictures. A thoughtful writer with a deeply philosophical mind, Frayn carefully shows his audience the possibilities inherent in any situation he puts on stage. He has turned the theater around on itself with the ground-breaking parody *Noises Off* (1982) and he has given audiences a chance to ponder the what-ifs of the history of the birth of atomic energy in his surprise international hit *Copenhagen* (1998).

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Frayn was born in London on September 8, 1933. He grew up in the suburb of Ewell and attended public school during his teenage years. Upon graduating, Frayn spent two years doing National Service. During this time, he learned the Russian language and worked as an interpreter. He later put these language skills to use translating several of Anton Chekhov's plays. Upon leaving the military, Frayn went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge; he graduated in 1957 with a degree in "moral sciences." His first years out of college were spent working as a journalist, first for the *Guardian* and then the *Observer*. While working for these newspapers, Frayn also began writing novels. His first novel, *The Tin Men* (1965), won the 1966 Somerset Maugham Award—the first of many such awards Frayn was to receive for his writing. Frayn is married to Clare Tomalin, who is also a noted writer.

MAJOR DRAMATIC WORKS

Most of Frayn's dramatic works have been solid, well-received plays. Some stand out from the rest, however. Several positively reviewed plays written in the 1970s, including *Donkeys' Years* (1976), established Frayn as a comic writer to be reckoned with. *Noises Off*, first presented in 1982, broke new ground with its twist on the play within the play and its focus on backstage



mayhem. His 1984 play *Benefactors* received critical acclaim and an Antoinette Perry Award (more commonly known as a Tony Award). But by far the play that has gained Frayn the most critical attention is his stark drama, *Copenhagen*. The plot centers on the recollections of three characters: Werner Heisenberg, a German physicist working on the atomic energy project for the Nazis; his former colleague, the Danish physicist, Nils Bohr; and Bohr's wife, Margrethe. In 1941 Heisenberg made a now-famous visit to his former mentor, Bohr, in German-occupied Copenhagen. By then, they were on opposite sides of the war, though they were apparently not personally enemies. The conversations that took place between the two men during this visit are a matter of much speculation. Frayn does not seek to settle what happened; rather, he examines the possibilities of what might have been discussed, what likely was discussed, and the possible repercussions of decisions made by both world-class physicists who were on the cutting edge of atomic physics during World War II. The play made ripples in theater and science circles

alike because of its highly technical subject matter wrapped around powerful human emotions. *Copenhagen* won the Critics' Circle Award for Best New Play in 1998, the Evening Standard Award for Best Play of the Year in 1998, the Prix Molière for Best New Play in 1999, and a Tony Award in 2000.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

The very first play Frayn wrote, a one-act, was rejected for performance. Frayn responded by writing a full-length play, *The Two of Us*, which premiered in 1970 to not entirely favorable reviews. Some critics were deeply offended by the onstage changing of a baby's diaper. This willingness to take risks and push the envelope regarding what the theater can be is a common thread that runs through Frayn's dramatic writing. His next production, *Noises Off*, showed audiences the behind-the-scenes drama that happens during a play's production. Many critics felt the play was uneven; the solid first and second acts were followed by a weak, meandering third act. Not all critics or readers felt that way, however. This parody of theater itself won three major awards: the Evening Standard Award for Best Comedy of the Year in 1982, the Laurence Olivier Award for Best Comedy that same year, and a Tony Award in 1984 for the Broadway production. A later play, *Look, Look* (1989), entailed the audience seeing itself watching the production. Critics panned it and the play did not do well. Frayn wrote a few pieces in the years after, but it was not until 1998 that his reputation as a dramatist rebounded on the release of his deeply thoughtful drama, *Copenhagen*. Like *Noises Off*, *Copenhagen* came under fire for presenting a strong first act and then a less compelling concluding act. Some critics also suggested that the play only raised difficult philosophical questions, but left the audience dangling without answers. Others praised the open-ended format in which Frayn presented several recollections of past events from the viewpoints of different characters and then let the audience draw their own final conclusions about what really happened. Regardless of some critics' objections to the play's philosophical structure, the play became an international success.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Plays

The Two of Us 1970
Alphabetical Order 1975
Clouds 1976

Donkeys' Years 1976
The Cherry Orchard [translator; from *The Cherry Orchard*, by Anton Chekhov] 1978
Make or Break 1980
Noises Off 1982
The Three Sisters [translator; from *The Three Sisters*, by Anton Chekhov] 1983
Benefactors 1984
Wild Honey [translator; from *Wild Honey*, by Anton Chekhov] 1984
Uncle Vanya [translator; from *Uncle Vanya*, by Anton Chekhov] 1988
Look Look 1989
Here 1993
Alarms and Excursions: More Plays than One 1998
Copenhagen 1998

Other Major Works

The Tin Men (novel) 1965
The Russian Interpreter (novel) 1966
Towards the End of the Morning (novel) 1967
A Very Private Life (novel) 1968
Clockwise (screenplay) 1986
First and Last (screenplay) 1987
A Landing on the Sun (novel) 1991
Headlong (novel) 1999
Spies (novel) 2001
Democracy (novel) 2003

NOISES OFF (1982)

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

Wade Harrell (essay date 1987)

SOURCE: Harrell, Wade. "When the Parody Parodies Itself: The Problem with Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*." In *From the Bard to Broadway*, edited by Karelisa V. Hartigan, The University of Florida Department of Classics Comparative Drama Conference Papers, Vol. 7, pp. 87-93. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987.

[In the following essay, Harrell evaluates Frayn's *Noises Off*, focusing on the third act and on the idea of the parody of a parody.]

After successful runs in London, New York, and other cities with a touring company across the U.S. in 1985, *Noises Off* probably has garnered a great deal more

critical acclaim than it deserves. Jack Tinker of the *Daily Mail* calls it "Mr. Frayn's brilliant and best work" (Reprinted in *Noises Off*, np). To the theatre-goer, however, the play is very uneven comically, the first two acts being much funnier and more tantalizing than the third act. The first two acts satisfy our conventional notions of what good parody is, while the third act deteriorates into a muddle of confusion onstage. To the drama critic, the play raises an interesting set of problems concerning the quality of the play itself, and its placement within the genre. In short, it is hard to decide just exactly what kind of play it is—parody? travesty? improvisation?

An analysis of the play first requires a familiarity with some basic literary definitions. Hugh Holman, in *A Handbook of Literature*, offers the standard but perhaps obsolete definition of travesty. He says the travesty is "writing which by its incongruity of style or treatment ridicules a subject inherently noble or dignified." This definition is unsatisfying because it is too closely related to that of parody which he defines as "a composition burlesquing or imitating another, usually serious, piece of work. It is designed to ridicule . . ." Enoch Brater, in an essay about parody in Tom Stoppard's plays, attempts a much needed distinction between parody and travesty. He says that "while both parody and travesty closely imitate the style of an author or work for comic effect or ridicule, only the former employs this strategy to make some critical commentary on the original. Travesty, on the other hand, makes no such evaluative claim and harbors no such analytical pretension" (Brater, 1981, 119). This distinction so far seems somewhat inadequate since ridiculing something is in fact making a critical commentary on it. But what Brater goes on to say is probably more important for differentiating the two: "A travesty is merely a burlesque whose tactics are gross distortion and incongruity for their own sake" (Brater, 1981, 119). Linda Hutcheon, (1985) in her exhaustive study of parody arrives at a broad but satisfying definition of parody as "repetition with difference" (101). She goes on to assert that "any codified form, can, theoretically, be treated in terms of repetition with critical distance" (18). It is clear from these definitions, that *Noises Off* is two-thirds well conceived parody which draws upon well-known codes, that is, props, plot twists, character types, etc., while the last act is clearly nonsensical travesty in which there are no readable codes for the audience and whose exaggerated action on stage is there for its own sake and as a way of compensating for other weaknesses in the plot.

Noises Off is not a well-made play, but the first two acts are made very well. Act I is exposition. Frayn teases us with a rehearsal for what we know will be a very funny parody of English comedy, with all the conventional codes: a fragile vase placed precariously

on a small table, a box of important documents, a flight bag, telephones and newspapers, a plate of sardines, and a row of doors leading to various rooms in a deserted country estate. Add to this two couples who enter the house each thinking they will be alone. As the play opens we see the actors rehearsing *Nothing On*, a farce in one act. As the actors enter and attempt to rehearse, the audience learns what is supposed to happen during the play. The rehearsal does not go smoothly, however. Lloyd, the director, keeps interrupting to reprimand the actors, one of the actresses disrupts the rehearsal by losing a contact lens, and one actor is nowhere to be found. All of this Frayn handles very well. Rather than presenting us with a complete version of *Nothing On*, he shows us only what we know to be the familiar props and a few of the events in a type of drama that we are already familiar with. What is funniest in Act One is what is left unsaid and undone, because the audience already knows what to expect. In short, Frayn has presented us with a clearly defined set of codes for the parody of a parody.

In Act Two, in the rising action, Frayn breaks those codes. In a clever twist, the audience is taken behind the stage during a production of *Nothing On* one month later and sees how the personal affairs, arguments, and actions of the crew and cast affect what happens on stage. The familiar props and situations that the audience expects in *Nothing On* never materialize. For example, we learn in the first act that at one point Belinda, who plays Flavia in *Nothing On*, is supposed to carry a dress on stage. What actually happens is that Lloyd, the director, sends Tim, the stage hand, to buy flowers for Brooke, who has the role of the dumb blonde in both plays and is his lover. Tim enters the backstage area with the flowers. Belinda enters and tells Tim that Selsdon, a fading and alcoholic star, has locked himself in his room. Tim gives the flowers to Belinda and goes in search of Selsdon. She in turn gives the flowers to Frederick, another actor, and grabs an axe in order to help Tim. Poppy enters to inform Belinda that she has an entrance; Belinda hands the axe to Brooke, another actress, so that she can make her entrance. Garry, a goodlooking but also dumb younger actor, enters and eyes Frederick's flowers suspiciously because the two men are both in love with Dotty, another actress. Frederick gives the flowers to Garry and exits the backstage area. Brooke comes down the stairs and Garry and Brooke exchange the flowers and axe, Garry intending to hit Frederick with the axe when he enters again. Belinda enters, grabs the flowers from Brooke, sends her after Selsdon, sees Garry, and runs to take the axe from him. Her cue comes, and she almost misses it, runs up the stairs, desperately grabs at a dress, misses, and enters the stage of *Nothing On* with flowers instead of a dress. We hear her exclaim, "Darling, I never had a dress, or rather a bunch of flowers like this, did I?" (90). Clearly, as its title suggests, much of the action of

Noises Off happens offstage, as in the ancient Greek plays where much of the violence and bloodletting happens offstage. Again Frayn's understatement makes for a successful parody. The audience does not have to see every action on the stage of *Nothing On* because it can guess at the ramifications of what is happening backstage.

What the audience does see backstage are the codes of a serious parody being broken. The actors and actresses are misplacing props and nearly missing cues, throwing off the comic timing of the play within the play. Clearly, Frayn is breaking the codes of his parody of a parody, *Nothing On*, and is replacing them with new ones. That is, a dress becomes a bouquet of flowers. Certainly parody can parody itself, as long as the acceptable code is there and recognized by the audience. For example, Stoppard in *Travesties* parodies Joyce's *Ulysses*, which is of course itself a parody. Unfortunately, in Act Two, Frayn's new set of codes, the action that is now occurring on stage does not become familiar enough to us so that in the third act we will be able to realize, see, understand, or remember how the action is being modified. The problem may be that there is not enough time for what Hutcheon has described as the "critical distance," the time to decode and look at a work objectively.

In the third act, which is definitely the climax—there is no resolution to *Noises Off*—we become an audience to a production of *Nothing On* twelve weeks into its run. As the audience quickly guesses, the play has deteriorated. Unfortunately, as the play within the play has worsened, so has the quality of Frayn's own play. By this time the personal conflicts behind stage have to become so heated that they are not influencing what happens in *Nothing On*, rather they are dictating the action. And this action is chaos. As the title of the play within the play suggests, nothing of importance is happening onstage. The action has become far from what we know from the first act should be happening, and since all of our rules for what to expect have been broken, clearly anything could happen. It makes no difference whether Brooke enters with a dress, an axe, flowers, or even a dog. What is happening on stage is what Peter Kemp terms "an undermining" of the traditional formula for farce (Reprinted in *Noises Off*, np). I would argue that this undermining has already occurred in Act Two. As Hutcheon writes, "The parodic text is granted a special license to transgress the limit of convention, but, . . . it can do so only temporarily and only within the controlled confines authorized by the text parodied—that is quite simply, within the confines dictated by 'recognizability'" (Hutcheon, 1985, 75). Clearly, in Act Three Frayn has lost that control and the audience no longer recognizes codes of what he is parodying. What we are left with in Act Three is simply travesty, where the actions are distorted and

grotesque for no apparent reason. For example, *Nothing On* contains the conventional telephone, which of course will ring at the wrong time or be answered by the wrong people. In the third act, however, the phone is useless except to be torn to pieces. Consequently, the actors throw the phone to the floor, pull it by the cord, rip the receiver from it, and carry it all over the stage from room to room. Such an exaggerated emphasis on the phone as a prop, for no apparent reason, does not, I think, suggest that Act Three is very well-conceived drama. At another point a burglar is supposed to enter the villa, but in the final version of *Nothing On*, three burglars enter. This alone would be an acceptable variation on the familiar motif of having a masked intruder, except that one burglar is played by the director, another by the stage hand, and another by Selsdon, the actor who is supposed to play him. Again we have no information about why the director or the stage hand has gotten on stage. We only know they are not supposed to be there. As one might imagine, the third act resembles improvisation more than drama.

What is intriguing about the first two acts is what Frayn doesn't tell us or show us, but what we can speculate about. What makes Act Three less interesting is that while we can no longer see the actions backstage which are dictating the action on stage, we are also not in the least interested in speculating about them. The main reason for this is that there has been so little character development thus far. Somehow it seems important to know the backstage hijinks since the whole second act is devoted to them. However, we quickly forget about the actors and their personal affairs in Act Three, and they suddenly seem unimportant to Frayn, who separates us from them.

Robert Corrigan (1973) writes that often directors will seek to compensate for this lack of character development or lack of significance in the script with an exploitation of the action in an effort to achieve novelty and uniqueness (68). Corrigan says that "rapidity of pace is seen . . . as a means of compensating for the script's obvious insignificance" (68). He goes on to warn that taken to the extreme, pacing can be detrimental because when everything is speeded up, what "has been created is not art at all, only confusion" (67). It is clear that this is what has happened in Frayn's comedy in Act Three. Frayn has relied on stage directions calling for a rapid pace and much movement to compensate for a weak script and character development. The funniest parts of the play are in the first two acts when the action is centered on the comic action of only one person or on all the characters who are in turn concentrating on only one action, as when Brooke loses her contact lens and everyone must look for it. In Act Three there is so much divided action, with people entering and exiting and doors opening and closing, that the result is chaos for an audience who is probably looking

for order. The disconcerting fact is that the order in Act Three is difficult to discern, and seems to be, in fact, non-existent.

Ironically, Frayn defended the weak second act of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in a 1978 essay by suggesting that the "difficulties with Act Two throw into even greater relief the sound structure of the rest of the play" (Frayn, 1978, xix). Clearly, this weak argument does not hold up for Frayn's own play or any other since certainly not all good plays must have weak spots for us to appreciate the rest of the structure. Rather, the best playwrights sustain a play's strengths throughout its duration, something that Frayn in *Noises Off* is unable to do.

But the value in *Noises Off* is that it helps to define and solidify through example the difference between parody and travesty. The first two acts, which are very clever and succeed well enough, illustrate that preconceived notions, rules, or codes are necessary to an understanding and appreciation of good parody, whose aim may be to ridicule. But the sheerly nonsensical third act just as clearly shows that when there is no preconceived idea of what to expect, drama may seem to lack order and turn into improvisation, while art itself turns into chaos.

References

- Brater, 1981: Enoch Brater, "Parody, Travesty, and Politics in the Plays of Tom Stoppard," *Essays on Contemporary British Drama*, ed. Hedwig Bock and Albert Wertheim (Max Hueber Verlag) 117-130.
- Corrigan, 1973: Robert W. Corrigan, *The Theatre in Search of a Fix* (New York: Delacorte Press).
- Frayn, 1983: Michael Frayn, *Noises Off*. (London: Methuen).
- , 1978: Introduction to *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov (London: Methuen).
- Holman, 1979: Hugh Holman, *A Handbook of Literature*. "Parody" and "Travesty."
- Hutcheon, 1985: Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*. (New York: Methuen).

COPENHAGEN (1998)

PRODUCTION REVIEWS

John Ziman (review date June 1998)

SOURCE: Ziman, John. "An Evening with the Bohrs." *Physics World* (June 1998): n.p.

[In the following review, Ziman considers the scientific aspects of Frayn's play.]

There is a new play by Michael Frayn, best known for his humorous writings, about the famous visit of Werner Heisenberg to Niels Bohr in *Copenhagen* in the autumn of 1941. Those who dismiss the work as likely to be yet another populist mishmash of half-understood physics, personality stereotyping and political mystery-mongering would be wrong. An enquiry into the events of a particular evening in Bohr's home becomes a wise and perfectly informed journey to the core of the scientific enterprise.

It is also brilliant theatre. The three characters—Bohr, Heisenberg and Bohr's wife Margrethe—are on stage nearly all of the time. Notionally, they are in the Bohrs' house, with three chairs as their only props. But they grip us continually with words, tones, gestures, movement and lights. The professional magic of the Royal National Theatre, embodied in David Burke [Bohr], Sara Kestelman [Margrethe] and Matthew Marsh [Heisenberg], is mediated by the refined direction of Michael Blakemore. But Frayn's sharp, spare script is the score for an intricate contrapuntal trio, played briskly back and forth in crisp sentences that merge into a sparkling stream of conversation, confrontation and debate among three old friends.

Historically, of course, Bohr was notoriously woolly in speech, and Margrethe was probably much gentler. Sometimes Heisenberg interpolates comments into a conversation about himself from which he is supposedly absent, or Margrethe plays Greek chorus to the other two. But this is not an exercise in factitious reconstruction. In any case, they are all ghosts, trying to work out in an after-life what really happened, re-enacting various versions of that brief encounter or recalling other times together. With unostentatious skill, these chunks of memory and afterthought are woven seamlessly into the fabric of the conversation. Nothing is unclear—except what was actually said between two people in a few fateful minutes.

And that uncertainty—the physics metaphor is much used throughout—is genuine. It was a very secret, undated conversation, of which the participants gave changing and conflicting accounts in later years. On stage, the actors are as much in the dark as the many historians who have studied the two physicists' lives and times. The actors must also infer the facts from the surrounding circumstances, with only the advantage of fallible emotional memories and empathic insights. Stepping out of that frame, we see how the author has built into his drama as much as he can find out about two highly complex individuals and about the extremely tense world in which they lived. Alas for the recent death of Charles Frank (*Physics World* June p43), who interrogated many German scientists at the end of the Second World War and edited the "Farm Hall" transcripts, in which Heisenberg unwittingly revealed some

of his thoughts when he heard of Hiroshima. Not being an expert on this subject, I can only assume that Michael Frayn has pretty fairly represented what is now publicly known.

The question is: in which of many contexts should the visit be best interpreted? The political context is obvious. But it is deeply fissured and riddled with secret caverns. Heisenberg was involved in a German nuclear weapons project. He suspected that there was a parallel Anglo-American project, and might have been fishing for information about it from Bohr. Or was he trying to tell the Americans, through Bohr, that the German project was not likely to be fruitful? Or perhaps it was just a subtle move in Heisenberg's campaign to retain control of his project inside the Nazi bureaucratic jungle.

The patriotic context seems clearer, yet makes no sense. Heisenberg was a sentimental German. His country was his beloved home: its people were his people. It must continue to shine among nations for its science, he felt. In 1941 the ultimate national disaster was not obvious. Even though Hitler was a homicidal maniac, it would probably come out all right in the end, he possibly thought. In visiting the Bohrs, Heisenberg tries clumsily to play a card of potential protection for Bohr, who is half-Jewish. They love him, but are affronted by his disregard for their Danish patriotism. Could he really have expected to enlist Bohr in the Nazi cause?

Hindsight makes the immediate scientific context too credible. Was a Uranium-235 fission bomb feasible? Conveniently for his conscience, Heisenberg had grossly overestimated the required critical mass of such a bomb, and was only trying to build a power reactor. But even if Bohr would not help directly, his confirmation of the estimate would have been reassuring. Indeed, in retrospect, one can imagine a fearful alternative universe opening up, in which Bohr suggests to Heisenberg that he should check his calculation, the Germans make the bomb, and eventually London replaces Hiroshima as the first nuked city.

All physicists know of the communal context. Just fifteen years earlier, Bohr and Heisenberg had tirelessly walked and talked themselves into the "Copenhagen interpretation" of quantum mechanics. Advised by Balazs Gyorgy, formerly professor of theoretical physics at Bristol University, Frayn has made a witty attempt to present this in lay terms, although I cannot guess how successfully. The main point is that Bohr and Heisenberg were at the centre of a truly international "invisible college" in which the new theoretical physics was being created. Perhaps Heisenberg was moved by the fragmentation of that community under the hammers of anti-Semitism and war, and was seeking vaguely to regenerate it.

It could be, of course, that Heisenberg, who had worked as a brilliant young man with Bohr back in the 1920s, has returned years later to show himself off to his former patron as a power in the great world. I doubt it. Certainly, the intellectual rivalry with Schrödinger spilled into their professional careers, but that was all past. Much more likely was a deeper personal context, in which Bohr plays father figure to the clever but insecure younger man. Was Heisenberg desperately seeking moral reassurance? Was he asking for absolution for the sin of plunging pure physics into the pitchpot of war? But then, didn't he realize that there could be no forgiveness for putting the diabolic power of the atom into human hands, especially the hands of such demons as the Hitler gang? Did even Niels Bohr understand then what is now all too clear?

It is impossible to answer these questions, for nobody can know what happened that evening in Copenhagen. The contexts and dimensions are too complex and contradictory. But these are also the contexts and dimensions of the great world of physics. They can no more be reconciled or resolved in the large than in the small. *Copenhagen* rehearses in microcosm the indeterminacy of all our lives and works. It is a fable for our times, a Greek tragedy where fate itself is shrouded in mystery and uncertainty. Go and see it, for sure.

Peter B. Young (review date May 1999)

SOURCE: Young, Peter B. Review of *Copenhagen*, by Michael Frayn. *Theatre Journal* 51, no. 2 (May 1999): 218-19.

[In the following review, Young positively assesses the Royal National Theatre production of Frayn's *Copenhagen*, singling out its staging, performances, and thematic emphasis on the motivations of the three characters in the drama.]

Michael Frayn's new play *Copenhagen* explores the puzzling trip German physicist Werner Heisenberg took to Copenhagen in 1941 to see his Danish counterpart Niels Bohr. That the meeting of these two old friends took place is historical fact, but what they said to each other is not, despite the best efforts of colleagues and British intelligence to find out during and after the war. Why did the German physicist, who was not a Nazi even though he worked on atomic energy research for his government, go to see Bohr, his half-Jewish friend and mentor then on the opposite side and working in occupied Denmark? The Gestapo was watching both men. Whatever they said to each other made Bohr deeply angry. He later gave one version of their meeting, Heisenberg another, further clouding matters.

How does one get an audience interested in such questions, and even heighten their involvement while having three characters discuss atomic physics? This problem

was solved admirably by Frayn's eminently playable script and by director Michael Blakemore and his cast, creating a riveting and theatrically intense production in this première of the play at the Royal National's Cottesloe Theatre. The play works because Frayn is a competent dramatist who is able to keep his own voice from intruding upon that of his characters. They are each complete, independent creations and believable agents of the play's events. Although Frayn is best known for his comic writings, *Copenhagen* should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with such works as *Benefactors*, *Here*, or the novel *A Landing on the Sun*.

Frayn's beautifully crafted play is not about the ethics of developing the atomic bomb, although it could be read that way. More fundamentally, the play concerns motivations for human actions and the uncertainty of even individuals knowing why they do what they do. As he said in a "Dialogue" presentation with Blakemore at the National Theatre on 1 June, "I thought what was said in 1941 might have some relation to uncertainty, at least in the theoretical limits on what we can know about human thought." Characteristically, Frayn does not solve the puzzle for the audience. He merely explores the situation in several permutations. The play is, in a way, a philosophical construction of another human attempt to make order and sense out of the world in which we find ourselves. Frayn's Cambridge degree is in moral sciences, now known as philosophy, and he has frequently said that all his plays have a philosophical basis to them.

The theatrical device framing the action is that, now dead, all three characters, Heisenberg, Bohr, and Bohr's wife Margarethe, have gathered one more time to determine just what happened and why. *Copenhagen* explores the multiple memories and versions of what may have actually happened, much as his *Benefactors* examines the manifold aspects of benefaction. As in the earlier play, here Frayn frequently has his characters address the audience directly from their post-life presence, setting the stage for us as they move to their several reenactments of the 1941 meeting, like variations on a theme. This technique is always made to seem perfectly natural in both Frayn's writing and the actors' portrayals.

Peter J. Davison's design is appropriately simple. He provides an arena setting at the center of which a large white circle with markings suggests a flattened and abstracted globe of the earth. At the rear is a steeply raised bank of four rows of seats, looking like either a lecture hall or an operating theatre. The sole entrance to the stage area, which thrusts into the globe design by means of a pointed wedge painted on the floor, bisects the bank. Three dark aluminum chairs, ironically designed for use on the Hindenburg dirigible, are the

only other props. The result is that all emphasis and attention is rightly directed to the actors and the text. Michael Blakemore's direction, his sixth collaboration with Frayn, reveals a solid concept at work. Movement patterns, for example, seem entirely natural because they are integral to the action, yet they also subtly illustrate and clarify it. Mark Henderson's lighting complements Blakemore's staging perfectly, keeping clear the transitions between characters' direct address to the audience and their reliving and enacting of the past. He accomplishes this with an economical selection of sources, angles, and a restrained but evocative use of color.

Matthew Marsh convincingly combines the Teutonic reserve and correctness of Heisenberg with his boyish desire to be accepted by Bohr as he was before the war. He shows us Heisenberg's complex mix of elusiveness and ambiguity, combined with a quickness of mind and precision of understanding. David Burke's Bohr is the opposite, a genial and fatherly sort given to methodically working through each step of a problem. Sarah Kestelman creates Bohr's wife Margarethe as a strong and gracious woman who is clearly Bohr's partner in discussions of physics and other matters, yet who maintains and asserts her own independence as occasions arise.

This production is a fine ensemble mounting of what may be Michael Frayn's best play to date. Setting, lighting, direction and acting combine smoothly to do what only the theatre can do so well: present the living semblance of an action unfolding before us.

Michael Posner (review date spring 2003)

SOURCE: Posner, Michael. "The Uncertainty about Heisenberg." *Queen's Quarterly* 110, no. 1 (spring 2003): 87-92.

[In the following review, Posner discusses the mystery surrounding the actual events that inspired Frayn's drama.]

At the height of World War II a secret meeting took place in German-occupied Denmark between Danish physicist Niels Bohr and a former student and colleague, the German physicist Werner Heisenberg. Did Heisenberg set up the meeting in order to spy on Bohr's nuclear research on behalf of the Nazis, or was he trying to assist the Allies by passing on information about Germany's progress toward building a nuclear bomb? Six decades after the event, a new play by Michael Frayn is recreating the drama and suspense of the wartime encounter, posing a series of challenging questions, not yet resolved.