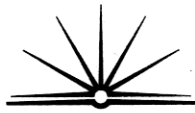


Shakespeare's play Hamlet and Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead are two plays based around the same story, but showing it from different perspectives. Due to these two plays being written at very different times (Hamlet was written during Elizabethan times, while R+G was written during the 1960's), their format and meaning are very different, as are their values.

Tom Stoppard wrote R+G about two minor characters in Hamlet, and told us their story. However, it was written in a very different way to Shakespeare's tragedy. For example, while the characters in Hamlet spoke in old English, and had a very poetic sound because Shakespeare wrote in iambic pentameter,



Stoppard's characters all spoke in our modern English. The exception to this is when R+G coincides with Hamlet, and the scenes from Hamlet have been put into R+G.

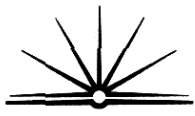
Context not only had an effect on the language Stoppard used in his play, but also the audience for which it was written. Hamlet was written in Elizabethan times for an Elizabethan audience. R+G was written in modern times for a modern audience. Therefore, Stoppard needed to alter the characters a little to suit the times. Stoppard wrote R+G with ideas from the Theatre of The Absurd as compared to the theatre Shakespeare would have written for. Examples of this can be seen throughout



the play. For example, the idea of the play within a play is brought up. We see Ros + Guild watching the players performing. The players are performing that they watching players perform. And on the outside of all this, we are watching Ros + Guild. (Ironically, in this scene, the players actually play out the story of Hamlet and what is going to happen. Ros + Guild even see their own deaths portrayed.)

Another example of this Absurdist Theatre is when Guildenstern shouts into the audience "Fire!!", then waits for a reaction. This tells us that they ~~play~~ characters have some sense that they are on stage, performing.

The tragedians are also aware of



this. Throughout ~~the~~ ^{R+G} ~~play~~ they make references to this. Especially in relation to death, which is another issue both plays deal with in different ways due to their different contexts.

In Hamlet, death is taken very seriously, due to the religious beliefs of society in those times. However in R+G, death is tackled in a different way. Because Hamlet was written with characters unaware that they are performing in a play, death, to them is real. When someone dies, that's it - they won't be back.

The player in R+G tells us that this ~~is~~ isn't ~~the~~ ~~fact~~ correct. Death, to the tragedians isn't real. It is just someone "failing to reappear." The deaths that they act out in front of



an audience is as real as death can get in their world. (Stoppard later shows us this again, when at the end we don't see Ros + Guildenstern executed. The lights just go out and ~~the~~ we hear the lines from Hamlet when they are told that Ros + Guildenstern are dead in that play.) This is another way that the different contexts have shaped both plays.

In conclusion, although both Shakespeare's tragedy of Hamlet, and Tom Stoppard's play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, are both the same story told from different perspectives, ~~the~~ time and context in which they are each written has shaped differently their form, meaning



and values.