

THE REAL INSPECTOR HOUND

A Play

by Tom Stoppard

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Stoppard's most recent play, *The Hard Problem*, opened at the National Theatre in 2015. He wrote his first play, *Enter a Free Man*, whilst working as a journalist in Bristol. His plays include *Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead*, *The Real Inspector Hound*, *After Magritte*, *Jumpers*, *Travesties*, *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (a play for actors and orchestra written with André Previn), *Night and Day*, *The Real Thing*, *Hapgood*, *Arcadia*, *Indian Ink*, *The Invention Of Love*, *The Coast Of Utopia*, *Rock'n'Roll*, *Dogg's Our Pett*, *New-Found Land*, *Dogg's Hamlet and Cahoot's Macbeth*. Adaptations include *Tango*, *Undiscovered Country*, *On The Razzle*, *Rough Crossing* and *Dalliance*. Translations include *The Seagull*, *Henry IV*, *Ivanov*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *The House Of Bernarda Alba* and *Largo Desolato*. He has written eight Evening Standard award-winning plays and five of his plays have won Tony awards.

Radio plays include *Darkside* (set to Pink Floyd's album, *The Dark Side of the Moon*), *On 'Dover Beach'*, *If You're Glad, I'll Be Frank*, *Albert's Bridge* (Italia Prize Winner), *M Is For Moon Among Other Things*, *The Dissolution Of Dominic Boot*, *Where Are They Now?*, *Artist Descending A Staircase*, *The Dog It Was That Died* and *In The Native State*.

Television adaptations include *Parades End* (BBC/HBO), *A Walk On The Water* (from *Enter A Free Man*), *Three Men In A Boat* and *The Dog It Was That Died*. Original television screenplays include *Another Moon Called Earth*, *A Separate Peace*, *Neutral Ground*, *Teeth* and *Professional Foul*, which won awards from BAFTA, the Broadcasting Press Guild and Squaring The Circle. He adapted his television dramatisation of Jerome K Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* for BBC Radio.

Screenplays include *Anna Karenina*, *Despair*, *The Romantic Englishwoman*, *The Human Factor*, *Brazil*, *Empire Of The Sun*, *The Russia House*, *Billy Bathgate*, *Poodle Springs*, and *Shakespeare In Love* (with Marc Norman), which won him an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, a Golden Globe and the Broadcast Film Critics and American Guild Awards for Best Screenplay 1998. He directed and wrote the screenplay for the film of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, which won the Prix d'Or at the Venice Film Festival 1990 for Best Film.

Tom Stoppard is a CBE and was knighted in 1997.

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THE REAL INSPECTOR HOUND

Presented at the Criterion Theatre, London on June 17th 1968
with the following cast of characters:

MOON	Richard Briers
BIRDBOOT	Ronnie Barker
MRS DRUDGE	Josephine Tewson
SIMON	Robin Ellis
FELICITY	Patricia Shakesby
CYNTHIA	Caroline Blakiston
MAGNUS	Anthony Webb
INSPECTOR HOUND	Hugh Walters

The action of the play passes on the stage of a theatre, set for the performance of a play, and part of the auditorium.

Time – the present

The first thing is that the audience appear to be confronted by their own reflection in a huge mirror. Impossible. However, back there in the gloom—not at the footlights—is a bank of plush seats, and pale smudges of faces.

*One of the seats in the front row is occupied by **MOON**. Between **MOON** and the auditorium is an acting area which represents, in as realistic an idiom as possible, the drawing-room of Muldoon Manor. There are french windows at one side, and a telephone fairly well up stage, i.e. towards **MOON**. The body of a man lies sprawled face down on the floor in front of a large chaise-longue.*

*Silence. The room. The body. **MOON**.*

***MOON** stares blankly ahead. He turns his head to one side, then the other, then up, then down—waiting. He picks up his programme and reads the front cover. He turns over the page and reads.*

He turns over the page and reads.

He turns over the page and reads.

He turns over the page and reads.

He looks at the back cover and reads.

*He puts it down and crosses his legs and looks about. He stares front. Behind him and to one side, barely visible, a man enters and sits down—**BIRDBOOT**.*

*There is a pause. **MOON** picks up his programme, glances at the front cover and puts it down impatiently. Another pause. Behind him there is the crackle of a chocolate box,*

absurdly loud. MOON looks round. He and BIRDBOOT see each other. They are clearly known to each other. They acknowledge each other with constrained waves. MOON looks straight ahead. BIRDBOOT comes down to join him.

***Note:** Almost always, MOON and BIRDBOOT converse in tones suitable for an auditorium, sometimes a whisper. However good the acoustics might be, they will have to have microphones where they are sitting. The effect must be not of sound picked up, amplified and flung out at the audience, but of sound picked up, carried and gently dispersed around the auditorium.*

Anyway, BIRDBOOT, with a box of Black Magic, makes his way down to join MOON and plumps himself down next to him, plumpish, middle-aged BIRDBOOT and younger, taller, less relaxed MOON.

BIRDBOOT *(sitting down; conspiratorially)* Me and the lads have had a meeting in the bar and decided it's first-class family entertainment, but if it goes on beyond half past ten it's self-indulgent—pass it on. *(He laughs jovially)* I'm on my own tonight, don't mind if I join you?

MOON Hello, Birdboot.

BIRDBOOT Where's Higgs?

MOON I'm standing in.

BIRDBOOT Where's Higgs? } *Overlapping.*
MOON Where's Higgs! Every time. }

BIRDBOOT What? *(He looks vaguely around, paying little attention to MOON's following remarks)*

MOON It is as if we only existed one at a time, two critics combining to achieve continuity. I keep space warm for Higgs. My presence defines his absence, his absence confirms my presence, his presence precludes mine. When Higgs and I walk down this aisle together to claim our common

seat, the oceans will fall into the sky and the trees will hang with fishes.

BIRDBOOT (*catching up*) Where's Higgs?

MOON The very sight of me with a complimentary ticket is enough. The streets are impassable tonight, the country is rising and the cry goes up from hill to hill: Where—is—Higgs? (*After a short pause*) Perhaps he's dead at last, or trapped in a lift somewhere, or succumbed to amnesia, wandering the land with his turn-ups stuffed with ticket stubs.

BIRDBOOT *regards him doubtfully for a moment.*

BIRDBOOT Yes. Yes, well I didn't bring Myrtle tonight—not exactly her cup of tea, I thought, tonight.

MOON Over her head, you mean?

BIRDBOOT Well, no—I mean it's a sort of *thriller*, isn't it?

MOON Is it?

BIRDBOOT That's what I heard. Who killed thing? No-one will leave the house.

MOON I suppose so. Underneath.

BIRDBOOT *Underneath?* It's a whodunnit, man! Look at it!

They look at it. The room. The body. Silence.

Has it started yet?

MOON Yes.

A pause. They look at it.

BIRDBOOT Are you sure?

MOON It's a pause.

BIRDBOOT You can't start with a *pause*! If you want my opinion there's a total panic back there. (*He laughs and subsides*) Where's Higgs tonight, then?

MOON It will follow me to my grave and become my epitaph.

Here lies Moon the second string: where's Higgs? Sometimes I dream of revolution, a bloody *coup d'état* by the second rank—troupes of actors slaughtered by their understudies, magicians sawn in half by indefatigably smiling glamour girls, cricket teams wiped out by marauding bands of twelfth men—I dream of champions chopped down by rabbit-punching sparring partners while eternal bridesmaids turn and rape the bridegrooms over the sausage rolls and parliamentary private secretaries plant bombs in the Minister's Humber—comedians die on provincial stages, robbed of their feeds by mutely triumphant stooges—and march—an army of assistants and deputies, the seconds-in-command, the runners-up, the right-hand men—storming the palace gates wherein the second son has already mounted the throne having committed regicide with a croquet-mallet—stand-ins of the world stand up! (*He pauses briefly*) Sometimes I dream of Higgs.

BIRDBOOT *regards him doubtfully. He is at a loss and grasps reality in the form of his box of chocolates.*

BIRDBOOT (*chewing into the mike*) Have a chocolate!

MOON What kind?

BIRDBOOT (*chewing into the mike*) Black Magic.

MOON No, thanks.

The chewing stops dead. Of such tiny victories and defeats...

BIRDBOOT I'll give you a tip, then. Watch the girl.

MOON You think she did it?

BIRDBOOT No, no—the *girl*, watch her.

MOON What girl?

BIRDBOOT You won't know her, I'll give you a nudge.

MOON *You* know her, do you?

BIRDBOOT (*suspiciously; bridling*) What's *that* supposed to mean?

MOON I beg your pardon?

BIRDBOOT I'm trying to tip you a wink—give you a nudge as good as a tip—for God's sake, Moon, what's the matter with you? You could do yourself some good, spotting her first time out—she's new, from the provinces, going straight to the top. I don't want to put words into your mouth but a word from us and we could make her.

MOON I suppose you've made dozens of them, like that.

BIRDBOOT (*instantly outraged*) I'll have you know I'm a family man devoted to my homely but good-natured wife, and if you're suggesting—

MOON No, no...

BIRDBOOT —a man of my scrupulous morality—

MOON I'm sorry...

BIRDBOOT —falsely besmirched—

MRS DRUDGE enters from the front door right. She is the char, middle-aged, turbaned.

MOON Is that her?

BIRDBOOT Don't be absurd, wouldn't be seen dead with the old—ah.

MRS DRUDGE heads straight for the RADIO, dusting on the trot, and switches it on.

MOON (*reading his programme*) Mrs Drudge the Help.

RADIO (*without preamble*) We interrupt our programme for a special police message.

MRS DRUDGE stops to listen.

The search still goes on for the escaped madman who is on the run in Essex.

MRS DRUDGE (*in fear and dismay*) Essex!

RADIO County police led by Inspector Hound have received a report that the man has been seen in the desolate marshes around Muldoon Manor.

MRS DRUDGE *gives a fearful gasp.*

The man is wearing a darkish suit with a lightish shirt. He is of medium height and build and youngish. Anyone seeing a man answering to this description and acting suspiciously, is advised to phone the nearest police station.

A man answering this description has appeared behind
MRS DRUDGE. *He is acting suspiciously. He creeps in. He creeps out. MRS DRUDGE does not see him. He does not see the body.*

That is the end of the police message.

MRS DRUDGE *turns off the radio and resumes her cleaning. She does not see the body. Quite fortuitously, her view of the body is always blocked, and when it isn't she has her back to it. However, she is dusting and polishing her way towards it.*

BIRDBOOT So that's what they say about me, is it?

MOON What?

BIRDBOOT Oh, I know what goes on behind my back—sniggers—slanders—hole-in-corner innuendo. What have you heard?

MOON Nothing.

BIRDBOOT (*urbanely*) Tittle-tattle. Tittle, my dear fellow, tattle. I take no notice of it—the sly envy of scandalmongers—I can afford to ignore them, I'm a respectable married man...

MOON Incidentally...

BIRDBOOT Water off a duck's back, I assure you.

MOON Who was that lady I saw you with last night?

BIRDBOOT (*unexpectedly stung into fury*) How dare you! (*More quietly*) How dare you! Don't you come here with your slimy insinuations! My wife Myrtle understands perfectly well that a man of my critical standing is obliged occasionally to mingle with the world of the footlights, simply by way of keeping *au fait* with the latest...

MOON I'm sorry.

BIRDBOOT That a critic of my scrupulous integrity should be vilified and pilloried in the stocks of common gossip...

MOON Ssssh!

BIRDBOOT I have nothing to hide! Why, if this should reach the ears of my beloved Myrtle...

MOON Can I have a chocolate?

BIRDBOOT What? Oh. (*Mollified*) Oh, yes—my dear fellow—yes, let's have a chocolate. No point in—yes, good show. (*He pops a chocolate into his mouth and chews*) Which one do you fancy? Cherry? Strawberry? Coffee cream? Turkish delight?

MOON I'll have montelimar.

The chewing stops.

BIRDBOOT Ah. Sorry. (*Meaning "You just missed that one"*)

MOON Gooseberry fondue?

BIRDBOOT No.

MOON Pistacchio fudge? Nectarine cluster? Hickory nut praline? Chateau Neuf du Pape fifty-five cracknell?

BIRDBOOT I'm afraid not. Caramel?

MOON Yes, all right.

BIRDBOOT Thanks very much. (*He gives MOON a chocolate. After a pause*) Incidentally, old chap, I'd be grateful if you didn't mention—I mean, you know how these misunderstandings get about...

MOON What?

BIRDBOOT The fact is, Myrtle simply doesn't *like* the theatre...
(*He tails off hopelessly*)

MRS DRUDGE *whose discovery of the body has been imminent, now—by way of tidying the room—slides the chaise-longue over the corpse, hiding it completely. She resumes dusting and humming.*

MOON By the way, congratulations, Birdboot.

BIRDBOOT What?

MOON Outside the Theatre Royal. Your entire review reproduced in neon!

BIRDBOOT (*pleased*) Oh—that old thing.

MOON You've seen it, of course.

BIRDBOOT (*vaguely*) Well, I was passing.

MOON I definitely intend to take a second look when it has settled down.

BIRDBOOT As a matter of fact I have a few colour transparencies—I don't know whether you'd care to?

MOON Please, please—love to, love to...

BIRDBOOT *hands over a few colour slides and a battery-powered viewer which MOON holds up to his eyes as he speaks.*

Yes—yes—lovely—awfully sound. It is, in the best sense of the word, electric. I would go so far as to say—kinetic without being pop, and having said that, I think it must be said that here we have a review that adds a new dimension to the critical scene. I urge you to make haste to the Theatre Royal, for this is the stuff of life itself.

BIRDBOOT Most handsome of you, Moon.

MOON (*handing back the slides; morosely*) All I ever got was “Unforgettable” on the posters for... What was it?

BIRDBOOT Oh, yes—I remember! Was that you? I thought it was Higgs.

The phone rings. MRS DRUDGE seems to have been waiting for it to do so and for the last few seconds has been dusting it with an intense concentration. She snatches it up.

MRS DRUDGE (*into the phone*) Hello, the drawing-room of Lady Muldoon’s country residence one morning in early spring? *Hello!* —the draw—who? Who did you wish to speak to? ...I’m afraid there is no-one of that name here, this is all very mysterious and I’m sure it’s leading up to something, I hope nothing is amiss for we, that is Lady Muldoon and her house guests, are here cut off from the world, including Magnus the wheelchair-ridden half-brother of her ladyship’s husband Lord Albert Muldoon who ten years ago went out for a walk on the cliffs and was never seen again.

MOON Derivative, of course.

BIRDBOOT But quite sound.

As MRS DRUDGE speaks the following lines, the suspicious character enters again through the french windows.

MRS DRUDGE Should a stranger enter our midst, which I very much doubt, I will tell him you called. Good-bye.

MRS DRUDGE puts down the phone and catches sight of the previously seen suspicious character who has now entered again, more suspiciously than ever. He senses her stare, freezes, and straightens up.

SIMON Ah! Hello there! I’m Simon Gascoyne, I hope you don’t mind, the door was open so I wandered in. I’m a friend of Lady Muldoon, the lady of the house, having made her acquaintance through a mutual friend, Felicity Cunningham,

shortly after moving into this neighbourhood just the other day.

MRS DRUDGE I'm Mrs Drudge. I don't live in but I pop in on my bicycle when the weather allows to help in the running of charming though somewhat isolated Muldoon Manor. Judging by the time— (*She glances at the clock*) —you did well to get here before high water cut us off for all practical purposes from the outside world.

SIMON I took a short cut over the cliffs and followed one of the old smugglers' paths through the treacherous swamps that surround this strangely inaccessible house.

MRS DRUDGE Yes, many visitors have remarked on the topographical quirk in the local strata whereby there are no roads leading from the Manor, though there are ways of getting *to* it, weather allowing.

SIMON Yes, well I must say it's a lovely day so far.

MRS DRUDGE Ah, but now that the cuckoo-beard is in bud there'll be fog before the sun hits Foster's Ridge.

SIMON I say, it's wonderful how you country people really know weather.

MRS DRUDGE (*suspiciously*) Know whether what?

SIMON No—weather. (*Glancing out of the window*) Yes, it does seem to be coming on a bit foggy.

MRS DRUDGE The fog is very treacherous around here—it rolls off the sea without warning, shrouding the cliffs in a deadly mantle of blind man's buff.

SIMON Yes, I've heard it said.

MRS DRUDGE (*moving right*) I've known whole week-ends when Muldoon Manor, as this lovely old Queen Anne House is called, might as well have been floating on the pack ice for all the good it would have done phoning the police. It was on such a week-end as this that Lord Muldoon who had lately brought his beautiful bride back to the home of his