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Stoppard has long demonstrated a certain interest in dramatizing political and cultural differences. Plays such as Professional Foul, Every Good Boy Deserves Favour, and Hapgood play off the Cold War politics of Eastern Europe (Czechoslovakia and the former Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s), as do shorter plays such as The Dog It Was That Died and Cahoot’s Macbeth. Significantly, the delineation of cultural differences in these plays is mainly subordinated to the repression and censorship of the artist or writer as individual. These plays emphasize the perspectives of English characters in these exotic settings or mark non-English characters as decidedly “foreign,” sometimes picturing, as in Every Good Boy Deserves Favour, repressive situations in ways that ultimately foster a sense of English nationalism. Night and Day (1978) might serve as a good example. Set in a volatile political situation in Kambwe, a “fictitious African country” (p. ix), it focuses mainly on the personal and professional dilemmas of veteran journalist Dick Wagner, photographer George Guthrie, idealistic young reporter Jacob Milne, mine owner Geoffrey Carson and his bored wife Ruth, these taking precedence over any psychological development of the African characters. The second act appearance of President Mageeba promises an interesting characterization; in an interview with Wagner, the British-educated Mageeba articulately delivers his perspectives on his country’s postcolonial politics and the role of the press. However, this conversation soon comes to an end. Mageeba reveals the danger barely concealed by his well-spoken exterior as he suddenly strikes Wagner; the interview ends entirely when Guthrie enters bringing news of Milne’s violent death in military crossfire. Mageeba’s presence ultimately serves only to establish the degree of uncertainty suffered by the English and Australian journalists and expatriates.

But the 1991 radio play In the Native State and the 1995 stage play Indian Ink seem to mark a change in the way Stoppard writes about culture, power, and difference. Although the plays do emphasize the perspective of the British characters, at the same time there seems to be a concerted effort to create Indian characters who are more fully developed. Stoppard integrates dramatic tropes and devices familiar from his other plays – a fascination with the politics of art, an interest in language games and debates, a gradual revelation of the past by characters operating in the present as “detectives” – into a more sustained effort to explore “the ethics of empire,” the colonial interaction between England and India.

In the Native State charts the visit in 1930 of poet Flora Crewe to Jumnapur, one of the “native states” still governed by Indian royalty in collaboration with British rule. On a speaking tour of India, where she lectures on “Literary Life in London,” Flora writes a series of poems and letters to her sister while having her portrait painted by Nirad Das, a local artist and literati. The free-spirited Flora meets a number of men who take an interest in her, including local British military officer David Durance and the Harrow-educated Rajah; yet it is Das with whom she has the most intense romantic relationship. Das draws Flora both in an unfinished “official” portrait and in the nude. These are the only surviving pictures of Flora, who dies on her Indian excursion later that year.

This plot is paralleled with a set of dialogues taking place in the mid-1980s: a teatime conversation between Das’s son Anish and Flora’s now-elderly sister, Mrs. Swan. Flora’s poetry has attracted the attention of feminist scholars. One in particular, a would-be biographer, places the “official” portrait of Flora on the cover of a published volume of her letters. Anish Das, an artist educated and living in England, sees the book and recognizes the unidentified woman whose nude portrait he has inherited from his dead father.

Indian Ink makes a number of significant additions to the radio version. Stoppard plays up the mystery of Das’s relationship with Flora as well as elaborating on the nature of his later political imprisonment. Stoppard also expands the role of the over-eager American scholar, Eldon Pike, whose attempts to find out the nature of Das’s portrait lead him to India. The stage play ends as the radio play does, with a flashback to the young Mrs. Swan’s visit to Flora’s grave, where she meets her future husband; and a quotation from Emily Eden’s 1866 account of her travels in India, Up the Country.

One way to read the play is as another of Stoppard’s dramatized debates. A series of positions on the “ethics of empire” and the colonial history of India can be traced, beginning with the conflicting perspectives articulated by Anish Das and Mrs. Swan. Anish’s heroic romanticization of the struggle for Indian nationhood and independence is juxtaposed with Mrs. Swan’s insistence that “We made you a proper country! And when we left you fell straight to pieces like Humpty Dumpty!” Likewise, the events of 1930 in Jumnapur also provide a forum for various reflections on dimensions of colonialism.
Here Stoppard turns his preoccupation with artist characters to draw attention to the cultural dimensions of British imperialism, questioning how British rule imposed English education, arts, and language upon an already vigorous culture and established civilization. This long history of linguistic and cultural indoctrination can be seen in the numerous “Anglicized” Indian characters who idolize English literature, paint in oils, and collect European cars and furniture. Stoppard describes Das as “the Indian who loves things English—literature and his references are English and he obviously is in a kind of thrall to English culture.”3 Lord William Bentick’s acceptance of Thomas Macaulay’s infamous 1835 “Minute,” arguing for the education of Indians in English, helped institute an educational system in India whose lasting effects are noted by Dilip in Indian Ink: “Yes, it’s a disaster for us! Fifty years of Independence and we are still hypnotized! Jackets and ties must be worn! English-model public schools for the children of the elite, and the voice of Bush House is heard in the land” (Indian Ink, p. 59). Das tells Flora that the bloody Empire finished off Indian painting! (Indian Ink, p. 44); significantly, fifty years later his son, trained in London, doesn’t consider himself a “particularly Indian” painter (In the Native State, p. 3; Indian Ink, p. 14).

The economic forces underlying Britain’s colonization of India also enter into Stoppard’s dramatic discussion. India’s colonization had its formal beginnings in 1600 with the formation of the British East India Company, a monopoly of London merchants given exclusive trading rights by Queen Elizabeth I; their influence expanded through the subsequent two centuries as the power of the Mughal emperors declined. The underpinnings of colonial enterprise, V. I. Lenin insists in his Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916), have all to do with the increasing need for natural resources and labor in the capitalistic expansion of modern industrial European nations. Furthermore, although imperial nations introduced the imperatives of industrialization, modernization, and capitalism to their colonies, they did not encourage indigenous enterprise nor did they foster the future capacity to compete in a modern industrial environment. These colonies remained underdeveloped even as they were modernized, in many cases continuing their dependence on foreign capital even after their later independence. Both of these dimensions of Indian colonization are stressed in the play. Das mentions Mr. Chamberlain’s lecture on industrial England’s exploitation of India’s resources: “The women here wear saris made in Lancashire. The cotton is Indian but we cannot compete in the weaving” (Indian Ink, p. 44). Mr. Coomaraswamy’s criticisms of empire argue Britain’s failure to follow through on the modernization of India: “Where are the cotton mills? The steel mills? No investment, no planning. The Empire has failed us!” (Indian Ink, p. 44).

Indian colonization is not just a matter of the forceful imposition of military rule and the institutionalization of economic and cultural hierarchies. It involves the appropriation of an already-existing Indian feudalism. In 1858, following the Indian Mutiny, the East India Company was dissolved, and its powers handed over to the crown. Moreover, the 1858 proclamation protected the hereditary power of native princes in exchange for their complicity with British rule. The proclamation pledged to respect “the rights, dignity and honour of native Princes” and “the feelings of attachment with which the natives of India regard the lands inherited by them from their ancestors.” It also promised “to protect them in all rights” and to pay “due regard” “in framing and administering the law . . . to the ancient rights, usages and customs of India.”4 This strategy was calculated to preserve a semblance of self-government and thus divide political opposition to British rule. Gail Ching-Liang Low notes that “Saxon domination,” as Lord Canning, the first viceroy of India, put it, “required the cooperation of sections of the Indian public in order to ensure its uninterrupted rule”; in his words,

I believe there is but one way of meeting this danger, and that is to bring the influential classes—the native states first and afterwards our own chief subjects—into that condition and temper in which, when the moment comes, we may as completely as possible throw the reins on their necks and entrust to them the keeping of internal peace and order.5

Stoppard’s choice to focus on one of the “native states” allows him to examine how well this tactic worked, particularly in the plays’ depiction of the Rajah’s guarded, yet still symbiotic, relationship with the Residency. It is the Rajah who suppresses dissent from nationalists, and fears that independence will mean the end of both the native states, and the “end of the unity of the subcontinent” (Indian Ink, p. 61).

This background allows Stoppard to dramatize a debate on colonial history, where characters provide a series of cogent arguments. The English Durance supports the idea of colonialism as benevolent paternal rule, imagining English and Indians in a relationship of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. He supports “Indianization,” the transition to self-rule that nonetheless preserves the existing social hierarchy; he notes, for instance, that Brahmins and other members of the Indian ruling classes will gradually inherit more powerful positions. Others such as Flora have a much more critical stance on British rule: “It beats me how we’re getting away with it, darling. I wouldn’t trust some of them to run the Hackney Empire” (Indian Ink, p. 51). A largely implicit yet significant voice in the discussion can be heard through the references to the emerging nationalism that was to result in independence in 1947: the 1857 Indian Mutiny; Indian-led nationalist and
independence movements, such as the nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns led by Mahatma Gandhi; as well as the many instances of local protest and unrest in the first half of the twentieth century, such as that in which Das presumably participates after his affair with Flora.

Stoppard weaves this historical background and its interpretation into more subtle aspects of his theatre. Both In the Native State and Indian Ink raise questions about colonialism and culture not only through dramatic debate but also through the creation of particular characterizations and imaginary spaces. In a 1991 interview, Stoppard made a telling comment about the challenges of writing In the Native State:

the difficulty, particularly in this decade by the way, is not to write Indians who sound like Indians, which is hard enough, but to avoid writing characters who appear to have already appeared in The Jewel in the Crown and Passage to India. I mean the whole Anglo-Indian world has been so raked over and presented and re-presented by quite a small company of actors who appear in all of them...and so I mean there is this slight embarrassment about actually not really knowing much about how to write an Indian character and really merely mimicking the Indian characters in other people's work. Because my own memory of living in India really hasn't been that much help because my conscious knowledge of how Indians speak and behave has actually been derived from other people's fictions.

(Allen in Delaney, ed., Stoppard in Conversation, pp. 242-243)

What Stoppard seems to be indicating here is not only the problem of writing believable characters from a different cultural background but also the degree to which these characters – particularly given his method of writing – are already established in overdetermined ways, influenced by the pervasive images appearing in novels, television, and film. His worry that the discourse, the field of representation, has been saturated by certain images, thus preventing access to a more “authentically Indian” characterization, is quite different from his apparently rather casual acceptance of stereotypes in his earlier work (“What I like to do is take a stereotype and betray it, rather than create an original character. I never try to invent characters. All my best characters are clichés”).

This negotiation of cultural clichés becomes a key question for Stoppard, for whom the “real” India is inseparable from the fictions influenced by the history of power and representation.

Thus to understand In the Native State and Indian Ink, one must think about a set of images and characterizations to which Stoppard is – consciously or not – responding, as well as whether or not he ultimately “betrays” these types. Such powerful images – which define an extensive field of representation – indicate, express, and disseminate deeper values of cultural self-definition. Stoppard spent several years of his childhood in Junmapur, where he sets his two plays. Yet he suggests that he can take very little from his own experience, saying of In the Native State that “there’s almost nothing of my experience in it, not even indirectly.” Stoppard’s “geography” should thus not be read as based on a literal recreation of space but rather as the creation of a set of evocative imaginative and literal spaces, each of which manifests this history of power.

Lisa Lowe suggests that an aspect of the colonial process was to intrain certain notions of “Indianness” defined against ideas of the quintessentially “English”: “As Englishmen constructed a myth of their own omniscience, there also evolved the myth of the ‘real India’.” In Stoppard’s plays there are also several versions of the “real” India that raise difficult questions about the responsibilities of representation. To some extent, Stoppard reiterates all too familiar images of India as an exotic, feminized, disorganized, and barbaric place in need of the British Empire’s regulation, governance, and cultural reform. Yet he also juxtaposes these stereotypes with a more difficult, complex, and still emergent notion of national identity. Both appear in the creation of fictional landscapes that are evoked in the characters’ descriptions.

To some extent Stoppard mocks those who hold patently stereotyped ideas about Indians – the inhabitants of the Resident’s club who quote Kipling’s poetry. Yet what he creates through the descriptions of English characters like Flora, Durance, and Mrs. Swan, who express a more complex and nuanced experience of India, are supposedly “authentic” visions of India that nonetheless also evoke racial and gendered difference in very predictable ways.

Flora’s poetry suggests a feminized, erotic, and irrational “India” under masculine English control. A quotation from her poem “Heat” opens In the Native State with a series of sensual images that associate the Indian climate with female sexuality and eventual decay. Flora’s voice speaks successive descriptions of “heat” as associated with female lust: “Yes, I am in heat like a bride in a bath, / without secrets,” to an image of the poet, “think of a woman in a blue dress...writing about the weather,” to explicit animal sexuality, “Or think, if you prefer, of bitches, / cats, goats, monkeys at it like knives / in the jacaranda” (In the Native State, p. 1). Later, her poem associates such heat with the death and decay of the poet: “a corpse in a ditch... each hair / a lily stem straggling out of a poisoned swamp”

Heat has had its way with me, yes, I know this ditch, I have been left for dead before, my lips gone slack and the wild iris flickers in the drooling cavity, insects crawl like tears from behind my eyes –

(In the Native State, p. 20)
In the stage play *Indian Ink*, the voiceover of her poems is condensed, and the suggestion of crude animal sexuality is omitted, but the basic progression of images remains the same. Both versions conclude the poem with an aestheticized image of "heat" that imagines sexual desire sublimated into art (“a pearl at my throat, I let go and slides like a tongue-tip down a Modigliani” [In the Native State, p. 77; Indian Ink, p. 75]), but then returns to the association of female sexuality (in an image of the womb) and the Indian landscape:

(Heat) spills into the delta, now in the salt-lick,
lost in the mangroves and in the airless moisture,
a seed-pearl returning to the oyster—

*et nos cedamus amori* – (Indian Ink, p. 75; In the Native State, p. 77)

Richard Dyer offers an evocative interpretation of the "dissolving, formless nature" so often evoked in describing female sexuality as well as the traditional female body. For Dyer, particular female bodies in film, influenced by early 1950s descriptions of the "vaginal orgasm," are often imaged as soft, blurred, or "oceanic." Flora's "Heat" adapts this association to a feminized image of India.

Flora's poetry is the play's strongest statement of how India becomes imagined as sexualized, feminized, illicit, and transgressive. Despite comments that insist on the rigidity of Indian patriarchy (Das's reminder that Flora's sister, had she been Indian, would have been dearly punished for her affair with the married Mr. Chamberlain), India is associated with the open sexuality of female bodies and, significantly, with Flora's personal and poetic liberation. The story of Krishna's love affair with "a married lady, Radha, who was the most beautiful of the herdswomen" and who "would often escape from her husband to meet him in secret" (In the Native State, p. 22; Indian Ink, p. 28) attracts her. When Flora asks Das, "Were Krishna and Radha punished in the story?" he simply replies, "What for?" It is his nonchalance that inspires her to comment: "I should have come here years ago" (p. 47). The association of India with the realm of the openly sexualized is rearticulated throughout the mention of Indian erotic art, both in Das's nude portrait of her and in the Rajah's gift.

The imagining of India as an eroticized and feminized body engages on the one hand in the "romanticising of healthy primitivity," while on the other it identifies India with contagion, filth, and disease, making "a metaphoric connection between organic, climatic and moral degradation." This imaginary space is attractive but also risky in its promise of adventure, wilderness, and danger. Durance comments to Flora, "People here drop like flies – cholera, typhoid, malaria – men, women and children, here one day, gone the next" (In the Native State, p. 56; Indian Ink, p. 52). This contradiction is maintained in numerous descriptions. The beauty and freshness of the natural wilderness are contrasted with the ills of modern civilization; Mrs. Swan remarks, "I can't get the tea here to taste as it should. I expect it's the water. A reservoir near Staines won't have the makings of a good cup of tea compared to the water we got in the Hills. It came straight off the Himalayas" (In the Native State, p. 19; Indian Ink, p. 26). Eldon Pike, on the other hand, refuses the Indian soft drinks unfamiliar to him. Durance's description marks out the thrilling yet at the same time disgusting aspects of the "real" India, praising the "wonderful" smell of the Indian countryside: "You should smell chappatis cooking on a camel-dung fire out in the Thar Desert. Perfume!" (In the Native State, p. 63; Indian Ink, p. 56).

Durance pictures an earlier state of India as an Eden before Eve, a homoerotic fantasy of virgin territory inhabited only by men.
JOSPHINE LEE

I'll tell you where it all went wrong with us and India. It was the Suez Canal. It let the women in...When you had to sail round the Cape this was a man's country and men mucked in with the natives. The mensahibs put a stop to that. The mensahibs won't muck in, won't even be alone in a room with an Indian.

(In the Native State, p. 61; Indian Ink, p. 56)

Durance's reflections and recollections of the "real" India are consistent with, as Renato Rosaldo puts it, a kind of "imperialist nostalgia" which pictures an "authentic" body of India that is both deliciously beautiful and thrillingly dangerous. This conceals "complicity with often brutal domination."12 Significantly, it is the presence of women that "contaminates" the purity of masculine bonding. Eldon Pike presents perhaps most memorably the culmination of associating India with the contaminined feminine reproductive body, as he describes a beggar-woman:

she had this baby at the breast, I mean, she looked sixty and -- well, this is the thing, she had a stump, you see, she had no hand, just this stump, up against the glass, and it was... raw... so when the light changed, the stump left this... smear...

(Indian Ink, p. 58)

Flora's own fate embodies the fear of contamination associated with India and its feminized erotic. The unconventional English woman, Flora reveals in her consumption of India, eating unpeeled fruit and living amongst the natives. Her lack of caution is contrasted with the eating habits at the Club, where they serve "soup, boiled fish, lamb cutlets, sherry trifle and sardines on toast" (In the Native State, p. 54; Indian Ink, p. 51). Yet the free-spirited Flora both thrives in and eventually suffers from this environment. Her carefree disregard of proper English manners and her embrace of India, while heroic, is associated both with her lack of control, her sexual excesses, and her untimely death. When Mrs. Swan describes her visit to Flora's grave, she recollects a pristine landscape: "I have never seen such blossom, it blew everywhere. There were drifts of snow-white flowers piled up against the walls of the graveyard. I had to kneel on the ground and sweep the petals off her stone to read her name" (In the Native State, p. 81; Indian Ink, p. 80). This recollection reiterates earlier connections made between India, female sexuality, reproductive excess, and death.

Each of Stoppard's characterizations, whether English, Indian, or American, is inextricably tied up with this delineation of imagined cultural space. While Stoppard's English characters are preoccupied with defining "India," his Indian characters show the contradictions of their own colonial history. Both In the Native State and Indian Ink end with the same quotation from Emily Eden's Up the Country:

Twenty years ago no European had ever been here, and there we were with a band playing, and observing that St Cloup's Potage à la Julienne was perhaps better than his other soups, and that some of the ladies' sleeves were too tight according to the overland fashions for March, and so on, and all this in the face of those high hills, and we one hundred and five Europeans being surrounded by at least three thousand mountaineers, who, wrapped up in their hill blankets, look on at what we call our polite amusements, and bowed to the ground if a European came near them. I sometimes wonder they do not cut all our heads off and say nothing more about it.

(In the Native State, p. 85; Indian Ink, p. 83)

The characterizations of Das and other Indian characters help answer the question of why the native "mountaineers" do not simply cut off the heads of the British. Colonial rule is maintained both through martial and ideological control.

The values disseminated by the English characters to justify their rule are absorbed all too well by some of the Indian characters. Macaulay's famous "Minute on Education" (1835) imagines "a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern -- a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect." Yet the transformation of the Indian "interpreter" into Englishman is inevitably partial and incomplete; the racial barriers could not fully admit Indians as Englishmen. Stoppard's plays reflect this paradoxical situation. The colonial directive imagined the "native" in need of improvement, education, and assimilation. However, at the same time there was also a corresponding need to protect racial integrity from the others; to foster the belief that the native was inherently unassimilable, primitive, and irrational. Although natives were supposedly reformed by receiving the proper literary education, serving in the military, and playing cricket, they would always remain imperfect copies of the white British.

Homi Bhabha describes the "mimic man" created within colonial situations who both resembles and yet must remain inevitably different from the colonizer, the product of "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite." Such versions of "mimic men" are those such as Stoppard's Das and the Harrow-educated Rajah; they are slavishly devoted to English literature and European cars, yet remain undeniably unassimilable. Flora describes the scene at her poetry reading: "it's so moving, they read the New Statesman and Time and Tide and the TLS as if they were the Bible in parts... and they know who wrote what about whom; it's like children with their faces jammed to the railings of an unattainable park." (In the Native State, p. 31; Indian Ink, p. 6). Das seems to embrace all things British: he desires "to write
like Macaulay” (In the Native State, p. 111; Indian Ink, p. 19) and imagines a fictional London populated by his favorite writers and artists. As Durance tells Flora, Anglicized Indians from the higher castes have begun to occupy positions of power within the military and government.

The extent to which the Indian can actually become British is, however, limited, as attested to by the display of “Indian English” in the play. Das, Coomaraswami, and the Rajah speak English fluently, but it is a version of English whose verbosity marks it as inauthentic English, an exotic hybrid. The hyperbolic and metaphoric nature of Indian English is demonstrated in the elaborately embroidered phrases that Das, Coomaraswami, and the Rajah use, and in the “Hobson-Jobson” game that Das and Flora play. Yet this linguistic playfulness is perceived, at least by Flora, as frustrating and excessive indirection, even dishonesty; she tells him to “stop being so Indian”: “You only do it with us. I don’t believe that left to yourself you can’t have an ordinary conversation without jumping backwards through hoops of delight, with whoops of delight” (In the Native State, p. 6; Indian Ink, p. 12).

This insecurity extends to Das’s failure to command a European style of portrait painting in his first “official” portrait of Flora. Unlike the high modernists Brancusi and Modigliani, whose nude sculptures and portraits happily incorporate African-influenced “primitive” styles, Das cannot successfully appropriate European aesthetics; his first portrait remains unfinished. Indian Ink suggests that his second portrait of Flora is successful not because it blends European and Indian influences, but because its Indianess emerges as “authentic” in spite of its Eurocentric aspirations. The second portrait is “a composition in the old Rajasthani style” (Indian Ink, p. 38) as compared to his first attempt which, as Mrs. Swan tells Pike, “is fairly ghastly, like an Indian cinema poster” (Indian Ink, p. 10).

Both plays suggest that some version of the “authentic” Indian – backward, irrational, and disorderly – will expose itself as ultimately incompatible with British civilization, efficiency, progress, and health. Significantly, characters who do not speak English – such as Nazrul, engaging in the comic thefts of pâté and chickens, and Das’s second wife, from a peasant background – remain at the background as testimony to an even more authentic, uncontaminated “native” state.

In the Native State and Indian Ink employ such stereotypes, evoking “India” as incomprehensible, erotic, irrational, unsophisticated, and childlike, and “England” as central, stable, and coherent.13 Yet happily Stoppard’s plays do not rely only on these problematic identifications. Acts of Indian rebellion, ranging from modest protests such as Das’s “home-made banner at the Empire Day gymkhana” (Indian Ink, p. 61) to Gandhi’s march to the sea, testify to an emergent national identity, one that allowed for the unification of groups distinct from one another in religion, culture, and caste into a movement for national unity and independence. As Lowe points out, “it was India’s identification of itself as ‘Indian,’ and the power of this notion to unify diverse Indians – Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, “representative” or not – which enabled the Indians to demand independence as a nation.”16 But what is “Indian” in Stoppard’s plays is irrevocably tied up with what is “English”; even the reliance on a binary opposition between Indian and English cultural values does not fully imagine these categories to be mutually exclusive and essential. Ironically, as Das suggests, it is the institution of English as a common national language that helps formulate this Indian national identity.

I have to thank Lord Macaulay for English. It was his idea when he was in the government of India that English should be taught to us all. He wanted to supply the East India Company with clerks, but he was sowing dragon’s teeth. Instead of babus he produced lawyers, journalists, civil servants – he produced Gandhi! We have so many, many languages, you know, that English is the only language the nationalists can communicate in! That is a very good joke on Macaulay, don’t you think? (In the Native State, pp. 11–12; Indian Ink, p. 19)

When Das is pushed by Flora to meet her expectations of rebellion (“If you don’t start learning to take you’ll never be shot of us”), to throw off the shackles of his Anglophilia, what he immediately reveals is not a heroic nationalist, the “thorn in the flesh of the British” (In the Native State, p. 8) that his son imagines him to be, but rather someone who is deeply attached to both traditional Indian and English culture, someone who is the product of this tension. When Das finally defends his love of English literature and European art, he does so on the basis of its parallels with traditions of Indian art; he argues that these complement, rather than displace, one another. Stoppard does no more than suggest that Flora and Das consummate their romantic interactions; as Mrs. Swan suggests, the question of “who does Flora sleep with” is not relevant: “It hardly matters, looking back. Men were not really important to Flora. If they had been, they would have been fewer. She used them like batteries. When things went flat, she’d put in a new one” (In the Native State, p. 76; Indian Ink, pp. 79–80). Yet their interracial relationship is central to the politics as well as the plot, not least because it presents the desire to bridge immense cultural differences.

Perhaps even the staging of Indian Ink through the conflation of English and Indian landscape, with its permeable boundaries between India and England as well as past and present, indicates the hope that English and Indian might merge into some newer sensibility. A developing Anglo–Indian
IDENTITY is expressed when Francis (Eric in *Indian Ink*) announces proudly that “We’re going to field a test team” in cricket; the “we” refers to “India” rather than England. Likewise, Mrs. Swan lapses into reminiscences of her beloved “fruit trees at home” (*In the Native State*, p. 81; *Indian Ink*, p. 80). Conversely, for Anish Das, “home” is London. In *Indian Ink*, this idea of an Anglo-Indian affinity is accentuated by the expanded role of Eldon Pike. Pike’s many slips of decorum remind the audience that, despite his extensive knowledge of Flora’s life, as an American he remains a cultural outsider. The final decision of Mrs. Swan and Anish Das to keep their discovery of the nude portrait and the affair between Flora and Das to themselves suggests that they share a “family” history in more ways than one. Their alliance suggests that both English and Indian are implicated in the larger space of empire; those twentieth century members of the former British Empire can define their commonalities against those much more removed from their colonial pasts.17

Stoppard creates characters who are not beings autonomous of culture but who are pointedly products of the real and imaginary spaces they inhabit. Flora is disappointed to be reminded that, despite her sympathies, she is still considered the “memsahib” (p. 43). In *Indian Ink*, Flora tells Das yet again to “Stop being Indian”; he finally replies angrily “And you stop being English!” (*Indian Ink*, p. 37). And yet, there is some flexibility in these positions. Even as Das resists being “Indian,” it is the nature of this Indianness that is in question. Both plays show the desire to move beyond the old divisive stereotypes of “Indianness” and “Britishness”; but what is to replace these divided spaces is unfortunately as yet not quite resolved. What emerges is only a gesture towards hybridity, the possibility of movement across what seems like an insurmountable divide.

NOTES

1 “Certainly the main one [starting point] was a rather generalized idea to write about the Empire and more particularly the ethics of empire And I’m not saying that *In the Native State* is that. In a way, I still want to do that. But this play is some sort of introduction to the subject for me.” Interview with Paul Allen broadcast on *Third Ear*, BBC Radio Three, 16 April 1991, reprinted in *Stoppard in Conversation*, ed. Paul Delaney (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994): pp. 239–247, p. 240.

FURTHER READING


