

ABSTRACT

Finding the “Right Angle:” Repositioning *Waiting for Godot* and *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* as Potential Expressions of Holocaust Remembrance

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As the number of Jewish Holocaust survivors continues to decline, we must find new ways to capture their hardships, memories, and legacies. Artistic images and dramatic representations possess the ability to meet this need because they put the past into a dialectical relationship with the present. Specifically, the human element and live, performative aspects of theatre enables this medium to speak directly to motifs in many Jewish Holocaust victims’ narratives: physical suffering, struggling to communicate, and the burden of “bearing witness.” My thesis proposes that culture can keep alive the memory of the Holocaust by revisiting theatrical works composed immediately after World War II and trying to understand them in light of this horrific event. I consider the characterization, fragmented dialogue, and metatheatrical elements of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, as well as Beckett’s own biography, to prove its potential to act as a Holocaust drama. I then meditated Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* in the same manner, focusing mostly on the play’s textual exchange with *Hamlet* and the ideas of hegemonic culture. Both sections conclude by demonstrating how these plays affect the audience and consequently prove the dangers of forgetting the stories of the Jews of the Holocaust.

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REPOSITIONING *WAITING FOR GODOT* AND *ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN
ARE DEAD* AS POTENTIAL EXPRESSIONS OF HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE

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INTRODUCTION

Dying Memories and Living Images

The Holocaust is dying. At least, this is the haunting claim made by scholar Susan Gubar in her book *Poetry After Auschwitz* (1). She argues that immediately after World War II, the Holocaust was dying, and, even worse, began to be “closed or forbidden to memory” (1). Remembering the Holocaust is not an easy subject; capturing its atrocities in literature is even more difficult. After Theodor Adorno’s famous decree “After Auschwitz to write a poem is barbaric,” most artists seemed to approach representations of the Holocaust with extreme skepticism and caution (qtd. in Schwarz 22). Fear of abusing personal pain for profit emerged amongst writers and scholars. Only eyewitness accounts were initially considered able to retain verisimilitude and genuineness. Survivors appeared to want “exclusive rights to the Holocaust” (qtd. in Gubar 5). However, as these survivors age, is it not important to keep their memories alive? Would not failing to remember the millions of Jews and other minorities who perished only signify Nazi victory? Gubar claims, “we must keep [the Holocaust] alive *as* dying” (7). In order to reconcile these two arguments, Walter Benjamin turns to images—representations that possess the ability to “put the ‘then’ of the past into a dialectical relationship with the ‘now’ of the present” (Gubar 7). In his book *Illuminations*, Benjamin claims, “every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (qtd. in Gubar 7). To prevent the tragic disappearance of Holocaust memories and images, present day society must be exposed to these images and recognize them as a contemporary concern. One way to create Benjamin’s dialectical relationship is to revisit artistic images offered to the hurting

cultures soon after World War II and to reclaim and understand these images in light of the Holocaust.

A recent neurological study suggests that creative art, specifically fictional narrative, helps cultivate a foundation of compassion in individuals, which is key to creating Benjamin's proposed "dialectical relationship." Psychologist Raymond Mar's study of the brain's neurological reaction to narrative concluded, "there was substantial overlap in the brain networks used to understand stories and the networks used to navigate interaction with other individual," especially "interactions in which we're trying to figure out the thoughts and feelings of others" (Paul 2). Being exposed to stories, despite their fictional nature, allows "a unique opportunity" to become more empathetic, caring, and understanding of someone's perspective, no matter how it varies from one's own (Paul 2). Dr. Keith Oatley claims, "novels, stories, and dramas can help us understand the complexities of social life" (Paul 2). Though the horrors of the Holocaust are truly unfathomable, these neurological findings suggest that exposure to fictive narratives furthers an individual's ability to at least see the importance of this event and the people involved. Connections can begin to be made that have the potential to lead to understanding.

Arguably, no presentation of fictional narrative is more conducive to community, connection, and showing a story's importance than theatre. Theatre requires the human element, appealing by definition to the audience's most basic common trait—their shared humanity. Also, the presence of live actors and spectators, combined with the live, performative aspects of theatre, enables this medium to speak directly to motifs in many Jewish Holocaust victims' narratives: physical suffering, struggling to communicate, and the burden of "bearing witness." Regarding the act of bearing witness, the other advantage

theatre has over other artistic mediums is the passage of time. With a book, a poem, or a piece of art, participants hold the power of time in their hands, as they are able to stop reading or looking at any point they desire. In theatre, however, the entire audience essentially must yield to the timing of the play. Thus, as they watch, the drama presently becomes a part of a collective memory, as well as an individual one. The ability to remember pieces of the play as it unfolds is essential to understanding it in its entirety. To react to and reflect on a play after its conclusion engages us in an act of remembrance, internally and communally. Therefore, theatre's ability to present narratives not only allows people to find understanding in places they typically would not, but also forces them into a communal experience partially dependent on remembrance. They are additionally forced to act as witnesses to the occurrences on stage, which continuously become part of their memory.

As previously mentioned, though the methods of remembering the Holocaust can create controversy, Holocaust remembrance remains important. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opens its video promotion of Days of Remembrance with Holocaust survivor Estelle Laughlin discussing the necessity of remembering. She reflects, "Memory is what shapes us. Memory is what teaches us. We must understand that's where our redemption is" (*Why We Remember the Holocaust*). Whether or not Laughlin's use of the pronoun "our" refers to all humanity or exclusively to the Jews of the Holocaust, she clearly notes that memory is key to one's personal preservation, progress, and improvement. With Holocaust survivors like herself becoming a rare resource, her statement calls us to action. New vessels must be uncovered to uphold these important memories and the lessons that accompany them. In regards to the previously mentioned findings and facts about artistic

images, narrative, and theatre, many options exist to take on this sacred task of creating a conversational relationship between the past and present, of remembering the Holocaust as dying.

My thesis proposes to reexamine post-World War II theatre in relation to the Holocaust to enable it to act as this conservational vessel. As examples, I reposition Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* as drawing on images, themes, and settings that evoke the Holocaust. Repositioning Beckett's and Stoppard's plays in this manner allows them to act as expressions of Holocaust remembrance without changing the physical text, design, or characters within them. The choice of these two plays comes from their specific theatrical qualities, as well as the context in which they were written. Importantly, both playwrights were directly affected by the terrible doctrines of Nazi Germany. I consider Beckett's own biography, as well as the characterization, fragmented dialogue, and metatheatrical elements of *Waiting for Godot*, to prove its potential to act as a Holocaust drama. Its images and symbols recall the intense physical and psychological suffering the Holocaust produced. I then analyze Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* in the same manner, focusing mostly on the play's textual exchange with *Hamlet* and Stoppard's use of Shakespeare's play (and Shakespeare himself) to explore figures of authority and of oppression. This method of textual exchange suggests the dangers of hegemonic culture, yet also captures the desperate need for the stories of the oppressed to be told. Both sections conclude by demonstrating how these plays affect the audience and consequently prove the dangers of forgetting the stories of the Jews of the Holocaust. By revisiting theatrical works composed soon after

World War II and attempting to comprehend them in this manner, theatrical culture can keep alive the fading memory of Holocaust victims and survivors.

CHAPTER ONE

Capturing the Unimaginable: Holocaust Imagery and Symbolism in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

Michael Billington once asked of Samuel Beckett's plays, "Is this the art which is the response to the despair and pity of our age, or is it made of the kind of futility which helped such desecrations of the spirit, such filth of ideologies, come into being?" (qtd. in Knowlson 216). Beckett was not only a playwright who significantly contributed to what is now called the Theatre of the Absurd, but also, he was a contemporary of World War II. He visited Nazi Germany, fought for the French Resistance in World War II, and witnessed Hitler's destructive impact on Western culture. Beckett's drama is extremely concerned with the human condition and its mysteries. His 1948 play *Waiting for Godot* seems to set these concerns in direct conversation with the Holocaust. *Waiting for Godot* depicts some of the horrors of the Holocaust, wrestles with its consequences, and attempts to allow the audience to experience empathy for its survivors.

To answer Susan Gubar's cry to keep the Holocaust alive, I believe it is helpful to undergo a reading of Samuel Beckett's post-World War II play *Waiting for Godot* as a kind of symbolic Holocaust Drama. I explore different historical characteristics of the Holocaust and Holocaust drama, how they can be seen in Beckett's play, and the themes they suggest. The life for Jews in the camps and ghettos, the struggles that occurred for Jewish Holocaust survivors, and the preservation of survivors' stories are all aspects of Holocaust history that directly inform this reading. Exploring such influences emphasizes certain ideas expressed in the play, specifically Beckett's view of the relationship between the body and the mind, the limitations of memory and language, and the universal and moral understanding of the play's minimalism. As these concepts unfold, the understanding of the practical, symbolic,

and philosophical functions of the play's audience arguably shifts, or even expands. This chapter finally explores the consequential shift in the audience's relationship to *Waiting for Godot*, allowing them to reconcile these past images to contemporary knowledge for the purpose of preserving the memory of the Holocaust.

Reading Beckett's play as a symbolic Holocaust drama allows for it to reinscribe these potent images and stories from the Holocaust. Gene Plunka claims, "The most important concerted effort that enabled the victims to survive was the will to bear witness... For most survivors the chance to speak comes later. To bear witness is the goal of their struggle" (275). To "bear witness" is also the goal and practical function of an audience, as a play "is designed for an audience to see, hear, and respond to" (Homan 14). This double act of witnessing opens the door for Beckett to place his audience in the position of Holocaust survivors. His characters are exposed to verbal and physical abuse. His design, from the costumes to the set, is stripped and minimalistic. His script is full of constricted movement and inconclusive dialogue. As previously discussed, all these elements of *Waiting for Godot* potentially symbolize different aspects of the Holocaust. Beckett successfully utilizes the responsive dimension of a theatre audience to educate his viewers in a more direct and confrontational manner than other mediums of art can. In doing so, he essentially overcomes the linguistic barrier that restricts and frustrates survivors' ability to express their experiences. He symbolically shows, not tells, his audience the story of Jews in the Holocaust. In fact, because his dialogue is overall "about nothing in particular," he ensures his audience will not be "carried along by the logic of language," forcing them to focus on the physical action (or rather inaction) being staged (Beckett 61, Esslin 20). The prisoners of

the Holocaust were similarly forced to observe the indifferent actions of the Nazis. Thus, Beckett grants significance to “bearing witness” and critiques complacency.

Beckett himself was deeply impacted by Nazi Germany and what he observed there. In fact, Beckett scholars have recently reassessed their original notions of Germany’s influence on the then developing artist. He first visited Germany in December 1936, “just as the tolerant façade rolled out for the Olympic Games was being rolled up again [and] [t]he Nazis were reasserting their grip on the capital of the Third Reich” (Sally). He stayed for six months. According to Knowlson, some of Beckett’s “later attitudes – politically as well as aesthetically – were nurtured and moulded at this stage” (qtd. in Sally). His newly published diaries from this visit to Germany affirm Knowlson’s claim. In Germany, Beckett indulged in his love of solitude. However, he also desperately tried to learn German by forcing himself into conversation, which influenced his artistic view of language. In regards to this conundrum, he wrote, “How absurd... the struggle to learn to be silent in another language” (Sally). His struggle with language certainly influenced his playwriting. Most likely, Beckett’s experience with German also allowed him to sympathize with Jews who later faced linguistic barriers, as demonstrated in *Waiting for Godot*’s dialogue.

During his initial trip to Germany, Beckett not only developed sympathy for the Jews, but also he additionally came to despise the Nazis. His German diaries reveal the beginning of his “uninterest in trying to understand the chaos of history and a growing acceptance of the mess of human [civilization] on its own terms” (Sally). Ironically, Beckett came to Germany to absorb its civilization and “cultural treasures” as soon as “the Nazis were, quite literally, ripping them from the gallery walls” (Sally). He developed a distain for “heil Hitler” greetings and the loud radio broadcasts. Beckett even called Nazis “great proud

angry poor putupons” (Sally). After listening to a radio broadcast of Hitler, Beckett noted the building national tension; he recorded, “They must fight soon or burst” in his diary (Sally). When World War II broke out, Beckett voluntarily fought in the French resistance. He once told Knowlson, “You couldn’t just stand by with your arms folded when you saw what they were doing to Jews” (qtd. in Sally). Notably, *Waiting for Godot* was written in 1948— three years after the war ends. Clearly, Beckett’s time in Germany and in the war directly informed his political and aesthetic ideas, and therefore his writing of *Waiting for Godot*. Such an impact drove Beckett to physically take action on what he observed through fighting and writing. In the same way, he places the responsibility to act on his audience and criticizes any indifference they may experience towards the staged physical struggles that they observe.

Through the use of the play’s “metadramatic dimension,” Beckett ensures his audience witnesses this indifference between his characters (Homan 13). The metadramatic dimension of a play is simply “the material or ground of the stage’s fictive world” that allows for self-reflection (Homan 13). With the exception of a soliloquy, a sort of “symbolic audience” always exists on stage, giving viewers “another image upon which the stage’s fictive world is constructed” (14). Therefore, if there are two or more characters on stage, and one is talking, the remaining character(s) act as an audience to the character that is speaking. The use of an actor-audience provides the true audience with key information regarding their relationship to the involved characters. However, Homan argues that an onstage audience is “inseparable from the existentialist’s notion that our human distinction...of all the earth’s creatures” is self-consciousness, or the ability to “play audience to our own actor” (13).

A linguistic analysis of *Waiting for Godot* demonstrates how the play's onstage audience functions in a similar manner to the house audience: it calls viewers to analyze what they see on stage in comparison to what they experience in their own physical reality. Of all the "utterances" made on stage, 24% are questions (Knowlson xx). However, only 12% of all lines said on stage are replies (xx). In fact, most of the replies do not act as answers at all, "since they leave the troubling problems that provoked the questions entirely unresolved" (xx). Clearly, the onstage audience silently listens to half of the questions posed. As is expected in *Waiting for Godot*, the overall response of the characters is inaction tainted by indifference.

Exploring the relationships and actions of Beckett's characters towards each other provides important insights into their relationship to the house audience. While helping direct *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett dedicated an entire section of his theatrical notebook to further define the relationships among the play's four main characters. He entitled the section "HELP" (Knowlson xxi). In it, he listed twenty-one instances in which "one of his characters asks for help from another of his fellow creatures" (xxi). The editor of Beckett's notebook, James Knowlson, lists the following results: fourteen are ignored, four are answered, one attempt [to give help] is made, one is not known, and one is "answered on condition" (xxi). The symbolic audience falls short in this regard as well, as the majority of the calls for help are completely ignored. However, the data also shows "the unpredictable and ambivalent nature of human sympathy and compassion" (xxi). Even more shocking, in *Waiting for Godot's* characters, the transition from gentle attitudes to inhumane ones is often unmotivated. For example, in Act One, Gogo speaks to the young boy both "*forcibly*" and "*violently*," though the boy is called "*timid*" multiple times (47-8). Because there is little or

no logic preceding such unpredictable changes in behavior like Gogo's, his words may come across to the audience as too dramatic or unrealistic. However, the Holocaust was an event so "unimaginable and irrational that logic and science ... seemed to be undermined" (Plunka 17). Thus, this image of human behavior is more accurate in the context of the Nazi/Jewish relations of the Holocaust than most audiences would like to recognize.

Beckett also allows his audience to function philosophically through universalizing his characters. The audience is thus directly included in the didactic aspect of the play, and the playwright relies on his audience's "ability to extrapolate general principles from our witness of ourselves" (Homan 13). The theme Beckett depends on his audience to grasp is found in almost all Holocaust drama: the call to "not be indifferent to the world's inhumanity" (Plunka 170). In order to achieve this goal, Beckett must first "universaliz[e] the experience" of his play (Plunka 94). Thus, he disassociates the setting of *Waiting for Godot* with a specific place or time period so that it appears to be timeless. Moreover, Didi and Gogo are sorts of Everyman. Holocaust drama sometimes draws such characters to "elicit the empathy of the audience" by depicting its Jewish characters as "representatives of all oppressed people" (Plunka 175). Audience members with no personal connections to the Holocaust are then able to relate more easily to a play. Beckett makes certain anyone can understand and engage in such an interpretation of *Waiting for Godot* by following this universalizing pattern. What he manipulates is his audience's connection to the play in order to engage the theme of indifference to inhumane actions (which will be expanded upon later in the chapter). Looking holistically at the play as an interpretive symbol of the Holocaust, Didi and Gogo could be seen as symbolic Jewish characters victimized by the Nazi rule.

Along these lines, because audience members observe Didi and Gogo's situation, they could be interpreted as complacent witnesses to the Holocaust. Whether they appreciate the play or not, most audience members experience frustration while watching *Waiting for Godot*. The characters' inaction and nonsensical dialogue, along with the play's anti-climatic plot, creates a sense of internal protest. However, because there is an assumed decorum expected of an audience member, no one would take action, express these feelings aloud, or try to persuade the characters on stage of their abnormal behavior. It is this reaction, or lack of reaction, that the play implores its audience to examine. The audience is illustrating the same inaction being demonstrated on stage. They are suppressing their emotions, failing to engage in purposeful conversation, and actively refusing to solve the problems happening in front of them. As the play goes on, the audience is placed in the position of Didi and Gogo. However, in a more meaningful way, the audience effectively becomes akin to those who witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust and, in the name of decorum, chose to do nothing. The audience is forced to face their indifference to the physical and symbolic struggles occurring before them.

Holocaust literature and drama focuses heavily on the physical, an emphasis partially influenced by "a key issue in the Nazi agenda"—Hitler's personal focus "on the body rather than the intellect or the arts" (Plunka 71). Hitler never received his diploma, was denied admission to art school, and found sole success as a young man in the very physical (and individualistic) sport of gymnastics. In Hitler's Germany, the case with the Jews was quite the opposite. They were "over-represented in trade, finance, commerce, the arts, and the sciences, yet under-represented in... occupations associated with manual labor." Therefore, when agriculture, industry, and physical labor became key components to Hitler's new

Germany, the Jews were seen more as a handicap than another human resource. In addition to an irrational hatred of the Jews, this “practical” question of labor led the Nazis to categorize them with the mentally and physically disabled and homosexuals, “all of whom were seen as biologically crippling to the Reich.” The lie that manual labor went against Jews’ nature would haunt them in both the ghettos and the concentration camps, as they were forced to do many tedious, yet meaningless physical tasks.

As a medium that essentially utilizes actors’ bodies as a means of expression, the theatre is especially able to symbolically express this plight faced by the Jews. Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* stages many moments of physical conflicts that suggest those experienced by the Jews of the Holocaust. For example, Didi’s and Gogo’s costumes do not portray them as laborers, but characters from the middle to upper class. They are both described as wearing bowler hats, as well as tattered business attire (suits). This description aligns with the Nazis’ stereotyping the Jews as more occupationally focused on trade and the arts and sciences than physical labor. Note, however, that the suits are indeed tattered. One could go so far as to claim that Didi and Gogo therefore represent fallen Decadents of late nineteenth century Europe¹. This depiction suggests Didi and Gogo as Aesthetes, proper artistic and literary types now made poor and irrelevant. In the context of the play, the idea of fallen Decadents parallels Nazi thinking: before the war, Jews were intellectuals concerned with artifice. Now, within the new Reich, the Nazis believed Jews had nothing to offer. The play supports this reading of their costumes. Gogo even claims to have been a poet at some point in his life previous to the action of the play (Beckett 14). Additionally, according to Jewish scholar Mordecai Shalev, Estragon’s name was originally “Levi,” a traditionally Jewish

¹ My understanding of Didi and Gogo as “fallen Decadents” derives from Dr. Richard Russell’s lecture on *Waiting for Godot* at Baylor University, Spring 2010.

name (qtd. in “Waiting for Youdi”). Considering the publication date, this appellation points to Beckett’s intention to suggest Estragon was Jewish and thus link his suffering to that experienced by millions of Jews in the Holocaust.

Another similarity of Didi and Gogo to the Jews of the Holocaust is the meaninglessness of their daily actions. As stated previously, Jews were forced into purposeless labor, such as “having to clean streets with toothbrushes,” because the Nazis “believed that Jews doing any type of hard labor went against their natural condition” (Plunka 72). Though Didi and Gogo never undertake such trivial labor (or any sort of physical labor for that matter), their actions and movements on stage often result in nothing. Perhaps the most recognizable example of this is when Gogo answers affirmatively to Didi’s question, “Well? Shall we go?” However, their words prove futile as “*they do not move*” (Beckett 88). Also, Didi constantly “*takes off his hat, peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, put it on again*” despite nothing ever happening, even when he “*knocks on the crown as though to dislodge a foreign body*” (Beckett 12). Similar meaningless and fruitless actions plague Didi and Gogo throughout the play. Such triviality may symbolize the Jews’ insignificant tasks of labor. To further the parallel, it is important to consider that, just as the Nazis forced the Jews into these actions, Beckett as playwright essentially forces Didi and Gogo into these actions. Beckett is, in no way, “Nazi like.” However, the power of the playwright over his characters is essential to the medium of theatre and enables it to engage in a conversation about control, specifically of one human being over another. On some level, most theatre-goers are consistently aware of the playwright’s “power.” The role of the playwright can often represent a hegemonic figure or idea: an invisible ruling force that defines their society. Therefore, Beckett critiques the power such authoritative figures or

ideas frequently exploit. Acknowledging Beckett's control of the action of the play allows Didi and Gogo to be perceived more so as victims of circumstance than merely ignorant, incapable characters who bring their absurd circumstances on themselves. As we will see later, the interactions between the controlling Pozzo and the pathetic Lucky in Act One are a perfect embodiment of this on the stage. In both the Holocaust and in *Waiting for Godot*, control is frequently abused to victimize the less powerful.

Unfortunately, in both cases, the party in control sustains the victims as well, however they choose. The Nazis took full advantage of their power, normally barely feeding the Jews kept in the concentration camps. "Prisoners were subject to constant hunger, thirst, fatigue," and especially malnutrition (Plunka 73). Malnutrition led a Holocaust victim's body through multiple other physical complications, eventually "progressing to the indifferent mechanical gaze of the walking dead" (Plunka 73). Malnutrition and its associated symptoms recur in the play.² In Act One, Gogo "*violently*" states, "I'm hungry" (21). The exchange that follows (which is repeated in Act Two) demonstrates the lack of access to food, for when Didi gives Gogo a turnip, after not being able to provide him with a carrot, Didi claims "Make it last, that's the last of them" (21) Gogo also gnaws pathetically on a bone Pozzo throws to the ground after practically begging for it from first Pozzo then Lucky. Didi and Gogo possess lethargic attitudes as well, and Gogo randomly falls asleep on stage, just as the Jews experienced a "dissipation of energy" because of malnutrition (Plunka 73). In a more abstract sense, Didi and Gogo seem to carry about them the "gaze of the walking dead" associated with malnutrition. Beckett includes many stage directions for both of them such

² In his essay "All the Dead Voices": The Landscape of Famine in *Waiting for Godot*, Joseph Roach convincingly argues the Beckett portrays the Irish potato famine throughout the play, adding evidence to the reading of Didi and Gogo as malnourished characters.

Didi “*staring sightlessly before him,*” Gogo “*gazes into distance,*” and “[Gogo] *reflects*” (13, 15, 19). Those in the Holocaust who became malnourished shared this same, distanced glare.

Malnutrition causes striking psychological effects, evidenced in *Waiting for Godot*. Especially within the context of the Holocaust, the Jews experienced, as well as relied on, many complex thought processes in attempts to alleviate their physical suffering. In regards to the Holocaust, Rosette C. Lamont observes, “Hope cannot cure malnutrition, but for a young, basically strong person the desire to live was often stirred by memory, that of one’s personal past” (qtd. in Plunka 51-2). There are two important applications of this claim to *Waiting for Godot*. First, Didi and Gogo undertake many exercises of memory through the play. They often attempt to recall their past; multiple times in the Act Two they even struggle to recall their actions from Act One. When they fail to remember something, the tension on stage usually increases. This failure occurs for the first time at the beginning of Act One, when Didi and Gogo cannot remember the day of the week. Gogo then tries to sleep, they argue, and a few lines later Gogo suggests that they hang themselves (17-8). Act Two opens similarly. Didi cannot remember a song and ends up arguing with Gogo (54). In part, their ability to maintain peace (or, at the least, contentment) with their existence and each other seems to be associated with their ability to remember how they arrived at their current state. Thus, they parallel Holocaust victims’ need for memory in order to have patience and survive; in *Waiting for Godot*, it is simply shown as more of an external struggle than an internal mental exercise.

Lamont’s observation suggests the importance of “personal past” in the Jewish tradition and their want to feel attached to a place, to have a sense of home and community.

However, the Jewish tradition calls for the Jews to be a people set apart. This calling establishes a conundrum for the Jewish people: should they remain set apart and face the consequences of being exiles within their own countries, or should they compromise and integrate themselves into popular culture? Often, Jewish communities chose to abide by their initial calling to be separate, making the concept of “home” even more important. However, the constant movement from regular subdivisions to ghettos to concentration camps did not allow Jews to feel rooted anywhere, not even within their own, created subculture.

Furthermore, the Nazis exclusively confined them to stark holding areas. This motif of physical displacement alongside a sort of geographical restriction is found throughout Holocaust literature. Because of the boundaries naturally presented by a stage, theatre is an effective medium to potentially demonstrate the Jews’ struggle with confinement. In *Waiting for Godot*, the set, as well as the blocking, emphasizes this motif. Beckett’s set calls solely for “a country road” and “a tree” (11). As a minimalist, Beckett makes his set essentially non-identifiable with a specific continent, country, or town. In fact, Didi and Gogo constantly argue about their location and whether or not they have been there before. This sort of detachment from one’s surroundings is what Jews felt in the ghettos and labor camps: these places were not their true homes. Also, just as the Jews were excluded from larger communities because of their “set apart-ness,” Didi and Gogo are completely outside any sort of culture or community. Pozzo claims to own the land they are on, but even then he angrily interrogates them as to why they are there (24).

Gogo does, however, describe the Holy Land’s topography in detail, which points back to a Jewish sense of longing for roots. He nostalgically recounts a memory of “the [colored] maps of the Holy Land” and “pale blue” Dead Sea (13). He dreams of going to the

“very pretty” place on his honeymoon where he will “be happy” (13). This image stands in stark contrast with the empty, bleak set. There is an implied significance in the use of the Holy Land as juxtaposing Didi and Gogo’s current location, especially considering Gogo’s nostalgic tone. This brief, but vivid reminiscence furthers the case for interpreting Didi and Gogo as Jewish characters. The Jews surely recalled their inherited homeland of the Holy Land/Promised Land often to mentally escape the ghettos and concentration camps.

One observation about the ghettos in particular is that “once the ghetto was created, Jews frequently lost the opportunity to flee; moreover, by doing so, they would have had to leave loved ones behind” (Plunka 189). The play imposes the same geographical limitation on Didi and Gogo that the Jews experienced. The boundaries of the stage are treated as though they are physical walls. Didi and Gogo wander constantly to the very edge of the wings and apron, but are both never able to completely exit the stage, even at the end of the play. At points, one of the two characters will exit, but the other will be unable. For example, Didi exits in Act One and blocks Gogo goes to “*follow him as far as the limits of the stage*” (18). Immediately after Gogo crosses, Didi re-enters. Blocking such as this, as well as Didi and Gogo’s multiple dialogues about leaving each other followed by inaction, symbolically underscores the largest problem faced by Jews who had the opportunity to escape. To leave the ghetto, like leaving the stage, would mean leaving behind a loved one. Thus, escape was typically not considered an option, which perhaps Gogo’s and Didi’s inability to leave stage for less than a moment reflects. The protagonists’ inability to leave the stage stems from their lack of control, directly paralleling this particular conflict for the Jews subjected to the Nazis’ confinement.

Along with being physically limited in their action by the stage, Didi and Gogo are emotionally suppressed characters. Sometimes brief moments of argument occur, but Didi and Gogo do not possess any evident depth of emotion and certainly do not experience any emotional growth. Instead, their conversations and actions simply seem to occur, as Didi states, “to pass the time” while they wait (14). Eric Bentley claims the play “represents the ‘waiting’ of the prisoners of Auschwitz and Buchenwald” (qtd. in Perloff 78). In the concentration camps, Jews normally had “a nervous state of mind” because of the constant “threat of ‘selection’ for gassing” (Plunka 74). Didi exhibits this state of nervousness throughout the play in his neurotic reminder to Gogo that they are “waiting for Godot” (74). Pozzo claims, and Didi indirectly agrees, that Godot “has [their] future in his hands,” which is probably the reason for his anxious waiting (29).

Didi and Gogo’s advanced age completes this comparison to the Jews of the Holocaust. Characteristically, Beckett is fascinated with the role of age and explores it throughout his plays. In *Waiting for Godot*, he chooses not to portray Didi and Gogo as young men. In fact, Gogo claims that their “blathering about nothing in particular” has been occurring “for half a century” (61). Therefore, they are probably around their seventies. However, in light of Bentley’s claim that Didi and Gogo symbolize imprisoned Jews, their old age possesses a problem. Because of the Nazis’ emphasis on manual labor, they would be among the first selected for gassing. This does not imply that Godot is symbolic of Nazi guards and that they are waiting to be gassed. In the play, these symbols and statements embody what that “nervous state of mind” may look like, which can especially be seen in the character of Didi. It also shows how the condition of one’s body can directly affect the condition one’s mind. Bentley concludes Didi and Gogo are “the prisoners behind...spiritual

walls and bared wire,” emotionally engaged as their bodies are physically engaged. This restricted lifestyle reflects that of the Jews in the Holocaust.

The exploration of the connection between one’s actions and one’s words, one’s body and one’s internal life, is a reoccurring theme in Holocaust drama and Beckett’s plays. In *Waiting for Godot*, the relationship of the internal to the external is especially important. Beckett was intrigued by Descartes’ theory that the mind and the body were two separate entities. However, Beckett believed that “the relation between mind and body is not quite as simple a matter” as many philosophers tried to make it (Murray 34). Thus, he blocks Didi and Gogo in a way that mocks Descartes’ ideas: “the time-lapse between decisions taken by characters and the actions which should logically follow” are comically, and often frustratingly, long (Murray 35). As seen in previous paragraphs, the relationship between mind and body was extremely important to the Jews of the Holocaust. They needed to control, escape, and live in their mind since their control of their bodies was extremely limited. The staging of Didi’s and Gogo’s slow reactions (and further, inaction) shows the conflict ideas such as Descartes’ would have caused concentration camp prisoners. Thus, not only are Beckett’s themes in *Waiting for Godot* related to the Holocaust, but also he creates images of frustration and internal conflict that were probably experienced by many Jews who could not act as they desired.

Though living in the ghettos and extermination camps was difficult, survivors of these atrocities suffer crippling repercussions, which have a cruel, ironic potential to turn the “blessing” of survival into a curse. Each survivor possesses his or her own memories that call for personal reconciliation. Despite the wide variety of experiences, most Holocaust survivors agree that their stories all have a single element in common: luck. Though “a

social support system” while imprisoned certainly assisted in survival, “Holocaust survivors admit that luck was a major factor in whether they remained alive” (Plunka 275). Regarding to *Waiting for Godot*, the emphasis on luck places the character of Lucky in an entirely new light. His name is often read as ironic. Lucky certainly depicts a victim of unlucky and harsh circumstances, like the Jews of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, he survives. Oddly enough, Lucky survives not only despite his situation, but also because of it, as Pozzo both abuses him and provides him with food, shelter, and employment (or purpose). Thus, Lucky’s name can be read ironic, yet chillingly accurate. Similarly, Nazi prisoners experienced this awful paradox. They were both subjected to torment and physically sustained (though barely) by the Nazis.

To further this symbolism, Lucky becomes Pozzo’s only means of survival in Act Two: because of his blindness, he fully depends on Lucky to lead him and to cater to his needs. The Third Reich needed the labor camp prisoners to produce many of the supplies used during World War II. Pozzo’s need for Lucky reflects this situation and sets up a chilling codependency between the abuser and the abused. Lucky not only depends on his tormentor for survival, but also helps his tormentor to survive. This cruel duality is seen and acknowledged by Holocaust survivors regarding their own experiences. Imprisoned Jews’ recognition of luck is what gave hope to their purpose, survival, and luck is what eventually enabled them to achieve this purpose. Despite their survival, however, they must carry with them the baggage of their experiences, just a Lucky refuses to “put down his bags” (29).

One of the most difficult aspects of the baggage that Holocaust survivors collectively faced after their release was expressing the horrors they witnessed. Adorno, who happened to be an early critic of Beckett, noted that there existed a “failure of the Enlightenment ethos”

which “revealed itself in the Holocaust” (qtd. in Perloff 79). He writes, “The metaphysical principle... ‘Thou shalt not inflict pain’... can find its justification only in the recourse to corporeal, physical reality, and not its opposite pole, the pure idea” (qtd. in Perloff 79). The victims of the Holocaust experienced first-hand the consequences of such a vast gap in thinking. The survivors, then, were the first to truly have the knowledge and experience to express the cruelty a “pure idea” can possess, not just the physical consequences of that idea. Thus, their expressions of their pain were hindered because many failed to understand this specific type of cruelty.

Beckett’s play revolves around a similar struggle. Didi and Gogo are “waiting for Godot,” and everything they experience is a direct result of this (Beckett 15). When they try to explain their situation to Pozzo, they are unable to clearly communicate with him. Pozzo blatantly misunderstands Didi and Gogo many times; often mispronouncing Godot’s name and even thinking they mistake him for Godot (Beckett 29, 24). Interestingly, this confused conversation begins with Gogo’s claim that they are strangers to “these parts,” followed by Pozzo’s reply, “You are human beings none the less” (Beckett 24). Despite their inherent recognition of each other’s humanity and the common bond that gives them, these characters cannot come to understand each other, though Pozzo feels they should. The horrors of the Holocaust were so terrible that they established a “void of the unspeakable,” or indescribable, between people (qtd. in Gubar 2). When trying to grapple with the Holocaust, the human imagination was in uncharted territory, leading to a sort of intellectual displacement. In fact, many critics, including Susan Gubar, argue that, between these unimaginable horrors and the abuse of language by the Germans to help create the Holocaust, the Holocaust “signaled the failure of language, indeed the spoiling of the very concept of language” (2). Thus, survivors

could not help but fail in accurately capturing some of their memories through language and finding empathy, even despite the common bond of humanity with the rest of the world. This inability to express oneself in search of understanding is seen not only in Pozzo's initial conversation with Didi and Gogo, but also in the hurt tainting Didi's first conversation in the play with Gogo about his being beaten (23-4, 11-2). Like Holocaust survivors, Didi and Gogo tragically fail to communicate in their unfamiliar setting, dashing any hopes for answers or understanding.

The geographical displacement Gogo refers to above directly impacted Holocaust survivors' inability to communicate with the world around them. During and after the Holocaust, many Jews left their home countries, either by force or voluntarily. Obviously, they then had to adjust to their new circumstances, which often included learning a new language. This exile posed a major problem for those who witnessed and survived the Holocaust. If they were asked to relate their experiences, "their [foreign] vocabularies now failed them miserably" (Plunka 252). Such a strong linguistic handicap often resulted in silence, with survivors "internalizing their frustrations" (Plunka 252). For example, Elie Wiesel was famously silent for ten years about his experiences at Auschwitz before writing what would eventually become *Night*. Interestingly, *Waiting for Godot* was first written in French, a secondary language (English being the primary) for Beckett. Martin Esslin claims that Beckett wrote in a foreign language to insure "that his writing remains a constant struggle, a painful wrestling with the spirit of language itself" (20). This struggle with language is seen repeatedly in both Holocaust and Beckett's dramas. In *Waiting for Godot*, the "painful wrestling" with language occurs throughout Didi and Gogo's dialogue. Early on in the play Gogo claims that they are "not from these parts" to excuse Didi's and his

confusion as to what Pozzo is saying, emphasizing a language barrier because of a sort of displacement (24). Often, they will stop their conversation to list synonyms for a word in their conversation, as though trying to seek a better alternative. Gogo even typically repeats himself, showing he is unable to come up with anymore synonyms (26, 71). Though full of word play and jokes, it is important to note that Beckett never represents this linguistic trait as a game in *Waiting for Godot*. It is treated like a regular trend in conversations between Didi and Gogo. The Jews' struggle with language can relate directly to such their struggle, and perhaps, in part, Beckett initially wrote his play in a foreign language to portray this in a more accurate manner.

Language is especially important in regards to the Holocaust because survivors will eventually all pass away, and their stories are the most accurately preserved memories of what happened during the Holocaust. Memory is a largely important motif in Holocaust drama, which is reflected in *Waiting for Godot*. Because "language cannot do justice to traumatic events of such magnitude," many Jews who survived "[distort] memory further by trying to find the appropriate words" (Plunka 302-3). Paying tribute to those who lost their lives due to the horrors of the Holocaust was an important task to not just survivors, but nations all over the world. Countless monuments and memorials have been made to serve this purpose. Unfortunately, "collective attempts at [nations'] healing" often leads to "false memory and forgetfulness;" they capture events in rather general ways, taking away from individual stories (301). Problems with memory and forgetfulness are found all throughout *Waiting for Godot*. For example, when Gogo asks Didi to recall the joke about the Englishman, memory is not an issue (17-8). However, when they try to remember something together, such as what day it is, they never reach a conclusion (16-7). This frustration could

symbolize the conflict between the tribute national memorials created and the individual stories that became less of a priority as a result.

Part of Holocaust survivors' struggle with memory can be traced back to the original social crisis the Nazis imposed on the Jews. Jews were robbed of "any social identity, having lost their businesses, fortunes, homes, families, jobs, land, and religious affiliations" (234). Didi and Gogo are portrayed in a similar state. They do not discuss any other external relationships they may have, refer to religion in an ambiguous manner, and wear ragged clothes that give no concrete detail as to their occupations. Little can be induced in regards to their identity. In fact, Gogo tells Pozzo his name is "Adam," and Didi answers affirmatively to the little boy's calling him "Mister Albert" twice (Beckett 37, 47, 85). This lack of identity essentially leads to lack of memory. Note how in a similar manner they can never remember Pozzo's name. When Didi and Gogo experience a loss of "what makes them human," their memory fades and "peels off like tatters" (Plunka 301-2). This relationship is closely examined in Holocaust drama, as a physical stripping of identity was something each Jew experienced as he or she entered a concentration camp.

Waiting for Godot similarly explores the connectedness of identity, material things, and memory. A good example of this process can be found in Beckett's use of Lucky's hat throughout the play. Pozzo claims Lucky "can't think without his hat," and Didi must "*seize Lucky's hat*" to stop his monologue (41, 44). Also, in Act Two, Didi discovers Lucky's hat and becomes extremely eager to imitate him (68). The fact that Beckett specifies Lucky enters "*wearing a different hat*" and never receives back his old one is surely symbolic. He does not speak another line for the rest of the play. As Pozzo reveals later in the play, Lucky is now dumb; "he can't even groan" (83). When Didi asks, "Since when?" Pozzo responds

essentially for Lucky in a way that is didactic. He never directly answers the question, but his brief monologue emphasizes the idea that time is not what is important, that mankind “give[s] birth astride a grave” and “one day we shall die” (Beckett 83). These words, in light of Lucky’s loss of his hat and of his voice, summarize both an idea typical of Beckett and to the common experience of Jews in the Holocaust. As the societal roles of people (specifically Holocaust survivors) and their identities are erased with their deaths, their voices, memories, and stories have the potential to be transcendent. The case of Lucky physically becoming voiceless before his death could symbolically capture the tragedy of Jewish Holocaust survivors. Because of language barriers, tainted memories, and very general portrayals of Holocaust events, many of their stories have essentially already been silenced and lost.

Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* cannot be strictly classed as a Holocaust drama, but many of its elements invite the play and its audience to enter into a direct dialogue with the Holocaust. The struggle with mental and physical limitation, as well as tainted memory and restricted means of expression, directly correspond to events of the Holocaust and the conflicts Jews faced before and after their imprisonment. Through its exploration of the role of the audience, *Waiting for Godot* paints a vivid picture of the dangers of indifference and hatred. Its infamously insightful look at human nature certainly makes the play impactful. Beyond this, though, *Waiting for Godot* begs to be remembered, because it contains a story that is quickly fading in both the minds of those who experienced the Holocaust first-hand and in the mind of the world. Beckett’s play engages and challenges his audience to preserve this story. Even more importantly, *Waiting for Godot* gives its audience the knowledge of inhumane origins of the Holocaust so that they can keep the story from repeating itself.

CHAPTER TWO

Reviving the Past: How Textual Exchange in Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* Presents Struggles of the Holocaust

Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* epitomizes his mastery of reworking existing texts such as *Waiting for Godot* into entirely innovative works, allowing for new voices to emerge. As noted by Katherine Kelly, his body of work may be experienced as "exchanges between texts quoted in the plays [and] between the history and fiction represented by the plays" (Kelly 10). Through this device, Stoppard engages his audience into a transformative process "by presenting them with familiar literary language (and visual imagery) made strange by an unfamiliar dramatic context. [Audience members] both hear and then re-hear quotations from the literary past as Stoppard selectively mines the 'imaginary museum' of western art" (10-11). The literary past that informs *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* is extremely rich. Heavily influenced by both Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Stoppard's famous existentialist play was most likely also influenced by his own biography and the context in which he wrote the play. The foundation for *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* is a one act play entitled *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear*. Stoppard wrote this play in 1964 in Berlin, Germany after receiving a Ford Foundation grant (2). Between living in the still recovering capital of East Germany and being personally impacted by Nazi's violence in World War II, a case can be made that Stoppard's play contains at least some qualities of a Holocaust drama. Its heroes possess many similarities to Beckett's Didi and Gogo and similar connections can be drawn between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and concentration camp prisoners and survivors. Through his play's textual exchange with *Hamlet*, Stoppard exemplifies for his audience the importance of questioning the authoritative nature of hegemonic culture and ultimately

challenges them to remember the stories Western society too often forgets—like that of Hitler’s innocent victims.

To provide a framework in which Becket’s *Waiting for Godot* and Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* can be both compared to Holocaust drama and to each other, outlining some key characteristics of creative Jewish narratives proves to be helpful. Adam Gillon claims that many Israeli writers from the 1960s and 1970s (notably the same time *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* was composed) “invariably present the hero trying to reconcile the past with the present, the religious with the secular” (193). In some cases, the idea of “now” represents “merely another perception of the past” (Gillon 193). This remembering of the past is tainted with “a feeling of nostalgia and world-weariness” in the present, a tone consistently achieved throughout both plays (Gillon 195). In fact, Gillon claims that post-World War II Israeli stories “paint a bleak canvas of [then] contemporary Israel, whose heroes are completely estranged in the midst of their familiar landscapes,” not unlike Beckett’s and Stoppard’s protagonists (198). As discussed in chapter one, these trends in Jewish literature can be traced back to the experience of Holocaust victims and survivors.

The estrangement described by Gillon is especially felt by the protagonists of both plays and reinforced by the set design. Like *Waiting for Godot*, Stoppard’s design for *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* is rather blank and nonspecific. Enoch Brater observes, “the landscape for this play is mostly a lighting job, stark and atmospheric, a minimalist’s *Waiting for Godot* minus rock and tree. No more courts scenes, graveyards, or ghostly apparitions. Stoppard is relying on his audience to fill in the blanks” (204).

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, like Didi and Gogo, often long for a different place, circumstance, or even the past.

However, they struggle to remember details about that past. They additionally fail to communicate well with each other and the other characters on stage. Significantly, they literally speak in a different type of dialogue from some of the other characters, as Stoppard continues to keep the lines of Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, etc. in the original Shakespearian language. This struggle with language parallels that of *Waiting for Godot*. They recreate the inability of Holocaust survivors to linguistically capture their unimaginably horrific past, as well as their need to learn new languages after being displaced into new, foreign countries. Stoppard resolves this struggle through his new presentation of *Hamlet* via Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

A major component that *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Waiting for Godot* have in common is the motif of waiting. In Stoppard's play, Rosencrantz declares, "I feel like a spectator—an appalling business. The only thing that makes it bearable is the irrational belief that somebody interesting will come on in a minute..." (41). Not unlike Didi and Gogo, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern play memory and rhetoric games to pass the time. Both plays contain a sense of hopelessness regarding the outcome of these characters' waiting, as expressed in Rosencrantz's line, "They'll have us hanging about till we're dead" (93). Unfortunately, Rosencrantz's pronouncement is much truer than he realizes. The attitude Rosencrantz claims is one once felt by many Jewish prisoners in the Holocaust. "Waiting" both in Beckett's and Stoppard's plays recreates this fruitless, dreadful suspense. All four protagonists feel anxiety in their own way as they slowly uncover the truth. Like the

death camp prisoners, they truly are just spectators with a diminishing hope that the redemption they desire will ever appear.

Although he continues to portray Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as spectators, Stoppard enlightens the audience as to their situation by transforming their minimalist plot-strand in *Hamlet* into the entire plot of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. When asked about *Hamlet* during Giles Gordon's 1968 interview of Stoppard, the playwright responded, "*Hamlet* I suppose is the most famous play in any language, it is part of a sort of common mythology" (qtd. in Delaney 18). However, Stoppard physically moves Hamlet's infamous story into the background. Besides the appearance of the Elizabethan players, a silent pantomime between Hamlet and Ophelia is the first staged action taken directly from *Hamlet*. Much of the other exchanges involving Polonius, Gertrude, and Claudius begin far upstage, if they do not remain there. Comparatively, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, much like Beckett's Didi and Gogo, never leave the stage until the play's final moments. In regards to this staging technique, Enoch Brater comments:

One of the most attractive elements of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* occurs in the dynamics of performance, when the production efficiently subverts the traditional relationship between background and foreground as it has been generally understood within the western theatre's conventions for the staging of "high" drama. The geography of Stoppard's play will capitalize on this motif in terms of downstage, upstage, and offstage action; and yet it is important to note that such theatrical reversals are prominently featured in this script's textual authority. *Hamlet* is to be staged, as it were, in the distance, one more icon undone, a pale shadow of its former self. (qtd. in Kelly 204)

Shakespeare's well-known narrative, then, becomes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's to tell.

However, in order to tell their side of the story, they must draw from the original narrative (*Hamlet*) in which they lack any sense of authority. Their being subjected to the authority of *Hamlet* may recall a cruel helplessness experienced by the Jews in the

Holocaust. Also, just as Stoppard reverses the conventions of Western theatre, he also inverts the characters with which his high society audience would typically identify. The play thus engages in a conversation about the dangers of having a prejudiced mentality, especially in regards to Western hegemonic culture. Like the Jews' exclusion from Hitler's idealized vision of Germany, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's inability to integrate into royal Shakespearian society proves fatal. Leading up to the heroes' deaths, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* creates a sense of dread around the present and a consequential longing for the past. These elements work to warn the audience about the potential society consistently poses to create unwarranted suffering. In regards to the Holocaust, Stoppard forces members of the "ruling class" in Western society to recognize their own destructive tendencies by looking at the past. His new framing of *Hamlet* repositions the spotlight on two "bewildered innocents," inviting the audience to unravel the complex relationship between authority and laxity, master narratives and forgotten perspectives, and the past and the present.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead captures the Jews of the Holocaust's struggle against authority by continually referring back to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Like the relationship between Beckett's Lucky and Pozzo, the very thing (Shakespeare's text) that sustains Stoppard's protagonists is also what destroys them. As previously mentioned, the Jews experienced the same conundrum. In the labor camps, they were supposed to be given enough shelter, clothes, and food to keep them alive. Their survival, though, was at the basest level, and prisoners were constantly aware that their lives could be taken from them at any moment by the same authoritative figures keeping them alive. Though Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not seem to experience this awareness to the same degree, they experience a

sense of dread about their present situation. In the middle of the play, Guildenstern pronounces, “Wheels have been set in motion, and they have their own pace, to which we are... condemned” (*Rosencrantz* 60). Unlike Hitler’s Jewish prisoners, Stoppard’s protagonists do not know who has set these wheels in motion, who has control over their circumstances. Stoppard’s audience, on the other hand, is well aware that the authority determining Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s fate is *Hamlet*. Similar to the educated German citizens who understood the unethical Nazi policies against Jews, the typical cultured audience of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*’s could identify the authoritative source ordering innocent deaths. The audience members’ understanding allows them to share in this authority, placing some responsibility on them.

Stoppard literally embodies such authority on stage, not only through the general presence of *Hamlet*, but also through his characterization of the Player. For many reasons, the Player can be interpreted to represent Shakespeare himself, who creates the chain of events leading to Rosencrantz’s and Guildenstern’s deaths. Portraying the Player as Shakespeare certainly seems appropriate, logistically. The Player leads a traveling, all-male troupe of actors (known as the Tragedians). He also gives multiple monologues describing the nature and inner workings of theatre as an art form. His troupe is asked, as was Shakespeare’s, to play at the royal court for the king and queen. Importantly, when he is first introduced to the audience (and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern), Stoppard emphasizes that the Player possesses a specific and unchanging presence. The Player reports to Guildenstern that he never changes out of his costume. He affirms that he is “always in character,” as well as demanding that he “starts on” even before his play has started. Thus, Stoppard attaches a sort of omnipresent quality to the Player. In the same respect, *Hamlet*’s, and by default

Shakespeare's, presence continually hovers over *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. Beyond these tangible similarities, the Player seems to possess foreknowledge of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's collective fate. Shakespeare possessed the same foreknowledge, as he was the original inventor of their characters and the author of the events that lead them to their deaths.

The physical presence of "Shakespeare" on stage, in the form of the Player, adds a new dimension to the dialectic of fate versus free will within Stoppard's play. Theatre as a genre is apt to this discussion because of its story-telling element. As spectators witness events unfold on stage, they are (either consciously or self-consciously) aware that a playwright has made those events happen. The characters cannot protest or change their given course of action; it is already written. In this way, Stoppard's text is reliant on Shakespeare's original text. Therefore, even as the playwright, Stoppard too must surrender to the previously decided sequence of events, and thus, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's tragic fate. Shakespeare holds the ultimate authority over both plays' characters and action. His presence on stage, represented by the Player, is menacing and chilling in this regard. It adds an entire new weight to lines such as "over your dead body!" and "I should concentrate on not losing your heads." The Player even admits to Guildenstern that he speaks from precedent. "You've been here before," Guildenstern concludes, to which the Player ominously replies, "And I know which way the wind is blowing" (66). Continuing along these lines, Stoppard then seems to immediately give a self-congratulating nod to his textual exchange through Guildenstern's lines to the Player: "Operating on two levels, are we?! How clever! I expect it comes naturally to you, being in the business so to speak" (66). Stoppard therefore emphasizes the Player's continual – though not always physical –

presence in the play, as well as his in-depth understanding of the plot. Furthermore, if one interprets the Player to be Shakespeare, then these lines point not only to his foreknowledge of their deaths, but also point to his willing and causing their deaths to happen.

Because of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*'s dependency upon *Hamlet*, as eerily symbolized by the Player on stage, Stoppard's heroes are only given the illusion of choice, just like the Jews in the Holocaust. No matter what Rosencrantz and Guildenstern choose to do or say, their fate is fixed through the authoritative narrative of *Hamlet*.

Guildenstern reflects, "Each move is dictated by the previous one—that is the meaning of order... if we happened, just happened to discover, or even suspect, that our spontaneity was part of their order, we'd know that we were lost" (*Rosencrantz* 60). "Their order" implies the ordered plot of Shakespeare's tragedy in which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been "caught up" (39). After observing that they have been "presented with alternatives... But not choice," Guildenstern advises Rosencrantz to "[t]read warily [and] follow instructions" until "events have played themselves out" (39, 40). Obviously, these "events" lead directly to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's demise, solidifying Guildenstern's notion that, though they have options, they have no true choice. Their lack of choice also proves their innocence. Stoppard views them "much more clearly as a couple of bewildered innocents rather than a couple of henchmen" (qtd. in Delaney 18). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have seemed to simply find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. The playwright painstakingly composes *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* to prove their innocence, and one of the methods by which he achieves this goal is by continually depicting their lack of control and influence in the play.

Ironically, Stoppard's heroes have so little influence that they fail to achieve any heroic actions. In fact, the one significant revision Stoppard made to the play after its debut at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival involves a specific scene in *Hamlet* that demonstrates Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's inability to influence the plot. Stoppard discusses this revision in Gordon's interview of him:

Stoppard: This is the scene where Rosencratz and Guildenstern accost Hamlet after he has hidden Polonius's body. It [the revision] arose because [Sir Olivier Laurence] pointed out that when Claudius came on and instructed them to find Hamlet... it was the one time in the play when they were given an actual specific duty to fulfill...

Gordon: The only scene which reveals them in action.

Stoppard: Though it's not very active for all that. (20-1)

As Stoppard's added scene demonstrates, even when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern attempt to directly obey authority, their actions have little to no impact. They fail to exude authority under any and all circumstances. Their being deprived of power and control over their own situation leaves them taking action in vain. Thus, Guildenstern is correct in observing that their having "alternatives" is not the same as "choice," because their decisions are irrelevant in regards to their eventual fate.

In his essay "The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps," Lawrence L. Langer explains how similar circumstances were created by the dynamic of Nazi camps. Survival in the death camps was the number-one priority to Jewish prisoners. However, "the forms of survival [were] extreme and loathsome, [and] they [were] not worth the price of a life" (Langer 229). In other words, there was no true choice between life and death in the concentration camps, but only "between two forms of humiliation, in this instance each leading to the extinction of a life" (Langer 228-9). Langer entitles this situation one of "choiceless choice." The term takes into account that "the death camp universe eliminated

conditions which support [human] worth” and “imposed *impossible* decisions on victims not free to embrace the luxury of the heroic life” (Langer 231). Thus, Holocaust victims’ actions within the concentration camps were essentially unimportant because they had no authority or opportunity to influence their fatal situation.

Interestingly, Stoppard’s play offers an appropriate image of “choiceless choice” via Rosencrantz’s famous monologue in which he asks if one would “rather be alive or dead” upon being stuffed into a coffin (71). He addresses the helplessness of eternally being “dead, lying in a box with a lid on it” (70). Initially, Rosencrantz thinks, “It’s silly to be depressed by it...[because] one thinks of it like being alive in a box...which should make all the difference...” (70). However, he unknowingly connects this same helplessness with “being alive in a box,” because one would have to wait for someone to “bang on the lid and tell me to come out” (71). Jewish prisoners could certainly be described as merely living in a type of coffin, dependent on outside help to release them. As history proves, though, many in the position to help refused to truly see and acknowledge the horrific situation in front of them until it was too late. This denial, too, was surely humiliating for Hitler’s prisoners. Stoppard’s characters again vocalize a similar despair: “You don’t understand the humiliation of it—to be tricked out of the single assumption which makes our existence viable—that somebody is *watching*...” (63). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s own helpless situation allows them to physically represent and verbally express Holocaust victims’ “choiceless choice,” especially through Rosencrantz’s ironically humorous monologue. Just as their lack of control amuses the Player and other authoritative figures in the play (and at times the audience), the Jewish prisoners’ were subject to humiliation by the Nazi guards no matter what decisions they made.

This same irrelevancy that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern face in *Hamlet* is emphasized by the way Stoppard stages their deaths in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. In Act II, Guildenstern defines death as “a man failing to reappear...an exit, unobtrusive and unannounced, a disappearance” (*Rosencrantz* 84). At the end of the play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do just that. Rosencrantz proclaims his relief at being able to permanently exit, physically leaving behind the world of the play and thus symbolically dying. Stoppard’s stage directions demand that Rosencrantz “disappears from view” unnoticed by Guildenstern (*Rosencrantz* 125). This stage direction suggests that perhaps, like Guildenstern, the audience does not immediately realize Rosencrantz’s absence. Not only does such an oversight emphasize the unheroic nature of the protagonist’s death, but it also starkly contrasts the audience’s expectations of the act of dying. Up until this point in the play, the audience’s interactions with death have been through the elaborate melodrama of the Player and his Tragedians, as well as any previous experiences with productions of *Hamlet* (again connecting the Player and Shakespeare). Guildenstern’s death occurs in the same seemingly unnatural fashion as Rosencrantz’s. He disappears midline as he states, defeated, “Now you see me, now you—” (*Rosencrantz* 126).

Such subtle depictions of death fail to prove noteworthy, especially when the two heroes bodies are missing from the overwhelming “tableau of court and corpses” presented on stage in the play’s final moments (*Rosencrantz* 126). Within the context of *Hamlet*, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s fate is often forgotten given the bloody circumstances of the closing scene with the “more important” major actors. At best, their final mention by the Ambassador simply allows them to be added to the body count at the last minute. As Guildenstern had discussed earlier in the play, the Tragedians’ portrayals of death have acted

to desensitize the audience towards death. He asks, “You die so many times; how can you expect them to believe in your death?” noting that their melodramatic reenactments “[don’t] bring death home to anyone” (*Rosencrantz* 83). Stoppard therefore forces audience members to realize their forgetfulness and complacency by demonstrating what they have done to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: disappear from their own collective memory.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s disappearance materializes the problem of remembrance that haunted both Stoppard’s childhood and countless Jewish families after World War II. When he was four years old, Stoppard himself lost his biological father to an attack indirectly caused by the Nazis. As Stoppard found out in the 1990s, his father was on a boat headed to Australia after he was forced to evacuate from Singapore because of his Jewish heritage. The Japanese bombed his boat, just as they had previously attempted to bomb the boat on which the young Stoppard was a passenger. In his article “On Turning out to be Jewish,” the playwright recalls that the bombings “[weren’t] personal...it was simply the war and being in the wrong place at the wrong time” (193).¹ Regarding his attitude as a young boy towards his father’s death, he claims, “As far as I was told he had simply disappeared” (“On Turning out to be Jewish” 242). His reaction to his father’s death clearly corresponds with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s last words and moments in Stoppard’s play.

Notably, many others besides Stoppard felt as though their loved ones had simply disappeared during World War II. This struggle is especially important regarding Jews in the

¹ Appropriately, the one time in the play in which Guildenstern expresses regret (and therefore implies his action had an impact on his fate) is when he claims, “Where we went wrong was getting on a boat...our movement is contained within a larger one that carries us along...” (*Rosencrantz* 122). This comment clearly corresponds with Stoppard’s own biography. Furthermore, it provides an additional metaphor through which the audience can understand the lack of control felt by both Stoppard’s characters and Stoppard himself regarding their own fates.

Holocaust. They were often separated from their family members, deported to different camps, and tragically shuffled into gas chambers, never to be seen again. Adding to the pain of such obscure deaths was the lack of tangible ways to mourn a lost loved one. No physical bodies could be peacefully put to rest. Instead, the dead were only inhumanly stored in mass graves—literally disappearing under other corpses and the dirt. Stoppard’s staging of Rosencrantz’s and Guildenstern’s deaths as a disappearance places into perspective the hardship endured by many Jewish families after World War II. The audience often forgets about these two characters’ deaths simply because of the absence of their bodies on stage at *Hamlet*’s end. Similarly, many Holocaust victims risked being forgotten by the world because, in some sense, Hitler achieved what he wanted to achieve—making the Jewish people disappear from German society.

Interestingly, this problem of remembrance manifests itself in Holocaust scholarship still today, only in a different form. In attempts to memorialize the millions of Jews who died in the Holocaust, organizations and countries all over the world have established special history museums and other tributaries. However, many historians, writers, and scholars have heavily criticized some of these monuments. In his 1997 article covering the opening of a new Holocaust museum in New York, Michael Kimmelman sheds light on how a desire to recapture the horrors of the Holocaust can actually deaden its impact. He insightfully asks if “too many memorials, an abundance that inures people to the singularity of genocide: a saturation point in other words, when remembering permits forgetting?” (Kimmelman 1). His observation holds true in a variety of situations; numbers, statistics, and overwhelming amounts of information tend to result in confusion rather than clarity. Thus, unfortunately, “extensive and nuanced documentation” causes spectators to forget the human beings whose

facts they are studying. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern could easily exemplify the same problem to an audience accustomed to intellectualizing plays or overwhelmed by the play's body count. Allowing one's memory to disappear, whether it is that of Stoppard's heroes or Hitler's victims, only reinforces the "absence of presence" that death has already created (124).²

However, though Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seem to have simply disappeared at the end of *Hamlet*, Stoppard does not allow their disappearance to remain insignificant. Just as Shakespeare does in his tragedies, a thespian's job is to "extract significance from the melodrama" –a comment made, appreciably, by the Player (*Rosencrantz* 83). The Player goes on to admit that, though he is to extract "a significance which [the melodrama] does not in fact contain...occasionally, from out of this matter, there escapes a thin beam of light that, seen at the right angle, can crack the shell of mortality" (*Rosencrantz* 83). Though Shakespeare's approach to the narrative is to draw significance from the death of *Hamlet*, Stoppard takes a different angle—literally and figuratively. He instead attempts to prove the mortality-cracking significance of Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's deaths, despite the significance perhaps not originally existing at all. He puts them on stage "into flesh and blood, undeniable and human" in hopes that this "theatrical installation" will deeply impact his audience (Kimmelman 26). Though they still remain powerless and lack the authority traditionally given to theatre protagonists, their story becomes the focus of the audience. The actions in *Hamlet* involving Rosencrantz and Guildenstern therefore obtain some

² I would like to note that the idea of reinforcing the "absence of presence" after death is strictly against the Jewish tradition. For this reason, they are not permitted to leave flowers or any other perishable items in graveyards. Instead, they typically opt to leave nonperishable objects like rocks or coins on top of tombstones. This tradition furthers the significance of remembrance in the Jewish culture. Allowing something to fade or perish in regards to death only adds to the death itself. Preservation, then, enables life in the Jewish tradition. Given this context, the call to keep the Holocaust "alive as dying" acquires a new importance.

significance, even if their own actions do not. Stoppard recreates Rosencrantz and Guildenstern into tragic characters. Despite their tragedy being belittled by their fellow Shakespearian characters, their circumstances obtain the impactful weight of a tragedy nonetheless. Thus, Stoppard successfully transforms two meaningless, flat Shakespearian messengers into dynamic, individual human beings whose story (though not actions) has the ability to evoke emotion and communicate meaning.

Holocaust narratives function in a comparable manner, recomposing faces and stories where one all too often only finds inanimate, statistical numbers. According to Schwarz, such stories “rescue Jews from viewing anonymous photographs of victims—victims deprived of their humanity and reduced to the way the Nazis wanted to remember them—to restore to them human dignity” (13). He further qualifies this restoration as allowing Holocaust victims “the dignity of voice” (13). Though Hitler’s Germany saw Jews as lowly, undeserving, and frankly as not human, stories recounting different experiences of these Jews refuses Nazi policies or objective histories to speak for them. Schwarz’s definition for Holocaust narratives is therefore similar to what Stoppard achieves through *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. In his *New York Times* article, Kimmelman testifies to the effects of individually driven stories about the Holocaust. The reporter recounts a man holding up his tattooed arm next to a photograph that presented multiple tattooed arms, one of which matched his own. This encounter affected him “more than anything else in the museum” because of its unquestionable human element (Kimmelman 26). Thus, the victims shown in the endless “dehumanized and...nameless photographs” revealed something beyond the helpless Jewish prisoners, something much grander than the horror of Hitler’s degrading vision. In the same way, by defying the little value that authoritative figures gave to these

forgotten heroes, both Stoppard's play and Holocaust literature restore the impact their tragedies should have always possessed.

Besides addressing the textual authority of *Hamlet, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* also deals with the idea of authority on a grander scale, looking specifically at the authoritative power culture has in shaping society. Stoppard's restructuring of great texts to create *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* points to problems of exclusivity practiced in hegemonic societies, like that of Nazi Germany. Cultural hegemony is a philosophy developed by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). A general characterization from Gramsci's translated writings describes cultural hegemony as:

the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (12)

In other words, "ruling groups impose a direction on social life" while non-ruling groups are subjected to that direction (Lears 568). Typically, though, people of the upper classes are well-educated and "cultured" and are thus seen as having "higher ethical standards" (Botwinick 86). But Gramsci critiques this "long-held assumption," severing the connection between culture and ethics. T. J. Jackson Lears notes that "[Gramsci's] concept of hegemony has little meaning unless paired with the notion of domination" (568). Power and authority complicate ethics, but they also assist in creating cultural notions. Significantly, the landscape in which Stoppard chooses to place his estranged heroes is one of the most important, influential, and studied Western narratives of all time: *Hamlet*. *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* turns the culture found within and surrounding *Hamlet* inside out, forcing the audience to question the authoritative figures on stage and the authority of Western culture in general.

Inside *Hamlet* itself exists a common culture: a specific hierarchy of power must be observed; children are expected to obey their children; royalty must adhere to a type of social conduct. The many deaths at *Hamlet*'s conclusion seem to point to a danger when one strays outside these accepted social structures and ignores ethics in the name of power. However, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are never included in this culture at all. About the Shakespearian text, Stoppard observes, "they end up dead without really, as far as any textual evidence goes, knowing why. Hamlet's assumption that they were privy to Claudius's plot is entirely gratuitous... they are told little about what is going on and much of what they are told isn't true" (qtd. in Delaney 18). They are outsiders, and this fact leads to their fatal manipulation by the different figures of royal power. Both then and now, these royal figures act as Western symbols of society. Similarly, the play *Hamlet* in and of itself has become a symbol of Western culture, and Stoppard utilizes it to represent the hegemonic culture of his time. By retelling a classic Western story about powerful Western figures through the eyes of powerless outsiders, Stoppard physically and thematically transforms the text entirely. *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* no longer makes Shakespeare's play about the consequences of breaking hegemonic culture. In an ironic manipulation of Shakespeare's great Western text, Stoppard's play instead discusses the consequences of being completely excluded from hegemonic society.

In order to create and secure his idealized society comprised purely of Aryans, Hitler knew that he first had to alter Germany's cultural hegemony to make specific groups outsiders. In fact, Hitler's *Lebensraum* is now one of the main examples of a hegemonic culture. Aryans were the priority and ruling class of society. All other people, especially Jews, were defined as weak and unimportant (and eventually not human) compared to this

favored race, and all aspects of society emphasized such views. Specifically, public education became the priority and worked towards instilling this cultural hegemony in the German youth. “The racial superiority of Germans found expression in almost every topic, and a pupil could not spend a single day without learning something about the perfidy of all Jews. Questioning the material was discouraged” (Botwinick 87). Even in light of a rich cultural and intellectual past, ethical standards were being erased through education. Botwinick writes, “The long-held assumption that educated people have higher ethical standards than uneducated people was refuted by Nazi Germany. University degrees and an appreciation for the classics did not influence the well-educated commanders of the...mobile killing units, as they carried out their bloody business” (86). However, many still ask, “How could the Holocaust have happened in the land of Goethe and Beethoven?” (86). Education furthered the unethical mentality of German citizens and supplied multitudes of indoctrinated Nazi followers. Often, the cultured and the educated are those who comprise the ruling class, and (as demonstrated so well in *Hamlet* and, consequently, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*) power often lends itself to corrupted ethics. Importantly, though, these same people also determine hegemonic culture. Therefore, Nazi Germany acts as an important example that culture and ethics do not necessarily go hand-in-hand.

Through *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*'s textual exchange with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Stoppard's play attempts to communicate this message to its audience members because of their typically high-society background. Stoppard's spectators were typically well-educated people who participated in all aspects of Western civilization and took great pride in being well cultured. Traditionally, Stoppard's drama was perceived as being “for the A-level and AP-English crowd... the same audience that knows this traditional

canon backwards and forwards” (Brater 205). However, as previously mentioned, being thoroughly cultured and educated does not necessarily make one ethical. Stoppard knew the typically narrow-minded mentality of his audience from his own life experiences. According to Stoppard himself, his stepfather, Major Kenneth Stoppard, “believed...that to be born an Englishman was to have drawn first prize in the lottery of life” (“On Turning out to be Jewish” 193). Major Stoppard possessed and expressed a “sense of superiority” over “lesser breeds...[such as] Jews, blacks, Irish, Yanks, foreigners in general, and the urban working class. (Homosexuals were hardly mentioned because they were hardly mentionable.)” (193). In fact, at the age of nine, he reproached the young Stoppard for referring to his Czechoslovakian birth father, saying, “Don’t you realize *that I made you British?*” (193). Major Stoppard’s prejudiced, unethical perspective was not uncommon amongst Stoppard’s upper class audiences, just as it was not uncommon in Nazi Germany. Using the story from *Hamlet*, a symbol of Western intellectual culture, to express the undoing of two innocent lives places Stoppard’s elite audience in a position to question the value and importance they place on culture – a question few seemed to have seriously considered under Hitler’s rule.

Importantly, though as the playwright Stoppard commences the textual exchange between *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, this exchange’s completion relies on these knowledgeable spectators. In her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Tom Stoppard*, Kelly insightfully suggests:

The Stoppard spectator... collaborates in anticipating and then recognizing familiar but transformed texts as these evoke and critique major works of the western tradition. Transformation is not, then, an operation performed by the author alone or a virtuoso display passively admired by a static spectator. Rather, it is Stoppard’s method of revising the artistic past and its customary expectations in league with a literate audience whose recognition and enjoyment of textual mingling completes the transformational process. (11)

Therefore, when the audience arrives at the theatre ready to recognize Western literary allusions and feel affirmed in their cultural superiority, Stoppard instead demonstrates the dangers of such a mentality by retelling *Hamlet* through his fated displaced protagonists.³ By doing so, he jolts spectators from their collective assumption that they will be able to follow the text closely based on what they already know. Stoppard criticizes their dependence on and confidence in their cultured backgrounds while simultaneously robbing them of this crutch. As spectators of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* begin to “fill in the blanks” of Stoppard’s textual exchanges, they cannot help but be disturbed by manipulation of the innocent caused by these ruling class characters that have come to carry so much weight in Western society (Brater 204). It is important to remember that these royals are also the characters with which the audience typically relates. Thus, Stoppard’s play destroys the assumed connection between culture and ethics in front of a ruling class audience, forcing them to explore the harmful implications of their own superior mindset.

If *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* is viewed as a type of symbolic Holocaust drama, this forced exploration can be taken a step further. Many people in Nazi Germany adopted Hitler’s invented idea that Aryians were a superior race. After a while, few chose to question the Nazi culture, and even fewer worked up the courage to oppose it if they did question its authority. In part, the public education system of Hitler’s Germany contributed to this complacency, at least on a local level. German education took a paradoxically “anti-intellectual posture” (Botwinick 86). Conformity was placed above individualism, and “education became indoctrination” (86). In other words, Germany was cultivating educated,

³ Interestingly, Stoppard’s title acts as a safeguard for any audience members who have not been exposed to *Hamlet*. Notably, Stoppard’s title is written in present tense and consequently places unfamiliar members in the same mindset as the familiar: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern *are* dead. Furthermore, to ensure each spectator understands this dynamic, Stoppard stages the tragedians miming Rosencrantz’s and Guildenstern’s deaths in the middle of the play.

“cultured” citizens who dared not question authority. Sadly, a lack of questioning led to a prejudiced mindset, as well as a desire to follow orders without hesitation. The result was the murder of six million Jews. Notably, German citizens are not the only ones to blame. Even the United States’ president at the time, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, refused to dedicate sufficient resources to help European Jews for fear of “jeopardizing the delicate balance of party politics” in the economically recovering country (209). Countless organizations, governments, and individuals feared defying the ruling culture of their own nations to save the Jewish people. Their refusing to question authority proved fatal for those Jewish prisoners who lacked the authority to do anything for themselves.

The Ambassador represents this concept on stage. His only part in Stoppard’s play, at least on stage, is to announce: “*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*” (126). However, as the audience has already experienced, with Stoppard, characters with seemingly small roles can carry weighty implications. In filling in the gaps of the Ambassador’s narrative, one can conclude that he is the one who ordered Rosencrantz’s and Guildenstern’s deaths. Why did he do this? He was following an order that he assumed carried great importance because it was presumably from a figure of authority. By unquestionably following these orders, the Ambassador has actually robbed two innocents of their lives. Many Nazi guards and officers possessed this same mentality of unquestionably following the orders of authority. In fact, at the Nuremberg Trials, many of Hitler’s right-hand men tried to use the excuse that they were just following orders when they allowed millions of innocent Jews to lose their lives. The court ruled it an invalid alibi. Stoppard’s play suggests that people should constantly keep this ruling in mind even today. Blindly accepting the standards that authoritative figures or the hegemonic culture portray can have dangerous consequences. *Rosencrantz &*

Guildestern Are Dead works to break the audience of their complacent mindset by physically demonstrating to them how abuse of authority or ill-informed subscribing to the authority of culture potentially causes harm to innocent people, like the Jews or two unsuspecting messengers.

The story of Jews who suffered through the Holocaust begs to be remembered, and the end of *Rosencrantz & Guildestern Are Dead* parallels this same desire. Immediately prior to the Ambassador's announcing Rosencrantz and Guildestern's fate, he proclaims, "The ears are senseless that should give us hearing" (126). He is clearly referencing the corpses that cover the stage. However, his comment is ironic in regards to the audience. If they have ever seen or read Hamlet, the Ambassador's comment is most likely true of the audience as they have probably never before paid close attention to Rosencrantz and Guildestern's deaths. Stoppard's play changes this fact, though. Thus, the Ambassador's claim could be interpreted as more of a challenge. Has the audience now thoroughly heard and absorbed Rosencrantz and Guildestern's tale? If so, then they now carry the burden of bearing witness to what they have seen. Just as Hamlet entrusted Horatio to tell his story, Stoppard entrusts the audience with this story and, providing Horatio as an example, compels them to remember and even recount it (126). Interestingly, Horatio's summary of the *Hamlet* narrative sounds like a summary of the Holocaust. He says:

*let me speak to the yet unknowing world
how these things came about: so shall you hear
of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts,
..... casual slaughters,
of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause... (Rosencrantz 126)*

By interpreting *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* as a type of Holocaust drama, then the play also challenges the audience to carry on the legacy of Holocaust victims, which has too often fallen on “senseless” ears.

In writing his play, Stoppard has ensured that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s story will be remembered because of the impact it has left on the literary world. Regarding the reception of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, Enoch Brater demands, “Let the world take note: Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* would never be the same again” (Kelly 203). Stoppard has forever altered readers’ experiences, understandings, and memories of the original Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s part in *Hamlet*. His play has reshaped Western society’s view of a story that he claims symbolizes Western hegemonic culture. Thus, the once untold story of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern has been successfully and permanently, though perhaps indirectly, integrated into Western intellectual and artistic culture. No longer forgotten, these characters are preserved and consequently live on because of their story’s impact. Furthermore, Stoppard’s example has arguably increased readers’ awareness of the marginalized characters found in Western literature on a broader level. Therefore, not only has the story of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern gained significance in the literary canon, but also the lessons their story teaches will be applied to even more narratives.

In the same way, the story of Jews’ suffering in the Holocaust has incredibly impacted human history and should forever being remembered. They need to be repositioned from insignificant to unforgettable figures by changing numerical statistics into stories about real human beings. At the end of Stoppard’s play, Horatio orders, “*these [dead] bodies/ high on a stage be placed to the view*” (*Rosencrantz* 126). Because Rosencrantz’s and Guildenstern’s bodies are absent from this collection of bodies (both in Stoppard’s and

Shakespeare's plays), Stoppard allows them to be placed high on a stage by resurrecting their forgotten story. Similarly, in lieu of individual headstones and gravesites that act to mark a type of platform for the dead to be viewed, Holocaust victims' stories must be what are rectified and placed in plain view of the world. Most important though, like the narrative formerly occluded Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, it is not enough that their stories be remembered and retold. The lessons must also become integrated into today's culture. If Stoppard's play changes audiences' attitudes towards other seemingly insignificant characters in Western literature, then the narrative of Jews' suffering in the Holocaust is to influence how people perceive other ill-treated groups in society. Therefore, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* ultimately argues for cultural elements like literature and theatre to be allowed to inform the ethical practices of that culture itself. Western narratives and attitudes alike can be altered and changed in order to remember the Holocaust, as well as through remembering the Holocaust. Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's deaths did not stop their story from being told, because Stoppard gave them a voice by retelling a narrative people already thought they knew or had originally overlooked. Similarly, the Jews of the Holocaust can potentially find a voice through existent narratives being re-contextualized in regards to their suffering. Stoppard's displaced protagonists in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* exemplify this possibility through their characterization, (in)action, and relationship with the *Hamlet* narrative, as well as through the resulting impact on readers' attitudes towards marginalized literary characters.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Addressing the Question of Ethics

To conclude, I would like to again address the notion that perhaps reading these plays as Holocaust dramas crosses a type of ethical line. As previously stated, the question of how to represent the Holocaust in literature, art, and theatre continually creates controversy. Survivor memoirs and historical accounts are obviously considered appropriate means of preserving these events. However, in regards to discussing how the Holocaust has sincerely changed a person's being, "we find it much more discomfoting when it issues from someone who has not experienced the circumstances that justify it" (Gubar 177). This discomfort finds its roots in the understandable fact that the horrors of the Holocaust remain too awful to comprehend without experiencing them. To attempt to express them and the pain they caused without having direct exposure to them is often considered arrogant and disrespectful. Thus, readings such as the ones exemplified in this thesis can also be reproached for potential insensitivity.

However, which is more disrespectful: trying to express the Holocaust's terrible effects and failing or not trying at all and forgetting? To try is to take action, though it could be considered incomplete or flawed action. To refuse demonstrates passivity in the name of perfection—a potentially dangerous mentality. Importantly, both *Waiting for Godot* and *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* openly discuss the failure of language. In their own way, each play acknowledges humanity's inability to communicate their past, their thoughts, and their fears clearly. Each play also demonstrates how not communicating at all proves fatal, especially in the case of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Thus, these plays, as well as others that can potentially act as Holocaust remembrance, do not presuppose what they are

able to accurately communicate. Instead, Beckett and Stoppard are trying to communicate some important messages about people's shared humanity. To call such a desire offensive or disrespectful is failing to take into consideration the great potential these messages have to positively impact audiences.

Another argument against the supposedly inappropriate nature of non-Holocaust survivors depicting or representing the Holocaust in art relates back to Langer's concept of choiceless choice. Throughout the Holocaust, Nazi prisoners were forced into actions that in any other circumstances would seem uncomfortable, inappropriate, and even inhumane. Though they were given "choices," all of their options led to the similar atrocious mentalities and deeds. Time has passed, but the conditions and the content of the Holocaust have not changed. As a result, poets and artists who have come after the Holocaust must grapple with this issue. Perhaps no comfortable, appropriate, or even humane method exists to recapture the events of the Holocaust once its survivors have passed. However, the choice to preserve the memories of Hitler's prisoners and victims must be made. Jean-Francois Lyotard concludes, "[T]he silence imposed on knowledge does not impose the silence of forgetting..." (qtd. in Gubar 179). An artist's inability to know exactly how the horrors of the Holocaust felt, sounded like, and broke others' spirits cannot be used to justify forgetting that they happened at all. Despite the options not being perfect, they exist, and therefore, art should continue to try to preserve this narrative to the best of its ability.

The theatre is especially appropriate for this venture because of the physical and communal presence it fundamentally presents. It is a medium that happens live—in real time—with people who are very much alive. In a concrete, undeniably real way, theatre allows for Wiesel's conviction that the "Living must be [the dead's] cemeteries" (Gubar

178). Wiesel also claims, “To be a Jew is to have all the reasons in the world not to have faith in language, in singing, in prayers, and in God, but *to go on telling the tale, to go on carrying on the dialogue...*” (Wiesel 277). This claim closely echoes the last line of Beckett’s novel *The Unnamable*, which many scholars see an accurate summary of Beckett’s work: “you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on” (418). Beckett’s and Stoppard’s characters experience this same impulsive need to press forward despite having countless reasons not to continue. They capture the spirit of many Jewish victims and survivors of the Holocaust. In the same spirit of endurance, today’s culture must fight to preserve the stories of Holocaust heroes. As demonstrated by my consideration of *Waiting for Godot* and *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* as expressions of Holocaust remembrance, such works can be utilized to preserve and to honor Holocaust heroes and their stories. Remembering stories such as these and integrating their lessons in today’s culture helps ensure that such “heroes” are never again produced by such horrific circumstances.

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