Stoppard, thoughtfully. “And be quite difficult,” the Old Vic in 1967, announcing Dead steamed onto the stage of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are than five decades, ever since as being theatrically challenging.”

I don’t think of them and make them work easy to absorb and understand purpose is to make these things cerebral subjects but the whole They might engage with slightly though they might get written about as

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Leopoldstadt, which opens in the West End in January, a family drama that begins in Vienna in 1900 and spans 50 years as it follows a Jewish family through the early 20th century. The anticipation surrounding its opening is all the greater because it is five years since Stoppard’s last new play, The Hard Problem, about the question of consciousness, premiered at the National Theatre.

“Five years is a long time at my age,” he says, in mock despair. “I’ve only once ever had the experience of finding a play to write of which I had no doubt, and that was The Invention of Love [About the poet A E. Housman] – so while Arcadia was still happening, I knew what the next play would be about.

I don’t think that’s ever happened before. Finding a subject is like being struck by lightning really. There is not a lot you can do to make it happen. You have to build up a lot of energy just to get the momentum to begin a play.”

He is reluctant to reveal too much about Leopoldstadt but acknowledges that it is bound up in the lineaments of his life.

Stoppard was born Tomáš Strausser in the former Czechoslovakia, but his family fled to Singapore as the Nazis invaded; Stoppard, his brother and his mother left there just before the Japanese invasion in 1942 but his father was killed. When he was five, the family moved to India where his mother married a British army major, and in 1946 they moved to England. After his mother’s death, he returned to Zlín in the Czech Republic to discover more about a family history in which his four grandparents, and much of his family of his parents’ generation, died in the camps. He says now: “In the long run, that visit accounted for my writing Leopoldstadt.”

He is now enjoying working with Marber once more on Leopoldstadt. “It feels like a new experience to have a playwright as director,” he says. “I like it very much. After I’d sent him the first draft, he came back with suggestions which in many cases were things I had already thought about and decided to do myself, so it was quite good synergy.

“The Invention of Love” has led a charmed life. “Not everything that happens is good, of course, for anybody, but I do feel essentially as blessed by fortune as anybody has a right to ask.” In particular, his relocation to England brought about a change of language which set him in the midst of a playwriting tradition in which he has thrived.

He came from a generation of aspiring English writers who thought that the theatre, rather than the novel, was the best place to be.

“My plays tend to be quite difficult,” says Tom Stoppard, thoughtfully. “And I don’t see them that way at all. They might engage with slightly

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Leopoldstadt is showing at Wyndham’s Theatre from 25 January.

For tickets, call 0844 482 5151 or visit delfontmackintosh.co.uk