



**THE THEME OF VIOLENCE AND DEATH IN TOM STOPPARD'S
*ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD AND SAMUEL
BECKETT'S WAITING FOR GODOT***

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JUNE 2015

**THE THEME OF VIOLENCE AND DEATH IN TOM STOPPARD'S
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BECKETT'S WAITING FOR GODOT***

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES OF
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**BY
IBRAHIM WALEED IBRAHIM**

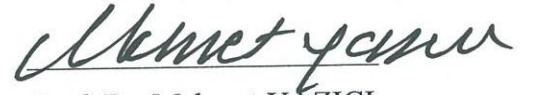
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Title of the Thesis: **The Theme of Violence and Death in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.**

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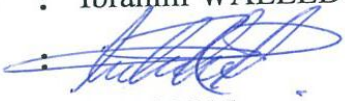
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STATEMENT OF NON-PLAGIARISM PAGE

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ABSTRACT

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead

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This study is concerned with the theme of violence and death in Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* within the framework of Theater of the Absurd, a literary genre that originated in Europe in the late 1940s after the Second World War. Basically, the paper centers on an analysis of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) with special emphasis on the theme of death and violence. Additionally, references will be made to Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* (1949) to highlight the influence of *Waiting for Godot* on '*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*'. Through this comparative approach, one can gain insight into the way this theme is treated in plays written in the tradition of Absurd Drama. Though this research mainly focuses on the theme of death and violence, it also refers to other topics such as the absurd behaviour of the characters in both plays, making a point of the similarities and differences between them. Also covered in this study are these characters' confused identity, their lack of decision-making skills and their faith in existentialism. There are *two main male characters in*

each play, who reflect the same way of looking at life, and suffer from being trapped in a meaningless and empty life.

ÖZ

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead

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Yüksek Lisans, İngiliz Edebiyatı ve Kültür İncelemeleri
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Bu çalışma Absürd Tiyatro, İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra 1940'ların sonlarında Avrupa'da kökenli bir edebiyat türü çerçevesinde Tom Stoppard oyun Rosencrantz ve Guildenstern Are Dead şiddet ve ölüm teması ile ilgilidir. Temelde, canlı Rosencrantz and Guildenstern bir analiz kağıt merkezleri ölüm ve şiddet konulu özel bir vurgu ile (1966) Are Dead. Ayrıca, referanslar üzerinde Godot'yu Beklerken etkisini vurgulamak için Godot (1949) bekliyorum Samuel Beckett'in oyun yapılacaktır 'Rosencrantz ve Guildenstern Are Dead'. Bu karşılaştırmalı yaklaşım sayesinde, kimse bu tema Absürd Drama geleneğinde yazılı oyunlarında tedavi edilir şekilde içgörü elde edebilirsiniz. Bu araştırma özellikle ölüm ve şiddet teması üzerinde duruluyor rağmen, aynı zamanda benzerlik ve aralarındaki farklılıkları bir noktaya yapmak gibi her iki oyunlarında karakterlerin saçma davranış gibi diğer konulara değinmektedir. Ayrıca, bu çalışmanın kapsadığı bu karakter 'karıştı kimliği, kararın yapma becerileri onların eksikliği ve varoluşçuluk kendi inanç vardır.

Hayatın bakarak aynı şekilde yansıtan ve anlamsız ve boş hayatında hapsolmek
muzdarip her oyunda iki ana erkek karakter vardır.

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My parents and my brothers have been an inspiration throughout my life. They have always supported my dreams and aspirations, and if I do say so myself, I think they did a fine job raising me. I'd like to thank all them for all they have done for me.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper centers on a detailed analysis of Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* with special focus on the theme of death and violence. Additionally, references will be made to Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* to demonstrate the influence of *Waiting for Godot* on '*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*'. *The world portrayed in plays written in the tradition of Absurd Drama is quite different from the world as we know it. Indeed, whatever one sees on stage looks like a sheer inversion of what happens in the real world. Death is no exception to this rule.* We normally think of death as the opposite of life, just as dark is the opposite of light. Nevertheless, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* shows us that death is simply a "man failing to reappear", and not always a tragic drama scene that we must complain about. Having said this however, one should note that these two characters have an ambivalent attitude to death. At the beginning of the play, they do not seem to be afraid of death; they regard death just as a failure to appear and as the inevitable end of human life, rather than as something to be troubled by. Eventually however, conflicts arise between the two characters as they talk about death just because they become increasingly terrified by the imminence of death.

At the beginning of the play, there are two characters on stage, *Rosencrantz* and *Guildenstern*, playing a game of luck, flipping a coin. Interestingly, each time Rosencrantz tosses the coin, the result is the same - the head. The two men ponder this dilemma evaluating many different possibilities of why this has occurred. This proves that some people are always lucky while others, like Guildenstern, are doomed to lose the game. Yet, as the play goes on, it becomes clear that there's nothing really odd about those odds. Actually, this incident represents the probability of human life. Death wins every time. Life is a gamble, at terrible odds the player explain, if it was a bet you wouldn't take it. Above all, this is a play about death. Most obviously, the title *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* reveals that the

protagonists' deaths are a foregone conclusion, which is in fact a line from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. As the two break from the coin toss game, they begin to wonder how they got to the place they are currently at and can only come up with the conclusion that they were sent for by a messenger.

As the characters are drawn from another play, the details of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead are already scripted by Shakespeare's play before Stoppard play even begins. From the first moment of Stoppard play, the audience already knows that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will die in the end. By building his play around these two characters, Stoppard emphasizes the inevitability of death.

Yet while death is a sure thing, the play presents it in an unsettling manner. Death itself may be a given, but the human acceptance of death is no given, and the character struggle against death even in the face of its 100% probability. Inevitable as it is, it seems impossible to accept death. In fact, it seems impossible even to describe it properly. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern argue with the player and tragedian about what real death looks like. What do you know about death? Guildenstern asks of the player and when the player replies that dying is what the actors do best, Guildenstern insists death can't be acted. Indeed, the player recounts that when he arranged for one of his actors to actually be hanged on stage, the audience disapproved of it as a medium performance.

Death remains hard to understand even as the play never stops dreading its inevitability. All the death occur on stage, be they play performances of plays within the play (such as those that occur during the tragedian's play and the fatal stabbing enacted by the player) or supposedly real action (such as Polonius corpse, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's death at play's end, or the corpse strewn final stage). The play's meta theatrical structure (play within play) keeps the audience extremely aware of his fact. Guildenstern's frequent critiques of death on stage make even the subtle portrayal of his and Rosencrantz death at the end of the play free from bloodshed their sudden disappearances seem unsatisfying, questionable, and incomplete. Stoppard seems committed to producing this sense of incompleteness. While this technique fails to deliver a complete understanding of death, it completely

captures the human understanding of death which is, of course quite incomplete. The play portrays awareness of death as the ever present yet ever unknown constant in human life.

There must have been a moment in childhood when it first occurred to you that you don't go on forever, Rosencrantz reflect, and yet I can't remember it. It never occurred to me at all. He concludes that he can't remember the moment of realization because no one moment exists. Instead one is born with an intuition of mortality. Before we know the word for it before we know that there are words, we know there is death.

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the idea of death is explored to highlight the important of human existence. When Guildenstern contemplates on death, he claims that

“Death is the ultimate negative, portraying the idea in the worst possible light” (Stoppard 108). This statement reveals that his tone sounds confident, as if he knows the truth about dying. Guildenstern's claim is stated as though it were a fact and by using the extreme word ultimate, he adds further assurance to his declaration. While Guildenstern is the character who fears death most, ironically, at the end of the play, both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern die (Stoppard 126). Serving also as the play's title, this quote draws attention to the important of living. While Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are minor character in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, they turn out to be the main character in this play and are the only character that the ambassador announces as dead. This demonstrates that death does not discriminate between minor characters like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and a member of royalty like hamlet.

The player claims that the only believable kind of death is stage death, complete with moaning and pain and twitching, and in a sense, he's right. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern die at the end of the play, but their deaths conform to Guildenstern's view on death as “just a man failing to reappear, that's all now you see him, now you don't hear one minute and gone the next and never coming back an exit, unobtrusive and unannounced.” (Stoppard 130) Despite being told that

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead, it is far easier for the audience to imagine them permanently suspended in a state of confinement, vanished not dead: without seeing them die, we don't believe they are dead, just as the Player says.

Neither the character of the play nor the audience can really comprehend death. In one of the most famous monologues in the play, Rosencrantz speculates on death and burial, but he continually makes the mistakes of imagining himself buried alive, not dead. He simply cannot imagine what it would really be like to be dead. Guildenstern has better grasp on it, but the finality of it still staggers him. More than any other character Guildenstern worries about death. No one gets up after death; there is no applause, there is only silence and some second hand clothes, and that's death. It's the absence of presence, nothing more the endless time of never coming back. It is a gap you can't see, and when the wind blows through it, it makes no sound. Yet despite knowing that no one comes back from death, even as he goes to his own, Guildenstern cannot help thinking that he'll come back in some form or another. He's right a sense, but it doesn't make difference one way or the other because he still has no control over events. The audience does not even the comfort of knowing that much.

Theatre of the Absurd deprives us of that dignity. Its heroes lack whatever it takes to act confidently in the world. They are essentially clownish character, without a sense of purpose and without the courage, wit to make one foe themselves. They spend their time anxiously confronting an abstract world, often desperate for some advance that there is something or someone who can help them out, but helpless of helping themselves. What makes their situation all the more hapless is that they no reliable memory, so they cannot even orient themselves and their present situation to what they once were; they can create no clear historical narrative for their lives.

Therefore, characters in the plays of Theater of the Absurd, are often unsure of whom they are. The possibility of taking action to achieve any goal is quite beyond them. The major attention in Absurdist Theater focuses upon how the protagonists try to struggle. Since they are, unlike tradition protagonists, incapable of independent action, what they do is always the same; they wait for something to happen, for

someone to come along and provide information, direction, or meaning. However, since the world is absurd, such reassurance never arrives. If it seems to arrive, the protagonists are incapable of understanding it sufficiently. And so the plays typically and as they start: with the protagonist waiting for something. The structure of the story does not end with a shocking scene (of the sort common in tragedy and comedy) because either of those ending has a value, that is, it implies some form of affirmation about the world.

Another important aspect of Theater of the Absurd is the absurdity of language itself. As with other writers of the absurd drama, in *R&G are Dead*, language is an effective (if often deceptive) way of coming to an understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In the absurdist world, language becomes careless, unreliable, and deceptive. In Stoppard's play, this point applies even to the character's awareness of their own names. But it also emerges repeatedly in the funny ways in which they misunderstand each other.

GUIL: You can't not be on a boat

ROS: I've frequently not been on boat

GUIL: No, no, no what you've been is not on boat

ROS: I wish I was dead (R&G, 3.55)

In the world of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, there are two separate planes of existence. On the one hand there is the world of Hamlet, where all the character is caught up in the story of the play: on the other hand there is odd, empty world of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The characters of Hamlet are unaware of any other existence than their own. They cannot find any reason to think that their world might not be real. The world that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern live in provides them with so little information that they are confronted with the fact that nothing is happening to them most of the time, and they are forced to struggle with the implication of this. Their confrontation with a world that looks like hamlet's gives them a feeling of discomfort. Moreover, no one in hamlet world's is interested in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The audience does not feel curious to know where they will go when they leave "stage".

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern encounter a group of actors called the tragedians, led by the player, who want the men to pay them for a show. The tragedians parallel the line between real life and acting, something that becomes a common motif in the story. The play change rather drastically and the two men are now in the presence of Hamlet and Ophelia who are in the royal castle of Denmark. The two men are mistaken for one another by Claudius while he explains why they were sending for: to find out what is bothering Hamlet. The two men decide that in order to understand what is bothering hamlet, they are going to have to deceive him with intricate word games. In order to prepare themselves, they play a word game using the rules of tennis. One of them pretends to be Hamlet and the other question him, but to still find no insight as to why Hamlet has gone insane. They are met by Claudius and they inform him that they have no idea if hamlet is crazy or not. Then, they continue to think about Hamlet`s mental state, but then begin wondering about death and what happens after it.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern then ponder on how they are to reveal the truth of Hamlet matter and remain in a confused state in which they cannot decide if Hamlet is insane or not. The two men are then invited to a play performed by the tragedians, which the reader discovers is a reflection of Claudius and Gertrude`s affair. They also witness two spies (dressed just like them) die during the play. These deaths foreshadow their death later in the play.

The next scenes begins with Claudius telling the two character to depart to England with hamlet to continue their investigation of hamlet`s mysterious case. On the best ride to England, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern contemplate where they are going and how their journey has come along. They begin talking about will happen once they get to England. And the letter given to them is the process. They read the letter and see that it instructs the king of England to kill Hamlet. They decide that they should not interfere with what is destined to happen and decide to deliver the letter. Hamlet however exchanges the letter once they fall asleep. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern wake up find that the letter instructs the king of England to execute these two men. Yet, the characters seem to be unaware of when Hamlet switched the

letters. Horrified, the character seems to question why their life has turned out to be so, just before the scene ends. Horatio ends the play with speech he gives at the end of Hamlet.

CHAPTER ONE

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

Theatre of the Absurd is a term first coined by Martin Esslin, a Hungarian born English producer, playwright and critic in his work which carries the same title (*Theatre of the Absurd*; 1961). This work has been regarded by some reviewers as the most influential essay written on drama in the 1960s. Martin Esslin defines the Theatre of the Absurd as follows:

A term like Theatre of the Absurd must therefore be understood as a kind of intellectual shorthand for a complex pattern of similarities in approach, method, and connection, of shared philosophical and artistic premises, whether conscious or subconscious, and of influence from a common store of tradition. A label of this kind therefore is an aid to understanding, valid only in so far as it helps to gain insight into a work of art.

Esslin categorizes as Theatre of the Absurd the leading works of some playwrights as Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet and Arthur Adamov who appeared in late 1940s and early 1950s. Moreover, younger generation playwrights such as Harold Pinter were inspired by the old ones (1989: 45). Yet, Esslin does not state that Theatre of the Absurd is a school or an organized movement. He sees the work of these playwrights as giving articulation to Albert Camus's philosophy as expressed in his philosophical essays entitled *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942). In his essay, Camus presents Sisyphus, the mythological absurd hero, as a reflection of the absurdity that characterizes the human condition, namely the alienation of humans from their universe and their being pointlessly preoccupied with continuous action while accomplishing nothing

(Simpson, 1998). The world portrayed in Absurd plays is essentially illogical and unpredictable (Ionesco, 1958).

Among the playwrights commonly associated with the "Theatre of the Absurd" can be cited Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Fernando Arrabal, Václav Havel, and Edward Albee. Each of the playwrights mentioned above has unique concerns and characteristics that go beyond the term "Absurd". In 1961, Esslin, the well-known critic who first coined the term "Absurd", cited the names of five playwrights: Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter. Other critics such as Andria include Tom Stoppard, Friedrich Durrenmatt, Fernando Arrabal, Sdward Albee, Boris Vian and Jean Tardieu among the writers of Theater of the Absurd.

Harold Pinter is one of most playwrights in British Literature who has been acclaimed critically, and *The Dumb Waiter* is his wonderful work is enlisted in the *Theatre of the Absurd*. It is about two hit-men awaiting their next assignment in a filthy basement; the stiffness builds between the characters themselves as their joking gets interrupted by a dumb waiter demanding filled orders. Whereas Albee's exclusively American take on the *Theatre of the Absurd* is not quite as overwhelming or irrational as some of the other selections on this list, he uses the dialogic techniques of Beckett and Tardieu to capture a professor's troubled relationship with his wife.

Theatre of the Absurd refers to the plays written by a number of western playwrights in late of 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The playwrights' work expresses what happens to human existence, which has no meaning or no purpose. Consequently, communication between characters breaks down and the audience has difficulty finding any meaning in the play. Absurdist playwrights have been influenced by the theories of French Algerian philosopher Albert Camus, who published an essay titled "The Myth of Sisyphus" (1942). Camus introduced the philosophy of the Absurd, in which he argued that man's quest for meaning and truth is a futile effort. He compares man's struggle to understand the world and probe into

the meaning of life, with the experience of Sisyphus, a famous figure in Greek Mythology, condemned to an existence of rolling a heavy stone up a mountain only to watch it roll back to the bottom (Eugene Ionesco, 1959).

Martin Esslin justifies the appearance of Theatre of the Absurd as a natural consequence of World War II. The war led to the weakening of religious faith, created a sense of loss and the pointlessness of existence, and confronted man with the absurdity of his or her situation (1989: 45). Doubts and fears surrounding World War II gave rise to the movement of Theatre of the Absurd. The deterioration of the traditional moral and political values accounts for the emergence of this movement, which became very popular in some European countries, chiefly in France, and then followed by Germany and England as well as Scandinavian countries. Later, several plays appeared such as Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* (1950), Adamov's *Ping Pong* (1955) and Jean Genet's *The Balcony* (1956). It is widely agreed that the death of Beckett in 1989 closed the movement's popularity.

Theatre of the Absurd is to consider it as a new combination of a number of ancient traditions in literature and drama. There are several features clearly found in Theatre of the Absurd; the tradition of miming and clowning which historically belong to Greece and Rome, and the pantomime or the music-hall in Britain, the tradition of nonsense poetry, the literature of dream and nightmare which originally date back to Greek and Rome times, and allegorical drama in the medieval plays, the ancient tradition of mad and fools scenes in drama as in Shakespeare examples, and ritual drama which belongs to the religion theatre. (Michael Y. Bennett, 2011).

Theatre of the Absurd aims to startle both the reader and the audience by unsettling and shaking them out of their mechanical existence and routine habits. Plays written in this tradition are against the conventional theatre art forms, which can no longer be convincing in a meaningless and purposeless post-war world. Instead, the playwrights offer an anti-theatre, with plays that lack plot in the traditional sense, consistent characters or conventional use of language. Consequently, the basic response of the audience and the critics to such plays is incomprehension and rejection. On the other hand, there are variations in the

playwrights' stylistic preferences for the creation of absurdity, which reflect each playwright's different dramatic technique. Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, which was first performed in 1896, was the first modern sample of Theatre of the Absurd. It includes savage farce in which monstrous puppets severely criticize the greed and emptiness of bourgeois society through a series of grotesque stage images.

Theatre of the Absurd evolved out of the ruins of the Second World War. These plays challenged the status quo of the theatre by violating the established rules of portrayal and narrative. As a result, they inspired playwrights all over the world to confront the social, psychological and political climate of their home countries. Playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Vaclav Havel staged the absurdity of life in conflict. The first performance of Genet's *The Maids* was in Paris in 1947, whereas Ionesco's *Bald Primadonna* and Adamov's plays were produced in 1950, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1952. All of the plays mentioned above were performed in Paris; in other words, Paris was the spring of the Theatre of the Absurd. The playwrights were exiled from various countries and lived formally in Paris; Beckett an Anglo-Irishman writes in French, Ionesco, half French and half Rumanian, Adamov a Russo-Armenian, only Genet is Frenchman. Their plays were written in anticipation of twentieth century man's shock in realizing that the world is ceasing to make sense.

Thornton Wilder, who writes "The Long Christmas Dinner play in 1931", is not the first involved in the Theatre of the Absurd, but some of the this play's elements would influence on some of repetitions of this movement. The setting of this play is a Christmas Dinner takes place over 90 years; the characters change clothes to accommodate up with the time. Tardieu's *Les Amants du Metro* was way ahead of its time. The experimental playwright functioned melodic and rhythmic patterns to dialogue. For example, there is a scene of two loves fight for mentioning the names of different women. The power of such dialogue would influence Samuel Beckett who is considered as the father of the absurd particularly his writing in *Waiting for Godot* play which it talks about two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, who wait for Godot, a shadowy figure and they spend the time desperately to break the

silence with fast and smart dialogue. Furthermore, features of Theatre of Absurd can be enlisted under the particular points.

When the plays of Theatre of the Absurd written by Ionesco, Beckett, Genet and Adamov first appeared on the stage, the audiences were puzzled and most of the critics became outraged. This was a natural reaction from the audiences and the critics because audiences were not used to such plays, which violated all the drama standards for centuries. Characters in traditional drama are able to convince both audiences and critics with their motivated actions whereas characters in the plays of Absurd have no motivation at all. Well-constructed conventional plays usually have a beginning, middle and an ending, whereas the plays of absurd often start at a random point and end in an arbitrary way. Samuel Beckett did not want the audience to go home pleased and contented in knowing the solution to the play's problem; rather, he wanted the audience to find out what he intended to communicate through the play. Playwrights of the Absurd believe that they do not have to come up with solutions to the problems presented in their plays.

Theatre of the Absurd has been inspired by the existential philosophy and attempts to apply it to drama. There is no underlying message to absurd plays, and they are virtually pointless. When writing a play in this style, there are various factors that you must consider. First of all, one must realize that these plays are written from an existential point of view and therefore have no apparent reason, true order or meaning. However, a play which belongs to this genre can still be informative and cause the audience to think about what is happening in a scene, the purpose being to provoke thought with laughter. There are always very intense moments, but it can never look like conventional theatre because it has no start, middle or ending. Moreover, a writer must be aware that the script cannot follow any specified form, and that language is reduced to a game of playful talk that usually ends up in chaos to confuse the audience. A sense of the place is minimal and characters are forced to move in an incomprehensible realm just like a void. Often, there is neither motion nor catharsis. The play should be about nothing and it should end where it has started. Furthermore, the audience can become mentally involved in this type of play by abstractly thinking about the scene and determining what is happening.

Life in plays of Absurdity is meaningless and miserable. Man's all efforts are ultimately futile and hopeless. The reality of harsh circumstances is unbearable unless one is relieved by dreams and illusions. Due to the horrible consequences of World War Two, particularly the usage of atomic bomb in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, man is charmed by death, which he hopes will bring eternal salvation. Plot and action cannot be found in the plays of Absurdity because there are very few happenings and no meaningful act occurs.

Authors of the Absurd aim to represent man's doubts about life and the world, and they want to express it through the use of metaphors and a particular language. In Absurd plays, communication among characters isn't enough. For example, in *Waiting for Godot*, the characters don't understand one another and there is no real communication between them. In fact, authors of the Absurd draw attention to the lack of communication that exists in society. In Theater of the Absurd, the characters are seen to be trapped in a world which they do not understand. In these plays (for instance, in *Waiting for Godot*), characters spend their time talking without sense, without hearing the other, or they play games. For example, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the characters play a game to guess "head or tail". Furthermore, the characters want to express something but they can't. Sometimes, the characters' behaviours contradict the words that they have pronounced. The plot in Absurd plays seems to lack meaning and sense, the dialogues are often repetitive, and sometimes the action seems to have neither a sequence nor a sense. Among the important plays of movement are; "El Rinoceronte" (1956), by Ionesco and "La cantante calva" (1950) by Ionesco. It should here be pointed out that few authors use the term "Absurd" for their plays. But three authors are undoubtedly important in Theatre of the Absurd: Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard. Samuel Beckett with his play *Waiting for Godot* represents Theatre of the Absurd. In this play, we can see two main characters that are waiting for nothing. They are just passing the time. Their lives do not make sense, and in the play, for example, they propose to hang themselves, which reflects the absurdness of the world, the absurdness of life. These characters have ridiculous conversations that make no sense. Both characters have a poor communication, because they don't hear each

other. The action of the play does not seem to have any meaning because it is very repetitive and the reader cannot understand the play. The plot and the topic of the play do not seem to make sense at all. The two main characters in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* are just like the characters in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Dumb Waiter*. They pass the time questioning themselves about life, the world, and fortune, while at the same time playing a game. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the characters are put to death as if it were a normal thing in life. In this play, the action is very odd, too, because at first we cannot understand what is happening in the play.

The situation surrounding the outline of the plays of the Absurd is both absurd and comic. Such theatre is without purpose; namely, no specific problem is to be solved. It is similar to abstract painting, which is not intended to convey a definite message. It seems that such theatre is a natural reaction to the loss of religious faith in human life. On the other hand, it is an attempt to re-establish the significance of myth and ritual in modern life. Playwrights of Theatre of the Absurd express the belief that human existence in a godless world has no purpose or meaning, and consequently the communications break down. The characters in Theatre of the Absurd are often portrayed in a closed circle which prevents them from escaping from their roles just like the players of Ping-Pong, who are confined to the playing space. On the other hand, Theater of the Absurd deals with the pressures that society imposes on individuals. For example, the destructive fascism and communism that devastated Europe during the mid-twentieth century. The ravages caused by political oppression are clearly portrayed in Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros* (1959) after the inhabitants of a small town turn into rhinoceros.

Theatre of the Absurd takes the shape of man's reaction to a meaningless world or it depicts man as a puppet controlled by invisible forces. The term "Theatre of the Absurd" is applied to a wide range of plays, some of which are characterized by a kind of comedy often similar to vaudeville, mixed with horrific or tragic images. Characters, who seem to have lost all their hopes for finding meaning and happiness, are forced to accomplish repetitive or meaningless actions. The dialogue is full of clichés, wordplay, and babble; plots are repeated or absurdly designed.

Though the title "Theatre of the Absurd" includes a wide variety of playwrights such as Tom Stoppard, Samuel Beckett, and Arthur Adamov, their writings are characterized by different styles (Esslin, 1961). The dominant mood in most plays of the Absurd is a mixture of sadness, happiness, and tragicomedy. As Nell states in Beckett's play, *Endgame* (1956), "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness it's the most comical thing in the world."

Theatre of the Absurd is commonly associated with Existentialism, which was an influential philosophy in Paris during the rise of Theatre of the Absurd; however, it would be inappropriate to call it Existentialist theatre for several reasons. Theater of the Absurd is often associated with Existentialism partly because it was named by Esslin after the concept of "absurdity" was advocated by Albert Camus, a philosopher commonly called Existentialist though he frequently refused to be called with that label. As Tom Stoppard said in an interview, "I must say I didn't know what the word 'existential' meant until it was applied to Rosencrantz. And even now existentialism is not a philosophy I find either attractive or plausible. But it's certainly true that the play can be interpreted in existential terms, as well as in other terms."^[49] Some critics describe the plays that belong to Theater of the Absurd as dreams. Yet, this does not apply to all plays; for example, Albee's *Zoo Story* is far more related to reality.

The fundamental idea or atmosphere in most plays of the Absurd is essentially static. Yet, this does not mean that there is no movement in those plays. In *Waiting for Godot*, for example, the movement continues in a severe or extreme way. In fact, the same is true for *Ros and Guil are Dead*, but the action of the play remains static. *Waiting for Godot*, a play in which literally nothing happens, can create considerable suspense and dramatic tension. In traditional plays, audiences can follow the action from the very beginning to the end and they can often anticipate what is going to happen next. In the plays of Theatre of the Absurd, however, audiences have difficulty making sense of whatever is taking place on the stage. It is hard for them to find out what the playwright is trying to say. In *Ros and Guil are Dead*, the

audiences cannot imagine in advance that the play will ultimately reveal the end of Ros and Guil, rather than Hamlet's experience.

In Theatre of the Absurd, playwrights express a sense of wonder in the face of the incomprehensible, along with a feeling of despair arising from the lack of meaning in this world where all beliefs and values have been lost. Accordingly, characters feel a strong sense of disillusionment, which results from factors such as the sense of loss of meaning, the weakening of religious faith and lack of communication. Theatre of the Absurd is closely associated with universal themes such as the transience of man, the mystery of human personality and identity, as exemplified by Beckett's plays. On the other hand, Jean Genet's main concern is the falseness of human pretensions in society, the contrast between appearance and reality, and the illusion of power.

It is no doubt that Eugene Ionesco is the most original and creative of Absurd dramas, the only one who discusses the theoretical basics of Theatre of Absurd and the one who reply to the attacks by the left-wing realistic. His work in *Amédée*, for example, is characterized in alternation between states of depression and euphoria, heavy oppression and floating on air, an image which reappears through his work to show an alien in a senseless world. Thus, in general those samples of plays reflecting the Theatre of Absurd present a disillusioned, severe, and unambiguous picture of the world. Though often implied in the form of extravagant fantasies, they are nevertheless essentially realistic, in the sense that they never shirk the realities of the human mind with its despair, fear and loneliness in an alien and hostile universe.

The realism of Theatre of the Absurd is psychological; those plays try to explore the human subconscious in depth and the inner realism rather than trying to describe the appearance of human existence from the outside. It is not correct that those play deeply pessimistic as they are, they are nothing but they are expressing an absolute despair. It is true that Theatre of the Absurd attacks the complacency of religious or political orthodoxy.

Theater of the Absurd aims to shock its audience out of satisfaction, to bring it face to face with the strict facts of the human situation as these playwrights see it. But the challenge behind this message is anything but one of despair. It is a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity, and to bear it with dignity, nobly, responsibly; precisely because there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence, because ultimately man is alone in a meaningless world. The easy solutions, of soothing illusions, may be painful, but it leaves behind it a sense of freedom and relief. And that is why, in the last resort, the Theatre of the Absurd does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation. To sum up, readers of plays of Theater of the Absurd are aware that this world is different from their own and they can thus construct it in their mind without considering it absurd. With absurdist plays, on the other hand, readers are faced with a world that is similar to theirs, but all their expectations for a realistic plot are then disrupted. This disruption is further reinforced by the characters' unexpected reaction to the impossibilities. Their attitude in no way accords with the way one would react in the real world, as characters do not appear to hold the same assumptions as the readers about the laws that govern their world. As a consequence, any attempts on the readers' part to construct a coherent text world are frustrated. Following Eco (1990: 76), such fictional worlds can only be "mentioned" but cannot be constructed.

Furthermore, it can be said that Theatre of the Absurd is a sort of theatrical movement that involves elements of surrealism. It expresses an illogical conflict and a play without any plot. In addition, it is considered as anti-theatre because events cannot be predicted, understood or rejected by the audience. One of the most important elements of Theater of the Absurd is the language used, which expresses distrust and disbelief. Language in such plays turns into meaningless utterances and exchanges of words. As a means of communication, such words prove unreliable and insufficient. Moreover, Absurd drama embodies conventionalized speech, clichés, slogans and technical jargon. Through meaningless exchanges of words, Theatre of the Absurd aims to make the audience aware of the importance meaningful communication among people in everyday life.

Theater of the Absurd distorts logic and whatever human kind has gained through reasonable thinking. At the same time, it draws our attention to the unexpected and logically impossible. In other words, such theatre is anti-rationalist. As a result, it offers a powerful sense of freedom. Sigmund Freud believes that man can enjoy the feeling of freedom when he is capable of abandoning the limits of logic. There is no dramatic conflict in absurd plays; there are no clashes of personality and nothing happens to the characters to change their existence. Other important elements found in Theatre of the Absurd are lyrical statements which are very much like music. These statements serve as a means to communicate typical human situations. Unlike the conventional theatre of sequential events, Theatre of the Absurd depicts a numbers of situations which do not seem to be related to one another. On the other hand, such plays present poetic images, namely visual elements.

Theater of the Absurd can be called a lyrical theatre that expresses abstract scenic effects. Many of those effects have been adapted from the popular theatre arts: mime, ballet, acrobatics, conjuring, music-hall clowning. It is worth mentioning that much of the Theater of Absurd movement has been inspired by the tradition of silent film and comedy as in Laurel and Hardy. To sum up, such theatre focuses on objects rather than language which is relatively regarded as a secondary element. It is worth mentioning that Theatre of the Absurd is a result of existentialism, which can be seen in the works of several playwrights such as Ingmar Bergman, Jean Paul Sartre, Dostoevsky, Ibsen and Kafka. These writers express a literary phenomenon as a philosophical point of view, but their works are known more for their fictional value than for their philosophical significance. As a philosophical movement, existentialism was a dominant trend among the intellectuals in Paris particularly by the mid-1970s.

Existentialism suggests a protest against academic philosophy and established system as well as a rejection of reason as the source of meaning. Among the themes popularly associated with existentialism are dread, boredom, alienation, the absurd, freedom, commitment, nothingness, and so on. After World War II, Albert Camus in 1949 published his book *The Rebel*, a collection of his thoughts on metaphysical,

historical, and artistic rebellion. The book was severely criticized by some of his contemporaries. In fact, he was ostracized by many French intellectuals. Another writer who was influenced by existentialism, John Osborn, provoked a major controversy in 1956 when he first published his book *Look Back in Anger*. The play focuses on modern man's existential problems: lack of identity, sense of insecurity and uncertainty, pain of being alive in a meaningless universe, isolation and break down of communication.

In *Waiting for Godot* and his other dramatic works, Samuel Beckett does not rely on the traditional elements of drama. The key features of traditional drama such as plot, characterization, and final solution are replaced with a series of disjointed and meaningless actions on stage. Language becomes useless, for the playwright creates a mythical universe inhabited by lonely creatures who hopelessly struggle to express what cannot be expressed. Beckett's characters exist in a terrible, dream-like vacuum, overpowered by a deep sense of confusion and grief. They cannot achieve any kind of communication with others. In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett focuses on the idea of "the suffering of being." In fact, the play has been viewed as fundamentally existentialist in its approach to human life. Throughout the play Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for something, Godot, to alleviate their boredom. Godot can be understood as one of the many things in life that people hopelessly wait for.

CHAPTER TWO

VIOLENCE AND MURDER IN ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTRE ARE DEAD

Violence and murder in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* are obviously exemplified by Stoppard in several ways. In this play, Stoppard depicts a scene in which the protagonists are executed at the end of the story to show how much violence there is in life. On reading *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, one may notice that the rising action starts with the idea that both protagonists, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, are sent by Claudius to discover the cause of Hamlet's strange behavior. In their attempt to do so, they encounter a peculiar troupe of travelling actors led by The Player. Both Ros and Guil find themselves involved in a series of incomprehensible occurrences and confusing situations. As the play draws to the climax, Ros and Guil, who are escorted by Hamlet to England, discover that Hamlet is to be killed upon arrival. The protagonists realize that their own lives will be sacrificed instead. The scene in which Ros and Guil are executed is a clear image of violence and murder. In the falling action, Ros and Guil hopelessly realize that they are to be put to death. In fact, they are painfully aware of the fact that they cannot do anything to avoid their situation. To sum up, at the beginning, the protagonists are sent for a specific task that does not have anything to do with violence or murder. Their mere task is to check the reason for Hamlet's strange behavior. They are not aware of what will happen to them in the end.

It is worth mentioning that Stoppard associates existentialism with murder and violence in this play. He even suggests that reality is without meaning and purpose, and that Ros and Guil's actions as well as what befalls them are fated. Actually, Ros and Guil are characters in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; so, there is already a framework within which they must act. Ros willingly accepts existential reality and the fact that

the world is absurd. Guil, on the other hand, tries to apply natural laws to reality in order to derive some transcendental meaning or purpose from existence. Guil can be compared to a man who stands on the edge of the cliff (an example of self-inflicted violence), afraid of jumping down and terminating his own life.

The play opens with the coin-tossing scene, by which Stoppard establishes both suspense and confusion. In fact, throughout the play the audience is allowed to witness neither an inciting incident nor a conflict. The audience is given no exposition. The characters are not introduced, the nature of their journey remains unknown. Thus, the audience is made to wonder what is happening while being given no clues with which to answer those questions. Thematically, Stoppard is establishing a framework for the rest of the play. The play takes place in a real setting that is essentially absurd, and there are no laws or a divine presence governing the action. Violence and murder that occur in the play are closely related to the themes of existentialists. How can human being commit a crime in particular circumstances unless he believes that reason is an illusion by attempting to explain such an improbable event through logical reasoning. Events in this play are non sequitur; they do not correctly follow from the meaning of the previous events. Ros willingly accepts existential reality and the fact that the world is absurd. Guil, on the other hand, tries to apply natural laws to reality in order to derive some transcendental meaning or purpose from existence. Even though Stoppard wants to suggest, by the absence of the law of probability, that reality is without meaning and purpose, the actions of Ros and Guil are fated. They are characters in Shakespeare's Hamlet, so there is already a plot framework within which they must act.

The unlikelihood of Guil's hypotheses, yet his willingness to entertain each as "reasonable," emphasizes the absurdity of trying to find meaning in life. This is exactly the reason Guil provides for entering into his convoluted syllogism. As he says, reasoning is "*a defense against the pure emotion of fear.*"

A clear image of violence is embodied in when Ros makes the statement about beards growing after death; he does not specify when the growing initiates. Guil incorrectly assumes that the beard starts growing after death instead of before.

Another curious scientific phenomenon is the fact that the fingernails grow after death, as does the beard.

Guildenstern: What?

Rosencrantz: Beard.

Guildenstern: But you're not dead.

Rosencrantz: I didn't say they only started to grow after death. The fingernails also grow before birth - though not the beard.

Guildenstern: What?

Rosencrantz: BEARD! What's the matter with you

[pause]

Rosencrantz: The toenails, on the other hand, never grow at all.

Guildenstern: The toenails on the other FOOT never grow at all.

Rosencrantz: ...no.

The scenic design creates a dramatic world in which the events happening around Ros and Guil are presented as beyond their control and beyond even their understanding. The scenic design includes unmotivated, unexplained flying objects that mirror the characters' lack of control, while the lighting design emphasizes the different moods of each character.

2.1. THE THEME OF VIOLENCE IN ROSENCRANZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD

When a light is highlighted on the following conversation between the Player and Guil, several inferences can be made implying that violence and murder are the result of mankind's will:

The Player: There's a design at work in all art... events must play themselves out to an aesthetic, moral and logical conclusion. We aim at the point where everyone who is marked for death... dies. Generally speaking, things have gone about as far as they can possibly go when things have got about as bad as they can reasonably get.

Guildestern: Who decides?

The Player: Decides? It is written!

The point here is that no one is allowed to choose a route to make an event, because events have been written in advance, just like the director of a theatrical work who draws and plans the events. Accordingly, all the characters follow the paths which have been drawn for them. No one can stand against that will, and whoever tries to do so is just in a situation like swimming against a turbulent current. Inevitably, any attempt to resist such a current is doomed to failure. Every character has to act in accordance with the orders of his director, thus the events of life are previously written and human being's role in life is to comply with them:

The Player: We're actors! We're the opposite of people! We're more of the love, blood, and rhetoric school. Well, we can do you blood and love without the rhetoric, and we can do you blood and rhetoric without the love, and we can do you all three concurrent or consecutive. But we can't give you love and rhetoric without the blood. Blood is compulsory. They're all blood, you see.

Guildestern: Is that what people want?

The Player: It's what we do.

The Player elaborates on that subject; all of the events seen on stage are combined with blood, in other words, with murder, culminating in the desired end, death. Here, the critical question is why human beings commit act of murder and violence? The best answer to this question is that mankind always looks for the best image of life, but killing, murdering which caused violence death is what man is doing or what man is led to do without expressing his own rejection for doing that.

Later on, a discussion between The Player and Ros and Guil follows. The ideas presented in the conversation between the two characters confirm the message above:

The Player: I should concentrate on not losing your head.

Rosencrantz: What are you playing at?

Guildenstern: Words. Words. They're all we have to go on.

Guildenstern: Rosencrantz?

Rosencrantz: What?

Guildenstern: Guildenstern?

Rosencrantz: What?

Guildenstern: Don't you discriminate at ALL?

The Player: Generally speaking, things have gone about as far as they can possibly go, when things have gotten about as bad as they can reasonably get.

The Player: We are tragedians, you see? We follow directions. There is no choice involved. The bad end unhappily, the good unluckily. That is what tragedy means. Hibbard, G.R. (1987).

The phrase "*Losing your head?*" (2.359). uttered by the Player foreshadows what is going to happen to Ros and Guil later on. On the other hand, these words embody the terrible picture of violence and murder that will take place when someone loses their head. Then, the Player says, "*Words. Words. They're all we have to go on.*" (2.339). The Player uses the words suggesting violence to express the end of man's life on earth. Finally, he assures that they are merely actors playing roles. In another conversation between Ros and Guil, they refer to Hamlet who has murdered them both:

Guildenstern: He caught us on the wrong foot once or twice, perhaps, but I thought we gained some ground.

Rosencrantz: He murdered us.

Guildenstern: He might have had the edge.

*Rosencrantz: Twenty-seven to three, and you think he might have had the edge? He *murdered* us! (2.449)*

In the conversation above, the pronoun "*He*" refers to Hamlet, who is accused by Ros and Guil of murdering them. The task they are sent for has turned out to be fatal for them, which is another example of violence and murder in the play.

The Player: [after the performance in front of the servants] Are you familiar with this play?

Guildenstern: No.

The Player: A slaughterhouse, eight corpses all told.

Guildenstern: [does a quick mental recount, then] Six.

The Player: Eight.

[the two tragedians who resemble Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are "hanged"]

Guildenstern: Who are they?

The Player: They're dead.

The Player: The bad end unhappily, the good unluckily... that is what Tragedy means.

The picture in this scene adds to the play another case of violence. The Player is seeking a means to kill Hamlet, which is depicted in the scene where two of the Tragedians who resemble Ros and Guil are hanged. By depicting this scene, Stoppard presents an incident which foreshadows the indispensable destiny of Ros and Guil.

2.2. A TYRANT OBSESSED WITH DEATH

Significant image of violence in the R&G is The Player, the leader of the Tragedians troupes. Though he can be pretty cheerful and friendly, The Player can suddenly change and start acting as if he were a totally different person. There is something very threatening underlying his whole behavior. The first example is the scene in which he strikes Alfred without explanation. Then, he tries to cheat Ros and Guil and, in the closing scene, as Guil and Ros's fate approaches, the Player's elegant manner turns into a threatening attitude, which is clearly seen in his argument about death with Guil. This point can be illustrated by the story told by the Player about the actor in his troupe that was condemned to death. He manages to get permission for him to be killed during one of their plays. Strangely enough, he attempts to turn an ordinary man's death into some sort of public entertainment. And does he have any guilty conscience about it? Of course, not. The Player says:

The whole thing was a disaster! – he did nothing but cry all the time – right out of character – just stood there and cried [...] Audiences know what to expect, and that is all they are prepared to believe in. (2.339)

This is one of the consequences of viewing human life as a play. Nothing is quite real to the Player, and as a result his morals are quite perverse. The most interesting thing about the Player is that he sees no distinction between life and art. He has essentially surrendered his life to become a permanent actor. Guil wants art to imitate life the same way the Player does, but for him life and art are separate. For the Player, though, nothing is sacred – he thinks that a play can do anything. It is all just about acting appropriately, playing your role, and doing your best to satisfy the expectations of your audience. This idea reaches its peak when he pretends to be dead at the end of the play, and does it so well that he manages to make both Ros and Guil believe that it is real. The Player wins the argument about whether death can be believably portrayed in art, but he is also out of touch with reality. This is the price he has to pay for it.

After an extended criticism about performing when no one is watching, the Player informs Ros and Guil that his troupe will be performing *The Murder of Gonzago* for the royal court. Since the show for acting is full of violence and murder, they could choose another show. Guil then seeks the Player's advice on how to operate in this strange place. The Player advises Guil to act naturally, and then helps them gather more information about Hamlet. This information causes them to question whether Hamlet is really mad, and whether he is really in love with Ophelia. The Player leaves to practice his lines, and Ros and Guil contemplate the nature of death before the royal court enters. The troupe enters and begins to practice the dumb-show that will be performed before "*The Murder of Gonzago*". But the practice is interrupted when Hamlet makes Ophelia cry. Finally, however, Ophelia calms herself, and the rehearsal goes on. The plot of the dumb-show reflects the plot of *Hamlet*: In the dumb-show, a king has been poisoned by his brother. The brother

then marries the queen and becomes king. The murdered king's son, Lucianus, is in anguish over this union, which has implication of incest.

In a rage, Lucianus murders Polonius, and his uncle, the King, sends him to England to be executed. When Lucianus arrives, he switches places with his two spies, and they are executed in his place. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not understand the similarities in the plots. Furthermore, they do not recognize the two spies as themselves. Claudius interrupts the rehearsal to announce that Hamlet has killed Polonius. Ros and Guil are ordered to find Hamlet and bring back Polonius's dead body. Their hesitation over whether to search for Hamlet or to wait for him gives Hamlet the opportunity to easily escape them, although he himself gets into Ros's and Guil's hands moments before they present him to Claudius.

They, along with a soldier, accompany him to England. At the end of play, in the third act, events occur in a boat, which is attacked by pirates; Ros and Guil hide in barrels and discover that the Player and his troupe are also on board the ship. They all wonder whether or not Hamlet has survived the attack. Ros and Guil do not know what has happened to him. Guil is worried about what they will tell the King of England. Reading the letter again, he finds that the names have been exchanged. The Player tries to instruct Guil about death, but he becomes so angry at the Player's assumption that he is ignorant that he stabs him. The Player dies, only to get up again and reveal that he is acting. After experiencing a series of mixed of emotions - fatigue, frustration, and apathy - Ros and Guil resign themselves to death and simply disappear. An ambassador from England announces Ros and Guil's deaths, and comments on the tragic end of the play.

Stoppard uses the play to foreshadow Ros and Guil's deaths, but Ros does not even realize that his fate is being played right in front of him. This point is clearly illustrated by the words: "...a gap you can't see" (3.228). With this metaphor, Guil states that death is invisible. Therefore, Stoppard is implying that it is impossible to predict the future or something that cannot be seen. In this case, no one, not even Ros or Guil, can tell when they are destined to die. Existentialists believe that reason is an illusion; Guil's attempt to explain such an improbable event through logical

reasoning is a clear example of self-delusion. Moreover, Ros and Guil act and speak independently of each other, without caring about what the other is doing and saying. This fact illustrates the existential motif of isolation, for even though each man knows that the other exists and that they have the ability to communicate, their minds are preoccupied almost entirely with their own affairs, Guil in his reflections and Ros on the game.

Though Guil has much reason to be upset, given that his uncle killed his father and married his mother, the audience is not made to feel as much sympathy for him as they would in Shakespeare's play. Here he seems extremely self-absorbed, and his motives are often vague. He stabs Polonius, and, given the opportunity, saves himself by changing his death sentence (in the letter) so that his friends, Ros and Guil, will be instead condemned to death. Stoppard depicts here another type of murder - stabbing someone to death.

In the play, Stoppard also illustrates several methods of killing and indirectly explains the causes behind them. For instance, he gives an example of killing for the sake of loving woman, as in the case of what happens to Guil's father, who is killed by his uncle to marry his mother. The Tragedians, who are led by The Player, are talking to Ros and Guil, hired by Hamlet to stage a play that exposes his uncle for doing all the things that he did (this actually happened in Hamlet). As the Tragedians are rehearsing the play, Ros and Guil see Hamlet yelling at a crying Ophelia to become a nun.

Stoppard depicts another sort of killing, it is another shape of violence, it is killing by mistake. As it happens when Claudius asks Ros and Guil to find Hamlet because he kills Polonius (Ophelia's father, who he kills by mistake thinking it is Claudius his uncle). This sort of killing happens when mankind is misled to do something which is not intended, it is predestined. Yet, it is a shape of violence. On the scene of Hamlet, Ros, and Guil are on a boat travelling to England, Claudius ask the two to escort Hamlet. Claudius gives Guil a letter that has sentenced Hamlet to death, but in the process of talking about the letter the two get confused once again as to who has a letter and what exactly they are supposed to do and what to do beyond

this voyage. In the middle of the night Hamlet switches the letter that now says that Ros and Guil are sent to death. That morning the Tragedians emerge from barrels from the boat and talk about death once more and acting death is far better than actual death. Guil disagrees takes the Player's knife and stabs him. Killing in pretending Guil presumes that he had actually killed the Player but instead it is a stage knife and he is merely acting.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead borrows and explores the philosophy of existentialism. Much of the play takes place in Elsinore, in early 1500s. The final lines of the play are recited by Horatio. Hamlet is upset and acting strangely because his uncle Claudius murdered his father and then married his mother. Ros and Guil try to find out the reason for Hamlet's strange behavior through a game of question and answer. During this process they use the scoring method of tennis. Hamlet and Ophelia love each other. Hamlet kills Polonius and gets angry with Ros and Guil because he thinks they have become Claudius's tools.

The play comes to a climax as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern escort Hamlet to England. They discover that he is to be killed as soon as he arrives in the country. At last the two characters are faced with an opportunity to make a meaningful choice; but they fail to act and discover that it is their own lives which will be sacrificed.

2.3. THE PHILOSOPHY OF KILLING

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are killed for doing what they have been told. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Stoppard investigates what might have happened if things had been a little different. The killing of Ros and Guil Hamlet's own Philosophic view. In terms of Hamlet's own philosophic view, the process of killing Ros and Guil is very out of character. Hamlet is an intellectual, and therefore believes that killing is not a good solution, which accounts for why he hesitates so long at killing Claudius. He does this more out of anger and revenge than out of his own will and good judgment. As some kind of justification Hamlet says, "*Ere I could make a prologue to my brains, they had begun the play*". His words reveal that, if he had enough time to think about his actions, he

probably would not have done it. Hamlet's goal of revenge as far as his goals of revenge go; yes this is an act of personal revenge for Hamlet, but it does nothing to help his ordered revenge of his father's death. Although somewhat justifiable, as the two characters are conspiring with the king against Hamlet, their deaths are not very practical.

It is, in fact, completely sensible that Ros and Guil have no idea of the contents of the letters they carried whereas Hamlet knows what is written in the letters. If they had known what the letters contained, however, they would probably have escaped from the boat as soon as possible. He actually accomplishes something instead of analyzing it to death, displaying the kind of action he should have taken towards killing Claudius. Hamlet's act of killing Claudius is a crime of passion, for he is driven by anger and devoid of reason. Rather, he reacts emotionally, without thinking much about the consequences of his action.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead examines the importance of knowledge and awareness particularly with regard to one's identity and surroundings. Ros and Guil do not know about their past, nor are they aware of the fact that they are characters in a play. They simply respond in their natural manners to changing situations, which are all new to them. Guil uses his logic and intelligence to try to make sense of the situation in hand, while Ros, who is a less sophisticated man, just goes along.

However, both characters are confused and uncertain about what has happened in the past and what is going on presently. In contrast, the Player knows every detail about his surroundings. He looks confident and not much concerned with his own fate, to the point of being careless. He also tries to help Ros and Guil understand the situation they have fallen into. Ros and Guil are unaware of almost every aspect of their own reality. In other words, they have no insight into their past and present. They keep doing something very meaningless like spinning coins and repeating questions, and have difficulty in realizing that they are old friends of Hamlet: *What have we got to go on? Guil: We have been briefed. Hamlet's transformation. What do you recollect?* While they sometimes sense that things seem to be unusual, they are

unsure if they are in a play and have to accept what they are experiencing as a reality. In addition, Ros and Guil do not anticipate their death. Ros and Guil react to situations in an ambiguous manner because they are unaware of their identities and surroundings. Guil mostly uses his logic and intelligence to figure out the situations.

Act III, Scene I begins with Claudius questioning Ros and Guil. The two characters tell the king what they have found out about Hamlet's madness, but leaves out the important truth that they have already revealed to Hamlet that they are sent for as spies by the King. Somehow, Claudius does not seem as dignified as he was the first time he appeared in Act I, Scene II. Because of the problem with Hamlet's madness, he seems to have become less certain of what he is doing. He seems to have lost the confidence he had the first time he appeared. He is not sure about how to approach Hamlet, and his choices seem to be less accurate now.

For example, his choice of using Ros and Guil was apparently not a wise one, for it is obvious that they would disappoint him by telling Hamlet that they are sent for. The fact that Claudius is not certain about how to make his own decisions and plans can be seen in another aspect of Claudius - that he has become excessively dependent on Polonius. For the most part, Claudius feels upset that the two characters are not able to obtain more information about Hamlet's madness; however, he is still happy to hear about Hamlet's proposal to invite the king and queen to the play. Because Ros and Guil, have failed him, Claudius now has to implement Polonius's plan of hiding and spying. Then, an important scene comes when Claudius mutters something about his guilt just before the two characters go into hiding, and after Polonius has just finished saying, *How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience! Heavy burden!* For the first time, we see a great possibility of Claudius being the murderer of the late king Hamlet. He admits that something is bothering.

Stoppard wrote plays in the tradition of absurdist drama, which was deeply influenced by the works of Franz Kafka and Beckett. Ros and Guil are summoned to a mysterious castle where they wait for a long time and receive instructions from invisible sources that eventually lead to their deaths. It remains uncertain whether they are the victims of chance or fate. What happens to these two characters lies beyond the range of their understanding. Actually, an important theme in the play is

the human perception of fate and death. Fate holds the main role in evoking thought throughout the play. As Guildenstern remarks,

"Wheels have been set in motion, and they have their own pace to which we are...condemned. Each move is dictated by the previous one--that is the meaning of order." (2.339)

Their presence on the boat is a parallel to their path in life. Guildenstern states it best,

"Free to move, speak, extemporize, and yet. We have not been cut loose. Our truancy is defined by one fixed star, and our drift represents merely a slight change in the angle of it: we may seize the moment, toss it around while the moments pass, a short dash here, and exploration there, but we are brought round full circle to face again the single immutable fact--that we, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, bearing a letter from one king to another, are taking Hamlet to England." (2.117)

Freewill plays no role in the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They move around within the boundaries of their destiny and their ultimate end cannot be avoided. However, death is the inevitable end of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Yet, death is questioned through the players' portrayal and Guildenstern's opinion of what death is all about. The Players take a light-hearted approach to death, saying,

"Deaths for all ages and occasions! Deaths by suspension, convulsion, consumption, incision, execution, asphyxiation and malnutrition--! Climactic carnage, by poison and by steel--! Double deaths by duel--! Show!" (2.442)

William Shakespeare, in his play, does not depict the scene in which his main character Hamlet is captured by the pirates. King Claudius pretends to send Hamlet to England for state affairs, but in reality he will get him executed by the English

King. The next scene of the play tells us about a letter sent by Hamlet to Horatio, that he was captured by pirates on the ship that was on the way to England. On the other hand, in his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Tom Stoppard feels free to create a complete new scene that describes Hamlet's capture and even includes the Players on the ship. In the play, Ros and Guil achieve nothing but their own deaths. According to the Player, in our experience most things end in death. This is the case with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* – the play ends in death. This is demonstrated through the play as the two characters question their very existence, putting forth the theory that if they do not exist, and then they really cannot be alive and so, are in fact dead.

The impending death of the two characters is suggested throughout the entire play by various incidents; everything that they do seems to foreshadow their death at the end of the play. Throughout the play, Ros and Guil question their very existence on this planet. As the plot unfolds, it becomes clear that the characters, who always question their destiny, will ultimately face their deaths. Ros and Guil are not able to convince themselves that they are alive. In doing so, they seem to feel that they are able to reassure themselves that they are in fact alive, but this only leads them to question if they really are alive or not. A comment by Ros that one's beard grows after death triggers a response from Guil who says but you are not dead. This reply leads us to believe that the protagonists are questioning the fact that they are alive. Then, Ros goes on, saying, all I want is immortality. This statement suggests the belief that human existence has no meaning or purpose if you are just going to die. What is the point of living if you are just going to die? This questioning of existence as well as the idea that life could be just a dream, leads to the fact that they are once again not sure if they really exist. If life is just a dream, then we are not tangible because we are only a product of imagination:

Guil (explosion): Oh for God's sake!

Ros: We're not finished, then?

Guil: Well, we're here, aren't we?

Ros: Are we? I can't see a thing.

Guil: You can still think, can't you?

Finally, it can be pointed out that, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Tom Stoppard retells the story of "Hamlet" from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's perspective. The play follows the basic plot Shakespeare's Hamlet, but the minor figures of the original work become the main characters in Stoppard's version.

At an interview with Jon Bradshaw in 1977, Stoppard said "the play (R &G are Dead) had no substance beyond its own terms, beyond its apparent situation. It was about two courtiers in a Danish castle. Two nonentities ...had no substance beyond its apparent situation. It was about two courtiers in a Danish castle, two nonentities surrounded by intrigue to do with the condition of modern man or the decline of metaphysics." (bradshaw 95) What is meant here, is that when he wrote this play, it wasn't supposed to be the sequel to "Hamlet", merely the same play through different eyes, in which case an understanding of "Hamlet" is not necessary in order for "Ros and Guil are Dead" to exist as a play. However, the last section of that quote Two nonentities surrounded by intrigue shows that Stoppard is referring to the intrigue Ros and Guil are given in the play "Hamlet", by saying this he means that in order for "Ros and Guil are dead" to be interpreted better, one would need to have an understanding of Shakespeare's "Hamlet", and therefore stating that "Ros and Guil are Dead" can exist as a play in its own right, but is more greatly appreciated when the audience has an understanding of Hamlet.

The reader meets Ros and Guil on their way to the court at Denmark. One of the first things that make them stand out is their inability to remember who Rosencrantz is and who Guildenstern is. Throughout the text this is a source of humor, something that is touched on in Shakespeare's version of the story but is elaborated on in this version. The characters of the Players are also expanded in this version. Ros and Guil meet them on the way to the court, as well as at the court, and the Players are also on the ship with Ros and Guil when they are sent with Hamlet to England at the end of the play.

If the reader doesn't have an understanding of the play "Hamlet", though, they may not have the faintest idea what's going on. Who are these two insignificant

clowns, anyway? Why do they keep getting themselves mixed up who is the madman who keeps appearing on stage? Actually, the play has less to do with Hamlet than it does with life, death and one's place in the universe. Stoppard takes the two least important characters in Hamlet and shows the play from their point of view, their confusion, their bewilderment and their utter inability to cope with their situation.

Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead For this play you will have to recall the play Hamlet. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were two old friends of Hamlet. Claudius has asked them to return to Denmark for the express purpose of spying on Hamlet. We don't know to what extent Ros and Guil were reluctant to do this, but we have to assume that Claudius threatened them in some way since he is now King. Hamlet, you will recall, is very upset not only because of his father's death but also because he feels everyone has betrayed him, especially his mother and Ophelia: his mother by marrying Claudius and Ophelia by spying on him at the behest of her father Polonius. Now he discovers that Ros and Guil are spies too. After Hamlet kills Polonius accidentally in his mother's bedroom, the King decides to ship him off to England for his protection (As Laertes will return to avenge Polonius) as well as his own (Claudius'). Ros and Guil are ordered to accompany Hamlet and they have with them a letter which states that the English are to execute Hamlet immediately upon his arrival. Hamlet steals the letter while Ros and Guil sleep and he changes the orders of execution from his own name to theirs. So Ros and Guil are headed to certain death, the meaning of the title of the play. Since Ros and Guil have betrayed him, Hamlet feels no guilt about this. On the ship to England there is a sea battle with another ship and Hamlet escapes on that ship and subsequently returns to Denmark.

In the play we meet them as they are on their way to Elsinore castle. Along the way they meet up with the Player and the troupes who are also going to Elsinore to put on the play the Murder of Gonzago which if you have read Hamlet reveals Claudius as the murderer of Hamlet's father. When everyone arrives at Elsinore you will find yourself going back and forth between the play of Hamlet (is it real or is it "the play"?) and the story of poor Ros and Guil who are trying to find out what is going on in the castle and what's up with Hamlet (is he crazy or not?). So every exit from the play Hamlet is an entrance into the play of Ros and Guil. Perfectly blended

with these two levels of action are the Players who perform feats of illusion for everyone in the castle as well as the play "Gonzago."

CHAPTER THREE

The Differences and Similarities between *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *Waiting for Godot*

This chapter contains a comparative study of the structure of the two plays: Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Using Beckett as a starting point, some critics believe that Stoppard can be considered as an ending point in the process of evaluating of Absurdist theatre. Considering Stoppard's and Beckett's characters, failing memory, confused identity, lack of decision-making skills are the symbols both playwrights use in order to express the theme of death in their plays.

Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* are two different plays with many similarities. Death is one of the various themes that the two dramatists deal with in their plays, such as lack of individuality or identity, lack of logic, faith of the existentialism etc. As playwrights who wrote in the tradition of the theatre of the Absurd, Beckett and Stoppard's distrust of language is shown in their distrust of words, using clichés, repetitions, pauses, silences and other tactics. Additionally, they use verbal games and word-plays with the intention of showing their distrust of language as a tool of communication.

Both Beckett and Stoppard have focused on the theme of death in their plays. In both plays, the main characters, Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* and 'Ros and Guil in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* talk honestly about death, suffer from lack of identity and sometimes look for it since they live in a world devoid of logic and order.

Throughout history, every human being has wondered about the meaning of death, regardless of their race, religion, geographic site, or time period. Various mythologies and theologies have explained death in countless methods ranging from total annihilation to immediate life after death in the presence of God. Irrespective of a person's particular belief system, death is the end of life, or at least the life that human beings know. What happens after death remains unknown for time being; so, the idea of mediating on death strikes fear into people's hearts. Human beings are incapable of preventing or overcoming death, so the fact remains that every creature dies in the end. The equation of being in life is to be dead. Indeed, death is mystery; throughout human history, every major religion, philosophy, and spiritual series of thought explain this mystery, every one meets the same end 'death'; poor and rich, powerful and humble, all of them leave this planet eventually.

One of the challenges in defining death is in distinguishing it from life. As a point in time, death would seem to refer to the moment at which life ends. However, determining when death will occur requires drawing precise conceptual lines between life and death. This is problematic because there is little consensus over how to define life. This general problem applies to the particular challenge of predicting death in the context of medicine. Other definitions of death have to do with the stopping of something. In this context, "death" is described merely as a state where something has ceased, for example, life. Thus, the definition of "life" simultaneously defines death.

It is possible to define life in terms of consciousness. When consciousness ceases, life can be said to have ended. In certain cultures, death is more of a process than a single event. It implies a slow shift from one spiritual state to another as in Hindus. The characters in "*Waiting for Godot*" and "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*" stand by to meet the inevitability of death, but they do not expect to be comforted after suffering for a long time in a miserable life. Since they have no faith in God, they do not believe in the world-to-come.

Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* are two different plays but similar in limited points, **death** for

instance is one of the various themes that the two dramatists tackle in their plays, such as lack of individuality or identity, lack of logic, faith of the existentialism etc. Forasmuch as of Absurd tradition of the theatre of the Absurd and its elements, Beckett and Stoppard's distrust of language is shown in their distrust of words, using clichés, repetitions, pauses, silences and other tactics. Additionally, they use verbal games and word-plays with the intention of showing their distrust of language as a tool of communication. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* vs. *Waiting for Godot*: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* seem to have been strongly influenced by *Waiting for Godot*. Both plays depict a world full of uncertainty. The characters and their relationships are similar in each play; So, Guil resembles Vladimir, or Didi, whereas Ros, resembles Estragon, or Gogo. Didi undergoes anguish and tells Gogo that he observes things that his friend misses (p. 38). Guil shows great tension and fear at the long run of "heads" at the beginning of the play. He is the one who meditates on philosophical matters, and mentally, he is much more alert than Rosencrantz. In *Waiting for Godot*, Gogo is concerned with food, his feet, erections, and sleep. He has been a poet, has dreams, but forgets about Godot. In *R&G*, Rosencrantz remains unresponsive to the run of "heads," but is provoked by the players' suggested exhibition (p. 28). He is the first person to anticipate Guildenstern death (pp. 37-38) and later the first to accept it. Both Gogo (pp. 9-10) and Rosencrantz (pp. 15-16) have a very poor memory. Didi and Guildenstern are the leading figures of the plays. Gogo faces difficulty in understanding how to play the roles of Pozzo and Lucky (p. 47). Similarly, Rosencrantz faces great difficulty in understanding how to play the role of Hamlet (pp. 46-48).

Both Gogo and Rosencrantz often desire to leave whereas Didi and Guildenstern think they should remain either waiting on the King as in the *R&G*, or as in waiting for Godot. Playing games in both plays reflects the process of waiting. Vladimir and Estragon play word games with each other all the time. Actually, the very attempt to play games is an act meant to be busy. This keeps them thinking on their current situation, waiting for Godot, and it keeps them searching for the meaning of their own existence. Stoppard's characters, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, also play several games. Essentially, Beckett uses the game for the same purpose, not to consider the game of coin tossing, which shows the tediousness

of their condition, as well as the power of chance. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern also play a game of questions and answers for the purpose of relieving themselves of boredom. As a game, they even perform their duty to the King, just like Hamlet. This conversation between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern bears testimony to their obsession with death:

Guil: We played it close to the chest of course.

Ros (derisively): "Question and answer. Old ways are the best ways"!

He was scoring off us all down the line.

Guil: He caught us on the wrong foot once or twice, perhaps, but I thought we gained some ground.

Ros (simply): He murdered us.

Guil: He might have had the edge.

Ros (roused): Twenty-seven? three, and you think he might have had the edge?! He murdered us. (pp.56-57)

Definitely, the idea of hanging oneself results in death, which is the end of everything that has been done during the eternal wait. The idea of hanging occurs to both Guil and Rose who talk about it while they are waiting for death. The same thing happens to Vladimir and Estragon when they think of hanging themselves on a tree. The emptiness of their existence, coupled with their staying in the same place waiting for someone to come, lead them to seriously consider committing suicide to get rid of this absurd life.

The pairs of characters in both plays try to express the importance of their own identity in the world. For example, early in *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir suggests to Estragon jumping off the Eiffel Tower. This idea is a double-edged sword: While on the one hand they really intend to kill themselves and put an end to their monotonous and meaningless life, finally they reach the decision that the best way to prove the importance of their life is by killing themselves. The act of jumping off the Eiffel Tower will give Estragon the chance to find something to be proud of as well as a sense of accomplishment, for he will be the first person to do such an action.

The same thing happens to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, they want to feel that they are important, they are not merely babbles which can easily be exploded; they feel they need to prove that their existence has a value in itself. In fact, finding out that they were intended to be put to death in England, Rosencrantz says, "*Who'd of thought that we were so important?*" Throughout the play, both characters try to feel useful by helping the King and following his orders, and in the end they feel important because their deaths were being plotted the whole time. Ultimately, they do not seem to be worried about their impending death, just like Estragon and Vladimir who do not worry about theirs; they just want to find some meaning in it. Both pairs of characters try to justify the reasons why they were selected, assuming that they are considered important enough to be killed. For that reason, there is a great plot to transfer them to the other world. They figure out that if the King wants them dead, then they must be very important; It means that their lives actually have some worth.

Another significant point in this discussion is the deep desire and the readiness of to be died, in other word the enthusiasm for death is clearly portrayed in both plays because the main characters of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Waiting for Godot*, as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* 'Ros and Guil, hereafter and *Vladimir and Estragon* are living is absurd. Most of the time they show that they are searching for something excessively important, death or they are waiting for it to come subsequently and most of the time, they have no choice, they have nothing better to do but looking for or waiting for death.

Those characters in both plays suffer from the lack of individuality; not sure who they are and what they are doing, sometimes there are many attempts from them to discover themselves but unfortunately are unable to get the reality of who are they and why are they there and what is supposed to do? When one contemplates the situation of being in life, he should asks himself what the task of being in life is, and is he the right person for accomplishing the task of life, is he capable of carrying out such task. They lack the ability of understanding the situations or comprehending what happens since they cannot find a way of reasonable thinking based on right

judgment at work. That is may be due to their inability to find that understanding the situation or logic or simply because there is no logic.

Both Beckett and Stoppard have discussed these themes in their plays; in both plays the main characters, *Vladimir and Estragon* in *Waiting for Godot* and *Ros and Guil* in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* talk frankly about death, suffer from lack of identity and sometimes look for it and are living in a world, which is devoid of logic and order.

The question to be answered is what is 'death'? Every human being has wondered about the meaning of death, regardless of consideration as race, religion, geographic site, or time period. Various mythologies and theologies have explained death in countless methods ranging from total annihilation to immediate life after death in the presence of God. The concept and symptoms of death, and varying degrees of delicacy used in discussion in public forums, have generated numerous scientific, legal, and socially acceptable terms or euphemisms for death. When a person has died, it is also said they have passed away, passed on, expired, or are gone, among numerous other socially accepted, religiously specific, slang, and irreverent terms. Bereft of life, the dead person is then a corpse, cadaver, a body, a set of remains, and finally a skeleton. Regardless of person's particular belief system, the fact says that death is the end of life, or at least the life that human being know. What happens after death is unseen action for time being, so the idea of pondering of death strikes fear into people's hearts. Human being is powerless towards preventing or overcoming death, so the fact remains that every creature dies. The equation of being in life is to be dead. Logically the source of life would hold the keys to death. The common language between all humanity is opposite meaning of life. Indeed, death is mystery, throughout time, every major religion, philosophy, and spiritual series of thought explain this mystery, every one meets the same end 'death'; poor and rich, powerful and humble, all of them leave this planet eventually.

The subject of death can be approached by a variety of perspectives. Every living creature will definitely die, but all people are not desired for getting died, they do their best to flee away as far as possible from death, meanwhile the big surprise is

that the death whom everyone is running off will undeniably meet it from the other side of their running face to face. Stoppard and Beckett portray Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Vladimir and Estragon in a situation to stand by to meet their inevitability destiny, the death, but do they themselves expect to be comforted after too long suffering of being in such miserable life and meet the best alternative that await the faithful in the afterlife? If people strongly believe in the day after and work for it, they will be comforted and substituted the lost love in life.

3.1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PAIRS IN BOTH PLAYS

Talking about the DEATH in both plays may lead us to have a little indication and concept on the two main pair characters in both plays. It clearly seems that the two characters in the 1st play; Ros and Guil and in the 2nd play, Estragon and Vladimir are a sort of friends and they cannot renounce and live without each other. When they often take a step to separate from each other, they do not carry out such step and insist to stay together. They do not move and keep their own companionship on, because both playwrights depict that those characters complete each other, each one has his own features which cannot be valuable unless they function together. Martin Esslin in *Theatre of the Absurd* also suggests "The opposition of their (*Estragon and Vladimir*) temperaments is the cause of endless bickering between them and often leads to the suggestion that they should part, their nature of relationship in both plays is being complementary, they are dependent on each other, too, and they have to stay together. But as T.S. Eliot, the essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic in the 20th century, has said:

"Between the conception and execution falls the shadow"

Namely that staying together is not an easy task to perform for both characters. The journey of their friendship seems to be threatened when Vladimir comments, "*They didn't beat you?*" and Estragon replies:

"Beat me? Certainly they beat me." But who are 'they'?

Why 'they' "wouldn't even let them up?"

Through this short conversation, it is showed that Vladimir has a bit of memory, whereas Estragon does not have any. But the only staying fact that both of them Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for Godot.

On the other hand, Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* seems to be inspired by Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The protagonists allocate a companionship and as the play proceeds they share bewilderment, angst, metaphysical speculations and the games in which they indulge in to while away the time and overcome their fear for the unknown resemble Estragon's and Vladimir's actions in *Waiting for Godot*. Scholars have drawn many such inferences to establish the Beckett-Stoppard connection. But the choice of such pairings like Estragon-Vladimir and Ros-Guil perhaps remains a bit of an enigma. Like Beckett's protagonists Ros and Guil have a few important differences between them. Guil has the stronger personality. He does not panic easily and reassures Ros and cheers him up whenever.

The play itself becomes a metaphor for life as its two principal characters struggle to find their way through a maze of events, lacking any memory of what has gone before and drawn inexorably toward their own deaths. Like all characters, their actions are predetermined by the playwright's wishes, and they find themselves unable to perform any action that breaks with the dramatic flow of the plot in their case.

At the end of their baffling journey lies their death, as inevitable for them. Hints of death appear throughout the play, beginning with its title and Tom Stoppard's assumption of familiarity with *Hamlet* on the part of the audience. During his first encounter with the Player, Guildenstern correctly interprets the actor as the harbinger of his own doom:

It could have been a bird out of season, dropping bright-feathered on my shoulder... It could have been a tongueless dwarf standing by the road to point the way... I was prepared. But it's this, is it? No enigma, no dignity, nothing classical,

portentous, only this—a comic pornographer and a rabble of prostitutes echoes Estragon's remark, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful."

One can question why at all there was the need of presenting such pairs like Estragon-Vladimir and Ros-Guil. If *Waiting for Godot* is a play about waiting for meaning in the midst of meaninglessness, significance in the midst of insignificance or even God and upon whose arrival Estragon and Vladimir will be saved from the futility of their existence, and then they could have been like any other normal couple. God's arrival is beyond any gender discrimination.

Through the language used by the Player, one of the characters, 'death' is embodied clearly in Stoppard's play. Player says to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, "*I should concentrate on not losing your heads.*" This statement does not carry a symbol of death, but also it foreshadows the imminent deaths of the two main characters. The language of the Player is used to indicate themes in the play, such as the time when he says, "*every exit being an entrance somewhere else.*" This quote is one of the most important quotes in the entire play. The Player is telling Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that even if they exit, they will enter somewhere else. So, at the end of the play, when they are killed, they do not die, they simply exit the stage for the first time the entire play.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are trying to understand the meaning of the events which they find out are actually carrying them to their own deaths. They exist in an atmosphere of uncertainty and confusion. They are essentially two characters lost in their own play. In a way they are actually waiting for Hamlet. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern also have difficulty in making decisions by themselves. They are essentially the king's pawns, doing everything he says. This becomes clear when they do not even prevent their own deaths. Instead of attempting to change their fate, they simply go with the flow.

They go on to England and try and follow their original plan; which ultimately leads to their deaths. The philosophy which says "*illusory spectacles of death are the only kinds in which we are prepared to believe*" is represented throughout the

Player, and it is his job to convince Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in this case. Perfectly, Ros and Guil express the idea of everyman in life. When their own deaths are presented to them two different times, they blindly do not see what they are headed for because the reality of what must be is too close to realism for them. The same is true for modern man. We accept only what we can believe in, and to believe in death is to believe in our own absence of presence. In more realistic terms, we see death as a tragic end which metaphorically symbolizes "*an abrupt exit from one's own drama into a place incomprehensibly other*" (Jenkins 43). Stoppard's ultimate conclusion on this subject is that we as human beings will be better off if we learn to accept that death is just as incomprehensible as life, and the only way to psychological happiness must come from dismissing social conventions and beliefs of death and reconciling it with the ultimate view that we live in a world which defies reason and meaning. Consistently throughout the play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern test this theory of control. When they first arrive in Elsinore (or in the Hamlet play) they contemplate what they should do:

ROS: Shouldn't we do something something- constructive?

GUIL: What did you have in mind? . . . A short, blunt human pyramid?

ROS: We could go.

GUIL: Where?

ROS: After him.

GUIL: Why? They've got us placed now- if we start moving around, we'll all be chasing each other all night.

Getting back to the issue of death, and the certain uncertainty of it, Stoppard sets up an argument between The Player and Guildenstern to show that just as there are two levels of life there are two levels of death: stage death and real death. As The Player is narrating the dumb-show to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Guildenstern asks the Player what the actors know about death. The Player tells him that it is "what they do best"(83). The conversation continues:

GUIL(fear, derision): Actors! The mechanics of cheap melodrama! That isn't death! (More quickly). You scream and choke and sink to your knees, but it doesn't bring death home to anyone- it doesn't catch them unawares and start the whisper in their skulls that says- "One day you are going to die." (He straightens up.) You die so many times; how can you expect them to believe in your death?

PLAYER: On the contrary, it's the only kind they do believe. They're conditioned to it. Audiences know what to expect, and that is all they are prepared to believe in.

GUIL: No, no, no. . .you've got it all wrong. . .you can't act death. The fact of it is nothing to do with seeing it happen- it's not gasps and blood and falling about- that isn't what makes death. It's just a man failing to reappear, that's all- now you see him, now you don't, that's the only thing that's real. . . (83-84)

At the end of the play, still unconvinced by The Player's definition of death, Guildenstern loses his patience with The Player and pulls his dagger on him, in an attempt to show him what "real" death is all about:

GUIL: I'm talking about death- and you've never experienced that. And you cannot act it. You die a thousand casual deaths- with none of that intensity which squeezes out life. . .and no blood runs cold anywhere. Because even as you die you know that you will come back in a different hat. But no one gets up after death- there is no applause- there is only silence and some second-hand clothes, and that's- death-

Guildenstern then proceeds to stab The Player who falls to the ground and dies. Thinking he has really killed The Player, Guildenstern is satisfied with his argument that real death and stage death are not congruent. However, he is denied this satisfaction because The Player gets up and is applauded by the Tragedians for his very believable "act" of dying. The Player reemphasizes, "*What did you think? (Pause.) You see, it is the kind they do believe in it's what is expected*" (123). Like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the play's audiences are also convinced of The Player's death. As Perlette suggests, "*We believe because we do not believe*". So, as a

result, we can believe by suspending our disbelief only if that disbelief is there to be suspended in the first place. This illusion is what The Player has been trying to explain all along, and what Stoppard wants us to understand most about his play. Therefore, as Cahn has suggested, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are at the end of their play "*the ultimate victims of absurdity*"(60).

John Perlette rightly points out that Stoppard knows that direct and immediate access to the reality of death is simply beyond the capacity of his audience and that the only solution is to present that illusory spectacles of death are the only kinds in which we are prepared to believe". This philosophy is best represented through the character of The Player, and it is The Player's job to convince Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that this is the case. Ideally, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern represent the concept of Everyman, or put more simply, they are no different from us. When their own deaths are presented to them two different times, they blindly do not see what they are headed for because the reality of what must be is too close to realism for them. Believing in death is to believe in absence of presence.

In more realistic terms, death can be seen as a tragic end which metaphorically symbolizes a sudden exit from one's own drama into a place incomprehensibly other"(Jenkins 43). Stoppard's ultimate conclusion on this subject is that human beings will be better off if they learn to accept that death is just as incomprehensible as life, and the only way to psychological happiness must come from dismissing social conventions and beliefs of death and reconciling it with the ultimate view that we live in a world which defies reason and meaning.

On the other side, the two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, spend their days reliving their past trying to make sense of their existence, and even contemplate suicide as a form of escape. As characters, however, they are the prototypical absurdist figures who remain detached from the audience. They essentially lack identities and their vaudeville mannerisms, particularly when it comes to contemplating their suicides, have a more comic effect on the audience than a tragic one. This is perhaps best observed in the beginning scene of the play when they contemplate hanging themselves:

Vladimir: What do we do now?

Estragon: Wait.

Vladimir: Yes, but while waiting.

Estragon: What about hanging ourselves?

Vladimir: Hmm. It'd give us an erection.

Estragon: (highly excited). An erection! (12)

What follows is a discussion of who should hang themselves first. Vladimir suggests Estragon go first since he is lighter and therefore won't break the bough and leave the other one alone and alive. The conversation continues:

Estragon: (with effort). Gogo light- bough not break- Gogo dead. Didi heavy- bough break- Didi alone.

Vladimir: I hadn't thought of that.

ESTRAGON: If it hangs you it'll hang anything.

Vladimir: But am I heavier than you?

Estragon: So you tell me. I don't know. There's an even chance. Or nearly.

Vladimir: Well? What do we do?

Estragon: Don't let's do anything. It's safer.

Vladimir: Let's wait and see what he says.

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: Godot.

Estragon: Good idea. (13)

Whereas Stoppard play's shows another concept of the subject "death" which is similar in some sides and dissimilar in other. Contemplating the following conversation:

Player: It never varies—we aim at the point where everyone who is marked for death dies.

Guil: Marked?

Player: Between "just desserts" and "tragic irony" we are given quite a lot of scope for our particular talent.

Guil: Who decides?

Player: Decides? It is written. We're tragedians, you see. We follow directions—there is no choice involved. The bad end unhappily, the good unluckily. That is what tragedy means. (80)

Guil. : You!—What do you know about death?

Player: It's what actors do best. They have to exploit whatever talent is given to them, and their talent is dying. They can die heroically, comically, ironically, slowly, suddenly, disgustingly, charmingly, or from a great height. My own talent is more general. I extract significance from melodrama, a significance which it does not in fact contain; but occasionally, from out of this matter, there escapes a thin beam of light that, seen at the right angle, can crack the shell of mortality.

Ros: Is that all they can do—die?

Player: No, no—they kill beautifully. In fact some of them kill even better than they die. (83)

After Guil finds the letter, they turn again to the philosophical:

Ros: We drift down time, clutching at straws. We might as well be dead. Do you think death could possibly be a boat?

Guil: No, no, no. Death is not. Death isn't. You take my meaning.

Death is the ultimate negative. Not being. You can't not-be on a boat.

Ros: I've frequently not been on boats.

Guil: No, no, no—what you've been is not on boats.

Ros: I wish I was dead. (Considers the drop.) I could jump over the side. That would put a spoke in their wheel.

Guil: Unless they're counting on it.

Hence it can be said that this paper intends to highlight on similarities and dissimilarities aspects in Stoppard's play and Beckett's play, particularly death aspect,

Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Such topic has been overlooked by critical consensus as Luigi Pirandello, Samuel Beckett, T.S. Eliot, et al.

Stoppard has injected into what he has drawn on an intriguing and sophisticated theatrical metaphor, and he has given Rosencrantz and Guildenstern a more human dimension than Beckett does to his new protagonists. But does Stoppard have anything to say? Is this play offering us anything which we might want to characterize as a vision of experience? Or is it, by contrast, simply a dazzling display of verbal and theatrical sophistication?

Beckett describes *Waiting for Godot* as a tragicomedy. His use of the term "tragicomedy" is characteristic of his wit. *Waiting for Godot* is a study of the nature of tragedy, an exercise of wit about the idea that tragedy is dead, and a demonstration of the extremes of art which seem possible in a state of skepticism in which images and ideas such as the golden age and the fall, and survival and destruction, seem to coincide and have equal value. *Waiting for Godot* imitates tragedy and presents an absurd entertainment in which the immediate view is a travesty of tragedy and heroism and classic art. One of Beckett's main devices is that his stage becomes a platform for an absurd and noble game, and a lecture about art and the modern mind.

Vladimir and Estragon are two sordid clowns presented as the tragic heroes of contemporary society. They meet each day at twilight on a country road somewhere near the end of civilization and wait for Godot. The conventions of heroic tragedy seem to be exchanged for absurd conversation and nervous clowning, notably on the two occasions when Vladimir and Estragon meet Pozzo and his slave, Lucky. Pozzo and Lucky are figures of terror, in the first act, Lucky presents an insane lecture on the nature of man; in the second act, Pozzo and Lucky appear to be struck blind and deaf, and imitate the fall of man and civilization in a fall on to the stage (an imitation which is Shakespearian as well as absurd). Vladimir and Estragon live in fallen and ruinous circumstances, but as clowns they escape extremes of violence, or seem insensible, and the end of *Waiting for Godot* can seem to be a happy end: as Vladimir and Estragon continue to wait for Godot, from one point of view, they have come to the end of a perfect day.

It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you?" (Beckett, 103). A life based on chance is worthless.

One of the most obvious of Stoppard's influences is Samuel Beckett, an Irish playwright working mainly in the mid-twentieth century. Beckett's plays are often confusing, uncomfortable to watch, and mysteriously depressing, yet darkly humorous at the same time. His most famous play, *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon who wait for Godot the one who is never really explained, but it hardly matters: he never comes, and they are left in a timeless state of inaction to the point of non-existence. They do not even really seem to care whether Godot ever arrives: they are emotionless and unexcitable. The play's audience often experiences the aforementioned depression: the two men have nothing to live for, realize that their lives are empty, yet continue to trudge on absurdly through a string of petty incidents.

CONCLUSION

This study deals with Theater of the Absurd in a historical perspective, with special focus on the theme of violence and death in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. In Chapter one a comprehensive account of Theater of the Absurd has been presented, along with a discussion of the philosophy underlying this movement. Then, a detailed analysis of the play has been made in terms of the theme of violence and death, with specific references to the play. In the third chapter, a comparative approach has been adopted: *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* have been studied in detail to present the way the theme of violence and death is treated in Absurd Drama.

The first chapter of this study builds around Theatre of the Absurd, which can be viewed as an outgrowth of the ideology of existentialism that became a highly influential philosophical movement after the Second World War. This unorthodox trend in drama was characterized by an attempt to question and ridicule the established values and norms of society. The Second World War destroyed the traditional norms and political values. After the war, human existence came to be viewed as trite and nonsense. Consequently, playwrights of Theatre of the Absurd wrote to reflect the sense of desperation and the loss of faith in the improvement of human condition in a godless world in which there is neither purpose nor meaning.

In British drama, several playwrights such as Stoppard and Beckett became interested in writing plays that reflected the basic features Theatre of the Absurd. The basic goal of this theatre is to defamiliarize the audience with a highly unconventional theatrical experience, without bothering to pose a problem or offer a solution. The purpose is to provoke thought with laughter. It is to be noticed that such theatre cannot look like as a conventional one, for it does not have a beginning or a middle or an ending. Playwrights of this sort of theatre use specific patterns of

language, full of words designed to get the audience confused. Absurd dramatists write with the idea that their plays have no message and end nowhere (or where they start).

In the second chapter, a lengthy discussion of the theme of death in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* has been made. In fact, death ranks high among the most common themes found in the plays written in the tradition of Theater of the Absurd. First of all, it must be noted that both plays, *Waiting for Godot* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, were written after World War II. Hence, both playwrights reflected in their works a philosophy of life shaped by the consequences of the damage and destruction wrought by the war. Millions of people got killed or wounded, and many got disabled during that war. Hence, death is one of the most dominant themes that can be found in the works of the playwrights who wrote in the tradition of the Absurd. In fact, what happened in this particular period turned everything upside down. One of these dramatic changes occurred in the field of theatre. Several playwrights rejected the traditional norms of drama in late 1940s and early 1950s, and for the new kind of drama that came into being in that period, a new term was coined by the critic Martin Esslin: Theatre of the Absurd. The feeling of hopelessness and the anticipation of imminent death are the common motifs in *Waiting for Godot* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. In both plays, the characters have been trapped in a situation where they have no other choice, but to wait for their inevitable destiny, death. Yet, they do not expect to be happy after all this suffering and such a miserable life. As the playwrights do not believe in the existence of God, they do not expect to have a new and happy life after death.

The main characters in both plays are male. These characters lack the knowledge and power necessary to turn life into a meaningful journey. They suffer from an absence of sense and purpose in this world; that is why they are full of doubt and ambiguity. Guildenstern in Stoppard's play is like Vladimir in Beckett's play, in that both characters are portrayed as leaders whom the other characters follow -Rosencrantz in the former and Estragon in the latter. Through the actions of and dialogues between the characters, Stoppard and Beckett reflect the tediousness of human condition, drawing attention to the importance of chance in determining the course of human life. Both

playwrights depict the role of illusion in helping one put up with the bitter facts of real life.

Throughout *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Guildenstern believes that death is the absence of being and if one does not return, he is dead. The players, however, believe that death is something that can be acted out over and over again. Their arguments build around questions as to what can be considered living or dying. The main characters in both plays attempt to commit suicide. They intend to hang themselves as a substitute solution to being in a state of waiting for nothing to happen and waiting for emptiness of their existence. At the same time, they think that doing an eccentric deed may help them to accomplish a victory which they cannot otherwise taste. Since dead people feel nothing, victory is meaningless for dead people. At the same time, the characters are waiting for something to happen to let them lead their lives with meaning and purpose. Though they consider death to be a method of ending suffering and great anguish in this world, they are eager to hold on to anything to go on living, and they do not care not about what kind of life it is. One can note that, throughout the play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern keep exchanging words on what life is all about. Yet, they do not know how to act without another person telling them what to do or how to do it. All through the play, Ros and Guil sit around the castle waiting for other characters to arrive and give them instructions (like stage directions) instead of taking the initiative and acting for themselves. They depend solely on the words and actions of others to motivate them to act. Even the title "Are Dead" suggests the image of dead people, but in fact in a sense it shows that they are just like puppets, with no freedom to choose. Ros and Guil blindly follow the instructions of others -they are just like machines executing orders. They lack sense, emotion, passion and vitality; in other words, they are dead.

Like Ros and Guil in Stoppard's play, Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* are almost dead. In fact, the characters in Beckett's play think of death as a way of being in life. Their minds are constantly preoccupied with the idea of death, which becomes clearly manifested as they discuss the idea of hanging themselves in a tree, or when they think of jumping off Evil Tour. All the time they keep waiting for Godot, who they think will come and save them from their purposeless and

meaningless life. However, their routine existence in this world comes into conflict with their desire to leave, which reflects their paradoxical vision. Every time the two fellows reach a dead end out of desperation, Estragon suggests to Vladimir that they leave, but the thought that Godot may come prevents them from actually departing.

The third chapter of this paper focuses on violence and murder, which are an integral part of the Absurd world. Stoppard depicts a world full of conspiracy, some people constantly make secret plans either to dominate others or to put them out of action; in other words, some people must die to give others the opportunity to live. Again this concept is naturally linked with the consequences of the World War II. In Stoppard's play, Ros and Guil are sent to kill Claudius. When someone intends to kill another person, there must be a rational reason, such as revenge, or punishment for a murder. But, killing someone to serve other people's interests, as what happened in the Second World War, is both an absurd and brutal act that turns the human life into life in a jungle. Foolishness is another important aspect of this violence. Ros and Guil are duped: They are sent to accomplish a specific task, a mission of murder. A secret plot has been laid to murder Hamlet, but in the end the events turn upside-down and ironically, Ros and Guil get killed – they become the victims, rather than the agents of the murder.

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APPENDICES A

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1. Fundamentals of the Physical Theory of Diffraction by Pyotr Ya. Ufimtsev, New York, Wiley/IEEE Press, 2007, 329 pp., ISBN: 9780470097717, reviewed for Radio Scientists Bulletin, March 2013.

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