

“Who the Hell Are You?”: Gender Performativity in Tom Stoppard’s *Hapgood*¹

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Abstract

Tom Stoppard is an outstanding playwright, embellishing his plays with scientific and philosophical approaches and presenting complicated, mysterious plots to the reader. He bases the plot of his postmodern play, *Hapgood* (1988), on quantum theory and draws an analogy between Werner Heisenberg’s principle of indeterminism, termed “The Uncertainty Principle”, and international espionage. Thus, he constructs the complicated relationship between the particle and the whole throughout the play to depict the relativistic and deceptive relationship between sex and gender. Focusing on the title character of the play, the present study proposes that the play represents the fluid and indeterminate nature of gender and identity within the context of espionage and indeterminism. Hapgood, who is a mother, a lover and a successful master agent in a man-dominated British secret service, navigates between “masculinity” and “femininity” during a day. Moreover, she metamorphoses into her twin, who is entirely different from her, except for their identical faces, to entrap the mole in the office. The study consults Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity and fluidity to indicate the unpredictable and uncertain nature of ‘gender identity’, which formulates itself through performances in social relations and trespasses the heterosexual matrix. It juxtaposes the Butlerian approach with the Uncertainty Principle in quantum theory pertaining to the confusing relationship between gender, the body and identity. The Butlerian analysis of the play reveals that particularly the modern

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way of life makes women transgress the Cartesian dichotomies of sex/gender, masculine/feminine and man/woman through the fluidity of their roles even during a single day and makes it difficult to find out who is really who.

Keywords: gender, *Hapgood*, identity, norms, performativity, quantum

INTRODUCTION

Tom Stoppard has produced extraordinary plays within the angle of science and drama including *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966), *The Real Thing* (1982) and *Arcadia* (1993). His plays have been read, screened and criticised on numerous occasions. *Hapgood* (1988) has been overshadowed by his other plays. The complexity of the play makes the play arduous to comprehend and stage. Revolving around an espionage thriller, the play is based on quantum mechanics and duality both in terms of characters and the plot of the play. The title character is a woman, who performs both male and female gender roles as a talented agent at work, mother and lover. In these aspects, the dramatist paves the way for questioning the complex and fluid relationship among the concepts of “gender”, “body” and “identity” through an anti-Cartesian approach by drawing an analogy with quantum theory. Therefore, the paper aims at scrutinising how these concepts are problematised in relation to quantum theory and the principle and indeterminism. To this end, Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity illuminates the discussion throughout the study.

A BUTLERIAN READING OF *HAPGOOD* IN THE CONTEXT OF QUANTUM THEORY

Ontological discrepancies in the genital bodies are utilised to construct epistemological differences in the phallogentric system. The power inequalities deriving from bodily differences in appearance and practice have been reinforced by gender ideologies intensifying the binarism between men and women through dichotomies such as spirit/matter, culture/nature and most importantly mind/body. Man, as mind, has been taken as a rational, unified and thinking subject in contrast to woman, as body, an irrational, hysteric and instinctual and physical subject. Thus, this distinction has served to justify men’s superiority over women and the female body which is “weak” and passive, vulnerable to the desire of men and reproductive with its feature of fertility. As argued by Baysal, “the birth of the first male introduces the concept of conflict into their [women’s] lives as both sides display hostility towards one another” (173). Thus, women

are constrained within their own bodies, and the female body has become the object of the male gaze.

While disciplining the female body, discourses produced by men help the patriarchal control over it by transmitting and permeating it through knowledge in scientific contexts, thus, making the division between man and woman seem like an evident truth. Thus, the body is socially "re-invented" and redefined through gender identity/ies (Benhabib and Cornell 14) with some masculine and feminine attributions as mentioned above. When a female person adopts masculine characteristics, including inner strength, violence, competitiveness, independence, rationality, she is often forced back into the feminine norms of society.

Butler is a noteworthy gender philosopher and theorist. In one of her prominent works, *Gender Trouble* (1990), she speaks out from the feminist side to feminism by interrogating the concepts of gender and identity drawing attention to their internal inconsistency (23). In contrast to most second-wave feminists who argued for the differentiation between gender and the body, she disrupts gender dichotomy, which is replaced by diverse, ambiguous, multi-layered and performatively constituted, fluid identity. Butler states: "[G]ender is real only to the extent that it is performed" (*Gender Trouble* 25). She argues that gender is not something that sex refers to, but what the subject does as a performance; thus, according to her, identity is "constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (*Gender Trouble* 33). Accordingly, performativity makes gender productive, so identity is merely a relativistic product of the repetitive system of performativity.

Butler adopts the Beauvoirian viewpoint that gender is not something one is born with, rather it is something one performs/does and eventually becomes (De Beauvoir 301). She interrogates the impacts of norms on gender through paradoxical practices and proposes that some specific roles are attributed to the sexes, and the subject is expected to perform in accordance with them in relation to each sex. In this aspect, she evaluates gender as clothes that people may change in contrast to the social expectations entailing gender roles to be a concrete mechanism (*Undoing Gender* 6). According to Butler, the biological difference facilitates distinguishing between gender roles, regarded as 'femininity' and 'masculinity' and attributed to the body as if they were natural and inherent in a normative framework. She argues that indeed, the body does not necessitate a specific gender, but is embodied through cultural norms. She notes that "there is a 'one' who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with a deliberation which gender it will be today" (*Bodies That Matter* 21). In this context, what she denies is not the biological distinction between sexes, but the 'biological fate' imposed upon the body. She notes that gender is "as determined as it was under

the biology-is-formulation. In such a case, not biology, but culture becomes destiny" (*Gender Trouble* 12). From the Butlerian point of view, gender is normative as it serves to normalise and standardise the subject in the heterosexual system (Chambers and Carver 29).

Butler proposes the variability of gender, which should not be confined to being "man" or "woman", but cover alternative categories, constituted by the term "queer". Thus, the Butlerian transgenderism "expresses a gender identity that differs from the one which corresponds to the person's sex at birth" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transgenderism>). Accordingly, regardless of sex, one may behave either/both "manly" or/and "womanly" relatively. In this regard, physical appearance misleads the subject's perception about gender as it is totally fluid, undecisive and arbitrary in its relation to the body. Emphasising the phenomenological nature of gender, Butler states: "What we take to be 'real', what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality" (*Gender Trouble* xxiv).

Stoppard bears upon German physicist Werner Heisenberg's "The Uncertainty Principle" thickening up the main plot, espionage. Thus, the play doubly holds a counterargument against the Cartesian framework of any concepts which are identified as "some independent reality" (Barad 58). The referred information of quantum theory throughout the play also juxtaposes the fluid and indeterminist nature of gender identity which cannot be determined through the genital body. This principle of quantum physics advocates that the energy and spatial coordinates of a particle of the whole cannot be precisely and simultaneously measured. In other words, according to the principle, when measuring the position and momentum of an electron, one can determine either the position or the momentum but not both. In simple terms, the act of measuring one quality affects the other quality, and thus one gets different results based on which quality is measured first. As stated by John Fleming, "[a] ramification of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle is that it acts as a limit upon the possibility of exact knowledge, and thus it undermines the idea of a strictly casual universe" (177). Accordingly, nothing is objective in a particular experimental context. In this aspect, everything which is supposed to exist independent of observation is formulated through "classical epistemological and ontological assumptions" (Barad 59). *Hapgood* defamiliarises the fluidity of gender identity through quantum physics in a postmodern way, which enables the playwright to "negate the man-centered mentality of the compartmentalized life for different sexes" (Kaya 97).

The Uncertainty Principle proposes that the 'reality' is eternally unattainable as there has been, is and will be something to tell more (Watts 49) just like the fluidity of gender which is relatively independent of sex. Quantum physics asserts that one is more than a limited body and personality (Valverde "The Quantum Body"

225). Stoppard is deeply influenced by Richard Feynman's ideas in his *Lectures on Physics* (1963), to which Kerner often refers in the play as follows:

Every time we don't look we get wave pattern. Every time we look to see how we get wave pattern, we get particle pattern. The act of observing determines the reality... [N]obody knows. Einstein doesn't know. I don't know. There is no explanation in classical physics. Somehow light is particle and wave. The experimenter makes the choice. (Stoppard 12)

Kerner points out the dual nature of light as a particle and wave which is perceived as a visual image of the duality inherent in light. In this respect, the significant idea of modern physics that one cannot measure the location or speed of a particle without changing one or the other underpins *Hapgood* via several analogies that demonstrate how much the subject's relativity affects his/her experience of the world. From this point of view, the individual does not have a certain core or permanent self, but a dual nature. It constructs and deconstructs itself in a constant process of change as the boundaries between themselves and others and between their different selves are shaped and negotiated. Thus, people are "seeds of essential eternity in this scenario of quantum eternity" (Valverde "Quantum Theory"). To put it differently, the indefinite and arbitrary part-whole, mentioned and represented throughout the play, makes the audience consider the issue of gender from a different perspective outside the heterosexual normative system and perceive the relativity of the concept of "gender" irrespective of the body. It is obvious that Stoppard draws an analogy between the dual nature of light and human identity, about which he states: "It's just that one chooses to 'be' one part of oneself, and not another part of oneself. One has a public self and a submerged self" (qtd. in Gussow 79).

When light is spread like a wave, it displays a pattern of diffraction through multiple particles which are called photons. Each photon both represents and negates the light. Such a paradoxical relationship between the wave and the particle is observed in the relationship between gender and performativity. Neither the wave/gender nor the particles/gender roles are inherently related to the object that spreads light/the human body itself. Within the context of quantum physics, which proposes the argument that there is no clear-cut division between the object which is used to measure and the object which is measured, the genital body which is used to determine one's sex and performativity function like a photon both representing and negating gender. From the Butlerian viewpoint juxtaposed to the quantum-theoretical approach to the particle/whole and photon/light, gender is "neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (*Gender Trouble* 10).

The Cartesian duality is also juxtaposed with the doubleness observed in the technical aspect of the play through two pools, zoos, rugby and office scenes in the context of espionage. The duality both leads to confusion in espionage and helps the agent solve the mystery in it. In the play, “[n]ot only are some of the spy double-agents but, having twins, they are literally doubled” (Uchman 152); Ridley and his biological twin, the unnamed Russian twins, and Hapgood and her twin Celia Newton. The play revolves around the characters’ efforts to reveal the person leaking information to Russia. The mole seems to be a part of the organization; however, is it Kerner, a Russian scientist who is already a double agent? Ridley, Hapgood’s right-hand man? Or Hapgood herself? Starting with a speedy shifting of suitcases among agents in a London bathhouse, the play makes the reader puzzled, however, then it is realized that the Russians have made use of twins to confuse the British, and that Ridley, a British agent, is, in fact, working for the Russians and has a twin. Then the Russian twins turn out to be the Ridley twins. Thus, the play presents ‘a quantum dance’ of the moles and agents confusing the reader and characters throughout the plot. Such a dance displays that the particles of the wave may differ from each other; however, they are spread from the same wave. The arbitrary relationship also exists in the relationship between sex and gender identity. The twins in the espionage are the same person in the body, however, differ in performance because either they work for separate organisations or the same agent works for separate organisations. This confusing case depicted through espionage throughout the play asserts the arbitrary relationship between gender and performance. Gender identity is revealed through performance, not the body itself. Thus, action surpasses the body replacing the gendered body with gender performativity as the twins’ bodies are surpassed by their agent roles in different organisations. To put it differently, ontologically both the same or separate entities are exposed to epistemological representation, which is identified through discursive practices.

The performative nature of gender is observed best through Hapgood in the play. Navigating between “manly” and “womanly” features, the title character affirms the Butlerian notion that “there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender” (*Gender Trouble* 180). Her separate roles with different people like particles or waves indicate her indefinite relationship with her body, which may be regarded as the ontological whole. Her division of gender roles during her typical day is reflected in various ways by which different people address her. Ridley and Merryweather call her “Mother”, Blair addresses her first name, “Elizabeth”; for her secretary, Maggs, she is “Mrs. Hapgood”; Water calls her “ma’am”: her son Joe says “Mum” or “Mummy”; her twin Celia refers to her as “Betty”; and Kerner uses the Russian equivalent of her first name, “Yelizaveta”, or sometimes “Lilya” and “Lilitchka”. Thus, as claimed by Fleming, Hapgood’s lack of a fixed name represents the divided nature of her identity (184).

Against the background of Cartesian phallogentric thinking, the genital embodied aspect of a woman's sex positions her into the gender roles, assumed for her through cultural codes of heteronormativity. However, Hapgood cannot be confined to social norms based on gender binaries, distinguishing between the "feminine" and "masculine". Therefore, Hapgood is comprised of all of them as a whole. She is introduced as "a brainy, calculating master agent" as "the only woman" in man-dominated British intelligence (Stoppard 27). She says to Blair: "I like all that manners maketh man stuff, and competition ad talking properly and being magnanimous in victory and defeat" (Stoppard 23). She is so intelligent and efficient that she can play the tricks of the trade of espionage and win a chess game without having a chessboard in front of her while she is solving her son's problem with rugby shoes at school on the phone.

Considering Hapgood's gender performativity during a single day from the anti-Cartesian vantage point of feminism, it is impossible to talk about the unified and stable self and any permanent knowledge to identify it. In this context, the mind/body duality, the man/woman duality and the epistemological association of gender roles with the difference in male and female bodies are put into question revealing the relativity and fluidity of human roles independently of their body-based discrepancies. Thus, any privileging relationship between men and women on the basis of gender-body association is negated in theory and practice discussing how a culturally constructed sex has come out of the natural sex through power moulded by social and historical forces. What Butler questions is "...that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning," that there is a 'one' who is prior to this gender, a 'one' who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with a deliberation which gender it will be today (*Undoing Gender* 6). Considering the panoptical male gaze which results in women's obsessive self-surveillance, the patriarchal system utilises the panopticon structure to turn "woman into docile and complaint companions of men" (Bartky 37) by making her conform to the patriarchal definition of the woman with the domestic responsibilities constructing the norms of femininity in the patriarchal society such as caring, childbearing and rearing, cooking, cleaning, defending her honour, obeying and serving men. However, Hapgood's performance indicates neither her femininity nor her masculinity. She is a professional woman who has control of the network and the men working in it (Uchman 153). She is so good at balancing her feelings and mind at work. As the head of an espionage unit, she is steady and effectively in control of the men she runs. She is quite a polite, patient and protective woman taking care of her colleagues and feeling concerned with any issues related to them. Moreover, she always pours the tea at meetings. Therefore, she is called "Mother". Hapgood's different roles in a single day shatter the clear-cut division between masculinity

and femininity and all the gender roles attributed to them embracing an androgynous identity which Yılmaz states to be “the state when a human being could make use of her/his complete set of abilities rather than eliminating some of them because of the socially constructed gender roles” (86). The fluidity of the roles indicates the relativity of performativity pointing to their discursive nature. Although the modern way of life makes women and men look similar to each other (Çetiner 648) in dressing, occupations and many other aspects of life. They seem like separate but similar particles of the wave in quantum physics.

The play never idealises Hapgood for her masculine or feminine qualities, but rather paves the way for questioning feminine and masculine roles in social norms, constraining people through gender identity, which is socially constructed. Hapgood also seems torn by her conflicting position between her public and private selves, and between her two “Joes”; her lover Joseph Kerner and her son Joe. She seems to be dependent on Blair when she invites him to the parents’ tea at Joe’s school as a father figure. It is obvious that she needs his friendship and responds to his intimacy to compensate for the lack of a concrete father figure for her son and a male partner for herself. While both of them are watching Joe play on the rugby pitch, Hapgood tells Blair: “He [Joe] got unhappy about something once when he was really little, he was crying, he couldn’t tell me what it was, he didn’t *know* what it was, and he said, ‘The thing is, Mummy, I’ve been unhappy for *years*’.” (Stoppard 18-19, original emphasis). She bestows a privilege on her son rather than her love affairs. When she discerns that Blair jeopardised Joe’s safety, she finishes her friendship with Blair, but she says she will continue her relationship with him merely in business (Stoppard 87). Moreover, she reflects her anger and sensitivity when Kerner says that he will return to Russia. She says: “I won’t need you any more, I mean I’ll need you again —oh, *sugar!* — you *know* what I mean — do you want to marry me? I think I’d like to be married?” (Stoppard 50, original emphasis). From the Butlerian approach, Hapgood both challenges and performs the gender roles ascribed to her sex. Her femininity reveals particularly in her private life, whereas she is on the foreground her masculinity in her public life. However, considering her multi-tasking character among which she tries to keep balance through the performativity of her gender roles in public and private sides of her life, she seems to have an androgynous identity.

Hapgood reflects the complicated roles of businesswomen during a typical day. Her identity is divided into different roles; an agent, a mother to her son, both a colleague and lover to Kerner. From the phallogocentric viewpoint, Hapgood is expected to be a domestic figure because born into a heterosexual-oriented society, girls are confined to domesticity playing with dolls, kitchen tools and wearing dresses and toy cosmetics, whereas boys grow up playing sports outside, imitate soldiers or use toys modelled on guns and cars. As for adulthood, gender identities

continue to be formulated around cultural norms, and the wider framework of the society presents conservative families with married heterosexual couples performing distinctly separate gender roles and childbearing restricted to familial life. However, Hapgood performs both 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles like a double-figure carrying a gun in her pocket like a man and taking care of her son as a mother at the same time. Stoppard has even said, "the mechanics of the plot . . . [are] just a necessary nuisance to provide the opportunity to write about this woman [Hapgood] who in Blair's words is 'A sort of double'" (qtd. in Fleming 178). Hapgood is like an electron without a definite momentum and position because of her multiple roles and performance during a typical day. Accordingly, in parallel to the indefinite relationship between the particle/waves of light and the light itself, there is an unclear, indefinite and complicated relationship between Hapgood's different roles and her identity as a whole.

The play also depicts that performativity requires observation as gendered performances are discursive practices, that is, phallogentric formulation of the culture versus nature duality. Considering the Butlerian assertion that gender is "the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body" (*Gender Trouble* 173), the play represents the fluidity of gender roles through Celia Newton, who is Hapgood's twin. Hapgood pretends to be her twin sister to entrap Ridley, the mole in the office. She takes on a convincing alternate *persona*, whose personality, behaviour, speech, and dress are the antithesis of well-organised, polite and practical Hapgood. She is "seemingly rash and scatter brained", "pot smoking and non-stop talking", "frequently swearing" and "untidy" (Stoppard 66). Ridley describes her on the phone to Hapgood: "She may be your sister, but there the resemblance ends. She's a pot-head, it reeks, she's growing the stuff in the window-box, she won't stop talking, she picks her nose, she looks like shit" (Stoppard 51). Indeed, for Ridley, who loves Hapgood and wears "a bright scarf just because she bought it for him" (Stoppard 51), Celia is his "dreamgirl", his fantasy made flesh, that is, "Hapgood without the brains or the taste" (Stoppard 83). Although she is an idealised domestic feminine figure, she is in the foreground with her body and emotions, not her mind. Therefore, he wants to fulfil his years-long desire to sleep with the physical equivalent of Hapgood. Only through some conscious changes in her performance, Hapgood turns out to be Celia, that is, totally a different person with the same genital body. It shares a similar ground to compare Celia/Hapgood with different gender roles; feminine/masculine in the same sex with separate photons spreading from the same source of light. Even though they differ in appearance confusing the observer, they belong to the same source.

The difference between the twins' behaviour reveals the performativity of gender roles, constructing the relative identity of the subject when they are adopted. Hapgood tells Ridley in disguise of Celia about the different choices they have

made in their lives as follows: “Well, she was the scholarship girl and I was the delinquent. Having the kid was good for her, she always thought the delinquents had the bastards and the scholarship girls had the wedding. It shook up her view of the world, slightly” (Stoppard 77). It may be claimed that Hapgood pretends to have her opposite identity, which she sometimes aspires to have as free of any social norms and that this is the reason why she becomes so successful in her role. In this context, as Demastes argues, “[c]ohesion of being is not singularly linear but multiple and simultaneous. Even as we strive to generate a majority self for public (or even personal) consumption, there’s something to be said for acknowledging the quantum selves that stride side-by-side with the selves we chose to show the world” (83). Therefore, it is Hapgood, not Celia that the character chooses to be in her social relations. The twin sisters’ case represents the identity phenomenon, which is “a social process of repetitive inheritance...[that is,] its *performance*” (Faber 17, original emphasis). In this regard, one’s gender identity depends on the subject’s choice of how to act in the public space. Although Hapgood’s appearance is matched with Celia’s, the difference between their behaviours stuns Ridley. He asks her: “Who the hell are you?” as he is misled by the phenomenological nature of the subject. Ridley’s question reveals that discursive practices not only describe but also produce the objects and subjects of these epistemological practices. In this regard, the impulse that makes Ridley feel confused about Hapgood’s behaviours in the appearance of both herself and Celia derives from his being a subject of the phallogocentric system as a gazer on the objectified female body. This aspect refers to the central question in terms of quantum mechanics, concerning relativity and the indefinite relationship between the body and its performativity. Quantum theory enables the playwright to depict this complex relationship by demanding “the recognition that no sharp separation can be made between an independent behaviour of the objects and their interaction with the measuring instruments which define the reference frame” (Bohr 224). Thus, the relativity of gender identity and quantum theory are juxtaposed throughout the play indicating that “measurements do not represent any measurement-independent states of being” (Barad 131). Against the background of quantum theory, considering the photon as performance, role or an object to be measured or as an apparatus used to determine gender identity indicates the discontinuous and misleading interaction between the body, gendered roles and identity.

CONCLUSION

The Butlerian reading of Stoppard’s *Hapgood* indicates that the modern way of life has made professionally successful women androgynous both in appearance and mind. The women’s roles change from ‘masculinity’ to ‘femininity’ or vice versa

in a single day so swiftly that it is nearly impossible to identify gender identity in heterosexual terms any more. Drawing an analogy between the Uncertainty Principle, underlining the relativity in observation resulting from the arbitrary relationship between the particle and wave of light in quantum physics, and the gender issue, the Butlerian approach to the play reveals that the performativity of "gender" makes the concept fluid, complex and ambiguous, trespassing the heterosexual dichotomies based on sexual identity and obstructing talking about a definite gender as "woman" or "man". The fluidity and variety of women's "masculine" and "feminine" roles even in a single day problematise the concepts of "gender", "masculinity" and "femininity" just like the impossibility of measuring both the momentum and position of the electron within the context of quantum physics. Based on an espionage story revolving around the title character who has several gendered roles differing from each other in a short time, the play exemplifies that working women are really good performers of the roles traditionally attributed to "women" or "men". From the Butlerian viewpoint juxtaposed to the quantum-theoretical approach to the particle/whole and photon/light and to the espionage in which it is difficult to distinguish the mole twin from the other one who is not the mole, there is not a definite relationship between the body or sex as a particle, and gender identity as a whole, and the complexity of performances in daily routines attributes different roles to working women blurring the clear-cut line between gender dichotomies in modern life.

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Kdo za vraga si ti? Spolna performativnost v igri *Hapgood* **Toma Stopparda**

Tom Stoppard vnaša v svoje igre znanstvene in filozofske pristope ter predstavlja gledalcem komplicirane, skrivnostne zgodbe. Članek analizira njegovo delo *Hapgood* s pomočjo kvantne teorije in Heisenbergovega principa nedeterminizma.

Ključne besede: spol, identiteta, norme, performativnost, kvantum, *Hapgood*