

Lincoln Center Theater's Platform series presents conversations with artists working at LCT before an audience of interested theatergoers. Admission is free and open to all. Platforms are held in the lobby of the Vivian Beaumont Theater. The following is a transcript, edited for clarity, of the February 14, 2007 Platform with Tom Stoppard:

Tom Stoppard: *The Coast Of Utopia*  
Platform Series Interview  
February 14, 2007  
Interviewer: Anne Cattaneo  
LINCOLN CENTER THEATER

AC: Happy Valentine's Day to all of you and thank you for coming out on this snowy evening, I'm Anne Cattaneo, the dramaturg of Lincoln Center Theater, and on behalf of Andre Bishop and Bernard Gersten, I'd like to welcome you to a larger than usual Platform event, in conjunction with our production of *The Coast Of Utopia*. I want to introduce our most admired playwright in residence, who's been with us this whole season, Tom Stoppard. (Applause)

AC: Some of the newspapers that picked up our press release may have led you to believe that this is a lecture of some sort by Mr. Stoppard, but in fact it is, as many of you who have been to our Platform discussions know, an informal back-and-forth, an opportunity for members of our audience who've seen the play or who are about to see the play, to speak with artists who are working with us here at the theater. So that's what we'll be doing tonight. I'm going to begin by asking Tom a few questions, but then the purpose of this event is to make it possible for you, the audience, to address thoughts or questions to Mr. Stoppard.

We've also passed out to each of you this evening (and if you've seen the show you may have already read it) a copy of the *Lincoln Center Theater Review*, which features an article and an interview with Tom about some of the origins of the play. So, I'm going to avoid the questions that he's answered already in print.

My first question: Tom, you told me one day in rehearsal that you wrote this play in 2000-2001. You've seen the trilogy premiere in London at the Royal National Theatre, you've been in rehearsal here for six months. You've traveled to Russia, where the trilogy is in rehearsal in Moscow now for an opening there later in 2007. So, you've been living with these plays now for six or seven years, in one form or another, and I was curious to know whether your feelings about any of the characters have changed over these years? Have you grown fonder of some of the characters? Were you starting the play now, would some of them have become larger characters than they are now? Has anything changed in your feelings? Like a seven-year marriage, do you love some of them more? Do you love some of them less?

TS: Let's see, it was more than seven years counting the time I spent getting ready to write it, and then writing it. This is only the second production. The Russian one will be the third. So, there's already a long history of different actors playing the same roles. Although the characters remain pretty much what they were, or what I thought they were, one becomes fond of actors, which complicates things. (Laughter) On the whole, you know, almost without exception, I get along well with actors. I like working with them, and I like them as people. So usually there is a basic level of good relations between me and the person portraying the character. But, here and there with all plays, without obviously specifying, sometimes the actor and the part meet at the right moment, they're the right people, as it were, and you become more interested for that reason. But as it's a play about historical characters, I don't really have enough freedom to start reinterpreting them too much. I begin with what I take to be some kind of reality about what kind of people they were. And the largest divergences from that initial vision or conception comes in the casting. And it's a rather a professional answer to your question, perhaps more so than it merits here, but it is an interesting question as to whether one ought to be looking for actors who look like the original people.

AC: And, what is your thought about that?

TS: My thought about that is that if the audience isn't particularly aware of what the character once looked like, then it's, as it were, a secret within the company whether the person is close or not. As it happens, the Russian actor playing Herzen there... they've been in rehearsal for a year now (Laughter) and when I visited - when the whole gang of them walked in to say hello, I knew right away who was Herzen. It had to be him, and it was. But here that doesn't really sway me much in casting. So, to try to just curve towards an end to a threateningly endless answer, the characters don't change, except to some extent in the hands of different actors, and I adjust to that persona.

AC: But to be specific, I know you worked a bit with Ethan Hawke to give him new material about Bakunin...

TS: I wrote a page, which yes ... but ... fine. (Laughter). A couple of weeks ago, I suppose, I finally caught up on something I've been dimly aware of, that sort of short-changed one of the characters in one of these three plays. It always bothered me a bit, just in the background, and I suppose actually (Laughs) to be really honest about it, I think that the fact that I got so fond of Ethan, somehow made me address this for him as much as for me. And, well, the result was that after telling them...telling Ethan particularly, but also Jack O'Brien, the director, "I'm going to do something for this scene, and I'll bring it in on Monday," which was like two days away, it took in the end about nine days - I was one Monday late. But I was working pretty much every hour I had, when I wasn't in rehearsal, trying to get this bit right. In the end, I did add, I would say, the better part of a page. Which is a huge addition, because most of the time I'm adding two words or taking three words away, or, I put in one word there, and take it out the next day. The difference of a whole page is quite major once a play is established - here it's already been performed, and you're well into rehearsal and you're practically performing again. At that point, half a page is by no means usual. And, I was pleased that I did it and I was pleased with the way that Brian O'Byrne and Ethan act the scene, which has this new material and some extra stuff for Brian as well, which has been moved from somewhere else. I should say what is probably already obvious, that I do not think and I've never thought of a play text as being in a kind of stasis from the moment you think you've finished writing it. Never! There are playwrights who I think are much inclined in that direction. But, one of the things which I really love about the theater and why I think I am still a playwright...because there are other things one could write, I guess....but the reason I'm a playwright, I think, is I really love the ... just the pragmatism of live theater. It's about an event, it's not only the text. The text is something which you try to keep in harmony with the event you want to achieve. And, I've just come from rehearsal across the road, and I think I made changes on probably five or six pages of *Salvage*, the third play which we're opening in a few days. I'm not even saying that these changes will be there the next time the play is done. It has all to do with where we are. I'm sure you understand that the Lincoln Center Theater stage is a very large area of a very particular shape. When we started work, three or four years ago it seems like, but actually it was last September ... (Laughter), I was really very, very concerned about the distance that the actor had to travel to get from the place where the actor first comes into the audience's view, to the place where the actor should start to speak, it's an immense distance. I usually work in theaters where the closet door opens and the person jumps out shrieking, "My husband!" or whatever. (Laughter) Every space is different.

AC: I've heard you in rehearsal saying, "Do you need something here? Could I give you another word?" It's very much about what the actors need practically. But to return to the first question, wasn't Ethan's question to you, "Isn't there a moment in this play when Bakunin can be right, and Herzen can be wrong?" (Laughter).

TS: I hope I'm not mis-remembering this, but I think I put that idea into his head.

AC: I'm sure you did! (Laughter).

TS: Actually I was really tired of Bakunin being on the receiving end of the last word, because essentially for much of their history together, Alexander Herzen, who emerges as the main figure in this cast of personalities, had a rather condescending attitude towards Bakunin, and because ... well, because ... the fact is I rather shared it. So, I kept writing Bakunin from Herzen's perspective. There may be people in this room who feel very differently about Michael Bakunin, but I never in the end found, and I don't believe there exists, a coherent structure to all the positions he claimed. And, for that reason, and for other sort of snobbish, intellectual reasons, I think subconsciously I slightly disdained him, as I believe Herzen did. And, so now we have a scene which includes a moment where Bakunin is saying, "No, you haven't got it," and when he stops speaking the scene is over. It gives me a lot of pleasure to have done that. (Laughter)

AC: In London and now here ... and you're leaving us early next week to travel to Moscow...are there differences in the way the plays are received by audiences in different countries?

TS: I'm sure there are differences, but they're not significant to me. My experience over the years, with other plays, has been that essentially we're on the same planet, and speaking the same language, and my experience shows me the inescapable reality that plays have good nights, and bad nights, and that is our fault, not the audience's. It's always our fault. We lose energy. We lose clarity. We lose precision. It will happen in London, or in New York, or in Manchester, or in Philadelphia. It's always our fault, because the audiences who come to theater, they're a kind of community in some way. And, it's one of the privileges of what ought to be an archaic, moribund art form, but is in fact a rather vital one. At any given moment, and simultaneously, the theater is in deep trouble, and extremely alive. When I was young, there were very, very few small stages for people like myself at that age. Now there are innumerable stages in this city, and in London, and in every metropolis in the world. People under 25, I don't know why, they want to write for the

theater. Many, many of them, and many people want to see what they write.

AC: I see you reading all the time - you're always reading one thing or another. How does something that you're interested in, such as these Russians from the 19th Century, which was probably one of about a thousand things you were interested in during the years that you wrote this play, how does a subject change from being something you're interested in to being a subject of a play?

TS: It's the other way around I think. A spark of interest exists, as do a lot of sparks in different subjects. The degree of interest I finally took in Russian radicalism emerged from wishing to write the play rather than the ability to write the play emerging from my knowledge. The things go together, but actually it's the desire to write the play which leads to the research.

AC: And, if you had to give a name to that desire back then, what would it have been? Was there a subject that you were interested in writing about, or was it a person ...

TS: I started off interested by Belinsky, he's the literary critic in *Voyage*

AC: Played in our production by Billy Crudup ...

TS: He has a major role in the first play, and a smaller role in the second play, and by the end of that he's dead. He died of consumption when he was quite young. I wanted to write about him, but in reading up about him I discovered this entire family of Bakunins who seemed to be several plays in themselves, and so on it went. (Laughter).

AC: I think you said, "Someone else now can write the rest of that family." (Laughter).

TS: Herzen was very much a central figure from the beginning, but in fact he doesn't really emerge properly until the middle of the trilogy, the second play. But why certain things appeal to me that much and others don't, that is to say why this spark makes a flame and this one doesn't, I have absolutely no idea.

AC: Could you tell us what you look for in an actor, how actors need to prepare to do plays of yours, talk to us a little bit about Tom Stoppard actors?

TS: I was going to say "the only," but perhaps it's fairer to say, "the first," the first thing I demand is clarity of utterance. Everything else is a poor second. (Laughter). There's no point in doing what I do if there's no clarity of utterance. And, I'm a fanatic about it. I'm a nag about it. Actors have very interesting little habits, all actors, in all countries. They try to avoid saying the word "if" whenever it appears at the beginning of a sentence. When rehearsals are finally over, I know exactly how many "ifs" there are in the play, because they're all in my notebook. (Laughter). And I go around after the show saying, "Well, your 'if' is in Scene IV, and your 'if' is in Scene VII." That's not entirely facetious of me. It's actually a very serious thing for me, because I don't think that I write naturalistically. I don't think I write naturalistic dialogue. And, one could ask the question, "Well, do you write artificial dialogue?" (Laughter). And, I say, "Well, no not exactly that either." Sometimes I feel that despite the subject matter, a lot of things I write are a kind of comedy of manners. There are plays - good plays - where I don't think that's quite as important - where the burden of what is happening at that moment between the play and the audience has less to do with the verbal element, and sometimes very much to do with the emotional language, body language even. I think that I write plays where most of the time, a lot of the burden is verbal, and has to do with articulation and enunciation. And that makes productions of my plays quite difficult and never more so that in a large, thrust-stage theater like the Beaumont.

I'm really a very conservative kind of person. You know, the first theater I ever went to featured picture-frame, proscenium arches, and I think I've been writing for picture-frame, proscenium arches ever since, really. It seems to me part of what I assumed without even examining it: a theater where everybody gets the same thing at the same moment, wherever they're sitting. You know, it's all up there! A slight change of angle there. But, when you're surrounded as you are in this theater.... you know, our director Jack O'Brien has worked a lot at Lincoln Center, and he's a very great director. I don't use those words lightly. And, one of the things which makes him most rare is that he can handle that space. I don't know how he does it. And, at his best (and may I say that Trevor Nunn has the same gift) you can watch a play in a fan-shaped theater, and you won't be aware of the manipulation which has gone into the result, but that result is that whenever you need to hear a word, or see a face, the word and the face is clean there. And, all over the place, and all the time, there are people with their back to you, and covering each other, but it never happens when it matters. And, it's ... it's a kind of secret within the show, which only people who've been at rehearsal are

really aware of.

AC: And how much work has gone into that?

TS: The work is horrible. I mean look (Laughter) ... no, actually it's wonderful. (Laughter). But, what's sort of horrible about it is that we all need a year to rehearse. It's not an indulgence. To put this in proportion, the Russians don't work five days a week, eight hours a day for a year, or in this case 20 months. (Laughter). They begin with a few people in a room, and progressively they spend more and more time on a given play. I think we did *Coast Of Utopia* far too quickly in London. We got away with it just about. Here we were more sensible, but also the theater was more generous. Because we opened the plays one at a time rather than on the same day. But with the third play, we had less time than would have been ideal for a play of this sort, because ... do you ever notice technical stuff? Our work is divided between rehearsal rooms where in a sense, the real play is happening. The interior lives of the characters are discovered in the rehearsal room. The whole wonderfully crazy thing which we think is the theater, which is which lights come on at which moments, and there's oh my goodness, fog and music (Laughter) ...and everything works perfectly – that's perfected in technical rehearsals. So, you sit out many days where you can't in a sense rehearse at all. And, when your rehearsal period is divided between those two completely different kinds of activities, you very frequently end up in a situation where by the time you've got the technicals right, it's so long since you've rehearsed anything, the actors have kind of lost touch with things, and you then have to have to find time to rediscover where you were. So, it's a fraught business, but then, you know, you don't have to tell me how lucky I am. So, it's okay. (Laughter).

AC: And Tom's every "if" is definitely heard. Every member of this company knows that every consonant is sounded, the beginnings and ends of every word ...

TS: You wish! (Laughter).

AC: My last question: When we put the Lincoln Center Theater Review together, we had a fascinating conversation with Margaret Atwood about the notion of utopias in general, and she posed an interesting thought to us. There's a flowering in utopian thinking in the 19th Century, whether it's here in the US among Mormons, or in New Harmony: we have a whole tradition of utopian thinking in this country. In the play it's the Revolution of 1848 and the philosophers and revolutionaries we meet in the play. These are the utopianists of the 19th Century. Are the utopian thinkers of the 20th Century people like Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot? And, is the utopian thinking of the 21st Century on the internet? Sim City, Second Life, these on-line communities where young people try and make an ideal world? Where's utopian thinking for you now?

TS: Paradoxically, the internet may be the only place where you can, as it were, have a containable community today. The whole tendency, from the middle of the 20th Century, has been against the traditional idea of a utopia, because the point of the utopia is that you're in it, and they're not! (Laughter). It has frontiers. This person says, "Oh, what we need is one which has got 800 people. Or another might say, "Actually 800 families." And then they would go to somewhere, you know, an undeveloped part of a developed country, mid-America in the 19th Century. And, they would say, "This is our utopia." But, of course, the whole notion of frontiers and borders has just dissolved before our eyes. So, geographical utopias would be places under siege, in a sense. They would be places which were somehow defending themselves against the rest of humanity. Frontiers are dissolved now, everything is about multi-culturalism, the ideal is everybody can live anywhere they like. Maybe the internet in a metaphysical sense is a place where you can say, "Yes, there are only 800 of us, and this is how it works. But we all live at home in different countries." Perhaps so. Herzen, if I may bring this back to the play for the moment, Herzen comes to a hard conclusion, which is that utopia as he understood it, and as he had looked for it, was the name of a place which did not exist ... could not exist is actually the point he would make. I first heard about Herzen in the writing of Isaiah Berlin. And, it was Isaiah Berlin, who ... I'm not sure if he spelled it out, quite in this way... but I rather think he would say that, "Utopia is not an optical illusion, but a logical illusion." It's like trying to "square a circle," as somebody says in the play. You cannot actually, even in your mind, construct an ideal society, in which everybody's take on what is equality, what is liberty, what is justice, what is mercy, is the same - where you can take an absolute position on any of these ideas, and hope for them to stick together like Rubik's cube They just won't do it. Because, if you have absolute libertarianism, you have a kind of chaos which leads to the victory of the strongest, which leads to a different set of inequalities. So, there's almost an algebraic equation, which is in a kind of dance with itself, where these ideals are negotiating with each other to try to find some kind of harmony, some kind of balance, where enough of each has been looked after, and, as it were, they've all made deals with each other, and maybe some kind of reasonably optimistic, optimum society is possible. The deeper question is whether we're good - we in this

room and everybody out there - whether we're good or not. Which is to say, if we were not constrained by our institutions, would we behave well out of our natural instincts? In which case, we might say that greed and selfishness and violence, aggression, all these, were the result of being constrained by society's institutions. Or, on the other hand, without these, would we fight each other?

AC: And, what do you think?

TS: Well, I don't ... I'm really a romantic at heart, an optimistic romantic, and I've always wanted to believe that the microcosm is an honest distillation of the macro world. In other words ... God, what a boring sentence. (Laughter). What I'm saying is this ... (Laughter). If you take a family, you know, mother, father, son, daughter, there's very, very strong instinctive force at work here, where we feed each other, defend each other, and so forth. Well, if the family was 12 people, you know, ten children, and what about auntie, and what about ...? And so, I feel that if it's true that there is an absolutely fundamental fellow feeling-ness built in to the undisturbed human being, the human being undisturbed by external pressure, then perhaps one has some grounds for being a romantic optimist like myself. That ought to be a semi-colon, but optimistically I'll make it a full stop here. (Laughter).

AC: And we'll open to questions from the audience.

Q: When did you realize that it was going to take three plays to tell your story?

TS: Well, before I started writing the first play, there was a mad moment where I wrote down everything I wanted to be in the play. And when it was written down, the piece of paper was about this big (Laughter) ... and I literally thought, "You're kidding yourself." At that moment I had to think, "Well, am I writing just part of this, because if I'm writing all of it, then who knows how many plays it is?!" So, it was before I started work ... before I started writing.

Q: Do you expect the Russian production will be more controversial, or full of political controversy?

TS: Because I've seen productions at this same theater previously and because of the way they intellectually approach their art, I think it will be a forward-looking piece of work. Cutting-edge, if you like, in the world of Russian theater. If you're asking, will it comment on Russian current events, for example, I would say, not overtly. Interestingly, the play has accrued a local resonance in Moscow since it was written. The people involved with the play, the people I talk to there, don't think of it as being a period piece only. They think of it as having something to say about the country now. And I believe that's true.

Q: Is it going to be performed in Russian?

TS: Yes.

Q: Do you speak Russian? How do you participate in rehearsals there?

TS: I don't know whether you'll find this surprising or unsurprising, but when I attended a rehearsal of the play in Russian, I knew everything that was going on. I knew what was being said at every single moment. Because I knew my play so well, there was simply no doubt about what was happening at any given moment. Of course, I couldn't tell them about missing out the word "if." (Laughter).

Q: Could you talk a little bit about "Le Dejeuner sur l'Herbe" : the painting by Manet that we see in the second play, *Shipwreck*? How did that get into the play?

TS: It's a painting which actually didn't exist until 14 .... 12 or 14 years after the events of the play. So that's one concession (Laughter). It's a painting in which an undressed woman is having *dejeuner sur l'herbe* with two or three men, who are dressed and there's a second woman in the background. Our scenic event mimics this famous painting. The scene takes place in a pastoral, beautiful setting, which happens to be the place where the philosopher Rousseau lived. And, it was Rousseau who first posited or made central, this question about whether we are naturally good or not. The play is concerned with that question, and within the play, at that moment, there is burgeoning an act of marital infidelity. So ... let me pause here...you can see, can you not, that the more I analyze, and justify the various components of that painting with my play, the more meretricious the entire enterprise will seem? (Laughter). One has to kind of take it on the wing, and think "That feels nice." I'm a great believer in things feeling right.

Q: As you wrote the play in 2000-2001, were you influenced by what was happening in the world around

you? Did you have any impulses as you were writing *The Coast of Utopia*, drawn from world events, that shaped the work?

TS: I'll tell you something, because it happens to be true. What it means to the play, or what effect it had on the play later, I simply don't know. But, we did a workshop of *The Coast of Utopia*, a year before we did the play. I've never done a workshop of a play before. I never particularly was interested in doing workshops. But, for one reason or another, we were all in this rehearsal, at the London National Theater Studio. And Trevor Nunn had got 30 odd actors there, and they were sitting in chairs, and we were reading and talking. And then we broke for lunch, and when we were coming back from lunch, (and we're still kind of milling about outside this room) one of the actors who had gone somewhere on the lunch break, came back and told us that his taxi driver had told him that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. And we really didn't know what to do. And, because there was nothing to do, we just carried on work-shopping because ... it sounds absurd. We just ... well, we really didn't know what was going on, and then the second Tower collapsed. This isn't the way you meant the question to be, but, of course, what it did for us, and what it did for every artist, I guess, every artist of any kind in the world - and nowhere more than here - It made you wonder whether it made what one does trivial, or very, very important. And, I'll just let that one hang there if you don't mind. If you then asked me, "Well, in the sort of geo-political world we were in, was I, as it were, massaging the play so that certain facets of it reflected on certain facts of what was happening in the contemporary world?" The answer is, "No, I didn't!" I wasn't interested. I wanted to write about these people in their own world.

Q: Were you drawn to the play because of your personal background and your discovery of your Czech origins?

TS: Not in any direct way. I think that, of course, my biology, like yours, accounts for so many of our choices and urges and so forth. But, no, I wasn't thinking, "Oh, well I'm an Eastern European, and underneath it all my heart lies there." I was attracted to them almost as people in a storybook. The actual subject matter itself, I guess you'd say, is universal. If people are living in despotism, they're trying to figure out how to get out from under, and how they fit in with other political systems and what the ideal one might be. It's not a specifically Russian area of thought. As a matter of fact, Russia didn't really have as much history of written or spoken thought as other countries in Europe at that time.

Q: Could you speak about the mysterious Ginger Cat from *Voyage*? (Laughter).

TS: In the play, Herzen invokes a six-foot cat he saw at a fancy dress ball, and he invokes this cat in a speech in which he's trying to make a point. And the point he's making is a counter-argument to a world view which everybody in Europe was in love with at that moment. It's a view made famous by the German philosopher Hegel. Essentially the idea was that we are all bound up in a narrative, which is being determined by forces outside us and much larger than us. That the history of nations is, as it were, the narrative of history, and that history is the author of this narrative. So, in other words, it's about pre-determinism, large scale pre-determinism. And, Herzen reaches for this Ginger Cat in order to say that as collectives of people we may be subject to some such universal law of history. But actually, that's not terribly relevant to us as individuals. Because as individuals, while this great rolling wheel of Hegelian narrative is slowly taking us towards an unknown destination, a yellow cab can come around the corner and just knock us over, or some other random event...

AC: And "What happens next is not up to the Cat, it's up to you." A line from *Voyage*. (Laughter).

TS: Herzen feels that there is lying in wait for all of us a nemesis which is completely arbitrary in so far as it has no motive or purpose. It's just terrifyingly, casually arbitrary. It will just come and get you at any moment. It could be anything. It could lay you low, or move you to another country. And, he's simply saying ... you just quoted it accurately, haven't you?

AC: I have indeed. (Laughter).

TS: It's like being subject to a cat's paw belonging to an enormous Ginger Cat. (Laughter).

Q: If Bakunin could appear magically at the Beaumont, walk in and see himself on stage, how much would he feel is Bakunin and how much would he feel is Stoppard? How did you find out about the characters? How did you research them?

TS: The answer's pretty much the same for all the main characters One of the things which I have had to be

careful about is a tendency I had to think that there was some virtue in an authenticity of quotation in the plays. The text was full of places where I could say "Oh, yes, in that scene those are his very words." Of course, that's nonsense, first of all because he was speaking in Russian, and I was writing in English, so it's already once removed from reality. But, to take the question on the level that you intended, I certainly have attempted to represent the characters fairly as proponents of an argument, and in many cases I have used some of their actual words. And, by the way, the most wonderful sentence or two in the entire trilogy is just something Herzen wrote after his seven year old boy was drowned in an accident at sea. "We think because children grow up, a child's purpose is to grow up. But, a child's purpose is to be a child. Nature doesn't disdain what lives only for a day ..." and so on. "It pours the whole of itself into each moment... The only worthwhile question is, was the child happy while he lived?" It's a heart-breaking speech from someone who's lost a little boy.

AC: And isn't it true that the glove of the child is in the Herzen museum in Russia?

TS: Yes. The one person saved in this accident at sea, the family's maid, had the little boy's glove in her pocket, and ... "A glove, it's all we have left ..."

Q: You're one of the most conservative people in the arts, politically speaking. Do you feel this makes its way into your work?

TS: I think I've got a conservative temperament, and conservative taste in many ways. Politically, I've always taken the same view of this, that political questions without exception resolve themselves into moral questions. So, left and right don't seem to me to be as critical as right and wrong. Does it show up in my work? I would think the answer is yes. I would think it would have to in some way or another.

Q: You've been writing for a number of years. How do you feel that your writing has changed, both in the material you choose to write about, and how you approach writing it?

TS: Some of my plays are just stuff I've made up, and some of the plays are some version of history or a real person's life - a poet like A.E. Housman, for instance - and most of those seem to have been written more recently. So that's one thing that's changed. I've gone to history or some account of a life for the narratives that I'm looking for. As to the style of the work, well, actually I don't know the answer, and the reason I don't know the answer is that it doesn't actually interest me to know. I have no interest in that kind of question. I don't see the relevance to what I do. In a way it's curiously otiose to examine how things change as though there were some kind of choice involved. (Laughter).

Q: How has *Salvage*, the third play, changed since the first preview I saw here?

TS: It's a little shorter than when you saw it. I thought it was too long too. I thought it was too long in London. I was looking for a way to ... I didn't want to cut bits off it, but I just wanted the overall arc, the playing length, which by the way is not the same as page length, I wanted to bring it down a bit, and we have brought it down. I would like it to be down further by two or three minutes, we all want to do that. This afternoon between roughly two o'clock and four o'clock, we were doing the last scene and tonight, although it contains most of the same words, I just mixed a little bit up, you'll be amazed how different it will be tonight from what it was last night. ... it's what we do. (Laughter).

Q: Is there a critical turning point that you see in Russian history when the country might have veered in a more Western direction.

TS: The play is the answer to the question, or, at least, Herzen's take on it: "History has no libretto, history has a thousand doors and the gatekeeper is chance ..." These forks in the road ...

AC: Yes, like the Tsar's assassination attempt, ... could you talk about ...

TS: The attempted assassination, had it succeeded .... everything would have been different from that moment. Yes, absolutely. But, if you're looking for a major arterial fork where if one person had done this instead of that, then the Tsars might have been followed by a parliamentary democracy, I just don't ...

AC: If only Lincoln hadn't gone to the theater. (Laughter).

W: I've only seen the first part, *Voyage*, and I was struck by the very stunning and very literal image of the sea, as the play opens ...

TS: It's fascinating. It's a tremendous tribute to Bob Crowley and Scott Pask, the scenic designers, because, of course the last thing it is, is literal. There's no water on the stage, it's black silk. So, that is also a metaphor. (Laughter). But, let me tell you one thing, which springs from your question...when I began, I said to the National Theater, "I think I'm writing three plays. I think they're called 'Bakunin,' 'Belinsky,' and 'Herzen.'" It didn't really work or fit, but it was like a working title. And then, one day, I said to Trevor Nunn, who directed the plays, "Actually, I've worked out what this thing is now. It's called *The Coast of Utopia*, and the three plays are *Voyage*, *Shipwreck*, *Salvage*." And, instantly he understood what the job was. So the metaphorical component is actually very powerful.

Q: After Herzen's loss, at the end of *Shipwreck*, why does Bakunin come to him, in his mind?

TS: A play is a storytelling art form. You've got a bunch of characters whom you're using to tell the story, and whether it's a historical play or not, you're manipulating them. In a historical play, it merely makes the manipulation more difficult, you have more constraints and so forth. You're thinking, "Do I need this person again, and how do I get him?" So, on one level, and it's a completely pragmatic level, I wanted to keep Bakunin alive in my play, at the time when he was in a six-foot by six-foot cell, hundreds and hundreds of miles away, in The Peter and Paul Fortress back in Russia. So, there are two occasions when Bakunin appears as a dream-figure, though up at that moment in Herzen's imagination. And, I can only repeat, on one level there's a completely kind of pragmatic empiricism about "Where is Bakunin? I want him." (Laughter). And then you think, "How?" So, "How do I justify this intellectually?" It's actually not hard, because Bakunin and Herzen, even down to today, are figures in a conversation, in an argument if you like, as are Marx and Turgenev. All these people are still, in a sense, continuing a conversation, or you're continuing it for them. Perhaps I ought to mention on this subject, simply, as a footnote, that Billy Crudup, who is dead at the end of *Shipwreck* and Amy Irving, who is also dead by the time the third play starts, both think that what the trilogy really needs is a dream ballet in *Salvage*. (Laughter).

Q: Have you written a play since *The Coast of Utopia*?

AC: Yes, he in fact has written a play called *Rock 'N' Roll*, which is on the boards in London and coming to Broadway next season. Maybe this is a good moment to close by asking you if you have an idea for a new play. What next?

TS: No, I haven't got an idea for a new play. I'm going to be free of everything pretty much this summer, until I'm back in New York with *Rock 'N' Roll* in October, for rehearsal. And, I'd love to spend my summer writing a play. But I've never ever had an idea for a play waiting, Whenever I finish a play I'm cleaned out ... and at the moment, I don't have anything. But we'll see.

AC: Thank you so much for coming ...  
(Applause)

(End of Platform Event)