

overSEAS 2022

This thesis was submitted by its author to the School of English and American Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts. It was found to be among the best theses submitted in 2022, therefore it was decorated with the School's Outstanding Thesis Award. As such it is published in the form it was submitted in **overSEAS 2022** (<http://seas.elte.hu/overseas/2022.html>)

A HKR 346. § ad 76. § (4) c) pontja értelmében: „... A szakdolgozathoz csatolni kell egy nyilatkozatot arról, hogy a munka a hallgató saját szellemi terméke...”

SZERZŐSÉGI NYILATKOZAT

Alulírott *Berecz Alexandra* ezennel kijelentem és aláírással megerősítem, hogy az ELTE BTK *anglisztika* alapszakján *angol* szakirányon írt jelen szakdolgozatom saját szellemi termékem, amelyet korábban más szakon még nem nyújtottam be szakdolgozatként, és amelybe mások munkáját (könyv, tanulmány, kézirat, internetes forrás, személyes közlés stb.) idézőjel és pontos hivatkozások nélkül nem építettem be.

Budapest, 2022.03.26.

Berecz Alexandra s.k.

CERTIFICATE OF RESEARCH

By my signature below, I, Berecz Alexandra certify that my ELTE BA thesis, entitled *The reality of illusion and the illusion of reality in Waiting for Godot and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is entirely the result of my own work, and that no degree has previously been conferred upon me for this work. In my thesis I have cited all the sources (printed, electronic or oral) I have used faithfully and have always indicated the origin. The electronic version of my thesis (in PDF or ZIP format) is a true representation (identical copy) of this printed version.

If this pledge is found to be false, I realize that I will be subject to penalties up to and including the forfeiture of the degree earned by my thesis.

Date: 26 March 2022

Signed: Berecz Alexandra

EÖTVÖS LORÁND TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM
Bölcsészettudományi Kar

ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

*Az illúzió realitása és a realitás illúziója a
Godot-ra várva és a Rosencrantz és Guildenstern
halott című művekben*

*The reality of illusion and the illusion of reality in
Waiting for Godot and Rosencrantz and
Guildenstern are Dead*

Témavezető:

Dr. Hargitai Márta
egyetemi adjunktus

Készítette:

Berecz Alexandra
anglisztika alapszak
angol szakirány

2022

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
1. Introduction	2
2. Existence and purpose	3
2.1 “We always find something, eh, Didi, to give us the impression we exist.”	3
2.2 “Life in a box is better than no life at all.”	7
2.3 The die is cast	9
3. Autonomy and fate	10
3.1 “Yes, let’s go. (<i>They do not move.</i>)”	10
3.2 “Decides? It is written.”	13
3.3 The one-sided coins of fate	15
4. Mortality and stage death	16
4.1 “We’ve nothing more to do here.”	16
4.2 “Now you see me, now you —”	18
4.3 Hide-and-seek with death	20
5. Conclusion	21

Abstract

Although many similarities can arise between *Waiting for Godot* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, numerous differences also stress the fact that “Stoppard's play is not merely an attempt to rewrite Godot within the framework of Shakespeare's drama” (Gordon 11). This thesis will aim to closely examine and compare how the main characters of these plays experience life, choice, and their possible deaths; to explore the means by which the distinctive line can be obscured between reality and illusion in these main areas of life.

On further examination, a plethora of variables can be perceived that influence these parts of life besides the evident sway of their writers, such as co-dependence, the audiences' role and dramatic irony, submissiveness, changes in role, conflicting thoughts, and self-imposed narratives. Moreover, taking the list determined by Hornby (32) into account, many metadramatic features can be discovered in these plays, in particular, role-playing within the role, play within the play, literary and real-life reference, and self-reference. Such characteristics also add to the shifting of the aforementioned distinctive line significantly.

The thesis will attempt to analyse these aspects among others and question the influence they possess while detailing whether these came to be due to predestination or the characters' own will.

1. Introduction

In theatre, it has always been especially challenging to distinguish reality from illusion as these two constantly intertwine. In the cases of *Waiting for Godot* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the distinguishing line shifts due to the audiences' role, the dramatic irony imposed on these characters and the occasional breaking of the fourth wall. Due to this, another difficulty lies in the interpretation of metaphors, as there are so many variables. Both plays use an abundance of allusions to their literary and philosophical predecessors, thus before any other aspect, much depends on the audience's knowledge of these. Hutchings also observes how many theories can spark from *Godot*, but none of them seems to be wholly validated (24). Each theory concerning the identity of Godot appears to be like Estragon's boots: either too tight or too loose but never perfectly fitting. Gruber (296) observes a similar tendency in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, as it does not offer definite truths rather sparks a philosophical debate about life, art and other issues that have been of interest for people for centuries.

Critics also often point out parallels between the two plays based on themes, metaphors, and dramatic technique, even though Stoppard and Beckett are considered to belong to different literary movements. After Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Beckett's plays were usually defined as absurdist. Consequently, as Stoppard was admittedly influenced by Beckett, absurdist elements are often mentioned in relation to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* even though Stoppard is mostly considered to be post-modernist. However, there is a more recent tendency to re-evaluate absurdism and the authors Esslin mentioned. Bennett (2) argues that these dramas are not about absurdism as such, rather about how one can find meaning and live in an absurd world. He suggests the name "parabolic drama" for these plays as they present allegories (2). However, Beckett's and Stoppard's plays cannot necessarily be related through this literary movement either. In the case of Stoppard, as Gruber (308-309) concludes,

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is quite classical as it presents a linear plot, a moral issue, a rather mythical atmosphere and everyone receives the punishment they deserve.

Despite Stoppard acknowledging his debt to Beckett in several interviews and the plays having certain commonalities in theme and technique, Stoppard's play is not only a rewriting of *Godot* in the framework of Shakespeare as some might suggest (Gordon 11). By analysing *Waiting for Godot* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the aim of this thesis will be to compare some of the main aspects in which the convergence of reality and illusion establishes a contrast or a meeting point between the two plays. These main aspects are existence and purpose, autonomy and fate, and mortality and stage death. Thus, this analysis will accompany the protagonists from being alive through making choices and finally reaching their real or illusory deaths.

2. Existence and purpose

2.1 "We always find something, eh, Didi, to give us the impression we exist."

Estragon and Vladimir seem inseparable and highly co-dependent as they always find each other the morning after their nightly departure. Bloom (7) mentions how the pair is connected by "metaphysical necessity" and points out the importance of knowing one to fully understand the other. Bennett, however, stresses the fact that they are not completing each other to be a perfect whole, but both of them have differences that influence the other (41-42). Didi is more concerned with philosophical questions and has a better memory, whereas Gogo concentrates more on bodily matters and his dreams while his memory seems to be worse than Didi's. Consequently, Didi helps Gogo remember recent things, while Gogo can remind him of good but old memories such as the start of their friendship. Bloom (62) also mentions Hugh Kenner's observation that in *Waiting for Godot*, "hats are removed for thinking but replaced for speaking". Didi often removes his hat, signalling that he is the more intellectual one, while

Gogo pays more attention to his boots. The boot problem can reveal many aspects of the pair's identity. Bennett (36-37) expresses how it further ties Estragon to the earth, to the physical. Furthermore, despite Gogo only blaming the boot, Didi also suggests that Gogo is equally at fault here, similarly to how he and Didi also misshape each other through their personalities rubbing off on each other (Bennett 41).

Bloom points out how similar the pair's nightly appearances are to actors coming to the theatre every evening to give performances (13). Hutchings, however, notes that they also serve as an audience, for the entrance of Pozzo and Lucky (33). This phenomenon creates one of the meeting points between reality and illusion present in the play. Hornby (32) identifies such literary and real-life references as one of the sources of metadrama. Furthermore, Hutchings points out how just like people outside the theatre, Didi, Gogo and Pozzo all seek validation of their existence from other people. Therefore, the two pairs validate each other's existence just as the audience does (33). They give each other the "impression" they exist and provide more hope for each other than the possible arrival of Godot ever did.

Bennett (42) proposes how their suicidal thoughts are not a result of their lack of hope but their inability to embrace their future that might or might not come. For this seemingly inescapable waiting, Cuddy (50) likens their situation to Dante's Neutrals, who have to pass their time as they can, as they do not have the chance to proceed to either Inferno or Purgatorium. As Hutchings (45) observes, their motivation might come from negative and positive reinforcement. They fear their potential punishment for not waiting, and they await their salvation for doing so. On the other hand, as Athanasopoulou-Kypriou implies, based on Breuer, Godot's figure might be a *petitio principii* (44). *Petitio principii*, first mentioned as one of the thirteen identified fallacies in Aristotle's *On Sophistical Refutations*, is a type of faulty reasoning in which a cause is fabricated to reach the desired conclusions (Aristotle 133-135). Committing this fallacy manifests itself in Didi and Gogo inventing their own Godot to justify

their lives, therefore creating the reason that leads to their desired consequence. Due to Didi 'leading the witness', the boy's responses are also used as support for their faulty reasoning. The boy might not be telling the truth, they might be talking about different people, and Didi and Gogo might not be the people the boy is looking for as he called for a Mister Albert (Beckett 163).

The identities of Gogo and Didi are not only defined by themselves but also by the nature of Godot, and thus the part Godot plays in their lives. His figure has been equated to many different concepts and all these possibilities allow for a plethora of often conflicting interpretations.¹ Beckett, however, often angrily denied several, stating that "If I knew who Godot was, I would have said so in the play," and "If Godot were God, I would have called him that." (qtd. in Bair 382-383). The only common aspect these interpretations share is the fact that Beckett does not allow Gogo and Didi to make their exits.

If Godot does exist somewhere, then the tramps' waiting is not in vain, but otherwise, it only stresses their inability to face their hopeless situation. This situation is being established from the very beginning, Hutchings (27) points out, with the line "nothing to be done" (Beckett 9). Moreover, he adds how these characters focus on the past, sharing memories and vaguely-remembered common knowledge while seemingly avoiding their present and future (29-30). The latter would usually lead them to painful experiences: contemplating suicide, the boy's message keeping their possibly false hopes alive, and their fears that the one approaching them is Godot. Kubiak mentions how they could try to escape the negative nothingness Godot represents in their lives. However, a Heideggerian reading suggests that this nothingness is positive, as new things can arise from it (401-402). Furthermore, as Steffney explains, nothingness is not the opposite of being but a type of concealment in Heideggerian philosophy

¹ Among others: God (Atkinson qtd. in Bennett 28, Baldwin qtd. in Hutchings), hope (Cohn), positive nothingness (Kubiak), negative nothingness (Cuddy), the projection of people's wishes (Athanasopoulou-Kypriou).

(93). Magrini summarises Heidegger's sentiment by saying that the feeling of anxiety makes Dasein² face the nothingness of existence. Successfully facing this nullity leads to an authentic existence that makes it possible to come to oneself and regain one's freedom (78). However, it is possible to come into contact with one's nothingness and not reach this desired state, as Dasein is absorbed in its inauthentic existence (Magrini 81). Perhaps this is the case with Didi and Gogo as well.

Critics, analysing Beckett's play on absurdist terms, often use the setting of the play to further exemplify this hopelessness, nothingness, and its universal nature. Despite this being the norm, Bennett (36) explains how leaving behind absurdism, the setting can be seen in another light. Since it is a country road, it must connect two small towns. The tree might be dead only in its looks as it might be fall or winter. Bennett (36) also exemplifies nothingness with the tree on stage but arrives at a much more optimistic reading of the play. The tree goes through stages of growth and death during the seasons; therefore, nothingness is part of its natural life cycle. The period of nothingness is needed for growth. The tramps separate after each night, but even the beaten-up Gogo finds the strength to go on with Didi by his side. These periods of nothingness, the time spent alone, and also their suicidal tendencies brought the two closer, giving way to growth. For these reasons, Bennett argues that Beckett's play is about the possibilities and the growth one can go through while connecting with other people (44).

² (Da-sein: there-being). One proposal for how to think about the term 'Dasein' is that it is Heidegger's label for the distinctive *mode* of Being realized by human beings. [...] we might conceive of it as Heidegger's term for the distinctive kind of *entity* that human beings as such are. [...] Dasein is not to be understood as 'the biological human being'. Nor is it to be understood as 'the person'. Haugeland (2005, 423) argues that Dasein is "*a way of life* shared by the members of some community. ("Martin Heidegger", Wheeler)

2.2 “Life in a box is better than no life at all.”

The main goal of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern throughout the play is to understand the situation they find themselves in, but at the same time, they fail to recognise it and even deny the other options presented to them. Gruber (300-301) explains how the Player is free of limitations and is without a true identity as he is expected to embody others. In contrast with the Player, however, Ros and Guil are only free “within limits” (Stoppard 108), as they mention on the boat on their way to England. Fleming (57) also points out Guil’s enthusiasm for boats as they have a set course and one can be free but also contained: “I’m very fond of boats myself. I like the way they’re — contained. You don’t have to worry about which way to go, or whether to go at all — the question doesn’t arise, because you’re on a boat, aren’t you? [...] I think I’ll spend most of my life on boats.” (Stoppard 92).

Guil mentions that he will probably spend most of his life on boats and that is quite true considering how they always seem to be free only within a set framework of events. Although every living being exists within mostly external limits (social, financial, biologically inherited etc.), Ros and Guil seem to be subjects to many self-imposed limitations as well, being too dependent on others. “Life in a box is better than no life at all” (Stoppard 62), as Ros explains, because someone might come at any moment to tell them to come out of the box. This remark also defines their whole living experience, not only their wish to avoid death. Even in this situation, Ros feels he would have a choice, but needs some outer force to make the choice to stay in the box or leave, as he states: “You’d have a choice at least. You could lie there thinking — well, at least I’m not dead! In a minute someone’s going to bang on the lid and tell me to come out” (62). Thus, he would be submitting to others’ will once more. This explains their decision not to act even when they see the letter ordering Hamlet’s death and even when it contains their death sentence.

The Player could give the guiding Ros and Guil seek but they do not utilize it. Egan, coming to the same conclusion, asserts the importance of the Player and acting in general. He points out the fact that each game and role-playing scenario enables the pair to gain a deeper understanding of their situation (63). Nevertheless, looking at their first encounter with the Tragedians, it seems Guil is disappointed, as he was hoping for a significant change in their predicament with the coins. Ros not believing that the music is real reminds Guil of a fable in which they thought a unicorn was just a horse with an arrow in its head. Egan (61) correlates this fable to Ros and Guil failing to realise the visible importance of one of the most significant encounters they had, thinking that there is “No enigma, no dignity, nothing classical, portentous, only this—a comic pornographer and a rabble of prostitutes...” (Stoppard 18).

What makes it even harder for Ros and Guil to form their identity is, for one, the fact that they exist both inside and outside *Hamlet*'s plot. Besides this and despite their apparent reluctance to play, they also seem like actors trapped in their roles (Fleming 53) or waiting and trying to pass time backstage until their next cue (Gordon 62). Their remark, “Well, we’ll know better next time.” (Stoppard 117), suggests that like actors, they are also destined to relive this endlessly. They are bound by Shakespeare and Stoppard likewise. One of the comical aspects of the play comes from the contrast of the Elizabethan and more contemporary language and issues (Gordon 11), which also makes it harder for Ros and Guil to find their place in the Shakespearean level of the play. As Wilcher (112) points out, they have to decode the blank verse of Shakespeare’s time and guess what someone could mean by it. Furthermore, Stoppard also extends the indistinguishable nature of these characters to Ros and Guil themselves, as they also seem frequently confused by which of the two they are (Fleming 55).

Gordon (64) emphasises how Ros and Guil gradually transform into the spectators of not only *Hamlet*, but also of their own lives as instead of meaningful action, they seem to role-

play through their lives. They even express their confusion over the fact that they should act and that their “little deaths” could have significance:

ROS. They had it in for us, didn't they? Right from the beginning. Who'd have thought that we were so important?

GUIL. But why? Was it all for this? Who are we that so much should converge on our little deaths? (In anguish to the PLAYER.) Who are we?

PLAYER. You are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. That's enough.

GUIL. No - it is not enough. To be told so little - to such an end - and still, finally, to be denied an explanation...

PLAYER. In our experience, most things end in death. (Stoppard 114).

Therefore, even they put themselves into the minor role Shakespeare gave them. However, despite all these struggles, they still long for the exact opposite of what they are destined to do: staying alive. As Gruber (303) notes, Guil also expresses how he longs for the beginning when he might have changed his fate, once again not realising that their actual choice came along near the end when they discovered the letter on the ship.

2.3 The die is cast

Fleming stresses that although many view Ros and Guil's inseparability as being robbed of their identities, the play also proposes many philosophical questions about the nature of self (55-56). The co-dependence of Didi and Gogo also goes beyond the question of their completing each other or clashing and influencing each other. Co-dependence, playing games, simultaneously presenting as actors and spectators in their lives, and being trapped in the feeling of powerlessness connect the pairs of the two plays. However, each pair wants what the other pair has: those predestined to wait endlessly wish to die, but those predestined to die would rather live miserably in a box. Moreover, the games of the two plays have a different nature

too. For Didi and Gogo, it is more like a distraction while spending time in company, whereas the games of Ros and Guil have a deeper significance. Also, Didi and Gogo seem to be living their lives in a way that serves them in a sense, and they are aware of their predestined fate to wait. However, Ros and Guil, while completing their quests imposed on them by others, can never be sure if what they are working towards would be beneficial for them or quite the opposite. They only realise their very possible demise on the ship, while the audience knows from the beginning of the play, hence its dramatic irony. Whether the characters of these plays realise it or not, their lives are already decided for them in many ways. As Julius Caesar allegedly said: "The die is cast".

3. Autonomy and fate

3.1 "Yes, let's go. (*They do not move.*)"

Estragon and Vladimir seem to have free will initially, but, as the play goes on, it becomes more and more questionable with the improvised theatrical movements and the recitation of vaguely remembered basic knowledge (Bloom 6, 126). They deliberate on their options when, for example, they decide if they should help Pozzo or not. They also choose not to leave and not to kill themselves, but that does not necessarily mean that it is free will and not a predestined fate that seems like their choice. For instance, when they mention leaving, they choose between agreeing on waiting instead and deciding that they should go but not moving at all. They have a choice, but essentially both alternatives lead to staying. It is as if their options were the same, only disguised to be different.

Additionally, the movement and placing of characters are not only important in binding Didi and Gogo to the physical or intellectual aspects of life. As Hutchings observes, the arrival of Pozzo gives the tramps a theatrical director as Pozzo even dictates the position of the characters (36). This is most evident with Lucky, repeatedly telling him "Back! [Enter Lucky

backwards.] Stop! [Lucky stops.] Turn!” (75). Although Pozzo’s role of directing the characters can be seen with Didi and Gogo as well: “Comfort him, since you pity him. [Estragon hesitates.] Come on. [Estragon takes the handkerchief.] Wipe away his tears, he’ll feel less forsaken. [...] Make haste, before he stops.” (101). Didi and Gogo also seem to be subjected to Pozzo’s will. However, appropriating Didi’s line “The essential doesn’t change” (Beckett 65), Bennett stresses how the characters’ essence does not change with their actions. Their understanding of themselves and their choices only reinforce their role (39-40). Pozzo also admits that his and Lucky’s roles could have been different “If chance had not willed otherwise” (Beckett 99), which would lead to the same conclusion: one’s essence depends more on chance than on any course of action. Additionally, even though Lucky’s name would make the readership assume otherwise at first, the truly lucky character is Pozzo because he ‘got Lucky’ both in a literal and figurative sense. Thus, names are not of importance in *Godot*’s world as the characters’ essence has already been decided beforehand.

Concerning speech, Bloom mentions how Lucky’s speech is “imperfect memory, an uncontrollable stream of unconsciousness” (6). Similarly, Didi’s speech is often built up of inaccurately remembered knowledge. However, Halloran adds that Didi’s speech is more cliché-based mixed with jargon, which results in his speech generating an endless string of associations until it “has turned itself inside-out” (102). Halloran takes Didi’s hortatory speech from act II of *Waiting for Godot* as an example of this phenomenon. Didi starts his monologue addressing themselves, “Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! (Pause. Vehemently.) Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. Not indeed that we personally are needed”, but as Gogo seems unaffected by his words, Didi once again retreats to the same conclusions: “But that is not the question. What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion, one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come -” (Beckett

289). Halloran likens Didi's speech to Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy and notes that Hamlet might not decide his fate, but he can have freedom in his use of words. Didi, however, does not seem to be in control of his words as rather than encouraging Gogo to act, Didi manages to convince himself not to act but continue waiting instead (Halloran 102).

Hutchings claims that Didi not being in control of his words is somewhat true for the boy as well (37). The information that Didi and Gogo receive on Godot is usually not suggested by the boy himself. He only affirms what Didi proposes. As Hutchings (37) points out, in most cases, the boy only gives a negative response to questions that contain negative phrases such as:

VLADIMIR. You don't know me?

BOY. No Sir.

VLADIMIR. It wasn't you came yesterday?

BOY. No Sir.

...

VLADIMIR. He doesn't beat you?

BOY. No Sir, not me. (Beckett 171,173)

His behaviour could either be the result of his politeness, wanting to please the adults, shyness, or even fear (37-38). Hutchings also adds that the only statements of the boy that are not "Yes" or "No" are either his replies to subjective questions like the enquiry about his happiness or his promise that Godot will not come today but he will come tomorrow (38). Consequently, it seems like Didi uses the boy and his dubious responses as a way to further justify his false reasoning for their lifestyle.

Godot, therefore, instead of encouraging action, seems to limit it and as Durán notes, the reason for this limitation of freedom comes from the characters' blind faith, which Durán relates to what Camus calls the sacrifice of intellect: philosophical suicide (986). As Durán

explains Camus' view, "By adopting systems of belief such as religion, philosophy, astrology, or what have you, one imposes a false logic and order on this world" (986). Consequently, this would mean that if Didi and Gogo choose to wait for Godot and not commit physical suicide, they will end up committing philosophical suicide. Therefore, these characters have limited autonomy not only because of chance, the futility of language, Godot, each other, and Beckett but also due to imposing a false meaning to their lives.

3.2 "Decides? It is written."

The fate of Ros and Guil is not only bound by Stoppard and Shakespeare but also other characters like Claudius. As Guil points out, "it would be presumptuous of us to interfere with the design of fate or even kings" (Stoppard 102). They continually choose not to interfere, for instance, when they see the letter ordering Hamlet's death. In this case, their choice could be seen as exercising their autonomy. However, knowing that they remain passive even after realising that the new letter contains their death sentence, it seems more likely that they merely submit themselves to the decisions of others. Gruber suggests that choosing not to choose is still a choice, but rather than their choices making Ros and Guil the protagonists they could be, they become cowards instead (306). Gordon also adds that Stoppard often emphasises how Ros and Guil have a choice, but they constantly miss their chance for asserting their free will. As Gordon further explains, this play allows Ros and Guil to choose if they wish to be of importance or not, which is also a choice between a pointless and a meaningful death (18-19).

Ros and Guil insist that they have no control and need guidance, but as Gruber (302) argues, they are not the helpless victims they are often understood to be. As he points out, they do have options, which can be seen best from the theories they make up for arriving in England (305). However, Guil saying "At least we are presented with alternatives [...]—But not choice" (Stoppard 30) seems to suggest the opposite. Guil's belief echoes the same sentiment as them

mentioning how they are only free within limits: they might have a choice in redundant matters, but not in important issues. In contrast, Guil later expresses his belief that “Your smallest action sets off another somewhere else...” (Stoppard 31), seemingly advocating for the exact opposite of what he mentioned not long ago. The idea of such a chain reaction seems to suggest that human agency rules over fate. However, as Fleming (56-57) points out, Guil starts to further elaborate on the topic and by the end, he seems to feel an inevitable fate at play. Thus, by saying “There’s a logic at work — it’s all done for you, don’t worry” (Stoppard 31), even this glimpse of autonomy is revoked by him.

As they gradually lose their sense of self-determination, Ros and Guil shift their focus to trying to comprehend their situation instead of breaking out of it. From the beginning of the play, it is apparent that the protagonists entered a highly irrational world, and Guil realises that during the coin tossing as he becomes more and more alarmed. However, just as they tend to miss moments of choice, they overlook every opportunity for understanding their entire situation, not only their eventual fate. As Fleming (59-60) points out, the Tragedians’ dumb show hints at Ros and Guil’s fate, yet they still fail to recognize their destiny. The Player even tells them that

PLAYER. ... we aim at the point where everyone who is marked for death dies.

...

GUIL. Who decides?

PLAYER. (switching off his smile) Decides? It is written. (Stoppard 71-72),

which further highlights their entrapment and makes a reference to theatre itself. As Fleming (60) quotes Brassell, it also suggests a hidden design behind their lives that the audience and the Players can see, but Ros and Guil themselves cannot. This is perhaps true of all people, as one only plays their part and cannot know what influence their action or inaction might have. A significant portion of *Ros and Guil*’s metatheatricality comes from such dramatic irony, self-

reference, and the hidden designs Brassell mentioned drawing a parallel between theatre and real life. This play seems to exploit almost all mentioned types of metadrama included in the list used by Hornby (32).³ Therefore, the autonomy of Ros and Guil is influenced by the dramatic irony they face, their pretences, the fact that they transform themselves back into the minor characters they were in *Hamlet*, and evidently by Stoppard and Shakespeare.

3.3 The one-sided coins of fate

Hence, all four protagonists have limited freedom due to external factors just as much as they restrict themselves. They impose a false narrative on themselves and their lives: one of waiting to avoid acting and one of not being important or knowledgeable enough to act. Ros and Guil believe that they are presented with alternatives but not choices, while seemingly, they do have several choices despite Ros and Guil not acting on them. In contrast, Didi and Gogo believe that they have a choice but seem to be presented with alternatives, all of which lead to the same result. Didi and Gogo seem to be content with the vague information they can get, while Ros and Guil feel like they need guidance as such ambiguous riddles are not enough for deciding if something is true or not. Didi and Guil both seem to be troubled by conflicting thoughts; thus, their speech is full of contradictions, and it is even more difficult for them to choose with certainty. Furthermore, while Didi and Gogo choose between their alternatives in speech, they always resort to the same actions, as opposed to Ros and Guil choosing to remain passive both in speech and action. Moreover, in *Godot*, all essence depends on chance, while in *Ros and Guil*, chance is important mostly in the coin-tossing scene, which establishes the tone of the drama in the beginning. Therefore, the world of both plays is immensely dependent on either chance, fate, or both, allowing only for small contributions from its inhabitants. It is

³ Namely, play within the play, role-playing within the role, literary and real-life reference, and self-reference.

as if both pairs were tossing coins with fate when making choices, not realising that both sides of the coin lead to the same result.

4. Mortality and stage death

4.1 “We’ve nothing more to do here.”

In *Godot*’s world, death is only present in certain interpretations of Godot’s character, the characters’ discourse, and stage metaphors. Instead of their awaited deaths, the tramps’ reality lies in various forms of suffering and coping with the fact that, just like Godot, death is also always around the corner, constantly allowing them to live one more day. For this reason, among others, many thought Godot would represent death, but it could seem rather unlikely as Didi and Gogo welcome death but fear their supposed saviour, Godot. Perhaps Godot could be death itself if one supposes that they either fear death while also being curious about it, or they long for death while not expecting it to actually come as that would be the end of their banter together. Although they echo the sentiment that there is nothing to be done from the very beginning of the play, Didi and Gogo always find something to be done. In contrast, in the cases of doing something to Didi’s boots or their fate, to which there is nothing to be done indeed.

Didi and Gogo wish for death, but as Gordon points out, Beckett’s characters that seem to be in the slowly advancing process of dying can never die by the end of the play, only draw nearer to their eventual natural death (20). Their presumed death also might not even occur, just as their suicidal thoughts always lead to them going on. As Bennett notes, “[Beckett] refuses to let humanity negate itself”. The motif of death, being the ultimate nothingness, only manages to bring them closer to one another and help them realise the meaning of their circumstances (44). Upon hearing the dead voices talk about death and their lives, they even seem bitter, as they say:

ESTRAGON. They talk about their lives.

VLADIMIR. To have lived is not enough for them.

ESTRAGON. They have to talk about it.

VLADIMIR. To be dead is not enough for them. (Beckett 215).

As Hutchings points out, the voices are incapable of staying silent even if they are not heard by anyone besides themselves, just like how the souls Dante meets along his journey from *Inferno* to *Paradiso* speak freely of themselves (39-40). Similarly, even when Gogo asks Didi to stop talking and Gogo manages to fall asleep, Didi wakes him as usual, as he feels lonely without him.

In terms of stage metaphors for death, Davies observes how Pozzo and Didi both mention human existence as giving birth “astride of a grave” (Beckett 333, 339) giving way to the opportunity to present such dying existence to an audience looking up at the stage from six feet under (87). Graver further adds how for many, the sole tree present on stage can not only remind one of nature and life, but it can also be reminiscent of the cross, the tree on which Judas died, and the tree beside Dante’s gates of *Inferno* (60). Davis suggests how the claustrophobic feel of the stage and Didi and Gogo feeling like they are “surrounded! [...] There’s no way out there” (Beckett 263) could be a metaphor for their confined human existence they cannot escape (98).

Didi and Gogo suffering from bodily punishments like sore feet, being beaten, or bladder problems, Cuddy claims, creates further opportunities to blame their surroundings for their problems. Besides that, it is also a tool of their torture, along with the boy, who keeps their hope alive (49, 58). Cuddy likens Didi and Gogo to Dante's *Neutrals*, giving a reason for Didi and Gogo never actually dying but being trapped in the waiting room of Dante instead (49-50). Hutchings, however, mentions how Beckett’s version of Hell is more like the biblical *Sheol* than Dante’s *Inferno*. Didi and Gogo exist in *Sheol*’s darkness and stillness where vaguely defined shadows of who were once people roam the lands, not yet reaching complete

nonexistence (40), as Beckett does not let them either. Therefore, they are not only restricted by Beckett and the audiences in their everyday decisions but also in death. Beckett binds them with the title as the audience becomes conscious of their fate before they even start reading. Besides that, Didi and Gogo also cannot die since the play is repeatedly performed and reread all over the world; thus, they are always waiting somewhere. Therefore, their hopeless situation extends to the setting of the play, physical issues, and their indebtedness to their audiences.

4.2 “Now you see me, now you —”

Ros and Guil are constantly surrounded by either genuine or acted death. Although they contemplate it several times, they would choose to live even if it meant a miserable life. As Gordon points out, Ros and Guil's way of thinking is similar to the two tramps of *Waiting for Godot* in always going on. Despite this viewpoint, Ros and Guil accept their destiny, whether it is changeable or not (13-14). Moreover, Fleming (62-63) mentions that Guil takes advantage of their supposed fate as he justifies his immoral actions. He rationalizes the fact that they do not try to save Hamlet from his death sentence by saying that “it would be presumptuous of us to interfere with the designs of fate or even of kings” (Stoppard 102). Furthermore, claiming that “If we have a destiny, then so had he— and if this is ours, then that was his—and if there are no explanations for us, then let there be none for him” (Stoppard 115), he also rationalizes his attempted murder of the Player (Fleming 63). Guil intended to impose a death no less meaningless than his own on the Player, but he does not share Guil's destiny; hence, his attempt was in vain. Similarly to Guil, Ros also seems to occasionally blame their fate, as he expresses his suspicions saying “They had it in for us, didn't they?” (Stoppard 114). Fate seems to be bothering them, but at times, it is utterly convenient for them as they have something other than themselves to condemn.

One of the most significant discussions on death takes place between Guil and the Player, as Guil exclaims:

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 it 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: here one minute and gone the next and never coming back-an exit, unobtrusive and unannounced, a disappearance gathering weight as it goes on, until, finally, it is heavy with death. (Stoppard 76-77).

However, by stabbing the Player on the boat, Guil helps the Player do just what he was advocating against: a believable on-stage death (Egan 68). Furthermore, Egan adds that in his monologue, Guil foreshadows their deaths as they do not die such a spectacular death as the Player does. Ros and Guil are merely there one minute and gone the next. Therefore, seemingly they get a fairly fitting death sentence (69). Guil even echoes his own words from this monologue when disappearing: “Now you see me, now you—” (Stoppard 117), and as Gruber notes, Guil turns their death into a game of hide-and-seek (299). Essentially, they also resort to “playing” their deaths, except, instead of a theatrical performance such as the Player’s, they give their audiences the antithesis of acting: leaving them to resort to their imagination. Gruber stresses how their meaningless deaths confirm that Shakespeare was right, as Ros and Guil lack the dramatic substance to have a right to a meaningful death. Their dead bodies cannot be displayed either, which would at least be proof that they had ever lived (307). After all, their frequent mention of their “little deaths” and insignificance proved to be their self-fulfilling prophecy.

Nevertheless, simply disappearing cannot merely mean that they died a death that Guil believes to be a real death. As their passing was not witnessed, it can also not be beyond doubt that they actually died. Consequently, at once, the readership also has to come to term with the

fact that “We only know what we're told, and that's little enough. And for all we know it isn't even true” (Stoppard 58). Thus, it depends on the readership if they take the advice of the Player to trust, as “truth is only that which is taken to be true” (58). “We'll know better next time” (Stoppard 117) might allude to how just as actors, they have to re-enact all the confusion they went through in hopes of one day understanding. The death of the Player is seen but indubitably only as an illusion. The only deaths that the audience can be certain of are those in the last scene of *Hamlet* appearing on stage.

4.3 Hide-and-seek with death

Thus, Didi and Gogo are surrounded by suffering but long for death, while Ros and Guil are surrounded by death but would rather suffer confined in a box than die. For Didi and Gogo, death is a force that strengthens their bond. No matter how one interprets their situation, they did not and cannot reach absolute nothingness. In contrast, Ros and Guil do not attribute such great significance to death as Guil minimizes it to a game of hide-and-seek in which one does not reappear. This analogy of playing hide-and-seek with death would assign the role of seekers to Didi and Gogo as they wish to die, while Ros and Guil become the hidings.

Furthermore, most deaths in Stoppard's play are acted out by the Tragedians. Therefore, in *Godot*, death is just an illusion, as Didi and Gogo cannot reach it, whereas, in *Ros and Guil*, it is chiefly illusory, as it is either performed or not seen at all. The characters of both plays have to face the fact that they will have to relive their parts in their plot as both plays stresses the fact that what the characters experience is not a one-time occurrence. Didi, Gogo, Ros and Guil are all trapped in time and space just as much as in their destiny and having to relive it.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to examine how reality and illusion intertwine in various parts of life, as seen in *Waiting for Godot* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. The dividing line between reality and illusion has always been difficult to pinpoint in theatre, and accordingly, in the case of these plays as well. Due to their co-dependence, forming a distinct identity is a complicated task for the protagonists, especially as they seek validation of their existence from others and submit to others' will. The main characters submit to the wishes of those seemingly superior to them, as they feel like they do not have a say in the grand scheme of things. Undoubtedly, they all look for some definite answers and guidance that would make them see the true nature of things. However, they need to decide on vague knowledge as Didi and Gogo only get answers they would like to hear, while the Player gives Ros and Guil options, but they refuse to take his advice. Although Didi and Gogo seem content with such vague information, Ros and Guil are more interested in understanding their circumstances than actively trying to evade their fate.

In terms of decision-making, the pairs are only "free within limits" (Stoppard 108). Limitations are imposed on them in the case of *Godot's* tramps primarily because their alternatives lead to the same results, but their restrictions are just as self-imposed as external. Limitations for Ros and Guil are also both internal and external.

In conclusion, the two plays are similar as the characters have to face their limited existence and have the chance to share it with someone else who does not completely influence them. The protagonists need to cope with this fact or distract themselves from it, and the subject of these activities is usually the practice of playing games. However, both the nature of their confinement and the underlying meaning of their games are different. Furthermore, Didi and Gogo cannot die on their own terms as Beckett does not allow the tramps to meet their deaths. Ros and Guil, on the other hand, cannot escape their deaths, and they are also too passive

to try to, nonetheless. As a result, both pairs are denied a meaningful death for varied reasons. All submit to their predestined fate, but Ros and Guil also have their shortcomings to blame, while Didi and Gogo's destiny might have been self-imposed all along. For Didi and Gogo, their death should depend more on their destiny as essence remains unchanged by action in their world. For them, options do not lead to different results, while action in *Ros and Guil* could have a meaningful effect on the unfolding chain of events, taking Guil's speech on chain reactions into account. Ros and Guil, however, choose inaction and, therefore, might not deserve a meaningful death as they minimize their role to that of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in *Hamlet*.

Works Cited

- Aristotle, "On Sophistical Refutations", *On Sophistical Refutations. On Coming-to-be and Passing Away. On the Cosmos*, Translated by E. S. Forster, and D. J. Furley, Harvard University Press, 1955, pp. 133-135.
- Athanasopoulou-Kypriou, Spyridoula. "Samuel Beckett Beyond the Problem of God." *Literature and Theology*, vol. 14, no. 1, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 34–51.
- Bair, Deidre. *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*. Simon & Schuster Inc., 1990.
- Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. Grove Press, 2006.
- Bennett, Michael Y. *Reassessing the theatre of the absurd: Camus, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Bloom, Harold., editor. *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot*. Infobase Publishing, 2008.
- Cuddy, Lois A. "Beckett's 'Dead Voices' in 'Waiting for Godot': New Inhabitants of Dante's 'Inferno.'" *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, Modern Language Studies, 1982, pp. 48–60, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3194475>.
- Davies, Matthew. "'Someone Is Looking at Me Still': The Audience-Creature Relationship in the Theater Plays of Samuel Beckett." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol.51, no. 1, University of Texas Press, 2009, pp. 76–93.
- Davis, Nathaniel. "'Not a Soul in Sight!': Beckett's Fourth Wall." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 38, no. 2, Indiana University Press, 2015, pp. 86–102.
- Durán, Richard. "'En Attendant Godot' or 'Le Suicide Philosophique': Beckett's Play from the Perspective of Camus's 'Le Mythe de Sisyphe.'" *The French Review*, vol. 82, no. 5, American Association of Teachers of French, 2009, pp. 982–93.

- Egan, Robert. "A Thin Beam of Light: The Purpose of Playing in "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead."” *Theatre Journal*, vol. 31, no. 1, The John Hopkins University Press, 1979, pp. 59-69.
- Fleming, John. *Stoppard's theatre: finding order amid chaos*. University of Texas Press, 2001, pp. 47-65.
- Graver, Lawrence. *Beckett: Waiting for Godot*. 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Gruber, William E. "Wheels within wheels, etcetera": Artistic Design in "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead". *Comparative Drama*, vol. 15, no.4, Comparative Drama, 1981, pp. 291-310.
- Gordon, Robert. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, Jumpers and The Real Thing: Text and Performance*. Macmillan, 1991.
- Halloran, Stephen M. "Language and the Absurd." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, vol. 6, no. 2, Penn State University Press, 1973, pp. 97–108.
- Hornby, Richard. *Drama, metadrama and perception*. Associated University Presse, 1986.
- Hutchings, William. *Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot: a reference guide*. Praeger Publishers, 2005, pp. 23-46.
- Kubiak, Aubrey D. "Godot: The Non-negative Nothingness." *Romance Notes*, vol. 48, no. 3, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for its Department of Romance Studies, 2008, pp. 395–405.
- Magrini, James. "“ Anxiety” in Heidegger’s Being and Time: The Harbinger of Authenticity.” *Dialogue*, College of DuPage, 2006, pp.77-86.
- Steffney, John. "Nothingness and Death in Heidegger and Zen Buddhism." *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol. 18, no. 1, Eastern Buddhist Society, 1985.
- Stoppard, Tom. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Faber and Faber, 2000.

Wheeler, Michael. "Martin Heidegger". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/>.

Wilcher, Robert. "Tom Stoppard and the Art of Communication." *Journal of Beckett Studies*, no. 8, Edinburgh University Press, 1982, pp. 105–23.