**Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead**
Tom Stoppard

**Background:** Absurd theatre, existentialism, theatre of criticism, experimental, intellectual, making fun of *Hamlet* text, *Waiting for Godot*

**Setting:** "a place without any visible character"

**Characters:** R&G - two aspects of one person? Interchangeable, interdependent but alone. 
*Rosencrantz* - Reality? Earthier, confused, reactive, obtuse. 
*Guildenstern* - Illusion? Intellectual, cultured, abstract, poetic, philosophical, insecure, questioning. 
Both show *self-awareness* of the way things are in the human condition and they "tragically" realise they cannot alter the way things are. The play consists of R&G's quasi-philosophical speculation about why they are here and what their death will be like.

**Structure:** Three acts, intertextuality of *Hamlet*, what is the climax? (Guil. "killing" the player?) 
Boat scene / sea travel a theme that helps the central theme of directionlessness

**Themes:** Self-awareness, death-awareness, fortune / destiny, acting, mirror on art, art vs life, self-identity, existentialist philosophy, uncertainty of man's origin, unpredictability of life, lack of control, fate / chance, inaction / filling in time with words / poor communication / poor connections with people (Beats, pauses, ambiguity), futility of human activity causes characters to abandon hope of any significant action, marking time / passing time, purposelessness, failing memory, *conflict* of real world and illusion, role-playing in life, man's isolation, life is a mystery, the only certainty is death.

**Language:** Blank verse / prose, simple / complex, confused, ambiguous, frequent references to fate ('wheels' in the "wheels within wheels" quote), rhetorical questions, repetitions, witty banter / repartee (comic routine) short / long passages, word games, biblical references, references to literature, echoes of the *Hamlet* text, breakdown of language / communication, Act 3 (short and preoccupied with death - the end is near)

**Player:** Contrast in philosophies to R&G, sardonic, unquestioning, accepting, he mirrors the conflict between real world and illusion, real, assertive, self-assured, confident, never unclear about his identity ("Relax ... respond.")

**Dramatic Techniques:** Intertextuality of *Hamlet*, self-conscious use of stage (actors go down to footlights, bring in audience to identify with R&G's dilemma, Hamlet spitting in the audience (can he change *his* destiny?)), dumb-show, role-playing, pratfall, body movement, coin tossing, experiments, lighting / blackout, music (drums / flutes - suspense - in the constant Players' tune), sets (unreal), conjuring tricks (players in barrels), silences / pauses / beats, word games, humour, stage directions (references to directions shows awareness of being trapped in a theatrical situation).
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Existentialism

Theatre of the Absurd