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Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead as a Dramedy Play

Abstract

The paper aims at reading Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and examining it as a dramedy. The research explores the features of dramedy being partly comedy and partly drama. Dramedy entails a tricky part that forms a balance between drama and comedy to identify real situations, unpredictable characters and grounded narratives with character-driven plots. Tom Stoppard prevents the play from falling into the dark gulf of life's bleak realities as most comedies tend. His plays represent the basic concept of life as a battle between random occurrence and grand design, between chaos and order, between mad involvement in the multiplicity of things and retreat into private visions. He combines comedy and drama in his play. The use of language is a tremendous mark which is the skillful technique of the playwright, whose exquisite use of puns adds to the comic elements in the work. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* revolves around the misadventures and contemplation of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two insignificant characters from *Hamlet* who are close friends of the Prince, mainly concentrating on their actions with the events of Hamlet as a background. The play is an established work that combines a tragic method of significant philosophical issues with a wide range of farce comedy. In other words, the play is admittedly a presentation of dramedies as dramedy. The research proves how Stoppard uses his skillful techniques in depicting dramedy technique and presenting its features in the play.

Keywords: Friendship, tragic-comedy, a play within a play, death, humor

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"مات روزينكرانتز و غيلدينسترن" كدراما كوميديه

مستخلص الدراسة

يهدف البحث إلى قراءة رواية توم ستوبارد "مات روزينكرانتز وغيلدينسترن" وفحصها باعتبارها دراما كوميدية. يستكشف البحث سمات الدراما الكوميدية كونها كوميدية من جانب وتراجيدية من جانب آخر. تستلزم الدراما جزءاً صعباً يشكل توازناً بين الدراما والكوميديا لتحديد المواقف الحقيقية والشخصيات التي لا يمكن التنبؤ بها والروايات المرتكزة على الحبكة الدرامية التي تحركها الشخصية. يحاول توم ستوبارد الا تعكس مسرحيته الظلام القائم الذي نعيشه وتصبح دراما سوداء كما تميل معظم الأعمال الكوميدية. تمثل مسرحياته المفهوم الأساسي للحياة باعتبارها معركة بين العشوائية والتصميم، بين الفوضى والنظام، بين الجنون في تعدد الأشياء والتراجع إلى الرؤى الخاصة. فالكاتب في مسرحيته يجمع بين الكوميديا والتراجيديا في أن واحد. فهو يعتبر ماهرًا في استخدام اللغة واستخدامه الرائع للتورية إلى العناصر الكوميدية في العمل تزيد من إثراء أعماله الفنية. تدور أحداث مسرحية "مات روزينكرانتز وغيلدينسترن" حول مغامرات وتأملات روزينكرانتز وغيلدينسترن. فهما شخصيتان غير مهمتان مأخوذتان من هاملت وهما صديقان مقربان للأمير، ويركزان بشكل أساسي على أفعالهما مع أحداث هاملت كخلفية. المسرحية عمل راسخ يجمع بين الأسلوب المأساوي للقضايا الفلسفية المهمة مع مجموعة واسعة من الكوميديا الهزلية. وبعبارة أخرى، أن المسرحية هي عرض للدراما باعتبارها دراما كوميدية. ويثبت البحث كيف يستخدم ستوبارد تقنياته الماهرة في تصوير التقنية الدرامية وتقديم معالمها في المسرحية

الكلمات الرئيسية: الصداقة، الكوميديا التراجيديا، مسرحية داخل مسرحية، الموت، الفكاهة

المؤلف

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Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead as a Dramedy Play

1. Introduction

The research sheds light on the skillful use of Stoppard in depicting the different features of Dramedy in his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. "Dramedy is a hybrid genre of both comedy and drama. It highlights the comedic elements that are presented in the comedy. The drama is not only limited to romance, but also revolves around other things like friendship and family relationships. They are usually based on real-life events and can be based on any event that has happened in the past or present. The plot of a dramatic drama usually focuses on an important issue that affects the characters involved" ("Dramedy", Britannica, Vol.8). The term "comedy-drama" was coined by the French in the early 1900s and used by American film critics to describe films such as *Duck Soup* (1933). Dramas are works that use comedy as the main method of storytelling. It is also called "comedy with dramatic elements." (Crowford, "what is a dramedy", 2020)

For decades, "narrative works have been highly arranged as one of two genres: a comedy or a tragedy. Even today, both of the two genres of drama and comedy are often the most prominent or simplest to determine. Even if one has insignificant features of the other, they can exist as separate entities. What is a dramedy? While it can be simplified as being a mixture of drama and comedy, it has perspectives and examples. Dramedies often discuss topics familiar to human life. Serious topics, such as, divorce; illness, hardship, and heartache are often addressed. Additionally, these topics can be customized and details added to personalize them. The major characteristics of dramedy involve realistic situations and circumstances, relatable and unpredictable characters, as well as grounded narratives with character-driven plots. It can also be noted that a dramedy is not just "drama with some comedic features" or "a comedy with some serious moments". It must entail equal parts of drama and comedy. Therefore, a farce drama or comedy drama must attain some comic moments or scenes

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and comedies often customize conflicts that are resolved in a humorous manner.

These major elements are portrayed in Tom Stoppard's play. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* investigates fate, free will, and fear of death using these two minor Shakespearean characters. These characters are extracted from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*-the two courtiers are Hamlet's close friends who betrayed him. The play is a great example of a tragic comedy or a dramedy play heavily based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In a deep sense, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a tragic play that explores revenge, violence, and complex familial relationships. Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, decides to revenge on his father's death which has been killed by his uncle in order to take the throne. The characters often find themselves in ridiculous situations in which they have no control over and that have no purpose. Therefore, the play takes an ironic and satirical look at real characters, frequently finds it hopeless. The paper aims to investigate the dramatic characteristics of the play. Finally, the conclusion of the paper provides an assessment of the results that the paper discloses which proves that the play has dramedy features as it succeeds in compounding the two elements to present the characteristics of dramedy.

2. Review of Literature

Several studies have discussed dramedy in regard. One of the most important studies on the topic is the book by Kavita Jagtap-M.A researcher at the Middle East University. The paper explores Tom Stoppard's works that highlights two main genres: comedy and tragedy through the two minor characters in his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966). He sheds light on his works through irony, satire, use of language, and witty dialogues. Thus, the play includes multiple analyses from different viewpoints. This paper mainly uses the analytic method of in analyzing *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.

The present paper is important because Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* as a dramedy play has not until now been seriously researched as a contemporary

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modern drama. It explores the skillful use of Tom Stoppard's figure of speech to reflect the dramatic elements in his work. Therefore, the present study increases an awareness of the multiple use of figure of speech in Stoppard's play to reveal its genre as a dramedy play.

3. Method

The research aims to discuss the following play Tom Stoppard's play in an attempt to analyze the characteristics of dramedy of being partly comedy and partly drama. The paper analyzes the techniques used by Tom Stoppard to explore the characteristics of dramedy in the work. The paper shows the features of Dramedy in the play. Stoppard discusses themes which all human beings can respond to, and thus this study is an exemplify work that mainly concentrates on the achievements of this iconic playwright.

Some playwrights such as, Tom Stoppard, Eugene Ionesco, and Harold Pinter began to apply Dramedy in their works until the term became popular. Therefore, it becomes popular nowadays not only for writing plays, but also for T.V scripts, films and even programs. According to Judith Butler, a critic, Tom Stoppard's play is depicted to be studied from various scales, depending on the applied analytical perspective. The play suggests a complicated mixture of modern themes, skillful language and an iconic style that stimulates any researcher to analyze the characteristics of dramedy that are revealed in the play.

4. Questions of this Research

The research answers the questions of the research. The research represents how the features of Dramedy are depicted in the play. Stoppard uses his skillful stylistic techniques in the play which reflect how he combines drama and comedy in the work. He uses irony, pun, and satire; to convey his message that the human life can combine joyful and hard times.

5. Discussion

Dramedy extracts the fundamentals of tragedy and combined them with comic elements to create a style of theatre that presents a world that cannot be logically articulated. Dramedy

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is an innovative technique in the modern theatre that has attracted audiences and critics in ages. It is heavily influenced by tragic-comedy that combines tragic and comic elements together. Genres are most frequently found in plays. Examples of tragicomedy include William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and *Waiting for Godot* (1953) by Samuel Beckett .

During the twentieth century, many major dramatists such as, "Tom Stoppard, Harold Pinter, Lynn Nottage have been affected by the bad conditions of The Second World War which has caused economic, political and social problems" ("History& Society, Britannica, vol.8). Everything has been out of control and people have been led to a war that nobody wants to face. These conditions have taken hold of the intellectual world through a tenacious grip. It has led writers to write about dramedy that is the suitable kind of drama that reflected the tragedy of life at that time. Some playwrights such as, Tom Stoppard, Eugene Ionesco, and Harold Pinter began to apply it in their works until the term became popular. Therefore, it becomes popular nowadays not only for writing plays, but also for T.V scripts, films and even programs.

The Dramedy playwrights depend significantly on reflecting the inner flow of the mind. Although dramedy plays presents a skillfully unusual form, seeking to shock the audience. These plays may seem to be meaningless from the outside and basic structure and meaning are usually found in the inside. Thus, the aim of drama is not just to depress the viewers with negativity, but a try to bring them closer to reality and help them apprehend their meaning in life

Tom Stoppard is considered one of the pioneers of drama whose works reflect some similar and different aspects worth studying. Tom Stoppard was born as Tomas Straussler in Czechoslovakia on July 3, 1937. Tom Straussler changes his name into Tom Stoppard and becomes known as Tom Stoppard and he has awarded numerous prizes for his numerous works.

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Tom Stoppard has been craped by writing scripts for TV and radio Shows, an occasional individual article or reviews, and some short stories. He also wrote several plays that attained a successful publishing and at the time. In 1965, an association granted Stoppard the permission to live in a Berlin House for few months and dedicated him to writing. The result is a play called *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. This short piece would eventually evolve into Stoppard's first big fame—a dramedy play retelling of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* from the perspective of two minor insignificant characters. However, he has included a new range of color in the spectrum of the English theatre as demonstrated by the frequent use of terms such as Pinteresque language in current dramatic techniques. ("Tom Stoppard")

Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* has received a political reputation. Additionally, critics such as Ronald Bryden praise the play. Through his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Stoppard has become, admittedly, the youngest playwright to have a play in this prestigious theatre. The play has received well in America, where *The New Yorker* called it "a tremendous compassionate fantasy." (Heilpern, 2001, 22).

Stoppard perceives an era of tragicomedy and new realism in theatre. As one of the most contemporary playwrights, he mixes up seriousness with comedy. He understands very well that neither readers nor audiences welcome an entirely serious playwright. He provides his messages in a funny manner. His plays give moral lessons, teach philosophical ideas, warn, inform, and entertain. However, he is an outstanding playwright in the sense that his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* investigates themes familiar to the reader and audience, but at the same time it has been presented on a different and unprecedented scale. The current research sheds light on the uniqueness style of Tom Stoppard's play, from an artistic and philosophical perspective as a dramedy play.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead revolves around (1966) the enterprises and entertainment of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two insignificant characters from *Hamlet* who

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are Hamlet's close friends, concentrating mainly on their actions with the events of *Hamlet* as a background. In *Hamlet*, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are used by the King in an attempt to discover Hamlet's motives and deceive him. Hamlet, however, mocks them and outwits them, so that they, instead of him, are killed in the end. Thus, from Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's perspective, the action in *Hamlet* is heavily desperately comical.

The protagonists of the play-Rosencrantz and Guildenstern- two Elizabeth gentlemen and close friends to Hamlet have been lost as they travelled to Elsinore Castle. On the way, they meet a group of Tragedians who attempt to sell them a play. At the castle, the King orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find out the secret behind why Hamlet acted strangely, since his father's death. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were unable to understand why Hamlet has acted mad. However, they witness a dress rehearsal for the Tragedians' performances at Elsinore Castle. Tragedians' play includes the execution of two characters dressed identically to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. After Hamlet murders Polonius, Hamlet is sent to a ship bound for England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Hamlet were, on a boat, directed to England. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern recognized that they were carrying a letter that ordered the king of England to execute Hamlet. However, Hamlet exchanged the letter during the duo's sleeping. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discovered that they would be killed now, they resigned themselves to a certain death.

The play challenges simple definition and has been variously described as a comedy by many critics. On the other hand, the playwright emphasizes throughout his work that he seeks to bring in the comedic and tragic elements that seems to be part of the play may have inadvertently crept into it, whenever it is presented as a serious play. However, the public's reaction to it was cold.

The aim of comedy is to raise laughter and lead to a happy conclusion, but in the modern context, comedy involves a perception of the irony that the audience can understand

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from the way in which the plot moves forward. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is a comedy play where the mindless sense of the characters is apprehended by the viewer while the courtiers in question are happily unaware of their tragic destiny.

The play, because of the satirical sense involved in it, provides for the comic features and the protagonists engage in senseless pursuits without giving any rational thought to why they are promoted to the task or what may be the outcome. To these nonsense games, where they highlights questions and provide answers to them, sometimes as more questions, Stoppard brings a sense of inevitable which brings tragedy for the play and gives it a glimpse of certainty. This certainty is the death to which the men are destined. That is why critics have called the play as a dramedy as it combines the two elements, drama and comedy, which reflect the dramatic situations in the lives of the characters involved.

The obvious main point to consider about Stoppard's work is that it is always very entertaining. He is a writer who enjoys unexpected verbal associations, word games, puns, conceit, and parody. The result is, indeed, one of his formidable works, a work of comic whimsy rather than solid fantasy; however, it has serious implications. The two heroes, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, are unable to maintain their separation, but are insidiously drawn into a dangerous situation, beyond their understanding or control.

Through mythological exchanges, Stoppard has succeeded in achieving a wide range of changes, from low comedy and wit to drama. These exchanges between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern range from repetition to extreme foolishness, intelligent discussions laced with hysteria, and a subtle incompetence as presented when they take part in interrogating *Hamlet*:

Guil: Yes.

Ros: Unorthodox.

Guil: Undid me.

Ros: Undeniable. Where were you?

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Guil: In Germany.

Ros: Usurpation, then.

Guil: He slipped in. (85)

Critics issue his plays because of its lack of authentic despair, alienation, skepticism and existentialism. Charles Marowitz is true in revealing that "the originality of his plays does not exist in its thought, but in its craft." But he is surely wrong to suggest that the craft finally leaves us with a blinding metaphor about the meaning of life. (Whitaker, 1983, 58)

Stoppard uses overlaps as a comic element of dramedy in the plot of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. "The playwright signals overlap and loudness as resources for performing the quarrels between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on the stage. The actors use both overlap and loudness in their acting, also together with other embodied resources" ("To Stage an overlap", Journal of pragmatics, Vol.3). Pinheiro states that "Stoppard alters the focus of *Hamlet's* "play-within-a-play" so that it reveals the ultimate destiny of the tragic-comedy's anti-heroes, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern" (2000, 185). However, this change mainly terminates in a comic anti-climax that counters the "Mousetrap" effect of *Hamlet*, and which greatly exposes the king's guilt. As Rosencrantz and Guildenstern encounter a mirror image of their future deaths in the dramatic scene presented by the players, they fail to recognize themselves in it or gain any insight into their identities or purpose. Therefore, Stoppard applies this method brilliantly in his play, because it is a post-modern technique which has used best in the play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. The potential message that this play aims to convey is that "a person will certainly fall into the chaos that occurs around him, for whoever sees himself, or tries to remain, is on the surface" (Cahn, 2002, 1-3). Thus, these interactions within the play lead the audience to misunderstand the plot of the play, and this reflects the ironic situation of human life that remains ambiguous, and this therefore reflects the comedy

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in the play. Kenneth Tynan, a critic, argues that "despite multiple sources, the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is a true original, while others believe that it is not. Stoppard uses the original work, combining his theatrical audacity with a unique sense of humor, thus forming a new work that resembles the original one with a new direction that makes the previous work forgettable. It is true that the reader reads his play in light of the original play, but as the play develops, the play moves to a different atmosphere, and as the end of the play approaches, the reader or audience is convinced that he has read fully a new play.

Language, as a term, is "a purely human, non-instinctive technique of communicating thoughts, feelings and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols" (Abu Hassoub & Mazid, 2020, 7). Language in tragicomedies or dramatic plays becomes an unpredictable, unreliable, irrational, and deceptive feature of experience. This point applies even to the characters' awareness of their names. Language, or the way words are used, is one of the most significant components of comedy. Through clever use of wordplay and the ability to add hidden meanings to comedic dialogue, Stoppard keeps the play from falling into the dark gulf of life's bleak realities as most dramedy works tend to. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as well as the other characters, are rescued from being mere clowns due to the trouble their surrogate parent takes in investing them with the richness of language, which is the handiwork of the playwright, whose brilliant use of puns adds to the comic elements in the play. This is greatly illustrated in the following dialogue between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

Guil: You cannot be on a boat.

Ros: I have frequently not been on boats.

Guil: No, no, what you have been is not on boats.

Ros: I wish I was dead. (Act III, 90)

This conversation indicates the playwright's belief is that language sets a limit to what people can express. Characters should confine their feelings within the confines of words.

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Stoppard parodies language in sequences where characters fail to express what they are thinking about because the words cannot fully reflect their thoughts. Despite of the fact, they look ridiculous.

Stoppard uses puns in the language of his works as another element of drama. Puns are the glory and curse of Stoppard's critical reputation. It is hard to resist the exuberance and creativity of Stoppard's puns. Slightly more sympathetic critics, those who curse Stoppard with faint praise, revealing his puns are actually witty and clever. Stoppard is clearly obsessed with puns, and like Coward before him, has an undeniable talent for entertainment. But although amusement in itself is an honorable theatrical intention that does not deserve the contempt and abuse the audience sometimes arrogantly and foolishly heap upon it, the use of puns are not there only to entertain. They certainly do, and they are intended to do, but also they have other functions as well. They are as structural devices in his plays as an integral part of the fundamental meaning of the play.

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Stoppard's magnificent use of pun are being articulated. The following dialogue between Ros and Guil illustrates the play's basic meaning:

Guil: receive such thank as fits a king's remembrance.

Ros: What do you think he means by remembrance?

Guil: he does not forget his friends.

Ros: Would you care to estimate?

Guil: Difficult to say, actually some kings tend to amnesiac, others I suppose the opposite, whatever that is...

Ros: yes, but.

Guil: Retentive he is a very retentive king, a royal retainer... (54)

Guildenstern is the main in Stoppard's long line of overwhelming punsters, and the audience laughs at the alertness of his mind and his witty skill: he has fun with language, play with it,

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and the audience share his pleasure. But the passage continues:

Ros: What are you paying?

Guil: Words, words. They're all we have to go on. (55)

Suddenly, the joking becomes "darker" more sinister. For Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, they live out the classical actor's nightmare with a desire for revenge: pushed onto the stage, forced to take part in a play of which they are completely ignorant, and not only are their lines forgotten, they are never learned. Their response, not surprisingly, is panic, but it is panic of a specifically metaphysical kind, for it soon becomes clear that what Stoppard is offering the audience here is a metaphor for life.

However, words in Stoppard's plays are puns, ambiguous, confusing, and enigmatic and those puns, themselves, reflect enigmatic elements. Just as it reveals comic elements, it also impacts dramatic ones. The humor in the play paradoxes the tragedy; and that's why it combines the two elements in one piece. The spinning of words thus becomes a symbol for the spinning of webs; linguistic uncertainty paradoxes metaphysical uncertainty. The audience is caught up in those webs, in a world in which there is such a confusing multiplicity of possible meaning that the entire concept of meaning becomes senseless.

The play satirizes the role of stereotypes to achieve a comical effect. In an interview, Stoppard reveals some information about *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*:

One of the reasons that the play becomes a well-prepared work, I think, is that the predicament of the characters coincides with the predicament of the playwright. So they end up playing word games, spinning coins, speculating on eternals as well as the immediate situation, getting nowhere, and one finds that there becomes a sort of empathy, a circular one, between audiences watching somebody killing time. (Brasell, 1985, 62)

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Therefore, the use of humor in Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is reflected in the pervasiveness of puns. It extends even to the title-characters itself. One of the play's comic leitmotifs is the confusion; a confusion which the characters themselves share. This identity mix-up is entertaining in itself, but it is also terrifying. For the two characters are not, concerning their personalities, interchangeable, as Guildenstern, at least, is painfully aware of (indeed, the fact that Guildenstern is generally much brighter than Rosencrantz). However, concerning their "destiny", they might as well be one person: for the purposes of *Hamlet*, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are interchangeable. In effect, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have become a kind of pun: two separate and distinct "identities" appearing to share a single unit (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern), just as, in a linguistic pun, two separate and distinct meanings happen to share a single sound. Thus, the main point about Stoppard's puns is that they are clearly comic figures of speech, and on that significant level, they succeed brilliantly. Their main aim is to make the audience laugh, and they do laugh, uproariously; and that is in itself a sufficiently impressive accomplishment.

Stoppard uses his play as a means to discuss issues about life. He illustrates his themes which focus on his humanistic values in a quite entertaining environment. Through his work, he attempts to challenge the traditional norms; in order to convey his message of individual freedom to the readers and audiences. While doing this, he employs a highly dramatic technique. He uses his creative ability in presenting comic with seriousness. That is why it is not easy to imitate him. It is possible to attain various things in his plays: comedy, irony, satire, philosophy, history, criticism and parody. (Brasell, 1985, 160)

Charles Marowitz is true in revealing that "the "originality" of this play does not exist in its thought, but in its craft. But he is surely wrong to suggest that the craft finally leaves us with 'a blending metaphor about the absurdity of life'(Rickers,2012, 55). Stoppard applies misunderstandings and repetitions as means of comedy. This is greatly articulated in the

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following quotation:

Player: Why?

Guil: Ah (To Ros) Why?

Guil: Exactly what?

Ros: Exactly why?

Guil: Exactly why what/

Ros: why what, exactly?

Guil: why is he mad?

Ros I don't know! (68)

Such misunderstandings in the play evoke a glimpse of humor which as a consequence entails the dramatic elements. Lacking any established standard of probability, evidence, logic, or sanity, they meet no one much better equipped. The player tells Ros and Guil that truth is just what is considered to be truth. It is the state of life. There may be nothing behind it, but it does not make any difference as long as it is honored.

Stoppard uses also parody as a dramatic element in his plays. He states, about his play, that "the play's parody of theatre critics, murder mysteries, and its own procedures is as much a part of its larger subject as its mocking of the audience"(Stoppard, intro, IV). Parody imitates a dramatic work that presents elements of comedy and satire. The role of parody as a figure of speech is to criticize the original one. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Stoppard attempts to fill in the gaps he believes that are missing. Stoppard extracts as much information as possible about the two companion lords, thus filling in unanswered questions, such as who are they? What are their final roles? Before writing *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Stoppard has decided to write a burlesque of *Hamlet* as he states in the magazine:

My agent picked up my interest in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and suggested a comedy about what has happened to them in England...The

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possibility appealed to me and I began to work in a burlesque Shakespeare comedy... (Brassell, 40)

Although it is derived from *Hamlet*, it transcends its origin. It is much more than just a comedy play. On the one hand, Stoppard maintains the original context, and on the other hand, he develops the characters in a completely different dramatic situation. The audience recognizes that there are two separate plays taking place in one play: one centered on *Hamlet*, the other centered on *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. The first is Shakespeare's play and the second is Stoppard's play. Thus, the two plays overlap with each other. The second is exchanged with the first play.

With *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the playwright combines Elizabethan and modern drama in the same play, mixing up the royal with the ordinary. While doing this, he plays with parodies in the historical original play, and criticizes it in terms of modern, humanistic and egalitarian measures. However, he does not act in an angry way; otherwise, and his work is always witty and funny. This is greatly demonstrated in the following dialogue:

Ros: Give him a shout.

Guil: I thought we would have been into that.

Ros: Hamlet?

Guil: Do not be absurd.

Ros: Prince Hamlet...

Hamlet: compounded it with dust, whereto "ties kin".

Ros: Say where it is, that we may take it hence and bear it to the church

Hamlet: Do not believe that (85)

The two characters search for Hamlet after the king orders them to find Hamlet and bring the Polonius's body to the church that is a scene from *Hamlet*: The parody that combines two different styles in one play epitomizes Stoppard's comic technique.

Characterization plays an important role in forwarding the technique of dramedy. In

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Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Stoppard uses the troubled story of the two minor characters in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The pair is not aware of the fact that the lord Hamlet has been driven by the ghost of the murdered king, Hamlet's father. They do not apprehend the norms of the cultural, social, moral, or sexual implications and their consequences could be, too. These two insignificant characters are given a vast duty which is indeed beyond their abilities. Stoppard depicts them with brilliantly that the heroes become symbols for any person who is psychologically suffering from confusion. In the lives they lead, they are themselves as much lost players as Tragedians whose role is to entertain the court, but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have difficulty realizing this despite being shown clear evidence.

On the other hand, the play entails the other part of dramedy which is reflected by witty dialogues between characters. It is noted that two courtiers live in an absurd world far removed from the rational world; while the conveying message behind this is rooted in a philosophical thought. For instance, the heads and tails on a coin may symbolize the hierarchical order that divides people into classes. The writer may divide them simply into two groups: heads and tails. Kings, princes, rulers, presidents and strong leaders are always the winners, while the subjects, ordinary people, and the rules are below the line and are the losers in this unjust world. Therefore, in the original play, *Hamlet*, the execution of the courtiers is performed so simply that the audience does not understand the slightest feeling of pity for them. However, Hamlet's death is considered the most tragic scene at the end of the play. In the play, "the coin-spinning game and other events experienced by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are clearly the game of destiny determined by Shakespeare and Stoppard. This applies to all the characters and their creators, the playwrights. They are limited, given their roles and destinies predetermined by the writers. "They are like existential figures that cast out their own will and consent or determined by an invisible hand" (Colby, 1978, 35). There is no alternative for the characters other than following the path determined by the playwrights as Guildenstern says: "We have

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been caught up. Your smallest action sets off another somewhere else, and is set off by it." (43-44).

The plays of Stoppard articulate a very basic dramatic point: that for people life, like laughter, is something going on in the next room, that if there is a system and order to human affairs, it is never readily apparent and that the only certainties are birth and death. As Guildenstern says: "the only beginning is birth and also the only end is death- if you cannot count on that, what can you count on?"(46) Which of course provokes memories of one of the most significant lines in *Waiting for Godot*: "we are born astride a grave"(Beckett, 2002, 22).

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the pair attempts to pass the time doing varied things such as spinning coins, watching Tragedians, and playing some sort of trivial games. They answer every question with another question or by repeating the same question without any answers or clarifications. In this way, many unanswered questions are raised, which sum up the absurd world in which people live. As a consequence, many mysterious questions remain unresolved. Their game is interrupted by an encounter with a group of Tragedians. Hence, this imaginary game creates a feeling that something supernatural is controlling all these events. This reveals that they are controlled by their fate which, apparently, conveys the tragic or serious element in the play.

The fear of death is considered one of the most terrifying anxieties in the tragic authors. It is considered as a trade mark to this inescapable end. For instance, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern know that they die at the end of each performance, and revive again at the beginning of new production, Guildenstern says, "And it has all happened has not it?"(108) They give unconsciously various evidences for their fate as Rosencrantz says, "he (Hamlet) murdered us" (56). All these prognoses and evidences have references to their death, and sometimes they have become aware of the existential fact that they are going to die at the end. The heroes are awaiting their fate quite calmly, and even make plans for what comes next, after

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this stage when Guildenstern says, "Well, we will know better next time. Now you see me, now you—and disappear)" (126). Apparently, with this word "next time," they mean the production of the next play after the theatrical death.

In Act two, Guildenstern adjusts himself to the suspicion that they are part of a larger system:

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. If each start being arbitrary, it'll just be a shambles: at least, let us hope so. Because if we has happened, just happened to discover, or even suspect, that our spontaneity is part of their order, we would know that we are lost. (44)

Moreover, in Act three, Guildenstern may be resigned to their fate: "We have traveled so far, our momentum has taken hold; we move idly into eternity, without possibility of postponement or hope of explanation" (61). While for the audience, their fate is a "dead end" that may reflect the entire meaning of their lives from the moment they are called to the stage. Stoppard's two characters are now driven to their death, Guildenstern says: "Death is nothing...Death is not...it is the absence of presence, nothing more..." (76). They both suddenly disappeared, as if they were never here at all.

Colby reveals that "with the reference to the boat, the playwright attempts expose the existential world of the human being" (39). The freedom granted to man is as restricted as the individual in a confined boat, without exception. He does not have enough freedom or power to rescue himself from deadly enemies. Rosencrantz recognizes the fact that the boat represents the means to death: "We may be dead. Do you think death could be a boat?" (108) The boat is not only a vehicle that takes them to death, but the boat itself is also a symbol of death, because life in it is nothing but a confined life.

Stoppard uses an element of insignificance to heighten certainty as a dramatic aspect of

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dramedy in his play. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern always experience that they are unable to decide that would indeed have an influence on their life. They admit that they must act on the random impulses of other characters, but they make no effort to combat this lack of control. Stoppard shows this theme in his transitions between scenes. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not have the right to move from one place to another, but they appear in a new place without deciding to go there. For example, they move from the forest with the Tragedians to the castle to have a conversation with the king and queen without actually revealing that they have intended to enter Elsinore. When Rosencrantz has decided to bring Hamlet to England, he has concluded that it would be best for them to continue on the right path they were already in. Stoppard criticizes this passivity. The title characters are able to make a life-changing decision when they find out that their letter contains an order to kill Hamlet. Instead, they decide to do nothing, and thus, the result is their death.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's powerless situation throughout the play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, afflicts them, and being controlled by an invisible hand gives them insecurity, this imprisoned life provides them an existential vulnerability. They do not have freedom, unable to act according to their free choice, and have no opportunity to escape.

The final act of the play contains some important evidences about their inability to control their destiny: they are in a somewhat restricted situation, in a boat where they have no opportunity to go anywhere else. They are living in a prisoned world, the boat, and the unique path, England where they will be executed. They do not have any alternative choice except a journey in this boat that leads them to their fate, which in the end they helplessly agree to.

6. Conclusion

Finally, by analyzing Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the paper sheds light on the skillful techniques used by Stoppard in depicting his play as a Dramedy. He uses pun, irony, satire, overlaps and insignificance in the conversations between

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characters to make the audience laughs at the alertness of their mind and their behavior. Stoppard has fun with language, play with it, and the audience share his pleasure. He uses his skillful technique to convey his message which is people is divided simply into two classes: heads and tails. Kings, princes, rulers, presidents and strong leaders are always the winners, while the subjects, ordinary people, and the rules are below the line and are the losers in this unjust world. Stoppard's dramatic work is considered to be dramedy in the sense that he appropriates the spirit of tragic-comedy rather than the technique. The aim of comedy is to raise laughter and lead to a happy conclusion, but in the modern context, comedy involves a perception of the irony that the audience can understand from the way in which the plot moves forward. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is a comedy play where the mindless sense of the characters is apprehended by the viewer while the courtiers in question are happily unaware of their tragic destiny. The fear of death is the dominant feature of tragedy throughout the play. He introduces on the stage a seemingly straightforward story, arousing different expectations in the viewer or the audience. Then by an unexpected treatment of both kinds of exposition; which is partly comedy and partly drama, he makes sure that the audience needs reorientation for consuming his work. Thus, it is hoped that the present paper opens up new horizons for the study of dramedy in detail.

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