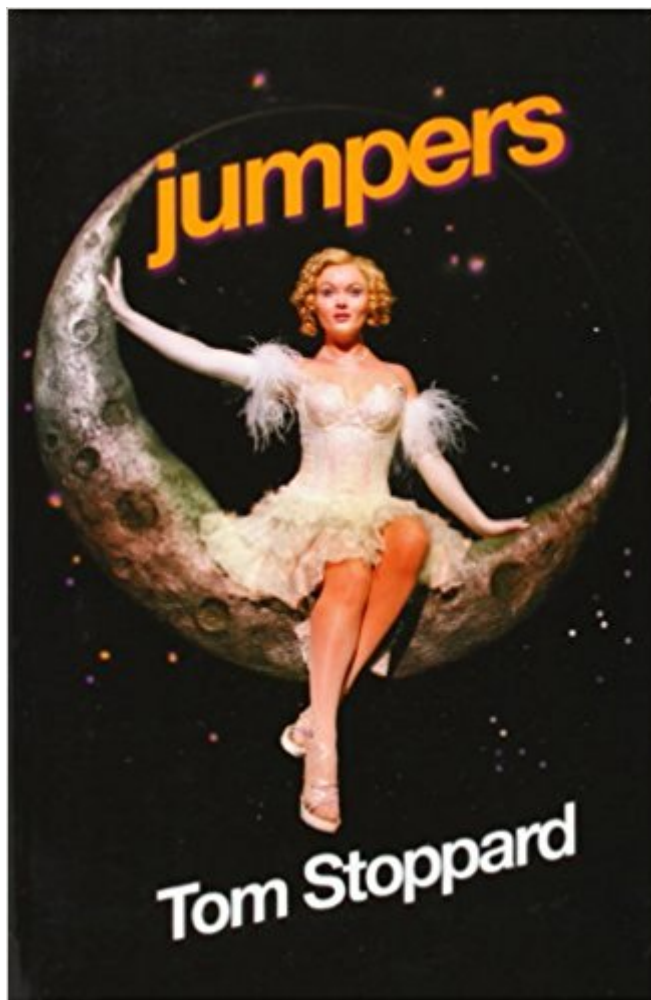


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# Jumpers



## Synopsis

Tom Stoppard's play "Jumpers" is both a high-spirited comedy and a serious attempt to debate the existence of a moral absolute, of metaphysical reality, of God. Michael Billington in "The Guardian" described the play succinctly: "The new Radical Liberal Party has made the ex-Minister of Agriculture Archbishop of Canterbury, British astronauts are scrapping with each other on the moon, and spritely academics steal about London by night indulging in murderous gymnastics: this is the kind of manic, futuristic, topsy-turvy world in which Stoppard's dazzling new play is set. And if I add that the influences apparently include Wittgenstein, Magritte, the Goons, Robert Dhery, Joe Orton, and The Avengers, you will have some idea of the heady brew Stoppard has here concocted." The protagonist include an aging Professor Of Moral Philosophy -- trying to compose a lecture on "Man -- Good, Bad or Indifferent" -- while ignoring a corpse in the next room; his beautiful young wife, an ex-musical comedy Queen, lasciviously entertaining his university boss down the hall; her husband's specially trained hare, Thumpers; and a chorus of gymnasts, Jumpers.

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## Customer Reviews

Tom Stoppard is the author of such seminal works as *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, *Travesties*, *Every Good Boy Deserves a Favor*, *Arcadia*, *Jumpers*, *The Real Thing*, and *The Invention of Love*.

Being a long term fan and researcher of Tom Stoppard's works, I should say this is stoppardian classic! Witty and absurd as we love it. Jumpers, murder and philosophical talk, where could one

find all these things together? Only in a play by Stoppard. Recommend for stoppardians and curious theatre goers.

I enjoyed it but it really needs to be seen on stage to be appreciated.

In "Jumpers" Tom Stoppard eviscerates logical positivism in a few well-placed dramatic strokes. This would seem an eccentric thing to do, even in the early 1970s, given that Gödel and Wittgenstein (nice name for a comedy team) had pretty well sliced up logical positivism decades before. But Stoppard recognized that even after Gödel and Wittgenstein had done their work, mainstream philosophy remained, as it remains, just as committed to an unreasonable hatred of absolutes, a hatred which leads ineluctably to moral relativism, which in turn might lead you to be as big a jerk as Bertrand Russell. Dead as logical positivism was in its classical formulation, this play was worth writing. It will always be worth reading. I realize I've made "Jumpers" sound like a polemic, but writing a work with a point of view is not the same as writing a polemic. If this were a polemic, Stoppard would not have made George nearly so ridiculous or nearly so blind. He would not have reminded us that abstract thinking about morality, however admirable, is not so good if it makes you forget to grab your wife and kiss her, especially when she's in the room across the hall yelling about wolves. He would not have reminded us so poignantly that even when our intentions are good we can still end up crushing tortoises. Even if the entire play were only an elaborate set-up for the line George delivers to Bones about who he was expecting, that would be sufficient *\*raison\** for the *\*Œuvre\**.

Tom Stoppard has towering class. His stage business is inspired, his coups de theatre invariably land on the chin, his punning dialogue is fresh, and his plays are rooted into important philosophical and moral dilemmas. Jumpers has dramatic verve, it has the dialogue, it has a husband being berated by a lover crawling out of the wife's bed, but a true Stoppard devotee will walk away slightly disappointed. A professor of Moral Philosophy, more pecked against than pecking at his college in the middle of academic nowhere, has to deal with a wife and a corpse in the bedroom (a causal link there), a dandy Jack-of-all-trades who is also his superior, a Colombo-like copper, and a janitor who is also an amateur philosopher. Well, of course, this concoction is funny by definition, but philosophy itself, the incisive Stoppard paradoxes resplendent in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* or in *Arcadia*, these are sadly missing--and that despite an hour's worth of philosophical lecturing pouring out of George the Moral Philosopher. This 1972 farce, similar in tone and quality to his *Dirty Linen*, is

far below Stoppard at his best, and yet still quite worthy: few playwrights can be thus described...

In *Jumpers*, Tom Stoppard was humiliating the pompous civilization that overanalyzes, deconstructs, and builds ridiculous rules and structures instead of dealing with reality. The line "Atheism is just a crutch for non believers to deal with the existence of God" caught it beautifully. By using the tool of Brits on the moon at several points, he said that if you take people out of the environment/context, they revert to selfish acts without benefit of cover. The pretense is gone. The astronaut at the trial didn't challenge anything; he just agreed and kept going. Similarly, Greystoke, a pure work of fiction, was the perfect embodiment of pompous manners and class structure, and was dismissed. The real wild man was the judge, a former caretaker, who had no qualifications, and ran the whole proceeding into the ground. As *The Common Man* (whose hobby was philosophy!), he told us how off course we really are. And despite all George Moore's philosophising and analyzing and caring, it was he who killed his hare, he who killed his tortoise, and of course he who killed his marriage, by refusing to defend it. He lost it all because his mind was focused on idiotic rationalizations. The vice chancellor (or chancellor of vice) was the "suit" in all this. When he spoke at the trial, he uttered total gibberish, and the crowd roared with approval. He was clearly what was wrong with everything, and of course, he was running it all. Meanwhile, The archbishop made sense and was disposed of, same for Greystoke, and for Bones. Meanwhile, George, whose night this was supposed to be, didn't get to utter a word. Then, at the end, the wife was sent to the moon, and was lifted above everyone else. And that's how it ended. She had a miserable time - unappreciated intellect, unsuccessful career, sham of a marriage - and all covered by her position in society...her husband, her relationship with the vice chancellor...Clearly, she needed to get out of it all and be herself, and the only place she could do that was on the old man-in-the-moon style moon of pre astronaut days. So there was actually method to the madness, and it was entertaining to boot. It was all very British humor which I really appreciated, and the similarities to the final episode of the *Prisoner* were too many to ignore. By the way, *Jumpers* are what shrinks call suicidals, and the fact they all wore yellow must have meant they refused to deal with reality, hiding behind their philosophy instead of dealing with it. I kept seeing Robbie Coltrane as George. He really would have made the play. And that reminds me: the female lead was first played by Diana Rigg. Imagine how different THAT would have been! I would have loved to have seen that. LOTS of food for thought in *Jumpers*. Loved it. David Wineberg

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