

REPUBLIC OF TURKEY  
YUZUNCU YIL UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

**ABSURD ELEMENTS AND ALIENATION IN THE  
WORKS OF SAM SHEPARD AND TOM STOPPARD**

PhD THESIS

PREPARED BY  
Aydın GÖRMEZ

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SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ'NE

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**ABSTRACT**

In this study we sought to expose how existential fears, alienation, absurd and social and moral contradictions dominate the works of Sam Shepard and Tom Stoppard comparatively.

The death of the American dream and myths, the desire to escape from the boredom of daily life which is full of dreams, pretensions and lies, the loss of traditional values due to the mechanization, the desperate search for identity and roots, the collapse of the families are the clear evidence of Shepard's absurd as well as existential way of writing. The power of inheritance is so effective in Shepard's play that he reduces all humanity in a single class: the evils. The good or right is only a misleading illusion since everybody is guilty by blood.

Unlike Shepard, Stoppard tends to use more intellectual background by blending his sophisticated ability of sense of humour with his deep study of history and philosophy. Stoppard has a real gift in intermingling reality and illusion in his plays. He masterfully meets the improbable and unrelated objects. He is a sophisticated intellectual who enjoys dealing with the contradictory situations and playing with them. Putting inept characters in such a confused milieu and forcing them to evade are his recurring methods of presentation. The helplessness and powerlessness of his characters, the shrinkage of the world in which they are squeezed, a cruel and chaotic environment, the bewildered characters, the clash of reality and illusion, scepticism, ambiguity, revolt against a deterministic destiny are the major themes approaching him to the masters of the absurd playwrights.

Although both playwrights have quite different methods and style in presenting the aimlessness, powerlessness and uncontrollability of the individuals, and the meaninglessness of their actions, absurdity and alienation of humanity are their major themes. Thus, the playwrights manage to reflect the boredom of life in modern period masterfully.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışmada Sam Shepard ve Tom Stoppard'ın oyunlarında temel temalar arasında yer alan varoluşsal korkular, yabancılaşma, absürt, toplumsal ve ahlaki çelişkilerin ele alınış biçimi karşılaştırmalı olarak ortaya konulmuştur.

'Amerikan rüyası'nın ve mitlerin ölümü, hayaller, yapmacık eylemler ve yalanlarla dolu yaşamın sıkıcılığından kaçma arzusu, makineleşme sonucu geleneksel değerlerin kayboluşu, umutsuz kimlik ve köken arayışı ve ailenin çöküşü Shepard'ın varoluşsal ve absürt oyunlarının temel dayanaklarıdır. Shepard'ın oyunlarında kötülüğün kaynağı genetiğe dayandırılır. Bu nedenle kötülük toplumun bütün katmanlarında vardır. Yazara göre iyi ve kötü sadece yanılısamadan ibarettir çünkü herkes doğuştan lanetlidir.

Shepard'ın aksine, Stoppard entelektüel bir arka plana sahiptir ve oyunlarında mizah duygusunu derin bir tarih ve felsefe bilgisiyle birleştirerek kullanır. Gerçeklikle yanılısamayı iç içe verme yetisine sahip olan yazarın yapıtlarında bu iki öge, ustaca bir arada kullanılır. Stoppard aynı zamanda zıt durumlar üzerinden oyunsu bir atmosfer kurabilen ve bunu keyifli bir oyuna dönüştürme başarısını gösterebilen bir sanatçıdır. Beceriksiz kişilerini karmaşık durumlarla uğraştırarak insanın çaresizliğini ortaya koymak, Stoppard'ın sıklıkla başvurduğu bir yaklaşımdır. Yazarın, kişilerinin güçsüzlüğü ve çaresizliği; daralan dünyalar, kaotik ve acımasız çevre, şaşkın karakterler, gerçek ve yanılısama çatışması, şüphencilik, belirsizlik ve kadere karşı koyma gibi temaları ustalıklı biçimde verebilme yetisi, onu absürt tiyatronun önde gelen yazarlarından biri yapar.

Bu iki çağdaş yazar, bireyin amaçsızlığını, güçsüzlüğünü ve kontrolsüzlüğünü ortaya koymada farklı yaklaşımlar sergilemelerine rağmen, her ikisi de yabancılaşma ve absürdizmi oyunlarının temeline yerleştirirler. Böylece yaşadıkları dönemin bunalımlarını tiyatro aynasında güçlü bir biçimde yansıtmayı başarırlar.

## INTRODUCTION

Although Tom Stoppard and Sam Shepard write plays dealing with different subjects, use different styles, and live in different countries; they write in the same language and above all, particularly their early works reflect an influential post-modern influence of absurd drama and of its leading writer Samuel Beckett. Both Shepard and Stoppard do not deny writing under the influence of Beckett. In an interview in *Theatre Quarterly* in 1974, Stoppard admits that this is the case: “My first play...called *The Gamblers*...was really *Waiting for Godot* in the condemned cell” (qtd. by Kelly 3). Having read *Waiting for Godot* (1952) for the first time, Shepard is astonished: “it was like nothing I’d ever read before” (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 23), and this shock would form most of his plays.

Both playwrights show, in their plays, how humanity has been alienated, and how individuals suffer from this alienation process. Alienation, which many intellectuals acknowledge as a condition of the civilized man in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is both an element and the natural outcome of a hostile universe. It is a sense of isolation, of being lost and left alone. Since the Industrial Revolution, philosophers, like Karl Marx, have pointed out to the estrangement of man from the things and from his environment; psychologists define it as the gap between conscious and unconscious state of man; on the other hand, theologians assert that the source of alienation is the distancing of God from the society (enotes 8). Existentialism is seen as a reaction to social alienation, and as dissociation of the individual has increased, this philosophy has been set firmly. As the title, *The Stranger* (1942) by Camus implies, the hero has been pushed out of society and thus alienated even from the closest relatives or friends. The term ‘existential hero’ came to be used to define anybody who acts independently, alone, unconnected, and who develops his own attitude in a world conceived by himself.

Both Stoppard and Shepard have experienced an existential and alienated chaotic life during their lives, but Stoppard hardly reflects it in his plays while Shepard likes to write about his life experiences openly in almost all his plays.

Stoppard prefers to study himself and his subjects from a distant point, “testing his universe as if by refraction from a neighbouring planet” (Brassell 7).

For playwrights, theatre is the life itself, a mirror in which the audiences see themselves. Theatre is also, as Stoppard reflects, a place where the audience passes time by watching somebody who tries to pass time, as in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967). In an interview made by Melvyn Bragg in 1978, Stoppard expresses his ideas on theatre: “I am quite hot on the theatricality of theatre. That’s not really the tautology it sounds...For me, theatre is not literature. It’s an event” (qtd. by Brassell 262). After experiencing role playing, Shepard loves drama, and what attracts him most in drama is stripping off the real identity and assuming the role of somebody else (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 24).

Criticising injustices and immoralities is a common feature both in Shepard and Stoppard. They show differences as regards the criticised objects; Shepard directs his criticism towards society, family and the individuals forming them while Stoppard criticises the politicians, states and other authorities.

Although men and women in Stoppard’s plays are given as sympathetic characters, they are, nevertheless, inept and powerless because they seem to live a life far from their control. Here are some statements made by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, indicating how desperate and incapable they are:

All right! We don’t question, we don’t doubt. We perform  
(78),  
Consistency is all I ask! (28),  
What a fine persecution - to be kept intrigued without ever  
quite being enlightened (30).

The characters of Sam Shepard also undergo a similar powerless and uncontrollable condition. This feature is also one of the commonest themes among the absurdist writers. The world portrayed in their plays is a chaotic as well as an unreliable one. No shelter can guard the individuals against the evils of this insecure universe. Anyone suddenly could fall from the place he occupies even if it is one of the loftiest heavens, as in the case of Hoss, Shepard’s hero in *The Tooth of Crime* (1972).



Meaninglessness, powerlessness and aimlessness are what Melvin Seaman regards as the states of mind and associated behaviours in an alienated individual (Oldenquist 4). These features of the characters and their actions can be traced both in Shepard and Stoppard's works clearly. The fact that meaning should not be sought anywhere is the message both of the playwrights try to give. Seeking for any meaning in a meaningless world is an absurd attempt, and it leads nowhere.

There are no false pretensions in these works. The works reflect the very feelings of the authors. They write what they feel deep in their psyches. The conscious together with the subconscious parts are uncovered. They have very little or no worry about the success of their works. There are pure feelings and emotions because they are stripped of the censorships or other worries.

Their works tend to move towards sheer realism although they seem to rebel against the prevailing disciplines. A complex plot instead of a well-knit one; depressive circumstances and dialogues; defenceless, numbed, and often identity changing characters are the elements both playwrights apply frequently in writing their plays. The past is uncertain and full of problems, and the future can not be predicted. But their characters try to survive despite these disturbing conditions. Although they are oppressed, beaten or degraded, they struggle to stay alive until the end of their lives. All these shared features of either playwright lead us to studying their works in the framework of absurd drama. As their career progresses, the influence of Beckett decreases in both writers (Hinden 401).

Stoppard believes that something hidden or inherited within us keeps us from evil, and lets us continue to believe in good and beauty. There is a feeling of heritage in Shepard, too. However, unlike that of Stoppard, this inheritance is the source of a destructive devil in Shepard's plays. While Stoppard writes intellectual plays, there is hardly any intellectuality in Shepard who is prolific enough to write even while driving.

That humans are genetically similar is one of Shepard's recurrent themes and is re-enacted again and again in his plays. It reflects the idea that every event is the same as the previously experienced ones either by parents or grandparents. So, he comes to a conclusion that in fact everything remains the same, nothing and nobody

changes even though time passes, ages and generations change. What seems to be changing is in fact only an illusion. And this stability is a universal one which leads to a monotonous, chaotic and a boring life. The message is clear: nothing is happening or changing, as in *Waiting for Godot*. Everybody is a passenger in a station waiting for a vehicle, a Godot-like hope, which is never to come (Biggsby, *Modern* 189). And this chaotic situation brings about despair in the plays of Shepard and Stoppard. Shepard cries, complainingly:

...Every time the thing's opened, there is some hoping, some hopeless hoping that goes on. Every time the lights come on, the yearning. We know it's empty. Why keep opening the door? Nobody's put anything in there! (qtd. by Shewey, *American Theatre* 25).

There is a clear difference, even a contrast, in their personalities as well as in approaching their countries and politics. Unlike Shepard, Stoppard has a cold nature, loves to remain elusive and does not like to show his feelings. The desire for a reclusive life is common with Shepard. While Stoppard is happy with his country and criticises other countries, particularly the communist ones, Shepard is not happy with his country. Stoppard criticises Russia and other communist block countries for human rights violations against their own citizens, whereas Shepard criticises American policies for deluding and harming their own countrymen, the Americans. Stoppard reveals that the despotic leaders in authoritarian countries are cruel who are full of tricks and pretensions.

Like Stoppard, who has suffered from the wars since his early ages, Shepard is also against wars and all its cruelties. Expressing his anger for Bush administration in Persian Gulf War, Shepard believes that there is no winner in a war, but losers:

...We're on the biggest losing streak we've ever had. How many people a month come from Iraq with limbs missing? Yet we're supposed to be victorious in this thing. It's a fucking nightmare. Everyday it's brainwashing, that this is a heroic thing we're involved in. It's unbelievable bullshit (qtd. by Shewey, *American Theatre* 82).

Similarly Stoppard makes his character Tzara, in *Travesties* (1974), talk and criticise wars and those who are involved in them:

Wars are fought for oil wells and coaling stations; for control of the Dardanelles or the Suez Canal; for colonial pickings to buy cheap in and conquered markets to sell dear in. War is capitalism with the gloves off and many who go to war know it... (39).

In handling characters the playwrights show similarities particularly when it comes to female characters. The desire to take women under control leads to violence in Shepard's hardly educated American middle-class families while there is a more dangerous situation in Stoppard's aristocratic intelligentsia: indifference towards women, leaving them completely on their own. Thus, the male characters of the two playwrights expose two different approaches towards women, neither of which seems to be reasonable. It may be inferred from their works that they obviously do not feel sympathy with the mentally and psychologically weak females. The type of woman Stoppard portrays in *Jumpers* (1972), like Shepard's female character in *A Lie of the Mind* (1985), is not the one they favour, they criticise such a female type. Stoppard's support for Thatcher could come from his admiration of strong, authoritarian, creative and independent women, as his former wife puts it:

When I first met Tom, I had a feeling of inferiority. I felt like a fish out of water, I suppose. I didn't feel I had any place among the literati and glitterati, I was insecure. I remember asking him which women he admired most. He named a few, writers and businesswomen; the sort of women that I later became...the more I did, the more he approved and the happier he was...Tom likes women who are independent, who can take care of themselves and have lives of their own. He likes working women (qtd. by Nadel 414-415).

Shepard's male characters are marginal characters and they apply fierce, brutal methods which appear in the form of domestic violence within the family. In addition to this, they are quite indifferent to women, and they are not even aware of the presence of women. Stoppard's male hero George in *Jumpers* is such a male character. Using different approaches, both playwrights share a common view by underestimating the female characters. In both writers the women are generally weak and need men. However, this need reaches to a great level and costs much to the male characters. It can end up with an incestuous affair in Shepard: the mother sleeps

with her own son in *Buried Child* (1977); the wife, in Stoppard's plays, may cheat on her husband in their own bedroom just as the husband studies in the next room, as is the case in *Jumpers*. In each case, it is clear that man is helpless against the sexuality of woman. Excessive violence and merciless behaviours in Shepard, and the absence of affection and concern which women need desperately in Stoppard are the reasons for the suffering of women.

Jake, in Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind*, is a typical Shepard character; a crazy, violent male who acts recklessly and ruthlessly. Beth resembles George's wife, Dotty in Stoppard's *Jumpers*. Both women work as either actresses or singers; they have mental problems, and have to give up their professions due to their illnesses. Each one is suspected to be engaged in betraying their husbands though seemingly Beth is innocent while Dotty is obviously involved in such an affair. Both women are dependent females, depending on males. While females, in either playwright, are similar to a great extent, the males are opposite characters, acting in contrast to each other: on one hand jealousy makes Jake almost kill his wife, on the other hand, unlike Jake, George ignores anything happening in his own house where he seems to be cheated on a regular basis.

Don Shewey claims that *A Lie of the Mind*, in which the playwright applies violence and unreason, is a continuation and the culmination of the earlier four plays (Sam Shepard 8), and therefore it also reflects Shepard's own life as the other plays do. The characters in these plays are like Shepard's family members who seek to ruin their own lives: *Curse of the Starving Class* (1978) tells the story of a queer family on an avocado ranch in Southern California: an alcoholic father, a mother trying to resist the father, the son who is continuously in deep thoughts and dreams, and the bad-tempered, man-like daughter. A similar alcoholic father and a vulnerable son are seen in *Buried Child* in which a deadly secret is revealed. *True West* (1980) exposes the fight between two brothers who are seemingly opposite characters: the clean-cut and promising screenwriter and the inept burglar who has taken after their father. The stormy quarrel and love story of two half-siblings, a stuntman and his beloved from his childhood is told in *Fool for Love* (1983). Even though it is not clearly stated, the hero of the plays reflects different situations of the playwright in different times: reclusive teenager, estranged son, confused but aspiring writer and

problematic lover. In each phase the writer handles the autobiographical elements on a philosophical base. His family plays imply that inheritance is a deadly fate and that the inner world of the individuals is a hell where ambiguously good and bad aspects clash endlessly.

The writer explains why he constantly creates a domestic tension within a family: “There is no law against bringing brothers into the plays several times. I like this predicament, one brother sitting with the corpse, and the other one coming from a long distance and meeting around the death of the father” (qtd. by Shewey, *American Theatre* 24).

Richard A. Davis claims that Shepard has discovered that no shelter man has found is permanent because it is an illusionary one, and it is only within the individual mind (qtd. in *Contemporary Authors* 4). To a great extent, Shepard’s plays continuously questions this problem and seeks an answer. He later comes to realise that fragmentation within self and society is the greatest source of these problems (Bigsby, *Modern* 168).

Having contradictory features of his characters, that is, two opposite sides of the individuals occurring simultaneously is the theme of Shepard’s most plays. His plays demonstrate how fractured and alienated the characters are. Divided selves and families have turned into demons eating their own off-springs. Alienated father and sons, siblings, husband and wives experience and suffer from the absurdities in an existentialist universe where love and values have been ruined irreparably.

Shepard believes that catastrophic destiny awaits us in whatever deeds we experience, and what man should do is to acknowledge it first and then to determine an attitude free from all prejudices and pressures because “no deceit is of primary or debilitating or weakening as self-deceit.” (Bigsby, *Modern* 165) In *Seduced* (1979), believing that man is living a life totally based on lies, the character Henry Hackamore has a misanthropic world view, which seemingly summarizes the playwright’s general views on man, and he expresses his despair and anger at humanity:

It’s the same thing I saw in Texas when I was a boy. The same thing I’ve always seen. I was myself. Alone. Standing

in open country. Primitive. Screaming with hostility toward men. Toward us. Toward me. As though men didn't belong there. As though men were a joke in the face of it... And far off, invisible little men were huddled against it in cities. In tiny towns. In organisations. Protected. I saw the whole world of men as pathetic. Sad, demented little morons moving in circles. Always in the same circles. Always away from the truth. Getting smaller and smaller until they finally disappeared (qtd. by Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 241-242).

As in most of his other plays, in this play also struggles and attempts to bring order do not succeed. The characters compose a community of dragons. Henry's assistant shoots his gun saying: "I'm the demon they invented! Everything they ever aspired to. The nightmare of the nation" (qtd. by Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 241).

Stoppard also handles the question of reality and illusion in his plays. The improbable coincidence of two unrelated objects is both Stoppard's and surrealists' method. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967) he exposes the difference between theatrical death and real death, so reality begins where illusion ends. Although we are controlled as stage characters performing nothing but the written predetermined script by an unseen hand out of stage, we still have responsibilities for our actions, and even the kings, princesses are manipulated actors created by this hidden force or forces. Neither Ros and Guil, nor Hamlet escapes this existential destiny (Brater 120).

Stoppard favours some different authentic techniques, knitting improbable plots, blending entirely two different stories, elaborating and reconstructing an existing tale in a new, but completely different environment and context. He adopts the principles of absurd theatre by questioning the false appearances and accounts of identities, language, histories and laws. The playwright brings two contradictory situations on stage, mixes them and then urges his characters to solve the confusion, which makes it so much complex that it becomes almost impossible to sort out.

Stoppard's plays are full of conversations causing worry and anxiety between characters, distracting attention, leading accidental misunderstandings or stupidity. Although Stoppard adds elements of comedy into the play in case of Tzara's, Carr's or Joyce's situations in *Travesties*, he does not intend to do the same for Lenin.

Rather, he gives a serious, frightening air. Thus, he shows his anger for politicians or cruel academicians like Lenin in *Travesties* and Professor Archie in *Jumpers*.

Stoppard gives privilege to the characters, like Alexander in *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1977), who are idealist in their moral and political thoughts. So, although he is against the cruelty and oppressions of Lenin and his ideology, a hidden respect for him is felt throughout *Travesties*. For example, dignity and seriousness of Lenin and his condition are not mingled with rest of the play which is mostly set on a comic basis. However, having read the play, one feels that extrovert and anarchic artist Tzara successfully opposes, and certainly is superior to autocratic politician Lenin because of his theatrical energy. Seemingly, Stoppard is angry with the leading figures and the dilemma they are in while enjoying their privileged lives. We get the impression that the playwright shouts at them saying: “you all the great leaders, politicians, professors or whatever you are, step down where you are occupying because you do not deserve it.” To take an example, In *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* the nonsensical and unfair laws of the intolerant state and its officials are parodied. They impose their absurdities as ‘realities’ or ‘sane’ on their people mercilessly, threateningly. The term ‘equality’ is also parodied. The doctor applies the sane procedures to both Alexander, the political dissident, and Ivanov, the real lunatic, who share the same cell as ‘equal’ individuals. The science of psychiatry, like art or any other science, is used as a tool for continuation of the prevailing ideology whether it is moral or not; right or not. As such, Lenin suggests, in *Travesties*, that literature should be in the service of communism, showing how good an ideology it is (85).

## **CHAPTER I – HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

It is not easy for a writer to be affected, and thus to write, independent from his time, milieu, influential movements and culture which dominate his time. As an example, Sam Shepard has been influenced by the culture of the 1960s deeply, and can be regarded as a man of sixties, or Tom Stoppard has been interested in politics, notably in the 1970s, and defended Thatcherism for a while even though he criticised some of its deficiencies later. Therefore, the knowledge of the period sheds light on understanding the works written in the relevant period. Given the fact that any work should be assessed in the context of the time it has been written, it would be appropriate to draw a picture of history in which Sam Shepard and Tom Stoppard produced their works. Since the playwrights gave their best, and most, works between the 1960s and the 1980s, we will try to focus on those mentioned years beginning from the post-war years, instead of giving a detailed history encompassing the whole 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Furthermore, since Shepard deals mostly with social issues in his plays, the social history of America will be foregrounded while the political history, as well as social history, of Britain will be emphasized because of Stoppard's political concern in his works.

### **1. AMERICA AFTER WORLD WAR II**

During WW II, Americans worried what post-war era would bring although they were on the winning side. They feared to return to the years of Great Depression. However, they enjoyed an economic development, material abundance and wealth. In the post-war era, numerous Americans owned new homes, cars, television sets, and other appliances. The twenty years of Franklin Roosevelt's Democratic Party in power came to an end in 1952 elections. The voters elected the war hero Dwight Eisenhower as president and the Republicans got the majority.

Prosperity influenced social and cultural structures and attitudes. A consumer culture began to develop after the war. In this new culture needs for a good life



became focal point. Conservative social values dominated the country. The rich but uneasy middle class society tried to challenge the threats to the status quo. However, amid this abundance and affluence poverty and social distress were not less. The affluent middle class itself, particularly women, experienced uneasiness and stress as domesticity and devotion to family became an ideal social lifestyle. Cultural critics, intellectuals and alienated youth questioned the wrongs and misdeeds beneath the illusion of Eisenhower prosperity; racial discrimination gradually emerged as a hard social issue; and worries caused by the cold war and the nuclear arms race surpassed the fake placidity. Thus American society between 1945 and 1960 presents a paradoxical picture of the progress in material wealth while undergoing uneasiness, social problems and cultural strains which the authorities did not acknowledge. Sam Shepard portrayed this chaotic atmosphere masterfully in his plays, notably in *Curse of the Starving Class*.

The war brought important social changes to the country. Women workers working in war plants had increased in number during the war. By 1945, 37% of all American women were in the work force. A migration wave towards the industrial centres was on the way, southern rural blacks were the majority group moving to the cities. In 1945 when demobilization of 12 million men and women took place, a fear of high unemployment aroused. But soaring economy absorbed the returning GIs rapidly. The short-lived panic was suppressed (Cayton 205).

Great resources and developments in electronics, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, atomic energy and other fields made post-war America the research centre of the world, and provided the country with the strongest economy. Devastated European factories could not continue to produce goods for a long time, but unaffected American factories produced and exported goods that could not be made elsewhere. In the late 1940s one-third of all the world's manufactured goods came from America.

Educational benefits, business loans and other facilities were provided to veterans thanks to the GI Bill of Rights. And veterans benefited from these privileges to the full. Nevertheless, no matter how financially these veterans were supported, they were undergoing a terrible and irrecoverable psychological post-war distress.

Shepard's father was also one of these veterans who could not get through this trauma and dilemma in the rest of their lives. And this impact was so powerful throughout the playwright's life that it is possible to see its traces in almost all of his works. The women were not lucky, either; most of them were workers in war-time factories, and as the war ended, a great many of them were fired and forced to return to their homes, which was mostly a reluctant withdraw. Most blacks chose to stay in the cities of the North, where many more blacks had already settled in search of a factory work. Thus, cities crowded by blacks were an indication of social formation of the cities in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 1950s, millions of new cars, refrigerators, radios, and so on were manufactured and sold with a growth in Gross National Product (GNP). All these meant a similar rise in expenditures. Energy was cheap and all forms of energy power like oil were abundant. From the post-war period onward reliance upon technological innovations, computers, and similar productions increased while manual labour decreased. This meant an increase in white-collar workers and a reduction in blue-collar workers. The material and economic development led a strong political and social conservatism among the middle-class society. Enjoying an affluent time compared to the misery and economic crisis of the 1930s, millions of the middle-class Americans were reluctant to change the status quo and to support foreign ideologies, or domestic critics (Cayton 206-207).

The Second World War, a new enemy, the Soviet Union and the mass media helped an American national identity to be formed. Homeless people began to move to the suburban areas to own their own homes. They were able to easily buy a house for a low cost. The Federal Housing Agency and the Veterans Administration subsidized low-cost mortgages on new homes. Moving to a far location had impacts on social, cultural, and psychological behaviours. They left their families, church, and ethnic ties behind, entering a new social and cultural environment where all these strangers found themselves as new neighbours. In this residence they got new ways of living, developing a new culture. This new culture was based on tolerance, adaptability, and conformism rather than harshness or conflict. A generation later when the new culture turned to the city they reflected their way of lives. In this new culture of the 1960s, church played an important role. Family members were mostly

constant church goers. While religion was a divisive agent in the 1920s causing street fights between sects, it was a unifying social force in post-war era. The society was as peaceful as the religion. In general, a moderate society replaced the violent and frightful community of the 1930s. This mood is epitomized in the 'Modern Republicanism' of the Eisenhower presidency in the 1950s. This increasing conformity and opportunism was regarded as excessive and criticized by some socialists, such as C. Wright Mills of Columbia University (Cayton 208-209).

Although television was first introduced to American life in 1939, it found a suitable environment for commercial development only after the war. Americans began to spend most of their time watching television which became an important factor in shaping the culture and the society. On one hand, it reflected suburban values; on the other hand, it served to form a consuming culture and a materialistic society. As television became popular and got an unshakable position as the most influential medium, the published media weakened and lost subscribers, and movie attendance declined greatly.

In the post-war era, people moving to the suburbs gave importance to wealth; social stability and family cohesion. Family, also Shepard's most important subject matter, became the focal point, and the number of marriages increased, which accounts mainly for the baby boom in the 1960s. The crowded households began to look for new residences for their growing families and needs, which meant new schools, hospitals and other services. Increasing marriages in number meant decrease in the age of married women. The new culture extolled domesticity and strengthened the place of women within the family. The female was portrayed as the happy housewife who had in fact hard and various tasks ranging from childcare to other heavy house works. Woman was confined to a narrow social role as homemaker and mother. Nevertheless, the rate of women in labour force was about 35 percent by the 1960s. The discontented woman could not articulate herself in the 1950s. Revealing this situation, Shepard's works could be regarded a historical account of women at the time. Women had no worry about making a career or an ideological one, either, but the reason for their working was just to enhance their families' living standard. The occupations they could get were limited to such jobs as nursing, teaching, secretary, and factory working. The conditions were mature enough for women in the

1960s to begin to show their dissatisfactions in a political and cultural atmosphere. They tried to resist the conditions of the earlier decade and narrowness of their status as young mothers. Shepard was one of these writers criticised for underestimating women and their achievements.

While the American community enjoyed affluence in the post-war era, the fears of communism, its possible extension, which could undermine political authority and nuclear war, were influential in shaping the life. The obsessions and concerns of the Americans with communism and dissident opinions at home intensified as the Soviet Union increased its impact on Eastern Europe. All these fears in the USA as well as in European countries created a shield, a shelter against the Soviets: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, founded in 1949. In the same year a communist authority came to power in China. And a year later, the US military waged a war in Korea which lasted three years. All these caused political and social climate to turn into a conservative one. However, such a belief can be traced in Tom Stoppard rather than Sam Shepard who has never shown an interested in such an issue. Nonetheless, the reason for the hatred for Communist Russia was based on a different matter in the case of Stoppard. His criticism of Soviet Russia resulted mainly from human right violations.

The fear of communist extension was so great that it became a kind of paranoia accusing many officials of disloyalty and treachery some of which ended in death penalties. An artificial climate of apprehension contributed to a mood of caution and anxiety in the 1950s. This groundless fear constituted a contrast to the prevailing prosperity. When the Soviets launched Sputnik I, the world's first orbiting satellite, Americans, under the presidency of Eisenhower, started to spend much for missile development, which resulted in the foundation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1958. This was followed by an educational reform across the continent. Many loans and funds were provided for improvements in science, mathematics and foreign languages.

Despite the developments and affluent economy, apart from communism, the society had another fear: an atomic war. The atomic bombs dropped over two Japanese cities might possibly one day have made the way towards American cities

as well. When the Soviets tested their first atomic bomb, the fears and anxieties soared. In 1952 President Truman responded with tests of hydrogen bomb, which was much more destructive than atomic bomb. Soviet and British tests of these bombs of doomsday followed one another. Meanwhile, the adults and children were taught how to behave, hide and evacuate in case of bombings. All these caused unconsciously a generation full of apprehensions, menace, annihilation, anxiety, and other irrecoverable psychological problems. The tests of these bombs in the Pacific pumped radioactive poisons into the drinking water, the food and atmosphere. This contributed to the unhappiness of humanity. Films, science-fictions, stories and other genres of the period reflected a culture which had fearful nightmares of bombings. Human extinction because of nuclear destruction, atomic wars, or radioactive fallout was the most common theme of the age. The contradictions of these anxieties, wealth, consumerism, and suburbanization epitomize the social history of the 1950s.

1950s was rather a new decade for Americans to generate a new life, a new culture and new norms different from the older traditions and values. In this period many renovations took place not only in industrial fields but also in life-styles, and moral life. It was a period of change and development. The new generation was in a search and ignored the old ones. While, on one hand, extraordinary technological developments and mechanization made life easier; on the other hand, they caused alienation.

Some literary figures criticized the conformity and blandness of the period. J. D. Salinger, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Norman Mailer were the leading critics of the 1950s. Rejecting conformity, family life, and capitalist America, the Beats like Ginsberg and Kerouac celebrated spontaneity, sensual pleasures, alcohol, drugs, and freedom. One of the most influential cultural phenomena was music during this time. While the mainstream music dealt with domesticity, partly piety and a sort of romantic love, towards the end of the 1950s, a new style rock and roll, which challenged all the features of the earlier music, became highly popular with the young generation. Sam Shepard's character Cavale in *Cowboy Mouth* (1971) reveals how powerful rock-'n'-roll was among the youth in the 1960s:

In the old days people had Jesus and those guys to embrace...they created a god with all their belief energies...and when they didn't dig themselves they could loose themselves in the Lord. But it's too hard now. We're earthy people, and the old saints just don't make it, and the old God is just too far away. He don't represent our pain no more. His words don't shake through us no more. Any great mother fucker rock-'n'-roll song can raise me higher than all of Revelations... (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 53).

Because of its open sexuality and some other anti-religious beliefs, church leaders and instructors protested against it. Nevertheless, it became a massive hit. Elvis Presley was the most famous performer with widespread and enormous popularity and with fans not only in the country but all over the world as well. This originally non-political, non-ideological music soon became openly a means of ideology and politics.

Although Shepard was affected by the counter-culture in the 1960s, he did not accept everything it preached and rejected some of the some issues that he considered wrong. The Hippies were effective in that period. With long hair, smoking marijuana ignoring everybody, raw sexuality and anti-war protests, they were making the old generations angry, and they were at the centre of media's interest. Shepard was against some of their ideas, and to show it he had his hair cut short. The owner of the record company was angry with Shepard and refused to put his picture on the album of *Rounders*' in which Shepard was a drum player then. As a matter of fact Shepard did not like the hippie cult. He tells a college reporter about Hippies, the social formation of the time and his disturbance about it:

When this influx of essentially white middle-class kids hit the streets, the indigenous people-the Puerto Ricans, the blacks, the street junkies and all the people who were really a part of the scene-felt this great animosity toward this flip-outs running around the lower East side in beards and hair down to their asses. There was this upsurge of violence and weirdness, and every body started carrying guns and knives. I was using a lot of drugs then-amphetamines, smack. Drugs were a big part of the whole experience of that time. It was part of a feeling that you wanted to experience different aspects of reality. I didn't use drugs to write. I only used drugs to live. But I was using heavy stuff, and I saw a lot of people go under from drugs, which is one of the main

reasons I left the streets, because street life went hand in hand with that (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 56).

Although the white suburban middle-class determined the cultural tone of the post-war era, there were millions of dark skin people, notably the Hispanics, living in the suburbs. Most of them came to America after the Second World War and lived in poverty. The overwhelming majority was Spanish-speaking immigrants, who were uneducated and unemployed, and could not speak, read or write English. The Native Americans, the most unfortunate race of all, were drifted to the cities after their ancestral lands were opened to the white dwellers. As a result of blending with white population, they began to lead a marginal, hard life to eke out. Although at the end of the decade, the black population increased greatly, they achieved only a little share from the affluent economy (Cayton 214-215).

After the whites moved to the suburban areas, the blacks and Hispanics were left in the cities. Most of them had no jobs or low-paid ones. The rate of unemployment, crime, health, education, and disorder increased to an unbearable level. Those problems afflicted not only the then population, but also constituted the seeds of greater catastrophes for the coming decades. The white middle-class citizens, most of whom crowded the suburbs, were relatively economically and socially in a good position, and they tended to ignore the problems of the others. It was not until the 1960s that these problems were voiced.

The fact that the problems of the races, except for American whites, were not taken into account urged the manifestations of racism and black political activism. This indifference was going to cost the country dear for decades. After the World War II, while the governments fought against racism abroad, they tolerated it at home. America continued this dilemma for a long time. This annoyed black citizens and forced them to form new human right organizations against race discrimination.

A young pastor of a Baptist church, Martin Luther King, Jr. led and organized these activities, and formed the Southern Christian Leadership Committee. King was a man of non-violence and applied practical strategies. Soon he and his followers drew attention and admiration. They succeeded in convincing the Supreme Court to pass the laws which declared that several segregationist practices around the country were illegal.

Meanwhile the black writers contributed to the civil rights movements. Such black writers as Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin wrote novels that showed the world how it was to be black in a white society, criticizing American racism. In the 1950s, there were many rallies and protests against racism, and a young generation emerged demanding full equality against unbelievable and ridiculous racist discriminations of local managements. For example, the blacks were allowed only to sit on the back of the buses, and if a white demanded his or her seat, he or she had to leave it. And even a black woman was judged for refusing to give her seat to a white (Cayton 216).

In 1961 Dwight Eisenhower stepped aside leaving the presidency to a vigorous young president, John Kennedy. Thus, Eisenhower era and its resonance were over. The years between 1945 and 1960 saw an unmatched time in the history in terms of economic affluence. American capitalism provided a high standard living during this period. Unlike the people living in this period, the later generation had to fight an industrial decline, trade deficit, environmental worries, and soaring energy crisis and other problems. However, the fears emerged just after the war had affected political, cultural, and intellectual life negatively. These fears included expansion of Soviet communism, nuclear or atomic bombings. All these fears helped determine the psychology of the American nation. The women were not happy for being underestimated wherever they were employed or lived. And above all, not all the Americans made use of the material wealth.

This era was also a time when reality and illusion clashed. The official history recorded the events as it dreamed them to be denying real issues. Only some of them found an opportunity to be voiced, but most remained unvoiced. Such issues as racism, gender exploitation, nuclear and environmental hazards, and vast class disparities were the major problems in the 1950s. Although the American nation was not prepared to accept the hidden reality lying beneath a gilded age, some prevailing cultural and social actions implied that it is the case. For example, science-fiction stories of aliens and robots taking over the world; movies showing a mutated world; cynical monologues of comedians in smoky nightclubs; hysterical and crazy cries of Beat writers and poets; the open sexuality and bluntness of rock and roll, the irreverent satires of *Mad Magazine*; the hellfire warnings of the churchmen. There



were many tensions, social forces and conflicts beneath the false placid surface in post-war America (Cayton 217).

## **2. BRITAIN AFTER WORLD WAR II**

The post-war years surprisingly became a wealthy period in economy. All the conditions to activate the domestic market and to make profit had already been prepared. The individual demands were easily met. The luxury goods of the previous decade, such as washing machines, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, televisions, and even cars, became ordinary needs and began to be seen in most British homes. Technology started to introduce new products which formerly cannot be even dreamed of: microwave ovens, stereo music systems, videos, or individual computers. Home-owning became widespread. As the prices increased, the working hours lessened. Nevertheless, to maintain the existing life standards, both man and woman had to work. The other factor contributing to an affluent society was the decrease in family members living in a household, for example the number of children was reduced to two, or even lower than that.

Unlike the prosperity of the British citizens at home, there was a dramatic decrease in its power outside. The economic collapse at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century surely played an important role in this failure. The former industrial rivals of the Britain began to see it no more as a rival. It even fell behind the countries which were defeated in the war like Germany and Japan. What the governments did in the post-war years was trying to maintain high living standard of the citizens, so they were consuming most of their energy for this goal. This became the major worry of the post-war governments because the English used to live a comfortable life, and their votes would go to any party which was going to do its best to provide it (Jenkins 156).

The war had a devastating impact on economy, nearing the country to almost bankruptcy. Liz Petheram gives a detailed picture of the economic cost of the war:

By 1945 Britain's overseas debts totalled more than £ 3000 million. Between 1939 and 1941, the countries gold reserves fell from £ 864 million to £ 3 million. In the course of the war, one third of the country's housing stock was destroyed. Two-thirds of the merchant were lost (249).

The Britain's regression went hand in hand with its army's loss of power internationally, so it decided to side with America after America and Russia appeared as the super powers of the world. Britain struggled to have a strong position among the other countries, but it failed. In fact, sometimes standing under the shade of the US harmed not only its prestige but also its interests as well. And, though it seemed as a bridge between America and Europe, its condition led to cold relationships with its neighbours in Europe. It also became a matter of discussion in domestic politics, and was never seen a popular situation among public (Jenkins 156-157). With Suez Crisis, the dramatic decrease in its power outside gained speed. Colonel Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal Company, so he was accused of undermining international law and security. Britain, France and Israel decided on a joint attack on Egypt despite USA's reluctance. They attacked Egypt in 1956, but the USA and USSR demanded ceasefire through the UN. Therefore, the attackers were obliged to withdraw with a terrible disappointment (Petheram 289). Suez Crisis exhausted British prestige most and her world role was badly hurt.

Although after the war there was not much political conflict, the major conflict took place at the workplace. And it was even exacerbated, and went out of control in the 1970s. While the unions pressurized the government to make a pay rise, their productions were too little to meet such an increase. The insistence on high standard life led a long lasting stagnant economy compared to the other European countries.

Despite the enormous cuts in expenditures, often there was a great budget deficit. And after the unsuccessful attempt in Suez and decolonization of Africa, the country began the European Economic Community (EEC) negotiations. This was a good opportunity to develop commercial relationships with the Western European neighbours. However, when France vetoed England's membership for EEC in 1963, the English government lived a shock; whereas, Macmillan had worked hard to

improve the economy to enter the EEC. The renewal of the application, in 1967, faced France veto once again (Jenkins 163-166).

In 1970 Conservatives took over the government surprisingly. The Prime Minister Edward Heath, putting aside interventionism, preferred a liberal economy. At last, England managed to enter EEC in 1973. In 1972 the strikes reached an unbearable state. With the strikes of miners and electricity workers the powers in houses and workplaces were cut. The rate of unemployment was above the tolerable levels in the late 1970s. The strikes crowded the streets and resulted in killings.

In 1975 Thatcher had become the leader of the Conservatives. Taking 1979, 1983, and 1987 elections, she managed an influential and striking ruling period which lasted 11.5 years, which is called Thatcherism (Jenkins, 169). This strong period of Thatcherism was also influential on the playwright Tom Stoppard as well as many literary figures writing in various genres. The idea of Thatcherism is traced to the Victorian age. The essential thought in Thatcherism was that Britain could escape the economic crisis in the 1970s only following the Victorian model. That meant increasing state intervention, the curbing of union power, limited responsibility and freedom of the individuals, the revision of rights, strengthening morality, reviving the traditional family, and restoring law and order. To sum up, all of these were reviving liberal and conservative policies (Fulcher 748). Thatcher refused any policy either Labour or Conservative before her government. She was determined to get rid of all the old practices, and bring new ones instead. Several over-manned state industries, such as gas, electricity, steel, and telecommunication, were privatized. The aim was to reanimate the economy, and provide the wide masses with shares of these sectors, and to develop competitiveness, and to give a good service to the consumers. The most encouraging performance of her government was about the unions: it limited their rights and activities by passing new laws. With the new legislations the unions and labourers became ineffective while the employers gained authority. Therefore, in deciding price policies and working conditions, the employers became quite influential. Thatcherism emphasized individual identities as consumers, share holders, and home owners at the expense of their collective identity as producers. It tried to modernise British society by

Americanising it. It worked hard to convince people about benefits of free market and entrepreneurship (Jenkins 169-171).

The Second World War strengthened the social solidarity and national feelings. What happened between 1939 and 1945 is still influential in shaping the British attitudes towards the other countries. But, of course some of its influences have gradually diminished. And some forms of different social identities have emerged as time passes. This difference, inevitably, has caused a new political stance. A complex life-style of modern society and various fragmented societies and groups have appeared. Traditional subjects which used to function as connecting agents had no more credibility and validity as the century came to an end (Jenkins 174).

With the 1950s, a new youth culture emerged in an environment where money, employment and opportunities were abundant. With their fashionable clothes, interests, styles, taste, music, such as rock and roll and other popular ones, teenagers began to make themselves felt and to be an important consumer class. They had great desire in declaring their independence even at the expense of revolting their parents and the authorities. This flourishing youth culture came to a culmination in the 1960s, which was helped to develop by popular pop groups, notably the Beatles and The Rolling Stones. All these were the products of freedom and free market of capitalism. As a contrast, capitalism also produced elements hostile to itself. Hippies in the late 1960s were a good example of this phenomenon. Particularly with different wearing styles and different music, the youth culture fractured into sub-cultures. As each generation grew older it developed an adaptation to the era in which it lived, and each generation was thought to pose trouble to the elder one (Jenkins 175-176).

Although the post-war generation enjoyed a high standard of living, consumerism, widespread media and educational opportunities more than ever before, this generation became experimental, non-conformist, questioning the institutions and traditions. This reached its peak in the 1960s. It was a period of popular culture. Long hair, jeans, and miniskirts were the symbols of the young generation. As a result of this young revolution, a radical change in social and moral

values emerged. They questioned the social, moral and political values held dear by their parents. The late 1960s saw the student demonstrations, the marches and occupations of university and college buildings by the youth. Dissatisfied and uneasy youth seeking social revolutions disturbed and shocked elder generations and authorities. Dangerous drug offences increased towards the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

Women growing in number also sought to make their voice heard starting from the 1960s. They began to be more effective in any field in the society. From medicine to law they became professional in various subjects. Many sectors, such as business and management, where there had been no women formerly, began to be occupied by qualified young ambitious women. They even began to compete with men in most industries. Post-war developments in humanitarian fields, the introduction of birth control devices, and the legislation concerning abortion right were some of the improvements women benefited from. And thanks to these achievements, they questioned the consent to the traditional affairs, such as marriage, child rearing, and other works of housekeeping. So, they began to reconsider their roles and relationships with men in the society. They went one step further by rejecting the male interruption in the any part of life. All these contributed to an organized feminist movement. People began to hear more female voices, so a new women era was about to open in terms of equal payment, domestic violence, rape, child care, divorce and other marital issues. The abolition of death penalty, the legalization of homosexual practice between consenting adults with Sexual Offences Act in 1967, easing the abortion with Abortion Act in 1967, modernizing divorce laws, providing family planning measures, ending censorship of plays in London (1968 Theatre Act), preventing discrimination in employment and housing with the Race Relations Act in 1968 were among the political achievements for the good of society in the 1960s (Petheram 312).

Universities increased in number, polytechnics developed, Open University, the courses of which were broadcast on television started in 1969s. Wilson governments (1964-1970) enforced some permissive laws concerning domestic issues such as the 1967 Sexual Offences with which homosexual practices were decriminalized; the 1967 Abortion Act with which abortion was legalized; and the

1969 Divorce Reform Act with which the conditions after marriage ending were eased. For the first time in its history, the Britons witnessed the initial developments like Concorde, a supersonic aeroplane made collaboratively with France; test tube babies, the first example of which came in 1978.

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the number of non-white inhabitants living in Britain was not less, and they were primarily from the former colonies, either Caribbean or Indian. They settled notably in London, Birmingham, Bradford, Leicester and Luton. The 1950s and 1960s were the decades when immigration peaked. People seeking wealth and better lives came to Britain. The attitudes of the indigenous white Britons toward these alien cultures were mostly hostile. And such feelings were manifested in annoyance, discrimination, and violence. While some immigrants adopted the values of the new culture, others preferred to carry their old conventions and rejected to be assimilated into a new society. The second group developed into a very strong community resisting to leave their religious and cultural beliefs. The younger generation of this group, born in Britain, felt anger towards the indigenous people for their humiliations. Thus, they developed an ethnic identity which challenged the national identity. Though the process was hard and painful, the British society developed into a mixed population diffused from each culture. This was managed partly because the majority did not show a serious interest in racial politics and parties. Consequently, many coloured people were seen to be good citizens contributing to the interests of the country ranging from sports, music, technology, science, medicine to politics. Seemingly Britain has benefited from a multicultural or multiracial society like the USA while several countries underwent serious racial conflicts.

Two race originated parties, The Scottish National Party and Welsh Plaid Cymru were potentially strong political forces in the 1960s. Both of these parties posed a significant threat for Britain, claiming that the central government in London ignored their needs. Their demands meant serious troubles for London: The Welsh forced the government to recognize Welsh language officially; the Scottish openly objected to the Britain's membership of the European Economic Community, and above all, they wanted independence in the 1980s. Though they became stronger from the 1960s onward, their popularity decreased by the 1990s, and the Labour

Party achieved an overwhelming electoral success both in Scotland and Wales. Labour followed a balanced policy not to offend these countries by devolution, which meant privileged new assemblies in Edinburgh and Cardiff in 1999. Though this policy had dangers for future, it functioned as reconciliation between the nations (Jenkins 178).

Britain's existence as a unified entity may not last longer, and soon it may split into at least three sub-cultures: the English, the Scottish, and the Welsh. People may feel related to various identities in different ways. So in Britain this identity division may be even more serious. This is partly a reason why the British are not in favour of European Union which is seen as a threat to pull Britain apart by combining all European countries under a single community from which the Scottish and Welsh find a different path to dissolve (Jenkins 182).

The empire remains a thing of the past. Now its economy is not very strong as it used to be. Its army, though influential in world affairs, owes its power mostly to being a close ally to the USA. After Communism lost its power in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, Britain was compelled to reduce its military power and a cutback in military expenditure in the 1990s (Jenkins 179).

Traditional institutions, such as The Protestant Churches, which used to be influential in policy making, lost power and popularity partly due to the fact that the society became more materialistic and urban. The Parliament, which was highly respected by the 1950s, began to lose prestige though once it was a model for the rest of the world. The recent attempts, such as broadcasting Parliament's proceedings, to earn the Parliament its old esteem and authority proved futile. Most dramatic of all has been the diminishing status of the monarchy, which used to enjoy a lasting respect and power. In this system crown is regarded as the head of the state, but this is a symbolic label. The crown is known to be not only the head of state, but also the head of executive, judiciary, legislative, the Church of England and the Army, as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Government or other powers govern and act on the monarch's behalf, so reigning power of the monarch is taken away from it. The monarch is supposed to be neutral and act only on the advice of the political ministers. It continues to be seen as a balance between traditional and modern

Britain, and British public still supports its presence. In the 1960s some precautions were taken to make the monarchy closer to the public, and it worked to some extent. However, the media, with its magazine publications, paparazzi as in the example of tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in a car accident in 1997, undermined the reverence of the royal family. Royal family was portrayed as heartless villains. Seemingly the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not be an easy century for the royalty to gain its former role and popularity lost in the previous century (Jenkins 179-180).

In the foreign affairs Modern Britain has not been in a favourable condition, particularly in relations with its European neighbours. Although European Union in which Britain officially participated in 1973 and which changed its name first from European Economic Community to European Community and finally to European Union to show a desire for a closer economic, political and militarist union was welcomed by most of its members, most British people were uneasy with it. The British show reluctance to adopt a unique European identity compared to their continental neighbours. And the British politicians made use of this reluctance and the antipathy towards Europe as an opportunity to get more votes instead of trying to persuade them about the benefits of a union. Thus, Britain neither rejected the union nor embraced it wholeheartedly, this elusive stance made the country lose in several fields. It could not become a determining factor in making decisions in the Union, and also lost its sovereignty that a single country might get. The British were left alone by just remembering their former glories as an empire. They thought that European Union would be a restricting factor on their independence, but on the other hand, they ignored the American influence in almost every way of life, from politics to fashion. In television programs, films and other broadcasts the Americans imposed their lifestyles over the British throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, this influence helped undermine conventional British attitudes and forced them to adopt a globally uniform style in eating, drinking, wearing, manners, ways of speaking and other choices. American cultural dominance took place easily because of a shared language and historical links between the two countries. The British also showed consent because this situation kept them separate from its European neighbours (Jenkins 180-181).



### 3. POST-WAR DRAMA

It seems it would be helpful to give a brief account of the time and the environment in which Sam Shepard and Tom Stoppard formed their plays as well as the background, nature and medium of theatre on which these playwrights constructed and promoted their styles and themes.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, realism was dominant in theatre. Towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century there were various reactions against realism. Cultural upheavals after the World War II contributed to the development of these anti-realist movements. These challenging theories affected drama deeply; nonetheless, theatrical realism kept its power and dominance throughout the twentieth century. Particularly American and English stage remained the least affected by the new developments compared to other theatres. The playwrights of these two countries wrote mainly realistic dramas about middle class life and comedy of manners. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) was an important play having a strong influence on the playwrights who were regarded as 'angry young men.' These writers attacked class differences and dealt with lower class affairs. Russian theatre also remained highly realistic due to the political pressures. Communist leaders, such as Lenin and Stalin, depended upon art to echo the doctrine of communist principles. Russian playwrights were forced to write plays praising the government policies. Playwrights in France and Germany were the most enthusiastic and determined in developing new theatrical models avoiding the stereotypical realistic drama. After the First World War the signs of change appeared in Europe, notably in France and Germany.

After World War I, many artists or writers believed that there were feelings and ideas that Realist Theatre could not express by just imitating daily life or what appears to be real. While painters turned their faces to abstract arts, playwrights wrote in different forms reflecting different thoughts. It is not easy to separate these forms with certain lines since they overlap in many points. Despite the differences, most of them explore to escape the false appearances of reality, and to show the audience that reality might be much more different than it is assumed to be. These thoughts mainly depend on the change of visual images or outer appearances of the

stage rather than the content. The aim is to break with the visual illusion of realism. American playwrights have also followed these changes closely (Grote 407).

### 3. 1. POST-WAR AMERICAN DRAMA

The most important post-war playwrights are Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams who appeared almost at the same time. Williams was first known with *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) and Arthur Miller, a year later, with *All My Sons* (1947). For a long time they occupied their privileged position in American drama. They studied all kinds of dualistic comparisons: man and woman; social and individual; logic and emotion. They were similar in many respects; they examined similar subjects, lived the same age, and underwent similar misfortunes. Furthermore, they lived the same Depression Period; their fathers suffered a bankrupt process; both writers left the college to be playwrights; and they mostly used local, American themes. They wrote about wrongs, hypocrisies, and self-deceiving conformist society (Wardle 208). Shepard's male characters resemble those of Williams in that Williams' heroes react their hopeless environment by trying to escape.

After Williams and Miller, two playwrights continued a lasting fame on Broadway: Edward Albee and Neil Simon. Albee is regarded an absurdist writer who tries to show that, not the whole world, but only American part of it is absurd. Thus, some critics call him a semi-absurdist playwright. He reflects some tastes of Eugene O'Neill and Samuel Beckett. Simon is a comedian indulging in Manhattan folk tales. He ignored any kind of censors as a free man (Wardle 216-217).

In the 1950s Broadway followed the rules of Hollywood. It became much more expensive and produced very little. The goal was producing plays full of stars and amazing productions. Beside Broadway theatre which is highly commercial, emerged a new kind of theatre: Off-Broadway Theatre. Off-Broadway meant any theatre not included in the district of Broadway theatre located between 41<sup>st</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> streets. It emerged for financial reasons. Average budget for a Broadway play was

almost 70.000 Dollars while for an Off-Broadway play it was around 5000 Dollars (Wardle 217).

Off-Broadway favoured experimental plays, which were mostly based on new techniques and ideas after a strenuous process. Edward Albee, Murray Schisgal, Arthur Kopit, Jack Richardson, Jack Gelber and Kenneth Brown were the writers who produced their American debuts on Off-Broadway. The audiences of Off-Broadway were among the intelligentsia who were interested in such playwrights as Eugene O'Neill, Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, and the leading absurd writers Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter. This class of audience was not interested in the new American dramatists (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 37).

Off-Broadway came to be known primarily staging post-war European avant-garde playwrights such as Beckett, Ionesco and Genet, and classical plays. Black, Jewish, homosexual or drug addictive ghettos helped it develop because Broadway had formed an elite society indifferent to those groups. Because of its low cost production it remained unaffected by the actors' strike in 1960 which hit Broadway badly closing the curtains of most Broadway theatres. Soon Off-Broadway became popular making its actors, actresses and directors popular, too. These developments made its productions costlier than before, and it became a theatre close to Broadway against which it started. As the producer Richard Barr puts it:

Off-Broadway began to imitate Broadway. Productions that used to cost between 5 and 7 thousand dollars began to cost seventeen, twenty-seven, and, in the case of Kopit's *Oh Dad, Poor Dad*, over fifty thousand dollars. One cannot survive Off-Broadway under those circumstances (qtd. by Wardle 219).

As Off-Broadway was institutionalized in the footsteps of Broadway, a new direction was needed. This new form was originally rooted in cafes, churches, New York's East Village, and even out of New York. That was Off-Off-Broadway. This was a kind of continuation of two important theatrical activities in the history of American Theatre: The New York Shakespeare Festival and The Living Theatre in the 1950s and 1960s. In one of his interviews in *New York Magazine* Shepard

remembers his early career, how difficult it became to put a play on Broadway and Off-Broadway, and the birth of Off-Off-Broadway:

When I arrived in New York, there was this environment of art going on. I mean, it was really tangible. And you were right, especially on the Lower East Side. La Mama, Theatre Genesis...all those theatres were just starting. So that was a great coincidence. I had a place to go and put something on without having to go through a producer or go through the commercial network. All of that was in response to the tightness of Broadway and Off-Broadway, where you couldn't get a play done (qtd. in Contemporary Authors 3).

In 1963, under the leadership of Joseph Chaikin, the Open Theatre emerged. It was influenced in many ways by the Living Theatre's founders Julian Beck and Judith Malina. Chaikin himself was previously a member of the Living Theatre. He was a politically rebellious character, but his company never showed a similar fervour. He aimed to demonstrate the sources which continuously poisoned the country and made it sick. Chaikin was well-equipped for this purpose, for he was an expert on such exercises. One of these was studying the texture of American life and showing 'exemplary community.' Another example for these exercises was 'transformation' exercises which meant it is likely that one may easily be another one. The characters change roles after an interruption, say, a judge turns into an accused and vice versa. This was a new style in drama. Chaikin was a close friend of Shepard, and he may have possibly been influenced by this style because Shepard's characters often exchange roles in his plays.

A few theatres and foundations and their productions contributed to the development of Off-Off-Broadway. These include Café Cino, Theatre Genesis, The Café La Mama and The Judson Poets' Theatre, the last of which was originally a church activity founded by The Judson Memorial Church. And this church was the original centre of the movement. It declared that there should be no censorship and no religious plays. The aim was to help new playwrights and to learn from them the secular affairs. Café La Mama was founded by Ellen Steward who used to preach an influential speech before every performance. Soon it became an experimental theatre known worldwide. Sam Shepard, Rochelle Owens, Leonard Melfi, Paul Foster,

Rosalyn Drexler were the playwrights who achieve fame on Off-Off-Broadway (Wardle 229). Their aim was to have a new performance style, and to expose the urban environment ranging from drug addiction, the impacts of technology to the sexual abuse. Shepard expresses his thoughts about the function of Off-Off-Broadway and theatre in general:

To me influence of the sixties and the Off-Off-Broadway theatre and the Lower East side was a combination of hallucinogenic drugs; the effect of those drugs and the perceptions of those I came into contact with, the effect of those drugs on my own perceptions, the Vietnam war and all the rest of it which is now all gone. The only thing which still remains and still persists as the single most important idea is the idea of consciousness. How does this idea become applicable to the theatre? For some time now it is become generally accepted that the other art forms are dealing with this idea to one degree or another. That the subject of painting is seeing. That the subject of music is hearing. That the subject of sculpture is space. But what is the subject of theatre which includes all those and more (qtd. by Bigsby, *Modern* 177).

Café Cino, known to be the birth place of Off-Off-Broadway, was founded in 1958. This extremely small side-street storefront was a bohemian hangout where its owner Joe Cino and his friends used to exhibit parts from plays and poems. Café Cino, which became a real theatre in 1961, not only gathered the most talented playwrights but also it had an anarchic and challenging aspect far from pretensions. Being different from the then conventional commercial theatre in essence and style, Off-Off-Broadway emerged as an innovation in drama. It was a starting point for many who were going to be famous playwrights soon, like John Guare, Israel Horovitz, Tom Eyen, Ed Bullins, John Ford Noonan, Harvey Fierstein and A. R. Gurney who still keep their reputation today.

Off-Off-Broadway formed an environment in which any kind of marginal groups such as blacks, gays and the like put on stage anything they wanted fearlessly. They broke all the limitations and acceptances restricting what could be staged, such as nudity or other previously censored actions. They made fun of the decent living room dialogues, and applied the ordinary behaviours in a house, like rude and offensive language, insults and other excessive speech that can be seen in real life.

They also dealt with the politics, and produced plays which criticised such issues as Vietnam, racism and injustices. Elenore Lester of *The New York Times* writes about Off-Off Broadway playwrights:

Most of the writers on the Off-Off Broadway circuit write as though they were born into the world the day after some metaphysical H-bomb exploded, and they accept this blasted world as the natural environment and proceed to play around in it with a great deal of gusto (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 39).

However, Off-Off Broadway was not founded consciously and in an organised way. It began accidentally and spontaneously by those, among whom there were also people who came to New York from their small towns for drug, adventure, fun or sex. Such men inhabited cafes, basements or attics. Shepard recalls that time:

On the Lower East Side there was a special sort of culture developing. You were so close to the people who were going to the plays, there was really no difference between you and them-your experience was their experience, so that you began to develop consciousness of what was happening... I mean, nobody knew what was happening, but there was a sense that something was going on. People were arriving from Texas and Arkansas in the middle of New York City, and a community was being established. It was a way exciting time (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 39).

The people here had no intentions to be famous or to earn much money. What they put on stage was solely their own real experiences, that is, they founded this theatre for themselves. Furthermore, they were not paid and the number of the audiences was meagre. Shepard was one of these men. They simply loved drama because writing was a kind of refuge for them.

Black Theatre Movement developed in parallel with Off-Off-Broadway. It sought to build an original style which entirely belonged to itself. The main stress was on verbally expressed conflicts of the characters particularly in the plays of Ed Bullins and Le Roi Jones, who was the founder of the Harlem Black Arts Repertory and progenitor of Black Arts Theatre network.

Shepard and David Mamet are seen as two eternal opposites and successors to Williams and Miller. Shepard grew up in California and appeared on scene both as a rock-drummer and as playwright on Off-Off-Broadway. He is indulged in what ever was on agenda and fashionable: drugs, astrology, science-fiction, detective films, and horse racing. What occupies his mind and work is the American West and the past. David Mamet portrays characters who have little or no understanding, just living a life concerning their limited worlds. Unethical business crowds his plays. Shepard seems to have read no book despite his prolific writing while Mamet's writings recall the traces of Harold Pinter's works. Shepard is known for his excursions into American myth. Mamet is also interested in national mythology. Both writers' plays are often put on stage on Broadway. Of the recent dramatists in New York, Neil Simon becomes famous, producing somber comedies in the middle of a gloomy atmosphere. Harvey Fierstein becomes popular with the plays examining homosexuality after the 1980s (Wardle 235).

### **3. 2. POST-WAR BRITISH DRAMA**

During the 1950s and 60s, musicals were at the very heart of the public attention providing almost no inspiration or influence for drama. An ineffective and insipid taste was what shaped the stages. And it is needless to say that London stages were desperately in need of a change, an action, or maybe a shocking awakening. And no doubt, the advent of English Stage Company, whose goal was to produce serious, contemporary, non-commercial works in order to stimulate new writing, and the influence of John Osborne caused a thrilling atmosphere in English Drama. Particularly, Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* was the most effective play leading the new direction of English theatre. Theatre began to deal with the social and political matters more than even before; the language it used approached that of ordinary people and thus it began to reach more people.

Naturalism has always been an indispensable feature of drama from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward all over the world, and since then it has never ceased to prevail not only stages but television screens as well. Drama critic Michael

Billington points out at an international theatre conference on new approaches to naturalism in 1980 that "...we in Britain cannot have a return to naturalism since we have never got that far away from it" (qtd. by Brassell 26-27). The kind of naturalism that theatre applies most is domestic naturalism, which presents family issues in a violent and harsh way as in the plays of Albee and Shepard.

After the 1950s there appeared a reaction against the old forms, theatrical conventions or subject matters, whether it is philosophical, moral, religious or political, which were held dear by majorities for ages. Surrealism was one of the attempts to react both realism and naturalism to which British theatre got stuck for a long time. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, while dominating the world drama largely, the effects of Expressionism, Surrealism, Existentialism and Marxism had little influence on British drama, but after the 1950s the impact was much stronger, if not immediate, with Bertolt Brecht, Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. The medium, which had already begun to push naturalism away, were prepared by the influential plays of Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Shelagh Delaney and Robert Bolt. British playwrights in 1960s and 1970s, notably John Arden, Edward Bond, Harold Pinter and Stoppard were deeply affected by these playwrights and their works.

In European theatre two important movements which, in some parts, were in stark contrast with each other opposed naturalism: Brechtian Theatre and Absurd Theatre. While the first stressing the importance of the role played by the individual, the later ignores and even degrades his struggle because of being estranged and expelled from the society.

Plays with epic structure came to England in 1956 with Osborne's *Luther* (1961), Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* (1960) and John Whiting's *The Devils* (1961). Sympathetic characters were portrayed in the traditional manner, so their influence, in terms of Brechtian sense, has been rather superficial, since none of them could serve the goals of Brecht in what a play should cause in audience such as breaking with the conventions or naturalistic circumstance, remaining critical, detachment from the emotions and the biased. Although Brecht's own plays cannot reflect his ideals completely, but still, they are more representative than those of his



imitators. For example, his anti-war play *Mother Courage And Her Children* (1939), the story of a woman who loses her three children in a war from which she tries to make a living, meets much of his ideals (Brassell 29).

During the 1960s and 70s, Brecht gave way to a politically devoted drama, as an anti-naturalist drama. Some writers, including David Hare, Trevor Griffiths, John McGrath, Howard Brenton, Stephen Poliakoff and David Edgar wrote plays reflecting this influence, showing post-war rottenness in the society.

Although English theatre had clung to realism so stubbornly that it could not get rid of it either in the 1970s or even in the 1980s, 1970s saw the attempts to move out of realism and its dominating effects, which lasted throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Parody and travesty are two major aspects of the new approach dominating the other post-war literary genres as well. In English Theatre Stoppard gave unique examples for both techniques, particularly in *Travesties*. As is the case in literary history, seemingly artistic conventions are to be re-tried, subverted, transcended, transformed, or even deployed against themselves to make up a new and influential works.

## **CHAPTER II – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Throughout history all philosophies have sought to understand human identity, which is also the goal of the existential philosophy, but the methods have been different. Identity is an alienated one in existential thinking. From the existence of man onward, the rules governing human's behaviours are non-existent, in philosophical terms, 'existence precedes essence,' that is, identity is hidden in human behaviour. From this point of view, existentialism can be seen as the source of not only absurd drama and alienation, but also other topics, such as alienated identity and dilemma, on which this study is structured. For this reason, existentialist philosophy, which can be regarded as the backbone of all these elements, should be examined carefully.

### **1. EXISTENTIALISM**

Existentialism rejects the idea that the universe gives any clue about how people should live. This idea mostly lies in what Jean-Paul Sartre claims: 'Existence precedes essence,' that is, the identity of a person cannot be determined by examining others or the society the individual lives in. The identity is hidden in the self and behaviours. Since the attitudes occur regardless of the community, existentialism focuses on the individual's freedom and choice. It became popular in France during the Second World War. When Germany invaded France, this philosophy began to be argued among the philosophers and scholars in the cafes of France. It appealed to many thinkers throughout the world. The political oppression under the Nazi sovereignty and the need to resist the invading force contributed to the development of existential thought which emphasizes individual action and responsibility.

Existentialism is mostly associated with the Second World War era and thereafter. However, its origin dates back to the late nineteenth century, when

Friedrich Nietzsche announced 'the death of God' in the 1880s as a response to the dreary loneliness and despair. The feeling of individual responsibility developed after the belief in religion, society and civilization was lost. This situation led a literature which reflected existential isolation, loneliness, fear and anxiety the universe presented. Fyodor Dostoyevsky in 1860s; Franz Kafka, Ernest Hemingway, James Baldwin and Nathaniel West in the twentieth century showed existentialist themes in their works. It has been so powerful that it is almost impossible for a work of art not to show an existential influence even today.

The term existential is so wide that it is not possible to limit it with a single definition or work, so each representative in this philosophy could only show one part of it, all those written in whole can constitute an exact picture of what it is. However, each one represents a different world view, technique and style.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) is the most important figure in French existentialism. Even in his early life, he was determined to show the hypocrisy of the life led and suggested by his parents and grand-parents. He gives utmost importance to being human because human is the sole creature who is aware of his existence. And it is nobody, but the human himself who creates his nature. For Sartre existentialism is humanism, that is, starting point is human. However, this humanism, unlike that of the Renaissance, is a gloomy and a chaotic one. His autobiographic work *Nausea* (1938) describes the disturbed condition of the individual in the modern world. *Being and Nothingness* (1943) demonstrates the condition of an individual in a hostile existentialist environment. Apart from being a philosopher and a writer, he was also a political activist. He participated in Marxist activity in France. His motto was an existential idea, 'to be is to do' which he reflected in his works *No Exit* (1944) and *The Flies* (1943). Since we have no a pre-determined role, guide or fate, we are like spontaneous actors who act from scratch. We ourselves should determine the way we live. An anxiety occurs when one realizes that one day he will die without meaning or goal. He also adds that man feels alone in an absurd universe, and his thinking himself as alienated produces feelings like despair, disturbance, nausea and absurdity. The feelings, such as depression and meaninglessness are among the most common diseases in our world today. The freedom of humanity is not a matter of praise, but a damned one. Human-being has

been subjected to a freedom because he has not created himself and because he has been thrown in a world without his consent; however, he has been held responsible for whatever he has done. There are no universal norms, so what we decide or choose is important because we are responsible for what we have chosen. Man cannot take refuge in laws or rules, for this way of life is a lie. He should live an autonomous and challenging life. Each individual has his own truth, instead of a fixed one. This approach is also implied in Stoppard's plays, notably in *Travesties* and *Professional Foul*. Sometimes we do not see the existing things, but instead, see the non-existents in crowds. For instance, entering a place, we look for the person whom we have an appointment with, and we do not even see others, and if our companion is not there what we see is the absentee. Shepard is also aware of this fact and argues that the audience forms an image which does not exist on stage because his theatre is a theatre of images. When Sartre was chosen for the Nobel Prize, he refused it claiming such an institute could not determine the true value of a writer. Similar rejections are a typical common feature in most existential writers.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1985) tried to apply existentialism into gender based human condition: man and woman. Like Sartre, she claimed that there cannot be a fixed nature for man or woman. It is believed that man had an 'outward' nature, that is to say, he is in search of anything outside home, like Shepard's male characters, particularly the fathers. And woman is 'inward,' her desire is to remain inside, the secure place, so she wants to keep her family and other things around her. This is also the case in Shepard's plays. But Simone de Beauvoir rejected this belief, suggesting that the society should get rid of such false assumptions.

Albert Camus (1913-1960) refused to accept the label 'existentialist.' He was brought up by his mother and grandmother in poverty, in a city of Algiers. He had tuberculosis, so he could not work as a teacher after university graduation. His masterpiece *The Plague* (1947) is the allegory of Nazi oppression and individual struggle against political pressure in the war. He left the existential movement in Paris rejecting Marxist political stance because he never wanted to be under the monopoly of a political party. His disagreement with Sartre was well known by anybody. He took part in a leftist theatre.

Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) examined human existence as a tragedy. In his works human search for reason often fails owing to a senseless universe. His father was a cruel, tough surgeon and was finally killed by one of his serfs. Dostoyevsky joined radical leftists, so he was sentenced to death. Though later his punishment was changed to a lighter one, the thought and anxiety of death never diminished until the end of his life. In his work, *From the Underground* (1864) freedom is emphasized as the most important value of humanity. This stress made him one of the most leading existentialist writers. *Crime and Punishment* (1866) examines the individual's existential condition after robbing and killing a man.

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) viewed the universe from a surreal point. He examined the commonest themes in existentialist literature, such as absurdity, fear, anxiety and alienation. Like other existential writers, he not only showed an existential life in his works but experienced it in his own life, like most existential writers, notably Sartre and Camus. Asking his works to be burned after his death is a good example of it. But this desire was never carried out.

The deadly diseases in the period during which the existential writers lived also afflicted them, and they died from similar illnesses. It is possible that fear of developing deadly diseases of that period, like cancer in our world, and fear of death affected their gloomy existential writings. And it is obvious that as these universal fears continue, existential writing will keep its validity and universality for ever. These fears dominate both Stoppard's and Shepard's dramas as well as our own lives. The anxieties, fears and hopeless situations are the very parts of modern life. The desire to escape it, but knowing its inevitability gives despair. Recovering is rather a long period compared to catch an illness which is sudden and unexpected. Furthermore, recovery does not grant a lifelong health. After a long and suffering recovery process, another disease or disaster may easily come and destroy the life. There is no guarantee for life ahead. The individuals live in an insecure and hostile universe. Existentialist writers and absurd playwrights are aware of this predicament and show it explicitly in their works. Kafka himself died of one of the irrecoverable diseases, tuberculosis in 1924. The themes of fears and confusion made him an influential author.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) changed his world views when he realized that his father's beliefs in Christianity was lacking. His father cursed the God and impregnated a female servant. His family problems, his troublesome relationship with his father, who was problematic, were influential experiences on his philosophy. Like Sartre, Kierkegaard also deals with the idea of anxiety. Unhappy marriages, chaotic life styles, gloomy and depressive personalities, pessimism are common features of existentialist and absurdist writers. Their pessimist and chaotic works are the productions of a similar life. His works, such as *Fear and Trembling* (1843), tells the chaotic sides of human freedom. He defies the organized institutions though he was a devoted religious person. Revolting the existing orders, institutions and systems is a typical aspect of the existential writers. Today Kierkegaard's teachings are regarded as the substantial ideas of existentialism.

*No Exit*, *The Stranger* (1946) and *The Trial* (1925) are wonderful examples summing up existential writing at best. In Sartre's surreal stage play *No Exit*, the notion 'Hell is other people' is introduced. Three characters are imprisoned in a room and they cannot remember how they got there. With this work the term 'existentialism' began to develop in America in the 1940s. Camus's *The Stranger* is about the judgement of a young Algerian Mersault. He quarrels with a man for no apparent reason and kills him. The judgement of Mersault is a perfect example showing the existential absurdity. Instead of judging whether he committed the crime or not, or what the incentives of the murder, the court questions some irrelevant, absurd matters, such as what his personality is like, and how the accused behave towards his mother and sister. As in the example of this case, what is judged is not man's single action, but his existence as a whole. Mersault represents the alienated existential hero who does not think the result and responsibility of his action. *The Trial* tells the absurdity which happens to Joseph K., a governmental bureaucrat. Awakened from his bed in a morning, he is put in jail. Soon he is released, but is told to come to the court and to give evidence constantly. Meanwhile, nobody, including the officials who have detained him, the judge, or even his lawyer, tells him what he is accused of. This absurd situation, like those in other existential works, is used to explain deep philosophical facts about the human nature. Atheism, freedom, guilt

and innocence, identity and self, alienation, humanism, nihilism, absurdism are the main themes and elements in existentialism.

Atheism is an important element of existential thought, and it is adopted by most existentialist writers. Any belief in God is seemingly contradicted with the core of this philosophy and individual responsibility. Sartre, Camus and Beauvoir were fanatical atheists. Their characters try to determine what an appropriate behaviour should be in a godless universe. However, Kierkegaard-like existentialists associated religious feelings with this philosophy. In the works, such as *Either/Or* (1843), *Fear and Trembling* (1843), and *The Concept of Dread* (1844), he tried to relate the belief in God to the idea of individual responsibility. He claimed there was no contradiction between them. While Shepard shows similarities with Sartre and Camus, Stoppard is close to Kierkegaard in approaching divine matters.

Existentialism proceeds from the idea that human behaviour depends on free choice. It rejects any system, like economy, psychology or sociology which tries to find out the factors that control the human behaviours. Existentialist writers partly recognize these systems, but they do not believe them to explain human behaviours for good. Though Sartre, for example, supported Marxist class struggle throughout his life, he never accepts the Marxist idea that certain behaviours belong to certain classes. On the contrary, behaviours vary for each individual and thus they are completely personal. This requires a personal responsibility which is the price for freedom. God or any other laws cannot be the cause of any behaviour which occurs as a result of personal choice. Hemingway's characters, as an example, determine what the later step is, so they are not the victims of the fate, but the victim of their own decisions. This freedom mostly leads the existentialist characters to commit evil actions. They never think a punishment coming from outside or from the God. They do not show any sign of remorse for their deadly guilty actions. For example, Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, or Mersault in Camus's *The Stranger* is not regretful for the murder they commit. These characters are not punished by a divine justice, but by a legal system; whereas, in traditional works such criminals are punished either by natural disasters, illnesses or accidents which seemingly come from a divine source. In *Trial*, Joseph K. is declared guilty for an unknown reason by a meaningless legal system. Due to the oppressive social system,

the individual is not allowed to understand that he has freedom and right to determine his own destiny. Universal system of guilt or innocence is frightening and absurd, and is only an obstacle in the individual's way.

Existentialist writers make their characters live what they themselves experience in real lives. This is a general attitude in existential literature. Existentialism rejects the idea that one can comprehend another individual's thoughts. Existentialist literature is mainly characterized as grey, depressive and hopeless. Even though Sartre, unlike the general assumption, argues that this philosophy is optimistic since it tries to provide man with an opportunity to determine his own fate, pessimism has been associated with this movement. Because it aims to change the traditional, it is difficult to accept. People, who heartily believe in the power of science, and who believe man will soon reach the perfect end, are shocked at the messages of this literature. Existential literature, which does not see the external forces as the source of relief and salvation, produces the feeling of shock with a horrifying thought of meaninglessness and nothingness. The titles of works, like Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and *The Concept of Dread* give enough clues about despair and gloom of the movement.

In spite of preaching meaninglessness, the existential writers try to inoculate man dynamism above his capacity because man is the unique creature who is responsible for giving a meaning to the life. Since they do not see man as the product of the past actions, their works do not apply chronological plots. In a traditional work, the result emerges at the end of the sequential chain of events. But in the existential works, a logical conclusion following a series of events is not possible. It is not necessary for actions to have a logical connection. Existentialism supports an absurd world view, and generally accepted rules are ignored. In Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915), the hero finds himself turning into a gigantic insect when he wakes up in a morning. Though this situation is seemingly impossible, it exposes the unseen absurdity of daily life, and how mistaken it is to look for reason.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries humanism, which was a cultural and literary movement spread throughout Europe against oppressive ecclesiastical doctrine, shed an optimistic light defending the rationality of man and challenging



the clergy who saw man powerless and immoral. It tried to verify that truth and beauty can be understood without the interference of the church. In a way, existentialism is the continuation and culmination of humanism because it gives priority, freedom and responsibility to man. Furthermore, it attributes a determinant role to the individual rather than to the fate. Many existentialist writers identify themselves as humanists even though some think that it is doubtful whether existentialism is humanistic or not, because the focus is on the human himself and on his responsibility rather than any external force.

Most of the existentialist writers prefer a nihilistic world view. Nihilism is derived from Latin term 'nihil' which means nothing. It is known as the philosophy of nothingness, pessimism and hopelessness. It has a world view having no goal in life and ignoring all values. It is related to the idea that ancient Greek skeptics accepted no philosophical thoughts. It was identified closely with Friedrich Nietzsche in the first half of the twentieth century. For Nietzsche, it was more than a sheer hopelessness; it was a significant power to destroy, and in the end, as he suggested in his book *The Will to Power* (1901), nihilism would surpass all other systems of thoughts and would lead to the fall of the whole society. In the 1950s and 1960s when existentialism was popular all over the world, Sartre's idea of nothingness was seen as a nihilistic world view. Although Sartre and Camus tried to show existentialism as a positive power, the idea that man should embrace life despite its nothingness seemed to be contradictory. Existentialism has become a word synonymous with nihilism though the existentialists claim that they fight against nihilism by giving meaning to life, even if existentialism includes meaninglessness in its nature.

In 1939 Hitler attacked Poland, and France waged a war with Germany and was defeated. The development of existentialism coincides with the invasion of France by Germany. The leading figures of the movement, such as Sartre, Camus and Beauvoir were in Paris at that moment. With the periodical *Les Temps Modernes* (1945) edited by Sartre, the thoughts of the philosophy were spread. The spread of the movement speeded up with the publications of the writers' novels and plays. In these works, the heroes preferred a death dealing with an active policy instead of a passive death. These characters struggle restlessly though they know they cannot

correct the crazy society, and they do not wait any help from a false religion or another emotional support.

Throughout the twentieth century, in the United States the youth was in search of developing a new culture and hope after the predicaments they underwent. Beat generation, which was not influenced by any political impact, announced to the world the existential message that the world was absurd, that the individual should create his own values and the idea of nothingness. In the 1950s existentialism became very popular in America.

Most existentialist novels, such as *Nausea*, or absurd plays like Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* (1960), are hidden autobiographical accounts of their writers, which is also one of the obvious characteristics of Shepard. The fears, anxieties, and miseries of the authors are reflected. This became a sort of principle in most of existential and absurd works. Kafka reflects his real life misery in *A Hunger Artist* (1922) as well as in other works. Though being against all systems and-isms is the common feature of existential and absurd writers, their methods and approaches vary in some subjects, such as religion, absurd or alienation. The leading existentialist writers show significant differences in their thoughts and methods. Camus had different view for the absurd. His characters seem to enjoy living in an absurd and alienated environment. The hopeless individual gets an odd pleasure living a cold, alienated, exiled life. Kierkegaard's characters are not much different from those of Camus. His characters, seemingly, like to live as alienated individuals. For him, man can only be happy and close to the God if he has no a shelter, a secure home to live in. Unlike other existentialists, Nietzsche rejects the notion that man can act freely. His naturalism and seeing man as a kind of domestic pet seems to contradict the belief that man has a privileged situation.

Existentialism was born as a post-war angst in an environment where the beliefs in progress, reason and science are lost. Man was left and forced to live in a strange and absurd world due to the death of god and of other rational or objective values. Man remained alone, on his own, so his philosophy, in this tense environment, was supposed to be subjective and individual. Man should go into his inner world and live the truth there. This truth is not limited by any traditional value

which lost its all credits. Therefore, this truth would be a pure one far from any interference, influence or pressure. The existentialist characters have no values; they determine the attitudes on their own; they are indifferent to the God; or they feel no remorse for committing a crime.

Existentialism was criticized for being an 'anti-intellectualist' philosophy preaching irrationalism against reason, nothing beyond a radical nihilism leaving behind a chaotic and meaningless action and negating everything else. For the existentialists, in fact, the world lacks values and harmony. All these are like the lines of latitude and longitude which man drew imaginatively on the world. The twentieth century began and continued with wars, so this century has been associated with international wars in the mind of people. Especially, after the Second World War, with America's using atomic bomb, the world experienced the worst destruction ever in its history. It became much easier to destroy the world completely. Now the world entered a new era in which it can be terminated in just one or two hours: 'the Atomic Age' which is another name given to the post-war era. Today human being, who developed nuclear bomb, in addition to the atomic one, proved to be the most brute to destroy his own species in the universe. The new generation of the 1950s and 1960s, meaning a new culture, which existentialist and absurd literature stressed, broke with its past. In this period, America and Russia appeared as the superpowers and Europe as the centre of thought because a ruined Europe had much to think after a devastating war. Like their countries, their dreams, religious beliefs, and values also collapsed.

Since it was a war product, it is natural that existential philosophy was popular only during and after the war. Though its popularity gradually decreased from the post-war period up to now, today its impact is still seen in literature. In 1980 the philosophy lost its most influential leading figure, Sartre. Now existential themes, which are called with different names, are widely used. And it refers to a mood rather than a philosophy in literature.

## **2. ABSURD THEATRE**

### **2.1. THE ROOTS OF ABSURD THEATRE**

The emergence of new literary movements and new approaches is almost inevitable. A constantly changing and developing world cannot be described or represented as it used to be. And it is impossible for the traditional literary forms to maintain their existence forever. This is especially true for drama, because it is one of the most affected literary genres. Absurd drama has emerged to meet such a need, and it is a reaction to the cultural and social change of modern times. Both Sam Shepard and Tom Stoppard are among the playwrights who have realized this urgent need. Therefore, they have applied a form of drama which combines the influential and shocking characteristics of existential literature, Dadaism, Surrealism and Epic Theatre, and above all, Absurd Drama which encompasses the required ingredients of all.

Absurdism is primarily a French movement. Absurdist playwrights emphasized the absurdity of daily life, traditional and modern institutions. Absurd theatre is closely related to the modern philosophy of existentialism (Grote 409). It is regarded as the application of existentialism in drama, or the continuing legacy of existential writing. Apart from existentialism, absurd theatre has been influenced by several anti-realist movements and uses some elements of them. Symbolism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Epic Theatre are among them. Therefore, to understand the works of Shepard and Stoppard as well as other absurd plays, it will be useful to give a brief account of these movements.

In symbolist plays, characters represent mental or social states or ideas. Belgian author Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) used techniques which became a model for the symbolist writing. Unusual settings, mythical stories, and fairy tales are the basic elements of this movement. Conflicts and exasperating costumes were used in these plays. Although Swedish August Strindberg is not a symbolist playwright, he is extremely influential in symbolist play writing. He began his career as a realist writer but soon wrote dream plays. These plays use dreams to show the

inner life of the character and complexities of the human psychology. The meanings of dream plays are difficult to understand.

Expressionism tries to reveal hidden emotions and feelings lying deep in the mind of the character. Every element used in the play serves this end. The playwright sees the world from the central character's eyes. As in dream plays, dreams and nightmares play an important role. Physical features are exaggerated and items are reshaped deliberately in wrong size. As an example, a gigantic adding machine occupies most of the stage in Elmer Rice's play *The Adding Machine* (1923). The American playwrights Eugene O'Neil and Elmer Rice gave successful plays in this theatrical form. Constructivism, which is associated with expressionism, was an elaborating stage design prepared by the directors in Russia in the 1920s, but it did not last long owing to the oppressions of Soviet governments. However, some contemporary directors still apply this technique in the productions of classics or new plays (Grote 408-409).

Dadaism is an international nihilistic and artistic movement which is a deconstruction form of art nullifying present and traditional arts claiming that there is no literature which can reach the majority and that its producers meet not the others' but their own needs because they write just for themselves. In every way it is a revolutionary and rebellious art form, as it is founder Tristan Tzara declaims in his *Dada Manifesto*: "I destroy the drawers of the brain and of social organization: spread demoralization wherever I go and cast my hand from heaven to hell, my eyes from hell to heaven..." (1). For Tzara whatever we see in our environment is false. Tzara claims that one cannot rationally articulate what he thinks, that is, only a relative explanation is possible, not an objective one. There is no ultimate truth. He is also against psychoanalysis or any science or systems for he thinks that they are dangerous diseases: "Science disgusts me as soon as it becomes a speculative system, loses its character of utility – that is so useless but is at least individual. I detest greasy objectivity, and harmony, the science that finds everything in order," he goes on saying: "I am against systems, the most acceptable is a principle to have none" (1). All philosophies are in vain, and cause no good. People have enough of science. There is no need to it any more.

Dada is not only negation of traditional art forms and voices but also of family, logic, good manners, every social hierarchy, values, sentiments, religions, faiths in anything, particularly in God, intelligence, love and harmony. For Dadaism, they are all nothing but spontaneous and temporary things.

Tzara rejects every answer given to the question of existence. The possible answers such as 'to make my children happy; to guard my country; or I exist because God wills' are all false and those are just for the sake of posing a serious attitude. Everything, in this world, is similar and of no importance. If nothing is important why one should bother himself? One should be indifferent to anything happening around. There is no room for passion and reliance in Dada. Tzara says that nothing is more delightful than to confuse and upset people because people in nature are egoist; they just love themselves and their little possessions.

All men are different, so anything good, beautiful or art is different, and words have different meanings for everybody. Their meanings change from one epoch to the next. This diversity makes life colourful. Unconsciousness has a power, and it is inexhaustible and uncontrollable. What is needed is spontaneity which is natural and free from all artificiality. Art is not satisfactory enough to picture life. Life is not that easy, for it is much more than art can reflect. Dada is a medium bringing art to daily life by saving art from its high place positioned by bourgeois. Producing art is not an insurmountable task as shown previously. Dada reduces it to a daily simplicity.

Tzara's *Dada Manifesto* describes and sums up Dadaism best. He concludes, in his manifesto, that the absurd is not that horrifying because every thing in life is already absurd. There is no ultimate truth or beauty either in life or in art. Nothing is coherent. There is no logic, no beginning and no end. Everything happens in an absurd way, and as everything is alike, everything is absurd. The starting point for Dada is disgust: disgust with philosophies which have been produced for some three thousand years, and which are recycled around the same blind circle; disgust with art which pretends to represent the divine, the supernatural; disgust with restrictions which were made for the sake of science or religion that suppresses man's instinct; disgust with traditionally made classifications; disgust with prophets, saints and other

holiness attributed features; disgust with descriptions and their doers as to differences between good and bad, beautiful and ugly. Dada is where all opposites meet. Dadaism prefers a unity composed of opposites, differences as a mode of life, not in palaces, castles but in the streets among the ordinary people.

Its impact lasted rather short, almost 6 years between 1916 and 1922. 'Nothing had a true existence' was Dadaists' motto, so they rejected all religious, artistic, and moral principles. It was a product of the First World War. It stressed the absurdity of the arts, Tzara's randomly choosing words and forming a meaningless poem is an example in *Travesties*. Stoppard, in his plays such as *Travesties* and *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972), gives detailed information about Dada Movement and its founder Tristan Tzara. Dadaists used to form absurd poems from randomly pulled words and read them in public. As explained in *Travesties*, the word Dada is found accidentally when Tzara inserted a paper knife randomly into a *Larousse Dictionary*. Dada movement found life in Cabaret Voltaire. Tzara and his friends declaimed their works in different languages. Tzara soon left Dada for Surrealism and died in France in 1920. Tzara's aim was to undermine all traditions and arts.

Tzara adopted a method of re-arranging poems in a simultaneous verse form, which is another subject described in *Travesties*. Tzara's nonsense recomposing prose may be seen as the 'travesty' of poems:

Eel ate enormous appletzara  
key dairy chef's hat he'lllearn oomparah!  
Ill raced alas whispers kill later nut east,  
noon avuncular ill day Clara! (18)

Intermingling with his way of irony, Stoppard seeks to outline the philosophies, beliefs and influence of the characters, Lenin and Tzara. Joyce is in an attempt to criticise and humiliate Dadaist Tzara, but Stoppard's concern is particularly with the philosophy of Tzara rather than Joyce's art. Stoppard goes on giving additional information about the philosophy of Dadaists and his founders apart from Tzara:

JOYCE: Give further examples of Dada...Is he (Arp) your  
friend, comrade-in-arms, trusted confidant or  
otherwise pal, mate or crony?...

TZARA: He is. My friend Arp.

JOYCE: Alternating with what colloquialism redolent of virtue and longevity.

TZARA: Good old Arp.

JOYCE: Grasping any opportunity for paradox as might occur, in what way is the first name of your friend Arp singular?

TZARA: In that it's duplicate.

JOYCE: Namely?

TZARA: Hans Arp. Jean Arp.

JOYCE: How can this contradiction of two distinct and equal first names be accounted for?

TZARA: Linguistically, each being a translation of the other, from German into French and conversely.

JOYCE: Given a superficial knowledge of your friend's birth and parentage on the one hand, and of the political history of nineteenth-century Europe on the other, how would his bi-lingual nomination strike one?

TZARA: As understandable.

JOYCE: Why?

TZARA: He is a native of Alsace, of French background, and a German citizen by virtue of the conquest of 1870 (56-7).

In *Travesties*, the playwright continues to give information about philosophies, making Tzara define what Dadaism is and who the leading figures of the philosophy are. Hans (Jean) Arp (1886-1966) is one of these figures, who is a German-French sculptor, painter and poet, born in Strasbourg. Tzara tries to explain the reason for his two names. His hometown, once within the border of Germany, was returned to France after World War I. Therefore, his name, Hans became Jean as determined by French law. He was one of the founders of the Dada movement in Zurich in 1916. In 1925 his work appeared in the first surrealist group at the Galerie Pierre in Paris.

Tzara openly declares what is his and his fellows' principle: "Everything is Chance, including design" (37). Tzara and his fellow Dadaists were quick in theatricality and biased in judgements. They created a protest movement during the World War I which destroyed the continent of Europe. Mainly with the great impact of the war they sheltered a destructive idea that all the established and traditional arts proved futile, and solely an art of anarchy fit the than existing chaotic environment. They exhibited more Dadaist creations in an exhibition in Zurich. And even the



disgusting performances were staged there. As Arnold Hauser puts it: “Dadaism...pleaded, out of despair at the inadequacy of cultural forces, for the destruction of art and for a return to chaos” (qtd. by Brassell 151).

For Beauchamp and his friends Donner and Martello, the characters in Stoppard’s *Artist Descending a Staircase*, who are artists and belong to the fortunate minority, art is a vacation free from obligations, so they are happy with it. They try strange and spontaneous works such as making sculptures from sugar, producing records and tapes which resemble “a bubbling cauldron of squeaks, gurgles, crackles and other inharmonious noises” (119). All these are the activities which Dadaists thought for art to take. This idea and a kind of summary of Dadaism are briefly quoted by Donner: “There are two ways of becoming an artist. The first way is to do the things by which is meant art. The second way is to make art mean the things you do” (124-125). Certainly this is what Dadaists and the characters in *Artist Descending a Staircase* prefer to do. Simply taking anything in life, whether ordinary or bizarre, and putting them in the realm of art. Eventually this negative shock resulted in giving new and creative works although they are widely known as destructive agents rather than creative in approaching art forms. Their importance lay in their negation of the established art forms, and thus preparing a medium in which the new ones might emerge. Surrealism is the first and direct example of this inspiration.

Surrealism, regarded as the continuation of Dadaism, is an avant-garde movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Led by André Breton and supported by the original members of Dada group, surrealism appeared in Paris after the First World War. An important contradiction makes itself clear in Surrealism. On one hand, it demanded the complete destruction of the current ways of expression; on the other hand, it sought the ways for spontaneous expression, and thereby based its theory of art on a contradiction. Because it is nonsense to destroy all means of communication while making oneself understood in a way, which is what surrealism intends to do. Tim Brassell argues that “in either direction, there is inevitably some form of servitude: either to the established, often passé conventions of the day or to the arbitrary dictates of chance or the subconscious” (151).

Surrealism makes use of the unconscious mind to achieve mysterious results through the combination of seemingly incongruous images. Surrealism, like Dadaism, ignores the autonomous institution of art and therefore gives a new political power and a new dimension to everyday life (Booker 79). Surrealism, like Symbolism, appeals to the dreamy subjects, too. Realist techniques were not enough to express subconscious feelings and thoughts, so the French surrealists applied surreal elements together with real ones. This school of philosophy was mainly grounded in poetry and painting. Surrealist playwriting produced influential works. The leading surrealist artist poet Jean Cocteau (1889-1963) wrote influential plays, novels and directed movies (Grote 409).

Stoppard writes *After Magritte* (1970), soon after his visit to a surrealist art exhibition. One year after visiting the paintings of Belgian painter Ren Magritte in Tate Art Gallery in 1969, he puts the play on stage. Either in opening or later stage directions he reflects his influence from this visit, particularly Magritte's painting, 'L'assassin Menac' (Scolnicov 3). In *After Magritte*, Stoppard examines the subject of surrealism, which replaced Dadaism both in history and in Stoppard's works, in a funny way. In the play Stoppard sets a surrealistic environment. His aim in using surrealism is: "to create a work of art which evades rational analysis, making their appeal instead to the imagination or the subconscious which, according to the movement's claims, is the original source of inspiration for their composition." (Brassell 106)

According to Bertolt Brecht, the founder of Epic Theatre, the realist illusion of drama urges the audience to feel satisfied with himself and his environment. Therefore, he sought the ways to break this illusion and consent by encouraging the audience to make analysis and take a political action. He employs a number of unconventional techniques to encourage audience to react to drama intellectually and critically rather than emotionally (Booker 478).

Brechtian or epic theatre does not aim at entertaining audience or imitating reality, but rather, providing a milieu in which the reader or audience could question the ideas and make judgments. The characters are not intended to mimic real heroes or heroines, but to stand for the opposing sides of ideas or thoughts instead. What

both epic and absurd theatres have in common is privileging human free will over the accepted, traditional beliefs, thus free individual can fight fearlessly against society and its pressures even if the result is always disappointing or a complete failure.

It is the term 'fourth wall' that gives the feeling that a play on stage is surrounded by four walls, the fourth of which, in fact, does not exist and is an imaginary one between the audience and actors. This 'fourth wall' stands as a symbol of the earlier drama and implies the boundaries of a play squeezed in a room, a naturalistic environment.

What is missing in the 'fourth wall' is the freedom, free will of both audience and actors. They are restricted, bound and made passive individuals subdued to a deterministic world view. The attempt to put an end to this restriction is known as 'breaking the fourth wall.' It is achieved by making the actor speak directly to the audience, or reminding the audience directly in a way that what he is watching is not real, or that he should remain indifferent to the emotional effect of it, which Brecht described as 'Verfremdungseffekt', meaning 'alienation effect' or 'defamiliarization effect,' therefore, smashing the imaginary fourth wall thought to be a barrier between the actors and audiences. Breaking this wall, for example, Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre strives to encourage the audience to think in critical and multi-dimensional ways, which has political implications.

The restrictions in theatre were felt deeply in any genre, including drama. To be able to get rid of such restrictions, some authors looked for alternative forms. For example, Strindberg says, even much before, in 1887, in his Author's preface to *Miss Julie* (1888), "we haven't succeeded in adapting the old form to the content, so that the new wine has burst the old bottles" (qtd. by Brassell 28). Therefore, to locate, in Strindberg's phrase, the new bottles for the new wine the avant-garde theatre attacked the traditional form, rejected its moral assumptions, its rounded and familiar characters and its well-made plots.

The Marxist critic Walter Benjamin claims that Brecht's alienation effect breaks the illusion which surrounds works of art, and thus art becomes a means of authority (qtd. by Booker 174). For example, shift of actions, like suddenly singing to the audience, is a means to achieve the goal. As an example of irony, the stage

may be equipped with a large photo or a similar sign. To shake the audience from his passive position, the playwright intentionally mixes old and new costumes, or similar elements. To break the illusion, his characters might speak directly to the audience, in the middle of the production, it does not matter whether the scene is the most exciting part of the play or not. Such Brecht's plays as *Three Penny Opera* (1928) have become modern classics and his way of staging has had a profound impact on many playwrights and directors (Grote 410).

There are serious similarities and differences between Brechtian and absurd world views. Both of the schools accept that the world, the institutions and the people occupying them are decayed. While the first seeks the ways to improve the conditions, continues its hope for change and progress, the later has not got such an expectation. The followers of Brecht think that man is strong enough to tackle alienating and dehumanizing influences. Absurd theatre is anxious to deconstruct the naturalistic conventions psychologically, while epic drama breaks with the physical. This deconstructing process is a reference to post-modern thinking which tries to break the established rules of conventional genres. Absurdist playwrights were influenced by epic theatre because epic theatre also tries to make man react, take an active role and make them realize the painful reality of the life.

## **2. 2. ABSURD THEATRE**

Absurd theatre is obviously affected by each of these movements which clearly challenge the existing forms and styles. The aim of absurd drama, like that of epic theatre, is to urge the reader or audience to develop a reactionary attitude against the illusions of realism by showing the absurdity of life on stage. Absurd writers wrote their plays leaving behind estranged and lost feelings in people in an environment where traditional narration techniques cannot be relied on any more. Despite the idea of lack of meaning, they tried hard to examine the hidden reality of the mind through drama. They are interested in reality occurred in the mind of the individual who comes to realize the existential medium. Integrating oppositions such

as abstract and concrete, rational and intuitional, absurd writers led by Beckett try to reach the final truth, which reason alone cannot achieve (Haney 39-40).

Absurdist dramatists do not follow a linear plot and present unexpected situations deriding traditional or accepted forms. They defy the drama which is in search of meaning. Ignoring the traditional forms and developing its own inner dynamics, absurd drama carries the marks of Dada and Surrealism which emerged in the early twentieth century. Absurd drama appealed to many playwrights after existentialism became popular after 1950s. Absurd was first used to define the plays of Camus. Martin Esslin was the first to lay the principles of absurd in his book *Theatre of the Absurd* (1961). What Esslin emphasized was that absurdists exposed human condition explicitly evading any interpretation. Absurd drama is hard to express and to understand. Inner world of the character is not exposed, but absurd theatre focuses its whole energy on reflecting the physical strangeness of the world.

It mainly studies and examines the ordinary matters. Therefore, it may also be seen as excessive realism of the life. Characters are shown in their natural conditions. What happens in an ordinary bathroom or kitchen makes people laugh. But, in fact, what are laughed at are the things that we experience in life, but we do not realize it, closing our eyes and minds. Absurd plays try to make us come to realize that undesirable, crude reality. Characters are sometimes drawn into surreal situations and that does not surprise the character. The audiences are surprised at their own ordinary conditions. It is difficult for the audience to know why and how the characters can stay calm and non-reactive. The characters do not react to a surreal situation which is expected to lead to a surprising reaction. In this way, the audience is drawn into a strange atmosphere.

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is regarded the best example of modern absurd drama to expose the contemporary existential condition. Godot, who seems to symbolize the meaningless hopes of two vagabonds, is awaited in a quiet, deserted village road near a single barren tree. How unbearable and absurd and painful a life can become if not lived properly and actively is the main message. Martin Esslin tells about a historical event in the introduction of his *The Theatre of the Absurd*: a group of actors would put a play on stage in San Quentin Prison in 1957. Understandably,

the director Herbert Blau and the actors are curious. The latest play shown in this prison was in 1913, and since then, no play was staged for 44 years. The play chosen to be performed is *Waiting for Godot* because of including no female characters. This complex and elusive play, causing anger even among the intellectuals, is to be staged in front of the savage murderers and bandits. The curtains open in the middle of all this anxiety. At first, loud whispers and talks are heard among the prisoners. But soon a deadly silence encompasses the whole hall. This play which perplexed the intellectual minds in Paris and London has grasped the prisoners. Esslin informs that the prison paper, *The San Quentin News*, published in 28 Nov. 1957, writes about that night:

The trio of muscle-men, biceps overflowing...parked all 642 lbs on the isle and waited for the girls and funny stuff. When this didn't appear, they audibly fumed and audibly decided to wait until the house lights dimmed before escaping. They made an error. They listened and looked two minutes too long-and stayed. Left at the end. All shock... (19).

He continues to inform that a journalist from *San Francisco Chronicle*, who happened to be there, says that the prisoners did not find it hard to make out meaning. The journalist adds that one prisoner tells him that "Godot is society," another one says "He's the outside." From the same article in the prison newspaper, it is clearly understood that the desired message reached its goal:

It was an expression, symbolic in order to avoid all personal error, by an author who expected each member of his audience to draw his own conclusions, make his own errors. It asked nothing in point, it forced no dramatized moral on the viewer, it held out no specific hope...We're still waiting for Godot, and shall continue to wait. When the scenery gets too drab and the action too slow, we'll call each other names and swear to part forever-but then, there's no place to go! (qtd. by Esslin 20).

It is said that for a long time Godot and other characters became the main subject of the talks among the inmates of the San Quentin, and a source of terminology special to the San Quentin dwellers. The question of how such a post-modern avant-garde play managed to be so effective in such a place surprised and

occupied the intellectual minds for a long time. An emphatic approach may have been the possible answer. By that time, they may not have gone to a traditional well-made play which has a beginning, middle and end. Therefore, unlike the critics, they may have had no expectations of a traditional play. However, the only, but the most important, thing they got was the message the play intended to give. They were neither sophisticated theatre audiences nor drama critics, nor had a theatrical taste. But what is more important is that they had some special common characteristics with the play. The interaction must have influenced them so deeply that the play, with its mysterious and apocalyptic impact, managed to convey a message and make them understand what the formal language, traditional, or scientific methods could not provide up to that time. They were prisoners, confined, controlled, and mostly had a chaotic life. As a matter of fact here was the genuine place of the absurd.

As one can conclude from the example of San Quentin, various meanings might be derived from the absurd plays, which were regarded as meaningless rubbish and harshly criticised by the critics. From the production in San Quentin onward, it began to be realized that absurd plays had many things to tell the world. And assessment with the traditional standards proved wrong, and caused unfair judgements and conclusions. Because these plays lacked any elements a traditional play had, such as a logical plot, cause and effect, familiar characterization, arranged theme, an orderly development, dealing with probable conditions, and meaningful dialogues. In contrast to the well-made plays, they had no story to tell, not a plot, and no familiar characters. The characters were robotic puppet-like characters. There is not a clear beginning and an end. What is happening is like a nightmare. And this kind of play is full of meaningless dialogues consisting of mutters and murmurs. The characters are entirely different, isolated outcasts, alone, cut off from people and the whole world, and they live in an estranged world. They have their own peculiar behaviours. They have individual roots and histories.

In the absurd drama, there is the cry of the sick member of the society who cannot find a solution to his incurable disease even if he tries any remedy available. As all the values and beliefs have been destroyed with the Second World War, the despair derived from this disappointment leads to the feeling of emptiness and the revolt of the absurd character. Esslin, explaining the chaotic world man lives in, uses

the words of Albert Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), which tells the plight of the man in a frustrating world:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. He's an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity (23).

Esslin gives another description of absurd made by Ionesco in an article he wrote about Kafka: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose...Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless" (23). For example, In *Waiting for Godot* Vladimir and Estragon live the time, setting and their existential goals ambiguously, but they are modern ordinary people rather than marginal or abnormal. And they make meaningless recycles of non-stop repetitions in a passive world.

Esslin differentiates the style of Sartre and Camus from that of absurdist playwrights because of their expression of irrationality of man in traditional ways. For Esslin, they gave the new content in the old form, whereas new content should be expressed in new form, and similarly the irrationality of man should be defined in an absurd way (24). In order to reach a solution, the absurdist writers deliberately prefer an intuitional choice instead of a conscious and rational one. They do not believe the rational statements can produce right solutions. Instead of discussing man's absurd position, they solely dramatize it by putting on stage.

Although absurd drama is centred in Paris, it is not French. And though its pioneers wrote in French and lived in France, they were not French. Furthermore, Paris is regarded as the capital city of the world literature rather than France alone. It has been a place where the literary figures and the philosophers always could express their thoughts freely.

Towards the late 1940s and the early 1950s, the absurdist writers were influential on the young playwrights. They enjoyed their most influential period towards the end of the 1950s, and began to lose their influence from the 1960s



onward. In its early years, absurd drama seriously affected, shocked, and confused. It is an undeniable fact that an effect cannot last forever, so it was impossible for absurd to continue the same impact in every age. As in every movement, absurd became an ordinary one as time passed. Consequently, the absurdist writers were integrated into the mainstream of dramatic technique gradually. The absurdist writers helped develop a drama where the psychology of man can be staged, and they created a vocabulary that could sustain it.

Dreams, fantasies, nightmares and hallucinations are the realities of human being as well as other concrete ones. In Esslin's opinion, absurd has never vanished, but has been integrated with the traditional, and therefore has enriched the drama. Of the leading absurdist playwrights, Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter continued their writings actively while Genet stopped writing. Even though the absurdist playwrights are classified into this movement after 1950, they do not fit this category accurately, yet they could not escape from its influence in the rest of their lives, as they could not escape from Brecht's influence (Esslin 432).

### **3. ALIENATION**

The roots of alienation go back about two Millennia in Roman law. The term *alienato* meant the act of transferring property. St. Augustine described madness using the word *abaliento mentis*; Ludz used the term in connection with the early Gnostics, and Fu Ting Lio gave it a positive meaning among the Taoists. The term reappeared again in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, mostly thanks to Marx and Freud. After World War II, the term implied the desperate and complex situation of the individuals in a changing and hostile environment (Geyer xi).

For existentialists, alienation is both a psychological and sociological phenomenon, and it is an indispensable process of the human condition and sometimes it is portrayed as a necessary part of modern, complex, social life though it appears as unhappy and destructive disengagement from society. In his article, 'On the meaning of Alienation,' in 1959 Melvin Seaman defined alienation in terms of

five states of mind and associated behaviours: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement (Oldenquist 4).

We have tried to show how these states of mind and associated behaviours are influential in the plays of Sam Shepard and Tom Stoppard. The fragmented modern man is a dominant theme in their works as well as in discussions of postmodernism. Non-modern man had no personal life, so was a part of community, upon which he depended to survive. While he was identified with the society and lived in crowds, the modern man has been living in isolation and solitude. The problem is not with the individual but with the external conditions the modern society has created. Of these conditions, chaos and crisis inflict on the individual most (Friedman 248). The social disorder brings about the personal disorders which result in a psychological crisis and a criminal identity. As a result, widespread violence and anarchy occurs, which Shepard uses abundantly particularly in his family dramas.

The modern man has a fragile identity and he has isolated himself from all his former ties and from his social identity. Thus, he has become an empty subject, capable of nothing and is satisfied with nothing. This modern individual has become independent and disconnected, but formerly he was a dependent one, that is, connected to the society. Human life lost its meaning with the death of God, the advent of nihilism, the end of history, the collapse of ideology, and disillusionment with faiths in religions and Enlightenment.

In describing 'alienation' Marx stresses that division of labour brings about fragmented individuals. These individuals become distanced from each other in terms of differences they experience in daily life, so this isolation leads to an estrangement from society. Specialization in work activities in the capitalist factory system has made the worker more fragmented than even before. As a result, this highly specialized, isolated man becomes estranged gradually in an irrecoverable way. According to the Marxists there are various reasons for alienation (Oldenquist 10):

1. The separation of the worker from his production as a result of paid labour and private ownership.
2. Monotonous, mechanical and fragmented process of production because of industrial technology and work organization.
3. The hierarchical distribution of authority on top of which resides decision making power, which leaves others powerless.
4. The absence of worker's integration in the work organization.

In Feudal system, for instance, a shoe maker would typically own his shop. He would gather every raw material he needed, and would be involved in each step in manufacturing his product. When final product came to an end, he would market it which was mostly ordered before. But the factory system dictated that the worker should not participate in other steps required for the final product. He is, now, involved only in a single, limited part of it so he has no control over his labour. He even cannot see the final outcome which is marketed to anybody who pays the price, so he loses control over his labour. Therefore, he becomes isolated from his own product, from his labour and even from himself.

'Commodification' is the later step in a capitalist system. For Marx, a commodity is a product which is not seen as a useful tool for practical use, but one in exchange system in the capital market. They are valued for the money they bring, not for the use they have. That is, they are evaluated not for their 'use value' but for 'exchange value': it is not important whether the product is useful or not. Such products as umbrella, watch, hat, begin to have a place in our life not for a practical purpose, but for an abstract feature, which constitutes an evasive situation within the society. All these influences lead the individual to see the materials in a different and queer way because the physical object has a new abstract quality. As a result of this attraction, the objects have a magical influence on the individuals. A sort of emotional relation occurs between that physical object and man. That commodity becomes a fetish because of the emotional attachment. Thus the product becomes a sacred object and takes supernatural roles in man's life, so his control over it is lost. This trick, which is central to the working system of capitalism, contributes to a gradual estrangement from the material reality.

Furthermore, besides exploiting the labour of the individuals as a source of commodity production, the capital economy begins to classify human-being not for their individual characteristics but for their economic function. Reducing the individual to a factory machine and isolating him from his human characteristics lead to the alienation in the workers. Georg Lukàcs draws attention to what he calls 'reification.' By this term he means the turn of all human values and life into things. Reification has a close relationship with Commodification. Reification implies that human life is fragmented, and individualism is in a constant losing process. Throughout this process, man loses all his senses, and alienation occurs as the final stage (Booker 74).

According to Marx, generally the individual undergoes alienation without knowing it. This unconsciousness may be covered with a false consciousness at times. The reason for this unconsciousness or false consciousness is not thinking over the situation. With the arrival of post modernity, alienation has achieved an intellectual dimension. After the student upheavals and revolutions in East and Europe, alienation studies have increased in number. Alienation was not denied in the western world though it was not same in the Eastern Europe, because the labourers were thought to have the means of production. The existence of alienation in the decadent societies in Europe was acknowledged, and it was seen as a step to the fall of capitalism (Geyer x-xi).

Changing its direction and wearing a new costume, alienation, which was thought to have its roots in poverty, hopelessness, and frustration after the World War II, found a new path and reason d'être after the 1960s. The reason beneath this phenomena was not shortage or absence but rather the opposite was the case; simply the overdose, notably in freedom.

Technological advancements, recent medical miracles, final computer systems, wealth and freedom, which humanity has more than ever before, and scientific and educational achievements has not been able to succeed in overcoming alienation. To the contrary, it has been proliferated under post-modern conditions. There has been a loss of feeling and an increase in boredom and anxiety. In short, the disintegration of traditional life increases individualisation and urbanization both

of which lead to liberation and alienation. Geyer explains how modern life contributes to and deepens alienation:

The fragmentation, the death of originality, the impossibility for authenticity, the loss of essence, the reduction of reality to simulacra, all of which are described by post-modern philosophy, are added by adaptation problems of individuals, and accelerated by environmental and individual internal complexity (xxvi).

Man is exposed to a confrontation which is derived from either a conflict between individual's self or societal complexity, and his reaction may be formed in two ways. He follows his self-referential way and his own decisions and becomes more complex and goes further away from the society and takes the consequences, or he may adopt whatever is imposed on him. Thus subdued, limited and subordinated characters crowd the society. This oversimplified and dysfunctional model withdraws to a simple past, culture and region instead of a global one. They mostly form a short-sighted ethnic and a nationalistic line. In either case the individual becomes alienated.

Geyer informs that Nietzsche warns us not to deceive ourselves in wishful thinking. He adds that the real concern should be what our alternatives are if we do not want to console and deceive ourselves with the impossible truth, Nietzsche goes on saying, "man would rather will nothingness than not will," which implies that though every hope is in vain, still man must insist on hoping something, it is better than not hoping anything (2-3).

Having different duties, man has various identities, such as self and social identity which should complete and supplement one another, and if one lacks, then individual or social alienation occurs. Social alienation is the loss or absence of identification with and participation in societal life. Communities produce alienated citizens when there is too much individualism, which means each member in society is deprived of the sense and the consciousness of being a part of the society. Such individuals develop a personality which lacks a social identity (Oldenquist 8). Alienation occurs with the separation of the individual from something to which he used to be attached and related for quite a long time. It should not be temporal, like castles in the sand easily washed away, but rather a constant one. As Geyer puts it,

alienation is “bid farewell to all gods and absolutes” (13). This idea is rooted in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and particularly in Émile Durkheim. For Durkheim, moral constitution of a society, which he calls ‘collective consciousness,’ represents shared values, aspirations, and moods of society. Suicide, for example, is not only a desperate reaction to private matters but also an ‘echo of the moral state of society,’ and it varies with the degree of individualism. To take an example Protestants are less integrated and so they commit more suicides than Catholics who are more socialized than Protestants. In other words, excessive individuality is the major source of alienation, and one step further, of suicide. According to Durkheim, people are more prone to disorder, unhappiness, and finally to suicide if traditional rules, morals, and customs are ignored or undermined (Oldenquist 8).

To sum up, in different times alienation meant different meanings: in Roman and modern law, it meant transference or divestiture of property; mental illness among Taoists; in Marxism, a condition of labourers under capitalism; in existential thinking various undesirable psychological conditions, the lack of sense-of-community, and a term for persons who are isolated from their families or society, the last of which will be the focal point this study foregrounds.

### CHAPTER III – SAM SHEPARD

Sam Shepard is one of those writers who like to reflect their own life experiences in their works to a great extent. Almost all Shepard's plays, more or less, bear some traces from his life. Therefore, it is possible to observe different moods and accounts of his life reflected in his plays. Perhaps this is the most distinctive characteristic of the playwright that distinguishes him from Tom Stoppard who, unlike Shepard, hardly reveals anything from his private life. These opposite features could possibly indicate not only the different personalities of the playwrights but also might reflect the general characteristics of the American progression and British conservatism. Accordingly, it will be more appropriate to give a thorough account about Shepard's world to understand his plays better.

Shepard was born in 1943 in Fort Sheridan, Illinois, an army base near Chicago. He grew up in the styles and fashion of the 1950s and 1960s. That was a period of great change. The violent shocks and cutting from roots were important changes in his life. Before his family moved to South California, they had lived in South Dakota, Utah, Florida, and Guam. His father was an official in the military when Shepard was a child. He was the only male child in the family. He says that his name came from seven generations earlier. The first male child used to take his father's name, and to prevent the confusion the mother gave a second nickname. His real name was Samuel Shepard Rogers, and his mother called him Steve. He continued to be known as Steve Rogers. His mother was a teacher, and he had two sisters.

In 1956 they moved to an avocado ranch in Duarte, South California, the setting for the *Curse of the Starving Class*. Shepard was twelve years old, and liked the natural life there:

We moved to this avocado ranch, it was like a little greenhouse that had been converted into a house, and it had livestock and horses and chickens and stuff like that. Plus

about 65 avocado trees. You can't depend on the rain in California, so we had to rig up an irrigation system which had to be operated everyday. And we had this little Wisconsin tractor with a spring-tooth harrow and a disc, and I made some money driving that for other people in the neighbourhood-there were a lot of citrus grooves. I really liked being in contact with animals and the whole agricultural thing, but it was a bit of shock leaving the friends I'd made (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 18).

Although Duarte was a small town, various people from very rich to very poor were living there. He was interested in animals and worked in a horse racing course. He also worked as an apprentice to the local veterinarian.

He attended Mount San Antonio Junior College in Walnut, California, but soon he failed. He left home because of disagreement and disputes with his father. Soon his father left home. He thought that the reason for this was primarily his father's bad-temper and quarrelsome traits. At that time he examined the conditions in which he was brought up, while he was forming his own family. He thought his father was the scapegoat, and so began to search for the dualities at home, such as good-bad, individual-society, reality-illusion, past-present, man-woman, old-young and so on.

His father settles in Mexico after leaving home. He visits his father several times. His father had to support his family in his early age because the arable lands of Shepard's grandfather could not feed them any longer. Therefore, Shepard deals with the underclass families who cannot afford a comfortable life to lead. For him, the reason behind his father's pessimism and disappointment is hardships of life and unbearable responsibilities to support a family alone: "It was past frustration; it was anger. My father was full of terrifying anger" (qtd. by Boehnlein 573). This is the source of anger in *Curse of the Starving Class* which reflects the playwright's own family most.

During the 1950s, that is, his childhood and youth, Shepard's world of dreams was formed with Hollywood films, comic books, television and rock and roll, junk and fun culture. With the help of all these factors, surprisingly he became a movie star at the age of forty, in 1984. This is the period when he went beyond the then narrow theatre atmosphere and reached the mass public.



His interest in theatre began in his school years. He took part in roles and even wrote a play, *The Mildew*, an imitation of Tennessee Williams play, for the school magazine. It tells the story of a girl who is raped by her step father. After watching, and deeply influenced by, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, he decided to roam on the margins of the life and to go opposite directions instead of staying and having an ordinary life in Duarte, and went to New York. Meanwhile Shepard joined Bishop's Company Repertory Players and acting in different churches. This experience gives him a great confidence and knowledge and makes him love drama (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 23-24).

Shepard's favourite writers, Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, Bertolt Brecht, Virginia Wolfe and Tennessee Williams have been influential on his writing plays. Before writing *Savage/Love* (1981) with Chaikin, Chaikin sent him some books to read, including Franz Kafka's some stories, a volume of Simone de Beauvoir, and besides, he advised him to read Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Merleau-Ponty. It is clear from his works that he must have read and influenced by them. His writing was also influenced by Eugene O'Neill and such Beats as Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso and Lawrence Ferlingetti. Shepard may have been affected by Chekhov, too, particularly by his short stories (Shewey, *American Theatre* 84).

Bored with class differences, uneasy at home, lonely as a teenager in a small town, Steve found himself drifting into drama. He was 19 when he left Duarte for New York; the year was 1963 and Kennedy was the president. The age was the baby-boom and an active jazz age and the people were full of hope, energy and prosperity. He starts to look for a job as an actor but is not lucky enough to find one. He worked as a busboy and lived in a shabby suburban apartment as he recalls: "I was living in a Harlem." (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 29). He undergoes a transformation from a natural, picturesque rural life to low urban life just behind the gilded, amazing New York streets. In contrast to the calm suburbs of Southern California, New York City gave a sense of wilderness, where one had to challenge and fight to survive.

Village Gate, where he worked as a busboy, was a popular nightclub and the other people working there were musicians, actors or writers. And this atmosphere urged him to be a writer and an artist. So he began to be interested in art. First he

develops an interest in music and later in paint. He was influenced by Beat poets like Jack Kerouac and Lawrence Ferlinghetti deeply, and he tried his hand on poetry, but did not like the poems he wrote. Shepard did not like reading books. What made him excited most was writing plays which gave a three dimensional impression because it was very much true to life. He did not receive good reactions for his first two plays *Cowboys* (1964) and *The Rock Garden* (1964). That could have been the end of his career, which the playwright recalls:

Jerry Tallmer from *The Post* and all these guys said it was a bunch of shit, imitated Beckett or something like that. I was ready to pack it in and go back to California. Then Michael Smith from *The Village Voice* came up with this rave review, and people started coming to see it (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 35).

After this experience, Shepard began to write with a great desire and enthusiasm. At that time, the year 1964, Beatle was regarded as the idol pervading the whole England. And rock and roll was the most widespread and favourable music throughout America. Particularly Bob Dylan was influential with his poetic protest style among the American youth.

When he came to New York, the conditions on Off-Off-Broadway were ready for a prolific writer like Shepard. While he was working as a waiter in Village Gate, he met Ralph Cook, the head waiter then. Cook was to be an art director later. Shepard's career began when he received approval from the critic Michael Smith. Smith himself directed the first production of *Icarus's Mother* (1965) in Cafe Cino, where the first seeds of Off-Off-Broadway began to be built, in 1965. Smith describes Shepard's theatre as "a gestalt theatre which evokes the existence behind behaviour" (Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 223). He was also praised by Le Roi Jones and Edward Albee, and was introduced to Café Cino environment by Michael Smith. In a short time he began to be known on Off-Off Broadway. His two one-act plays *Dog* and *Rocking Chair* were produced at La Mama in 1965. In the same year Playwright's Unit founded 4-H Club to which he was enrolled. This is also the club to which Emma, the daughter character, was a member in *Curse of the Starving Class*. His two other plays *Icarus's Mother* and *Red Cross* (1966) were staged at Café Cino and Judson Poets' Theatre successively.

One of the things that affected Shepard during his early years was Joe Chaikin and his theatre, The Open Theatre. Chaikin had acted as an actor in the political Living Theatre. His aim in founding The Open Theatre was to arrange an environment where Brechtian plays and verse drama could be staged. Therefore, it attracted avant-garde playwrights' attention. Thus, Chaikin became an influential figure on Off-Off-Broadway playwrights and on their writings in the 1960s.

Just after the birth of his son, Jesse Mojo, Shepard began to live with another woman Patti Smith, and very rarely he visited his wife, O-Lan and his son. Patti was a poet, and Shepard was affected by her. Shepard began to develop an interest in poetry. And he wrote poems in the style of French surrealists. He published these poems in his *Hawk Moon* (1972) attributing to Patti.

Conveying his real life experiences to his plays made him successful and he began to be interested in his roots. Since his plays reflect a part from his own life, it is natural that the attentions and concerns focus on his real life experiences. Therefore, the reviews and interviews examine the writer himself rather than what his plays meant (Hart 74). Like his technique, his writing style also reflects his life style (Shewey, Sam Shepard 46). Shepard, making his character talk, gives realities about his real life; for example when Carter talks to Cecelia, the characters in *Simpatico* (1993), the writer, possibly, expresses his own thoughts about race horsing:

It (Kentucky Derby) is like no other race horse in the world. Impressions are stamped on you for life. Branded. The Twin Spires. The icy eyes of Laffit Pincay. The hands of Eddie Arcaro. The rippling muscles of Seattle Slew. These are things that never leave you, Cecelia. Things beyond seduction. Beyond lust! (271)

In another scene he makes Simms talk about his belief about horses: “The glaring truth is that every single solitary thoroughbred horse in the world—living or dead—and all those foals yet to be born are, in one way or in another, related by blood...” (290).

He has transformed from bohemian playwright to Hollywood actor, appearing in masculine roles in movies such as *The Pelican Brief* (1993) and *The Right Stuff*

(1983) (Schulman 58). The writer appeared as an actor first in the film, *Days of Heaven* (1978) by Terrence Malick as an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Texas farmer. *Fool for Love* is his first play in which Shepard plays one of the characters he wrote. The film critic Pauline Kael wrote in *the New Yorker*, "...he makes a strong impression; he seems authentically an American of an earlier era" (qtd by Shewey, *American Theatre* 24).

He adopted the sixties faith in authenticity of the subconscious as an access to truth. His plays are the products of his conscious and unconscious states, so he gives importance to this process. Shepard is a man of sixties, reflecting the enthusiasms of that time such as rock and roll. This music belonged to the youth, those who roam on the margins: the outcasts, blacks, poor. In the 1960s rock and roll had a deep impact on the youth, and Shepard felt this strong impact closely. Beginning with *Melodrama Play* (1967) he wrote some rock-'n'-roll plays the best of which are *The Tooth of Crime* and *Cowboy Mouth*. His rock and roll excitement increased when he was granted scholarship by Rockefeller Foundation in 1967. He was closely interested in the world of rock and roll. Not only was he a fan, but also a member of a folk-rock band, Holy Modal Rounders whose motto was "if it does not make you feel horny, it's not art" (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 55-56). Rock and roll kept Shepard from the streets away. He reflected his rock and roll experiences in his plays like *Melodrama Play*, *Forensic and the Navigators*, *Operation Sidewinder*, *Mad Dog Blues*, *Shaved Splits*, *The Unseen Hand*, *The Holy Ghostly*, *Back Bog*, *Beast Bait*, *Blue Bitch* and *Killer's Head* (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 59).

His photographs, in a cowboy hat and vest, with a cigarette dangling from his mouth, reflect his longing for the past and American myth, and he often gives interviews by phone from a far ranch (Schulman 58). As an actor Shepard often plays a type of man very well known in the history of American film: the strong, silent, the isolated character, a kind of modern cowboy. But it is a role he also plays in real life. Shepard has always been interested in cowboys seeing purity and naturalness in them:

Cowboys are really interesting to me, these guys, most of them really young, about 16 or 17, who decided they didn't want to have anything to do with the East Coast, with that

way of life, and took on this immense country, and didn't have any real rules. Just moving cattle, from Texas to Kansas City, from the North to the South, or wherever it was (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 31).

Sam Shepard made his remarkable appearance in the late 1960s. He has been a productive artist throughout his literary career. He has also published two volumes of prose, *Cruising Paradise* (1996) and *Great Dream of Heaven* (2002) both of which contain not only fiction but memoirs, dialogues and journal records. He also played as a capable actor in movies, such as *Black Hawk Down*, *Dash and Lily*, *Hamlet*. He also directed such films as *The Late Henry Moss*, an autobiographic filmed play, which deals with the death of his father and problematic relationships with his father. This was also implied in *Curse of the Starving Class* which reveals how deep the gap between the writer and his father (Shewey, *American Theatre* 22).

Meanwhile Shepard began to be known outside New York. With a group of experimental playwrights including Megan Terry, Barbara Garson, Lanford Wilson and John Guare, Shepard was granted a scholarship and invited to Yale Drama School to continue their career. Later Shepard preferred a quite stable theatre, Theatre Genesis to produce his plays. Ralph Cook, the founder of this theatre, expresses his ideas about it: "Theatre Genesis defined itself in terms of a deeply subjective kind of realism and, within the Off-Off-Broadway circuit, an almost conspicuous heterosexuality." (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 43). The first Shepard's play produced in Genesis is *Chicago* (1965). He won his first Obie award for this play. Then he won two Obie awards more for *Icarus's Mother* and *Red Cross*.

When he was awarded Pulitzer Prize for *Buried Child* in 1979, his fame had already increased as a movie star. With this award he entered the mainstream. But, at that period his life was rather stormy and much unhappier than ever before. From the late 1970s onward, he was a playwright known throughout the country, and his works began to be reviewed carefully. He was invited to the White House by the president Carter to participate in a Kennedy Center honours ceremony.

He has a great experience both in playwriting and film making, so he is an expert making exact differences between both. He developed a unique feature of acting onstage and in film. He also directed films which starred such famous actors

as Sean Penn, Nick Nolte, and Woody Harrelson. Shepard has won eleven Obie Awards for best Off-Broadway plays, a Pulitzer Prize for *Buried Child*, and a New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for *A Lie of the Mind*. Jack Kroll of Newsweek calls Shepard "the poet laurette of America's emotional Badlands," and goes on saying that "Shepard's plays have overturned theatrical conventions and created a new kind of drama filled with violence, lyricism and an intensely American compound of comic and tragic power" (qtd. in Contemporary Authors 1).

Shepard is an interesting figure, for example, though he has written numerous plays, he is not fully indulged in theatre, and is not a habitual theatre goer. Only a few kinds of theatre and movements appeals to him, for example, he is only interested in the form which shocks the audience or the reader to shake him from conventional acceptances and consent. He likes action and fierce situations. He is indifferent to the mild issues; furthermore, his indifference to such concerns sometimes may turn into hatred. He likes the forms which are a combination of all genres: poetry, prose, short stories, diary all in one.

In the article 'In American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard,' Micheal Earley says: "Shepard seems to have forged a whole new kind of American play that has yet to receive adequate reckoning," Earley calls him "a true American primitive, a literary naïf coursing the stage of American drama as if for the first time" (qtd. in Contemporary Authors 2).

Shepard has always been in search of roots. Because of living in a semi-rural environment, he prefers country life to city life. He spends little time in metropolitan centres and rarely gives interviews and never appears on TV. He knows that the power of publicity destroys people's lives: "I prefer a life that isn't being eaten off...it is very easy to be fed off of in a certain way that distorts and actually diminishes you completely, destroys you to the point where you don't have life anymore." (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 5).

When he comes to New York at the age of 19, he describes himself as a 'kid in a fun park' (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 79). But it is not that easy. When he becomes adolescent, the conditions change; he takes drugs, and his life becomes unbearable

although he can find a place for himself in a band of rock'n'roll of which he has usually been a fan.

Experiencing a bitter life and witnessing the decadence of the society, the playwright does not like New York any more. New York becomes a prison for him, a damned place where values are sacrificed for the sake of material, where there is no friendship and sincerity and where people live not a real life, and consequently not a place to live. Together with Jesse and O-Lan, they move to England in 1971. In England, where he seems to be more peaceful, writes two important plays *The Tooth of Crime* and *Action* (1975) (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 75-79).

In England the environment is suitable for writing play. The state supports drama, and English theatre is in a powerful position. There is a revival in English drama in the late 1950s. With John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger*, the theatrical product of 'angry young man,' this revival has been triggered. English theatre, which has no commercial worry that Broadway imposes on American playwrights, continues to develop without any corruption. Furthermore, there emerges an industry of television and radio, which provides talented playwrights with material support. The people related to The London Theatre welcomes expatriate Shepard in every way. He stays in England for three years writing and staging plays. He meets Charles Morowitz, an expatriate experimental theatre director, who was born in America. Morowitz helps him in several matters during the period the playwright stays there. Later he returns to America in 1974 to settle on a ranch in California.

Writing functions as a kind of purifying factor in his soul and writing about problems mean different to him: "Catharsis is getting rid of something. I'm not looking to get rid of it; I'm looking to find it. I'm not doing this in order to vent demons. I want to shake hands with them" (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 168). What the playwright aims is to reveal the hidden and mysterious part of human beings:

....I feel like there are territories within us that are totally unknown. Huge, mysterious and dangerous territories. We think we know ourselves, when we really know only this little bitty part. We have this social person that we present to each other. We have all these galaxies inside of us. And if we don't enter those in art of one kind or another, whether it's painting, or playwriting, or music, or whatever, then I

don't understand the point in doing anything. It's the reason I write. I try to go into parts of myself that are unknown (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 167).

Shepard is believed to have written many more unpublished or unfinished plays. For example, the actress Joyce Aaron, Shepard's girlfriend, says that Shepard gave her play drafts full of a luggage which nobody had seen earlier (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 36). It is a proof of his prolific writing that his many plays were put on stage in the theatres, cafes or universities when he was only 32. However, despite his success, he often underwent economic problems. After 1980's, his actor career went bad. He started to play other character parts rather than starring roles. And his efforts to direct films end up in failure.

## 1. THEME & STYLE

The diseases of the 1960s, such as aggression, paranoia, infantilism, narcissism, played an important role in Shepard's plays. He is amazed by comic books, cinema, television, and popular music, and the images he uses derive from these fields. He has been influenced by rock culture of the sixties, and his plays are highly experimental. He portrays the well-recognised American world. It is a world mixed with popular folklore, the stereotype, the cartoon, modern life tragedy and the American style. Modern Drama Critic Charlie R. Bachman sort of takes the picture of Shepard's world:

Shepard draws much of his material from popular culture sources such as B-grade westerns, sci-fi and horror films, popular folklore; country and rock music and murder-mysteries. In his best work he transforms the original stereotyped characters and situations into an imaginative, linguistically brilliant, quasi-surrealistic chemistry of text and stage presentation which is original and authentically his own (qtd. in *Contemporary Authors* 3).

The setting of most of his plays is Duarte where Shepard is brought up and developed his ideas which would hold a mirror in his future life. Mostly in his plays



he remembers this vicinity and the adolescence period of his life there in the 1950s (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 22). His setting is everyday life setting: home. The playwright often chooses kitchen in a house as the setting, and he explains the reason for it: “The kitchen has always been my favourite in the house. The kitchen is where serious conversations happen, where genuine gathering together with family happens, where devastating things happen. Eating.” He continues to say that he also uses some domestic objects, such as refrigerators, stressing their presence symbolically: “I just love finding an object that’s so domestic, so common in life, in an uncommon situation, on stage, as a character” (qtd. by Shewey, *American Theatre* 25).

In his plays, the set has a tendency to be realistic: old wooden staircases, pale or worn out carpets, or a bare setting. Though the sets are realistic, the plays are in no way conventional. His plays are not structured in a well-play basis. He is not interested in a formal structure.

In most of his plays, the stories echo almost the same: there is a narrow circulation in which man and woman follow one another, influenced by an ambiguous history, and their lives are in a world in which identities are lost. His heroes live in a corrupt world. Although it is useless, still they stick to one another. Violence gives damage to the individuals and their relationships. Language is degenerated. The hero is in a passive waiting position observing the fall of what can be regarded as beauty. The author believes in the power of beauty and love, but in such a universe there is left no any. The inhospitable and egotist world can no more contain such things. His characters inhabit a world drained of values, traditions and moralities which give meaning and strength to the life.

Sam Shepard points out social, moral, and psychological matters. He tries to find an explanation to some issues, like the function and structure of family; the mood of the individual who is cut off the feelings, such as love and self-sacrifice; how the families have lost their meaning and goal; defective dialogues within the family; how the lack of support makes the individual unhappy and alone (Boehnlein 575). The playwright deals with the weaknesses in the family, the dilemma of the

human nature, and the dark and clear sides of his characters. He made us see hard and unpleasant realities.

He likes to be inspired, but not to be imitated. To him, authenticity is of utmost importance, and an author should adopt his own style. He likes changes, even when his plays are changed in production. Critics categorize his plays into two parts: early one-act plays of wild poetry and rock-and-roll energy, and his later family plays even though he never thought of classifying his works (Shewey, *American Theatre* 23). In the introduction to *Seven Plays by Sam Shepard*, Richard Gilman writes: “Shepard slips out of all the categories... He seems to have come out of no literary or theatrical tradition at all but precisely from the breakdown or absence – on the level of art if not of commerce – of all such traditions in America” (xii-xiii).

In 1979 Shepard’s mother takes a trip to Alaska, and Shepard goes to her house in Pasadena and has a rest there. This place is also home to *True West* which tells the fight between two brothers who have gone to their mother’s house after the mother goes to Alaska for a trip. The setting of *True West*, which is regarded as “raucous male wasteland and a comedy of male manners” (Hall 102), is stated by the playwright himself to be California. And the action takes place in a suburban house between the brothers Austin and his elder brother Lee. Suddenly, the brothers change personal identities, the socially accepted one transforms into an outcast one, and vice versa. The artificiality of lives, careers and occupations, the quest for identity and search for true west and true man are among the apparent themes. Everything in life is based on a temporary and false base. A man of credit and dignity may easily turn into an ordinary thief.

The playwright does not reject entirely the claims that the play carries traces from his own life, and adds that it is almost impossible to escape from personal life:

I never intended the play to be documentary of my personal life. It’s always a mixture. But you can’t get away from certain personal elements. I don’t want to get away from certain personal elements that you use as hooks in a certain way. The further I get away from those personal things the more in the dark I am. *True West* is riddled with personal sketches like the tooth story for example (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 132).

Austin tells Lee that he visits their father and takes him to a restaurant where he loses his false teeth. In real life that ‘tooth story’ happens to Shepard’s father. Once, Shepard’s sister Roxana takes the father to a Chinese restaurant. And indeed, Shepard’s father loses his false teeth there. Implying that his writing carries traits from his inner world, Shepard makes a kind of description of his plays in *New York*: “Survival kits, in a way. They were explosions that were coming out of some kind of inner turmoil in me that I did not understand at all. There are areas in some of them that are still mysterious to me” (qtd. in *Contemporary Authors* 4).

C. W. E. Bigsby makes a different comment on Shepard’s taking stories from a real situation:

His reference to a story ‘that has already been told’ is a hint at the significance of ritual and myth in his work for in so far as his plays are accounts of the rivalry of sons, of the son’s search for the father, of men and women caught in the contrarities of emotions, they are, indeed, stories that have already been told. In that sense Shepard’s plays are best seen as fables, re-enactments of myth (*Modern* 173).

The more we probe into the writer’s private life, the more we learn about the backgrounds, settings and subjects of his plays. To take another example, one of the painful experiences the writer undergoes and influences his writing is Shepard’s wife, O-Lan’s mother’s brain haemorrhage and what happens in the wake of it. Scarlett has a heavy brain operation. Both she and her companions live a very painful life. She has to learn all the speaking and motor abilities again after the operation. What she lived evokes the childish behaviours of Beth who has a brain trauma after being beaten to death by her husband Jake in *A Lie of the Mind*. Shepard refers to it as ‘a big-assed play’ (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 8). In *A Lie of the Mind* and *Simpatico*, Shepard arranges time and place masterfully. When mentioning about different events, the writer produces an atmosphere as if they are close to one another or there is even no distance between them.

In his Pulitzer winning play *Buried Child*, which shares a similar story to that of Harold Pinter’s *Homecoming*, living his final days, the old man Dodge is mistreated by his wife. Their sons, amputated Bradley and childish Tilden show a

similar indifference and irresponsibility. Vince and Shelly are confused against this hatred, ignorance, and anger. However, Vince is from the same blood and prefers to stay while Shelly cannot stand and leaves. The play ends with the emergence of the buried baby, who is the secret and the nightmare of the family, and who was born as a result of incest, and who was killed and buried under a heavy rain by the father himself. His aunt Nancy sends him a letter saying that with *Buried Child* he courageously exposed all the sins of the Americans, notably those of Shepard's father, grandfather and grandmother (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 128).

Shepard's award winning screenplay *Paris, Texas* (1984) tells the story of a man looking for his beloved Jane who left him after a stormy life. The main character Travis continues his research until he finds her working in a striptease show. Jane makes shows in a glassy section and cannot see the audience. She can communicate with them only through telephone. Thus, Travis can see her, but she cannot. In his later visit Travis tells their story as if it happened to another couple: A man loves and marries a young and a beautiful woman. His love is so strong that he does not even want to go to work and to cut all his connection with the outside world. Soon this excessive emotional situation produces imaginary dangers. He begins to question her loyalty. Meanwhile, the woman gets pregnant. This relieves his worries to some extent. He begins to believe that the woman is pregnant because of her love for him. No sooner has she delivered the baby then the female is again disturbed and suffers from the man's groundless and paranoid obsessions. The man goes further and binds her with a rope from ankles so that she cannot escape. The woman is fed up with it and dreams of running away. One night when the man is deep in sleep, the female escapes with her baby. And the man wakes abandoned and finds himself in flames around him. After this story Jane recognises him.

*Simpatico* is about the story of former partners who have separated after one of them, Carter escapes with the other partner's wife. Soon Carter becomes very rich while Vinnie, the other partner, survives poverty and hardships. Carter gives him enough handouts to continue his humble life. Vinnie has some documents which include Carter's involvement in illegal dirty affairs. As the play develops, Carter undergoes a declining period as bad as that happened to Vinnie. In this distrustful and slippery circumstance, as evident in other absurdist plays, anything may easily

turn upside down. The instability dominates anything in this universe. In this insecure world, the rich may suddenly end up poor, the strong weak, reality dream, honest dishonest, safe unsafe. The trend is towards a worse, a catastrophic one. The partners' role changing is very much similar to that of brothers in *True West*.

What made Shepard's plays different is distancing from the traditional characters and plot. In the traditional plays the characters do not change no matter how long the time passes. However, Shepard's characters are in an abrupt change, and they do not pretend. Quick changes are exposed to be indispensable human behaviours, so the playwright tries to show this natural psychology in his plays. As a result of the quick identity shifts, either consciously or unconsciously, the characters attain different moods and roles. Shepard tries to reflect these various moods in a direct and powerful way. This is never seen in the traditional theatre in which characters and his actions are filtered and given after a make-up process. Shepard gives importance to naturalness and spontaneity, so he does not think much, or does not rewrite while writing his plays, thus he tries to give the feeling of reality to his dialogues. Shepard indicates, unlike an unchanged outer appearance, how quick inner worlds undergo a dramatic transformation and the contradiction of appearance and reality. Shepard talks about this continuous shift: "I preferred a character that was constantly unidentifiable, shifting through the actor, so that the actor could almost play anything, and the audience was never expected to identify with the character" (qtd. in *Contemporary Authors* 5).

*Curse of the Starving Class*, a three-act play, is the first of his family dramas and carries all the characteristics of his writing style. In the play the family inhabits in a wholly neglected ranch. Weston is an alcoholic, in debt, and both a victim and a cruel. His wife, Ella, is determined to escape like the other family members. It is about the alienation of family members whom he sees like those in his real life experiences (Biggsby, *Modern* 176). Shewey argues that his style in this play comes closer to the American realism of Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller (*Sam Shepard* 106).

*The Tooth of Crime* tells a battle between two rock stars. This is a style war where each one fights for a kind of psychological territory. *London Times* reviewer Irving Wardle wrote for *The Tooth of the Crime*:

Its central battle to the death between an aging superstar and a young pretender to his throne is as timeless a myth ...and...has proved a durably amazing reflection of the west coast scene. If any classic has emerged from the last 20 years of the American experimental theatre, this is it (qtd. in Contemporary Authors 5).

Just in the opening of the play, Shepard makes his hero sing a song which draws our attention to the line between reality and illusion. That the world we live in is an unreliable one is the major theme. Hoss, the champion, is easily stepped aside by an unknown young man. Struggle and fights of those many years prove futile. Anytime anything bad could happen and may easily destroy everything around is the message.

*Fool for Love*, made into a feature film, is his one-act play which he wrote, produced and also starred in. In the play the incestuous lovers are shown as the characters who do not know even what they wish, so they are grasped in the ambiguity of both their desires and feelings. The female either asks the male to leave or beg him to stay. Incest and the existential dilemma, both of which are also threats in real life, are main themes of the play. What is implied is that the sexual relationships in the society are so complex and uncertain that anyone of us may be involved in an incestuous act unconsciously, or might have been the product of a hidden incestuous relationship like these characters in the play.

*Operation Sidewinder* (1970) is the critical play in which the playwright openly criticises the American society and its deeds. The society has created a computer-like demon and this creature soon begins to destroy its own creator, the society. The fact that either the individuals devour their own children or they are killed by these children is given in a masterful way. Walter Kerr of *The New York Times* writes about *Operation Sidewinder*, which reflects almost all Shepard's plays: "Non-rational, surreal, fancifully pictorial, carefully mythic, conventionally angry,

heavily overproduced and rock-group-interrupted” (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 64).

In almost all his plays the characters, who appear to have different personalities, in fact resemble each other in that they are all cruel. Like the similarities in their names, they are similar persons or two different sides of a single personality. We are shown a society which gradually but constantly undermines its own roots by poisoning their off-springs. As in the story of the cat and eagle told by the father in *Curse of the Starving Class*, we the humanity even the same family members, particularly fathers and sons, continue to tear each other.

## 2. ABSURD ELEMENTS

Martin Esslin states that the influence of absurd drama is clearly seen in the works of Sam Shepard (434). In most of his plays like *A Lie of the Mind*, *States of Shock*, *Simpatico* and *True West*, Shepard reflects such essential absurd elements as the feeling of loss, loneliness and emptiness, all of which he has experienced personally. He writes about this feeling and how the identities are fractured and finally lost by a “shock state” in one of his letters to his close friend Chaikin in 1983:

Something’s been coming to me lately about this whole question of being lost. It only makes sense to me in relation to an idea of one’s identity being shattered under severe personal circumstances—in a state of crisis where everything that I’ve previously identified within myself suddenly falls away. A shock state, I guess you might call it. I don’t think it makes much difference what the shock itself is—whether it is a trauma to do with a loved one or a physical accident or whatever—the resulting emptiness or aloneness is what interests me. Particularly to do with questions like *home?*, *Family?* The identification of *others* over time? People I have known who are now lost to me even though still alive? (Biggsby, *Modern* 195).

The frustration caused by a shock state is the theme of most of his plays. Shepard is one of few playwrights who live the drama in his real life. He experiences most of

his theatrical techniques personally. Therefore, the line between his life and theatre is not clear. As an example, abrupt identity changing is a characteristic which Shepard shows both in his plays and in real life. Absurd drama is a common technique he applied frequently not only in his writing but also in his own life. He uses crazy dialogues in order to make friendships with people. He acts as one of the two characters in absurd plays. He might have been influenced by Albee's *The Zoo Story* in terms of characters' way of initiating dialogues. In this play, Jerry approaches Peter and tries to start a dialogue. They carry out a highly absurd communication throughout the play, which ends in Jerry's suicide-like killing by Peter. Similarly, one day Bill Hart, who shares his flat with Shepard for a few years after Mingus, is approached by Shepard when he sits on a bench in a park. Shepard starts an absurd dialogue and Hart reacts in the same way, and thus they become good friends (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 32).

Summarizing the function of theatre in an interview in *Village Voice*, Shepard makes a kind of description of absurd drama: "If the experience of being confronted by a theatre event brings some shock to your reality, brings you in some kind of new touch with yourself—then it's important. But if you leave theatre with a lot of theories about how to approach the world...well, that just lasts for a while" (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 67).

His real source of inspiration in writing is Samuel Beckett. When he reads *Waiting for Godot* for the first time, he understands nothing, but soon is influenced deeply:

I hardly knew anything about the theatre. I remember once I went to this guy's house who was called a beatnik by everybody in the school because he had a beard and he wore sandals. And we were listening to some jazz or something and he sort of shuffled over to me and throw this book on my lap and said, "Why don't you dig this," you know. I started reading this play he gave me, and it was like nothing I'd ever read before—it was *Waiting for Godot*, and I thought, "What is this guy talking about, what is this?" And I read it with a very keen interest, but I didn't know anything about what it was. I didn't really have any references for the theatre, except for the few plays that I'd acted in (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 23).



Influenced by Beckett's absurd views, he began to see theatre and life from a very different point of view. Shepard's life begins to change dramatically. He is not happy with the vicinity they live in. He uses acting as a means to get out of his environment. He is so bored with his life in Duarte that he seeks the ways to escape like the households in *Curse of the Starving Class*. Similar to this family, in the Rogers family, everyone does nothing but fighting.

His theatre expresses the experimental absurdities of the world of the subconscious and repressed. As his career progresses, he gets more and more involved in examining what is repressed and hidden, and as a result, anarchy occurs in his work. Thus, his characters find themselves in a loveless and hopeless world. They are afflicted with the loss of their lives and the world, which Shepard describes, runs down. His plays are inquiries of emotional states, anxieties, and individual's subconscious realms (Bigsby, *Modern* 165-174).

*States of Shock* (1991), regarded as one of his most absurdist plays, is set in a restaurant. It was written during the Gulf War as an anti-war play as well as an attack on the corruption of American familial affairs just like the other plays. Violence and boredom dominate the play. It contains the destructive results of a war and its devastating influences. The character Colonel's son has been killed in the war. He invites a veteran, Stubs to the restaurant. Both characters are old army officials like the playwright's father. Stubs gets wounded and loses his legs in the war, so is confined to a wheelchair. There are American flags on his wheelchair, seemingly, as an irony for American foreign affairs. The behaviours of these estranged men, coupled with the feelings of losing sons and organs, become highly absurd as the time passes. They cannot control their behaviours: they blow whistles, scream in an alarming way and the like... Stubs and the Colonel's son fight in the same war, and are the victims in the same explosion. The Colonel invites him to mark the death of his son. We, at times, get an impression that the dead son and Stubs are the same characters, or, at least, that is what the Colonel feels. They restage that deadly explosion in the war with the help of toy soldiers and knives and forks in the restaurant. This staging is backed by off-stage sounds of explosions and fires. For

Shepard, the country is gradually terminating itself because these young men are ruined not by the enemy, but are the victims of their own society and country.

On the other side of the restaurant, there is the middle-aged couple watching what happens in the restaurant while waiting for their orders. They wait motionless and in vain. Presumably, they represent the non-reactionary, merely witnessing society (Bigsby, *Modern* 192). Insistently waiting for a false hope is one of the main elements of absurdity. They just wait unconsciously and does not question although they have expectations, the orders which are supposed to come. They wait the food to be served in boredom. The theme of waiting which is a terrible illness surrounding the humanity like gangrene, and through which the alone man waits his whole life, as in *Waiting for Godot*, are openly given in the words of Hoss, in *Tooth of Crime*: “Yeah. Right. Alone. That’s me. Alone. That’s us. All fucking alone. All of us” (224).

Absurd drama argues that the world man lives in is nothing but a ‘waiting’ hall for a hopeless goal. Waiting, which is a universal phenomenon, is the substantial subject of absurd plays. Waiting may be meaningful in itself and exists in every phase of life, but considering it throughout the whole life, it is disturbing and horrifying to see the total amount it occupying the whole life. Most of life is spent waiting. In *Waiting for Godot* it continues to the end destroying both past and present. The prisoners wait for nothing. Everyone all over the world from different sex, age or occupation wait for something or somebody. And there is always a Godot, everybody waits for, an image of dead God who is mentioned several times, but never appears in the play. There is no an end for the waiting. Godot, therefore, is waited forever. No expectation in one’s life is the last one: graduation, having job, marriage, buying a house or a car, having children, promotion...

This passive and depressed situation derives from a shocked and frustrated humanity as the title of *States of Shock* implies. This is just one of the states of shocks paralysing and devastating the society stuck in its routine boredom. As in his film *Far North* (1988), the men appear in their beds and can only watch the world and what is happening around through television or a window. These people are confused and in loss of directions as well as their minds. They are very much like

Kafka's character Gregor Samsa, in *Metamorphosis*, who feels powerless and turns into a gigantic bug. The men in *Far North* hardly act, and even the limited act they perform can be carried out by the help of women, who also have been turned into robotic creatures.

Shewey argues that German directors Hartmut Wicket and Alfred Nordman comment on *States of Shock* and label the play as absurd: "ostensibly an absurdist one-act about a retired military man and a wheelchair-bound Vietnam vet terrorizing an elderly couple and an inept waitress in a roadside diner" (*Sam Shepard* 220).

The setting of *Curse of the Starving Class* is an avocado farm in South California. The characters are problematic Tate family members. Weston, the father, is an alcoholic and Ella, the mother, is a shrew and degenerated woman. Their children Wesley and Emma, the fierce youngsters, whose names echo those of their parents, are two exact copies of the father and mother. The opening setting, as in his most other plays, is kitchen.

Wesley is cleaning the mess of the door broken into pieces by the drunken father Weston the previous night. Emma appears and shouts at Wesley for his disrespect for the posters she has prepared for her club, 4-H club, of which Shepard himself was a member in real life. Ugliness and disturbance reach an unbearable level when Wesley urinates on Emma's work openly before the audience.

Emma has just been experiencing her initial menstrual period. Before long we find out that Ella is trying to sell the avocado ranch secretly. She arranges a meeting with a trickster lawyer who is trying to buy the ranch. When the lawyer comes home, Emma shows hostile behaviours towards him. This lawyer is a real enemy, an outsider who tries to undermine the family.

Weston comes home after some time, searches the refrigerator and finds it almost empty. He complains for providing foods and for being seen only as a caterer: "We've done it again! We've gone and left everything up to the old man again! All the upkeep!... Mr. Slave labour himself came home to replenish the empty larder" (27) he puts a bag of artichokes in the refrigerator and leaves.

Wesley complains about the ineffectiveness and inability of his parents. Wesley and Emma do not want to stay there anymore. Though escaping is their

greatest dream, they feel powerless to do it, so they wait as the absurd characters, thinking it as an impossible task. This passivity reminds us the static and non-reactionary world of *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. According to William S. Haney the desire to escape is a universal one, “just as Clov cannot escape from Hamm’s oppressive realm, so each of us, Beckett seems to imply, cannot escape our temporal existence” (50). *Endgame* symbolizes an endless desire for escape as Shepard’s *Curse of the Starving Class* does. Desire for liberation is one of the major influences of both Absurdist and Brechtian playwrights. Almost all of the absurd playwrights suggest everyday boredom and paradoxes it causes, which make the environment ready for them to base and erect their structure gradually. Absurd plays continued to reflect this desire to escape to be free incessantly.

Wesley is disappointed with the modern life and wishes to go to Alaska. He lives a dilemma in his life, for he speaks angrily about the possibility of bulldozers destroying their ranch and new buildings being built instead. On one hand, he wants to leave forever; on the other hand, he does not wish any change to take place there:

There’ll be bulldozers crashing through the orchard.  
There’ll be giant steel balls crashing through the walls...  
Cement pilings. Prefab walls. Zombie architecture, owned  
by invisible zombies, built by zombies for the use and  
convenience of all other zombies. A zombie city! Right  
here! Right where we’re living now” (163).

Weston comes back again drunk more than usual and finds out that Ella has been out the whole night leaving home with a lawyer, so his anger intensifies. He informs that he will sell the ranch without telling anybody, and there is a buyer. Though he rebukes Wesley for fixing the door, he admits that he is jealous of his son for his constructive character and that his own condition is poisonous. He blames his own father, for he thinks that poisonous condition derives from a hereditary predicament. He calls it Tate family poison, ‘the curse’ inherited from his father who lived an isolated, estranged lifestyle away from his family. As soon as he learns about Ella’s plan to sell the ranch, which is the same as his own plan, Ella arrives with the lawyer. She expresses her disgust for Weston while he is in kitchen. Wesley defends his father. Meanwhile, Ellis the owner of a local club-bar comes to tell them Weston sold him the ranch. Ella rejects this request proclaiming that her husband has no legal

right to sell it. Taylor, the lawyer, who made a deal with Ella earlier, comes and begins to argue with Ellis. Both men want the house and the ranch. At that moment a policeman appears to inform them that Emma has damaged Ellis's bar by breaking into and shooting the bar. Ellis takes the money back as a partial compensation for the damage. Now, Ellis claims the ownership of the farm and the money he paid for the ranch, so the family neither has the ranch nor the money.

The following morning, there is deadly silence after that stormy day. Weston tells a highly metaphoric and meaningful tale about an eagle and a cat. This is clearly the purifying effect of catharsis after a terrible tragedy of the Tate family. Only after losing their properties, and roaming on the borders of an estranged world, the father and the other family members are tired of the eccentricities. That same morning Weston wears clean clothes and prepares breakfast. He promises a new beginning and put everything in order. However, it is not that easy to reach a happy end. After all those years of gangrenous lives, a quick recovery seems impossible. Wesley, for example, looks terrible, is in a dirty image, and does not believe him because it is too late for a hopeful future. Having understood his defeat, Weston leaves there. Taking off his own clothes, Wesley wears his father's clothes, feels like becoming his father. At that moment, Emma comes; she has just got out of the prison. She furiously takes the keys and rushes to the car. She hardly starts the engine when a loud explosion is heard and obviously she is killed there. Later, two mafia-like men come and question them in a degrading tone. They openly ridicule the family. Ella and Wesley are frozen and do not comprehend what has happened.

*Curse of the Starving Class* is an excessively realistic play, and it reflects the bitter realism in which the feelings have lost, the dreams have failed, the hopes have been exhausted, and the relationships have begun to be broken. Decaying in itself, the family has become a prey for the swindlers and tricksters coming outside. The solutions have been used up for this family which is in search for a hope, but has been blockaded in every way. There is no way out. Hopelessness has increased their susceptibility. The family members are so pessimistic that they themselves prevent any attempt to get rid of the predicament they have to live. The family, whose inner world has already been corrupted, invites the intruders to destroy the remaining unit. The actors of the absurd world, who make use of existential freedom and the right to

choose to the full, cannot carry its responsibility, and finally they are crushed under such a heavy burden. The individuals who struggle in a narrow vicious circle collapse as they strive. Carrying destructive genes, the characters are like bombs about to explode. These characters are very much similar to each other. The traditional household does not exist in this family; there is no more guarding, strong father; no devoted, affectionate mother; no pure, beloved children in this family. The play is crowded with monsters resembling brutes rather than human beings. The behaviours confirm this brutality and violence: the father breaks into the door; the son urinates on the posters, and what is worse the place is the kitchen; the mother goes out for lunch, but does not show up the whole night; the daughter rides towards the club, shots at, and gives damage. Like the actions, their fantasies lead to their catastrophes. Neither the reality they live nor the dreams are able to save them. The family members living at the same home tear each other as in the story of the father.

Having consumed his whole money, Weston, the father owes more than the family has. The more he gambles, the more risky becomes the future of the family. The family tries to obtain things beyond their reach. They even do not know what they need and the means to reach them. The father's idea for the family is frustrating: "family was not just a social thing, it was an animal thing" (186).

There are also absurdly comic elements in the play: the daughter seeks to prepare a seminar to illustrate how to fry chicken for H Club, but the mother mistakenly cooks this chicken; Wesley pisses on the charts she prepares; the father comes home with a bag full of artichokes and puts them in a boiling pot, but falls asleep on the ground.

For Shepard, everyone is trapped in a hostile and fractured world, and they cannot even see it. He tries to show what those fragments are, which direction humanity is heading and the gaps increasing alienation. Pointing those who are caught up in a fractured world, Shepard writes in introductory note to his *Unseen Hands*: "...What's happening to them is unfathomable but they have a suspicion. Something unseen is working on them. Using them. They have no power and all the time they believe they're controlling the situation" (qtd. by Bigsby, *Critical*

*Introduction* 221). His plays expose this paranoid, and the reasons which lie beneath the paranoid.

The setting of *The Tooth of Crime* is a barren stage on which there is only a silver-studded black chair which gives an evil appearance. The play tells the duel or an absurd word battle between an aging superstar, Hoss and the young Crow. This is an elusive battle and its rules are confusing. A 'game' is mentioned in the play, and seemingly this is a death game. Hoss is the best in this game in the recent times, but is afraid to be defeated. His fears deepen when the fortune-teller informs him an unpleasant but indispensable end. The young pretender Crow defies him. After a tactical long dialogue, Crow wins the game of three rounds. Hoss becomes angry and kills the referee. He offers Crow partnership. He offers him his turf in exchange for Crow to teach his tactic. All his attempts prove futile, and helplessly he commits suicide. The aspects and the rules of the game are not described. We face many ambiguous terms, such as 'markers,' 'Gypsies,' 'the code,' or 'the charts.' There are many absurd elements in the 'game,' which keep their ambiguity throughout the play. The words of Crow, which are even hard for Hoss to realize, increase the absurdity:

...Cut at the gait. Heel-toe action rhythms of New Orleans. Can't suss that particular. That's well covered. Meshing patterns. Easy mistakes here. Suss the bounce. Too heavy on the toe. Maybe work the shoulders down. Here's a mode. Three-four cut time copped from Keith Moon. Early. Very early. Now. Where's that pattern. Gotta be in the "Happy Jack" album. Right around there. Triplets. Six-eight. Here it comes. Battery. Double bass talk. Fresh Cream influence. Where's that? Which track. Yeah. The old skip James tunes. Question there. Right there. (*sings it*) "I'm so glad, I'm so glad, I'm glad, I'm glad, I'm glad." Yeah... (228)

Together with such repetitions of the words and their meaninglessness, what Shepard thinks for *The Tooth of the Crime* reflects intensively the characteristics of Dada and Absurdism:

The character of Crow in *The Tooth of the Crime*, came from a yearning toward violence. A totally lethal human with no way or reason for tracing how he got that way. He just appeared. He spit words that become his weapons. He

doesn't mean anything. He's simply following his most savage instincts. He speaks in an unheard-of tongue. He needed a victim so I gave him one. He devoured him just like he was supposed to. You are writing inside of a character like this, you aren't pausing every ten seconds to figure out what it all means (qtd. by Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 235).

There is a lament over existential abandonment in this play as in *Waiting for Godot* and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. It is possible to give two meanings to the play. The first one is a play which is mentioned and which results in the death of Hoss within the play. The second one is an imaginary play in an unreal life. Existential anxiety and doubt have covered this character. He is aware of the loneliness, emptiness and meaninglessness of his situation, so cries questioningly: "You mean we're just ignored? Nobody's pain' attention?...I don't believe we could that cut off. How did it happen? We're playing in a vacuum? All these years. All the kills and no one's watching?...The outside is the inside now (229-230).

What Shepard says about the play openly evokes a battlefield: "The idea was like a gang-warfare situation, where the gangs had been split up into individual mobile warriors that fought from Maseratis and Lamborghinis with all kinds of fancy aluminium weapons" (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 84). His most plays reveal the existential despair of people from different qualities, types or regions.

The characteristics of the heroes in *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* (1974) which he wrote during his three years' life in England, sum up the existential man and his predicament: "The petty gangsters simply follow instructions, live out determined lives, trapped in their own myths: 'It's like a snake bitin' its own tail. We keep infecting each other..." (Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 237). The character Doc realises the absurdity and the unfair universe:

Each of us paralyzed within certain boundaries. We'd do anything to cross the border, but we're stuck. Quite stuck... There's no way for any of us to be in any place but the one we're in right now. Each of us. Quite separate from each other and yet connected. It's quite extraordinary, isn't it? (qtd. by Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 237).



In Shepard's plays materialism and failures in human relationships increase the already absurd human condition. Bigsby argues that the enemy for Shepard is essentially the same as that identified by Kierkegaard, he adds that this enemy is "passion-less existence, a positivism which has no time or space for pure energy" (Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 249).

In *Action* (1976) the society is far from all its crucial roles and meanings. The term society becomes equal to negativity, and immorality. Life, in which escape is impossible, becomes synonymous with prison. The individuals have lost their essential features, and have formed an estranged community. The absurdity and despair of the human actions, which is a continuing threat throughout life, is best described in *Suicide B* (1978):

You struggle to the window. You hold yourself up by both elbows and stare down at the street...But all you see down there is yourself looking back up to you...You fall. You lay there gapping at the ceiling...You crawl back for another look...You pull yourself up to the window sill and peer down again. There you are, still standing down there on the street. Still looking straight back up to yourself...You check out all the details...You check the face, the hands, the eyes, the turns in the mouth...Then you see him signalling to from the street. He's pointing to his head, to his own head, then pointing back to you. He keeps repeating this over and over as though it's very important...You pick up the gesture from him and start repeating it back to him. Pointing at your head first then pointing down to him on the street. He starts to nod his head and smiles as though you've finally got the message. But you're still not clear what he means... 'If only I don't die before I find out what he means!' you say, 'just let me live five minutes longer...' You see for sure that he is you...He yells at you so the whole street can hear him. 'YOU'RE IN MY HEAD!' then he turns and walks away. You watch him go until you can't see him any more...And your life goes dancing out of the window (qtd. by Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 241)

This ending is a wonderful description for an existential final. All the struggles prove futile; the end is an indispensable death mostly through suicide. There is a similar ending in most of the absurdist plays. For example, in Ionesco's *Chairs* (1952), an old couple restlessly try to fill a room with chairs, and at the end,

the room becomes so full that no space is left for them to act. Having finished this nonsensical duty, the old couple holds hands and jump out of the window as the hero does at the end of *Suicide B*. In this play, which is a parody of detective play, one of the detectives cries loudly the absurdist lamentation: “WHY ARE WE BEING SYSTEMATICALLY BUMPED OFF BY AN UNSEEN ENEMY! IT’S NOT FAIR!” (qtd. by Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 242). This cry is a revolt against the powerlessness of man and the injustices in the world. The play implies that however hard they try, the characters cannot make out the meaning.

His characters usually face the mysteries, and live past and present conflict together. Shepard knows well that the main feature of absurd is penetrating into the mysterious world, so it is crucial to keep these mysteries. Shepard is claimed to be one of the natural instinctive existentialists, such as the Beats, who try hard to regenerate and refresh America by seeking a mysterious underground life through which experience produces meaning. What Beats preached was simply changing the present life into a new romantic lifestyle. Shepard suggests that man looks out of a narrow perspective, so the playwright tries to show the world from different points. As his plays develop, the strength of disorder, confusion and absurd increases. Like Beckett and Pinter, he believes that language masks devils and angels. The predicaments of his characters are, in fact, those of ours, and both they and we try to find these problems and the solutions, and thus to end all those ailments and chaos (Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 249-250).

Shepard refers to inconsistencies, timeless actions and identity changing in *True West* and *Simpatico*. *True West* is another play in which the individual terminates himself, and in which absurdity is overtly displayed. This play takes place in the suburb of South California in the east of the city of Los Angeles. It is a highly realistic story of conflicts which takes place between two opposite brothers, Lee, a man of disorder and Austin, the scriptwriter. The dreams of the brothers in *True West*, as in *Curse of the Starving Class*, undermine and finally destroy the real world they live in. Ironically, Lee implies that Austin is not an artist, not even a real man. Although Lee has never been engaged in any art throughout his life, he shows that he can write better than a writer. Here Shepard criticizes Hollywood, its artists, producers and its artificiality. What is at issue is not art or artist but business and its

gilded but cruel world. Lee knows that this is the case, and how America and its institutions work, so he can make a distinction between reality and dream, which Austin cannot (Hall 103-104).

The arguments of Lee and Austin are the source and subject of the play. Lee writes a story and tells Austin that his script is “true-to-life” (15) because his script tells the story of himself and Austin in a symbolic way:

They (two characters) take off after each other straight into an endless black prairie. The sun is just comin’ down and they can feel the night on their backs. What they don’t know is that each one of’em is afraid, see. Each one separately thinks that he’s the only one that’s afraid. And they keep ridin’ like that straight into the night. Not knowing. And the one who’s chasin’ doesn’t know where the other one is taking him. And the one who’s being chased doesn’t know where he’s going (27).

This speech is a summary of an absurd story in which existential characters are involved in an absurd world.

While the brothers fight at their mother’s home, the mother has gone to Alaska for her vacation. The image of Alaska is another interesting point. Hall associates Alaska with the desert, where the fathers in Shepard’s plays leave for, to seek a shelter far from the crowds. Alaska is also one of the few places, which is regarded as ‘frontier’ in American culture (105). Seemingly the Mom in this play has been bored from daily life and she is infected with alienation from anything concerning modern life. No doubt, for her such a chaotic life seems lifeless and unreal (Kleb 122–123).

Furthermore, this mother is not a traditionally accepted mother type. She shows no affection, love, or any other feelings that are typical of a caring mother towards her children. We do not see other maternal issues in this play, such as cleaning the house or the clothes, cooking meals, and other housekeeping works. She is not tolerable towards her children and becomes extremely angry when her sons make her home dirty. Despite the brothers’ attempt to convince her to stay, she resists, defies, and leaves there. They continue to fight until the end of the play when

they stand face to face, giving the image of looking in a mirror, and seeing their reflections in it (Hall 106-107).

Shepard's *Red Cross* presents an absurd play with its every detail. Jim and Carol live in a cabin with a twin bed, double windows and a door. Everything, even the characters, in the cabin is white. Carol feels disturbed but does not know why. She dreams of skiing and leaves suddenly. Jim has a secret which he does not let Carol know. As soon as Carol goes out, he undresses his trousers and begins to remove crabs off his skin. The maid comes to change the sheets of the beds and Jim shows her the crabs. They lie on separate beds and Jim tries to teach her how to swim. And reciprocally, the maid tells him her dream of turning into a fish after drowning, and then she leaves. Jim has been affected by this story deeply. Carol comes and tells him every part of her body is covered with lice.

His play *La Turista* includes absurd and mysterious elements. It takes place in a hotel room in Mexico. Two young Americans Kent and Salem lie on their beds and read American magazines. A shoeshine boy comes to the room, and they try to get rid of the child giving him money. The child smashes the telephone mounted on the wall, and spits on Kent who rushes to the bath because of diarrhoea. Salem tells a story about his childhood while the child takes off his pants and climbs on Kent's bed. Then the child describes an American, once his boss. Kent comes from the bath and says that he feels completely a different identity, and his face, which was sunburnt, has been painted with white and has resembled the American boss the child has mentioned. Seeing the child in his bed, Kent screams and passes out. Salem calls a doctor. But a witch doctor comes with his son. The witch exhibits a queer ceremony killing a chicken and spilling its blood on Kent. But all the things that have been done seem to no avail. Meanwhile Salem also suffers from diarrhoea and hurries to the bath. When he exits from the bath, his face is painted white like Kent. He wears a poncho and tries to sell the child to the audience. Telephone rings; it is the child's father and says that he will come to take the child. The setting of the second act is an American hotel room. Kent suffers from a sort of sleepiness. The doctor to cure him and his son is in the civil war costume. The doctor tells Salem to make Kent walk until he wakes up. When Kent wakes up, he utters nonsense things, pretends to shoot with his hand, and makes African wild dances. He goes out of stage

and mentions about a doctor and a brutal creature he created. At the end of the play Kent runs not to be caught and flies over the heads of the other characters with the help of a rope, jumps and run towards the back stage walls leaving a cut-out shade of his body in the wall.

This play wins Shepard Obie award in 1967. The play does not show a rational narration and development. Swift identity transformations and time-stopping monologues and visual images, such as white and yellow colours and the silhouette of the Kent's body are striking subjects drawing attentions (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 51-52)

*A Lie of the Mind* opens with a telephone conversation between Jake and his brother Frankie. Jake has beaten his wife to death and thinks that she's dead. However, Beth is not dead, but she has had a terrible brain damage. Jake has been affected by this event so much that he consults his brother Frankie to find a solution and to take refuge. He thinks that the monster within him comes from his father who has recently been passed over by a lorry. Frankie makes for Beth's father's house and tries to learn about her health, but gets himself in trouble because Beth hysterically expresses her love to him. Jake's mother and sister burn their house down and go to Ireland. Jake, in boxer short and an American flag in hand, goes Beth's home. Jake's aim is to apologize to her. This play includes events not only from other plays but Shepard's real life as well: his problems with his wife which lead their separation, his father's death in a car accident and the paralysis inflicting on his close friend Chaikin (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 180-181). Shepard is often criticised for usually mixing his real life with his plays, which is a common attitude among the existential and absurd writers who like to reflect their chaotic lives in their works. The play involves the physical and psychological lost values and physical violence, too.

Having a brain damage, Beth has lost most of her motor abilities including control over using language. When she speaks her tongue becomes troubled and towards the end of her speech the meaning is finally lost with stuttering. The language she utters is fractured and becomes meaningless. The inadequacy to control what is being said is a technique Shepard applies most. Beth's difficulty in speaking derives not only from her brain damage, but it is the language itself lacking. There is

a gap and even a conflict between what is thought and what is being said in Shepard's works. A language which has lost its function and meaning is not only Shepard's but also almost all of the absurd playwrights' thought. Clichés and repetitions, contributing to this deficiency, are also the diseases of modern man, which are obsessive habits of mankind (Uslu 190). Then, if the language is lacking and cannot reflect truth or provide communication, it is invalid.

Most of the play depends on the naturalistic attitudes and language. The play is crowded with inconsistencies and absurdities. For example, how does Jake come from Southern California to Montana in his boxer short? How can Beth's mother see from her porch the burning of Jake's mother's house? There are similar absurdities in the play. Robert Brustein writes about *A Lie of the Mind in New Republic*: "Shepard is moving inexorably toward the heart of American realism, where audiences have the opportunity to identify him as a family member like themselves—son, brother, lover, husband" (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 186).

*When the World Was Green*, which he wrote in collaboration with Chaikin, tells the story of an old man who wait for the capital punishment, and the young journalist who wants to write his story. The old man had wanted to kill his cousin, but inadvertently kills another man who is likely to be the journalist's father. The play leaves many questions unanswered; for example it is not clear whether the play takes place in America or Bosnia. It is an open ended play the setting of which is a simple prison cell with a dark grey wall and a high tiny window, recalls Beckett's plays. It portrays a chaotic absurd play and a typical Shepard classic: an ancient curse, the deadlock of man and woman and looking for the lost father.

Almost in all his plays there is no stability in life; the base under the feet of human-being is not constant. An ever-changing environment is what his characters have to face in life. This instability is in every field of life from social, psychological conditions to the economy. A respectable, dignified personality may easily turn into a burglar, as in *True West*, or a professional killer at the top of his career may be stepped down by an unknown young man, as in *The Tooth of Crime*. His characters have no future, hopes. An uncertain future awaits them, and this future is presumably a chaotic one.

The film critic David Thomson, pointing the playwright's existential condition and absurd way of life, explains why the film director Phil Kaufman gave role to Shepard in *The Right Stuff*: "I think Kaufman picked Shepard for the way he represents the movie star as real man and existentialist, a dramatist whose plays have not been sold to Hollywood and who was for years wary of Broadway production. A rebel with a cause" (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 166).

### 3. ALIENATION

Sam Shepard's plays are surrealistic and show a lack of order. The disorder and smashed materials, Indian rituals, rock and roll music, and cowboy images symbolize strong passions, which cannot be easily described. He explores corrupted families, landownership, immorality of American success, failed fathers, attempts to find out individual past, lack of emotions, and death of love in his plays. The visual images of empty and broken goods, such as the empty refrigerator, or the smashed door in *Curse of the Starving Class*, symbolize the meaninglessness and emptiness in life. The characters in his works are ready to set fire, literally or symbolically, to their last possessions and to escape from the disturbing and annoying crowd, the society, and to end up in a desert land. In an interview he expresses his worries about alienated humanity and its terrible consequences:

...What's more frightening to me right now is this estrangement from life. People and things are becoming more and more removed from the actual. We are becoming more and more removed from the Earth to the point that people just don't know themselves or each other or anything. We are this incredible global race of strangers...*That's* terrifying. Things are so dispensable now. People live together for a while...then they split, and they never see each other again. Then they get together with somebody else-split. Have kids-split. Then the kids never see each other. It's absolutely frightening-this incessant estrangement ...People are being amputated from each other and from themselves (qtd. by Bigsby, *Modern* 171).

This explanation briefly describes the atmosphere of Shepard's plays. His characters are alienated both from their own inner worlds and from one another. The distance among them is inaccessible. Feelings are dense but uncontrollable and arbitrary. Emotions are not for love but hatred and anger. Family members, fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, lovers are estranged strangers.

Living a cold and isolated life in every way, constantly moving here and there because of his father's job, his communication problem with his father, being a sole male child and starting his education very young, at the age of five, among the elder boys... all these cause a feeling of loneliness and alienation from his childhood onward. His close friend Charlie Mingus, a black, helps him to find a work and a flat and teaches him how to live in New York suburban quarters. Mingus is a typical alienated character who has been oppressed and lived misery throughout his life: his parents divorced when he was a small boy; her mother had left him to a nursery school; felt isolated among white people. Shepard is influenced by him and by the life he leads, and thus begins to criticise the injustices and the hard life. They share the same flat, a dissenting lifestyle of misfits. In one of the interviews in 1979, Shepard acknowledges his estrangement: "I feel like I've never had a home," he continues to confess that he himself is a confused one like the characters he portrays: "you know? I feel related to the country, to this country, and yet at the same time I don't know exactly where I fit in ..." (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 97).

While living on a ranch in Santa Fe in 1983, writing a letter to his friend Chaikin, he admits that what frightens him most is isolation and tells him that he lives a real alienation, that he is exhausted, that he is in a queer situation, and that as if he "swept up in a hurricane and landed in a strange land" (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 145-146).

In Shepard's work men show violence toward one another, the women they love and anything around them. They have no ability to articulate their feelings, and they are unable to even understand their own conditions. They seem to have no job, or busy with the marginal ones. They are failed fathers and farmers. They are the victim of the intensity of their emotions. Many things are missing from their world,



the most important of which is the lack of a rational control. They live intuitively and subconsciously. They act however they feel and wish.

Shepard's characters live in a world where they have lost their will to develop a healthy life. They each seems to have psychological problems and should be treated in terms of psychiatric treatments (Bigsby, *Modern* 194). In the lines in his radio play *The War in Heaven*, he sums up an irreversible disordered world:

There was a time  
When I felt I had a destination

I was moving  
Toward something  
I thought I understood

There was an order  
That was clear to me  
A lawful order

Then we were invaded  
All the domains were shuttered  
Connections  
Were broken  
We were sent  
In a thousand directions (qtd. by Bigsby, *Modern* 197).

These words pour out of the mouth of a desperate, disappointed and alienated man who has lost his hopes, his family, and his morality. This man is like a man who has fallen in a deep hollow and cannot escape it even how hard he tries. The Angel, who narrates the story in *The War in the Heaven*, reveals how hopeless and helpless the man is:

Every minute I'm here  
Something's changing in me  
Something's diminishing...  
Every second I'm here  
I'm weakening...

I have a partner  
The partner  
Is me  
The partner  
has a partner

in me

Turn me loose...

There are no days

There is no time

I am here by mistake (qtd. by Bigsby, *Modern* 197).

*True West* is like a medium connecting the playwright's masculine stance of earlier work with the unpleasant relationships of the recent family dramas. Austin is a scriptwriter and writes a new film scenario for which he is about to have a deal with a Hollywood producer, and Lee is an immoral thief who cannot help stealing even his own brother's deal. While Austin works on his project, his attention is distracted by his elder brother Lee. Lee carries the very genes of the father, who is a broke, drunk and lives in the desert. Accustomed to stealing anything worth money, Lee manages to steal his brother's deal, too. When Austin talks to the producer, Lee draws the producer's attention to his script. And now he has made a new deal with the producer. We are not informed how he could achieve it. The producer is appealed to Lee's story of two men's chasing one another in the desert instead of taking Austin's love story. When the mother turns, she finds them fighting brutally, making the house a real mess. And she leaves there as soon as she expresses her disappointment. These two brothers are not different from those chasing each other aimlessly in Lee's story. There is no right or good between them. There is no good side in his plays because all characters are the same, there are only bad ones. The difference between good and bad is only a fake appearance of the modern individual. This constitutes a contrast between the outer and inner reality (Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 131-132).

In *True West* the individuals are so alienated and degenerated that they do not feel any disturbance in cheating each other. The feelings of close relationship among fathers, mothers, brothers or sisters cannot prevent hatred, enmity and violence of people. As though the two figures we observe are not brothers, but two fierce animals ready to tear one another. They are like the eagle and the cat in the story of the father in *Curse of the Starving Class*:

WESLEY: And that eagle comes down and picks up the cat in his talons and carries him screaming off into the sky.

ELLA: And they fight. They fight like crazy in the middle of the sky. That cat's tearing his chest out, and the eagle's trying to drop him, but the cat won't let go because he knows if he falls he'll die.

WESLEY: And the eagle's being torn apart in midair. The eagle's trying to free himself from the cat, and the cat won't let go.

ELLA: And they come crashing down to the earth. Both of them come crashing down. Like one whole thing (200).

In *True West*, brothers, Austin and Lee, come to their mother's home to get some self benefits: Austin for inspiration of writing his script for a new film deal; Lee for finding any financial assistance in an immoral way. Lee tends to steal both from his mother's home and from the vicinity. In the absence of Mom, both males try to make use of this opportunity.

Austin says that he cannot inform the police about the crimes of Lee just because of the family tie between them, and this relationship prevents him to carry out his social responsibilities (23). However, Lee opposes this idea reminding him the cruelty surrounding the whole universe: "Family people. Brothers. Brothers-in-law. Cousins. Real American-type people. They kill each other in the heat mostly. In the Smog-Alerts. In the Brush Fire Season. Right about this time a'year" (24).

Changing the roles, they attempt to steal one another's life. Neither the brothers nor Mom has normal behaviours. They are all problematic characters. Most of the play is occupied by male characters and their absurd deeds and dialogues. The single female character is lost and appears only for a very short time towards the end of the play. Now the picture is complete with the last piece of the cold and tough Mom. Though Shepard often reflects his anger towards his father clearly, he does not show much sympathy to the mother in this play, either. While the father symbolizes destructive agent, the mother is ineffective or erased and sometimes as guilty as the father in such plays as *Buried Child* and *True West*. The mother is as alienated as the father and the brothers. While the father is drifted away from home, the mother is under the excuse of having a voyage to Alaska.

Lee and Austin's father is an alcoholic man who loses his false teeth in a doggie bag full of leftover chop suey. The father has ruined his life plunging into a swamp becoming a useless drunk. Lee is after an easy life stealing, and leading an immoral life, not much different from that of his father. Austin is doing no good business but pretending to be a false Hollywood writer having an unstable, fragile career, and may easily turn out to be a vagabond very similar to his father and brother Lee (Schulman 58).

His family picture is full of divorces, inconsistencies and changes, and fragmentation is central to his plays. Therefore, it is quite natural that his plays reflect these problems. Increasingly, all these lead to a deeper alienation, a division within the individual and the family.

Shepard uses a bitter criticism in his play *Operation Sidewinder* (1970). A gigantic computer in the shape of a sidewinder is invented by American Air Force to follow and search for unidentified flying objects (UFO). This personified creature is left in a nearby desert. Later some unexpected events happen and the sidewinder wraps a woman. The creature is divided into parts and used for Shaman Indian rituals by a magician woman. Now a third world war, in which materialists are to seek a shelter, is foretold. People who are peaceful and good-hearted will not need a shelter, and there will be no shelter for vicious people. The war will be between material and spiritual beings. People who do not want to divide the world found a single nation of fraternity. Materialism is to be defeated in the end, which evokes Historical Materialism of Marx. Analysing the movement of history, Marx predicts that capitalism will break down as a result of class struggle and decrease in profit.

*Operation Sidewinder* meant many things for the period it was written. The painful Vietnam War, materialist society, ignoring spirituality, losing values, the monstrous humanity are the criticised subjects in the play. The Young Man in the play is a merciless murderer, and is the outcome of the lost hopes. He takes refuge in drugs and violence to overcome alienation. The dialogues in the play are very much like laments for the lost American culture. The character Young Man is similar to the hero, who has the same name, in Edward Albee's *The American Dream*. Albee's Young Man has been emptied as the American dream, the title of the play. While he

is handsome and his outer appearance is quite excellent, his inner world has decayed and is utterly hollow. He could do any brutal action for money and for his interests.

His families transform into a closed system alienated in tensions and contradictions in itself. The household in these families undergo a prevailing feeling of claustrophobia. These characters are trapped in a vicious circle and every attempt results in worsening the already chaotic situation. Alienation, in this close and boring circle of the chaotic family, like an infectious disease, infects and afflicts the family members, among whom, the son is the most effected. This predicament is seemingly inherited from generation to generation. While blaming the father, the playwright makes self-criticism as well. Referring to his alcoholic father, he makes a parody of his own case, because he is a representative of humanity. Like him, all the humanity is in the grip of an existential absurdity. Here what Shepard suggests is that the family is the source of pains and one cannot escape from it. This reality is told in the allegoric tale of the eagle and the cat told by Weston, the father in *Curse of the Starving Class*.

In *Buried Child*, Vince and his girl friend Shelly go to visit his grandparents after some six years of leave. The grandfather Dodge sits in front of a TV, drinking. The grandmother wears black clothes as if mourning for his dead son Ansel. Vince is ignored by every member of the family including his own father Tilden. Tilden is busy carrying vegetables from the garden which is said to have borne no vegetables for a very long time. This indifference and being not recognised by anyone brings him to the edge of insanity. This father's indifference to his own son recalls the author's own life experience.

With *Buried Child* Shepard invites the readers or audiences to a house familiar to them but with a slight difference: in this family the masks have dropped and the secrets have been revealed. This is a house where everybody, more or less, can find something from his or her life. Together with the physical appearances the inner worlds are presented, too. Therefore, the family and its members are monitored in several dimensions. The family seems to be put on in an exhibition gallery with its crude details in order that the visitors can watch it. Thus, the audience is disturbed at times because of the tough realities presented among the households. On the other

hand, Shepard tries to keep something hidden in that family. As a result, some parts remain as a puzzle in the minds, and the audience or reader is urged to think and make different comments. Among the puzzling subjects, though we get some slight implications, are why does nobody recognize Vince until he is drunk? Who is the real father of the buried child? Why has Dodge killed him? What is the real relationship between Vince and the buried child? Are they same persons? And is this the playwright himself? All these mysteries represent universal questions pertaining to families.

He focuses his attention on the failure of relationships which are expected to be cordial and strong within a safe and sweet family. Home should be the core in which family members shelter against any danger they face in life. Basic human emotions and feelings need a secure, a sincere home to shelter, that is the nature, the desire of any human beings. Human beings cannot fend for themselves without love or other psychological needs as well as other basic needs. For example, Tilden is desperately in such a need, saying "I thought I was dying but I lost my voice...I was alone I thought I was dead," and he concludes "you gotta talk or you'll die" (78). However, modern man is hungry for psychological support though he is in no way in need of any material need. The materialistic and capitalist world has stripped the man of his inner wealth, morality and beliefs. He has become deprived of these values. Therefore, he has been halved, emptied as a result of the divorce from these essentials, and his roots. Home is an important source to provide these essentials, but this home is no more such a shelter. It has no more any children playing in the yard because this child was buried in this yard a while ago, as reflected in the title of Shepard's play, *Buried Child*.

Unlike the past, the parents do not love or care the children; rather, they give harm to them either in abstract or concrete meaning as Dodge tells Shelly: "You think just because you propagate they have to love their offspring? You never seen a bitch eat her puppies?" (111-112). That bitch is either himself who kills the incestuous baby or his wife Halie who is the cause of a deadly affair, and the eaten puppy is Halie's own child buried in his garden. At the end of *Buried Child*, Tilden brings home the tiny decaying corpse of the buried child. This decay represents the rotten family, which is revealed clearly with the final scene.

No vegetables have grown in the back garden since 1935. Halie does not believe Tilden who says that he brought corn full in his lap from the back garden, and accuses him of stealing corn from the vicinity. That accusation gives the impression that Tilden got in trouble for similar crimes. However, this time Tilden does not say lie. It is realized that surprisingly the garden behind the house is full of vegetables, such as corn and carrot. And Halie informs it crying from upstairs. It is a strange and an absurd coincidence that her cry and Tilden's entering with the corpse of the baby in his arms and Dodge's death on the sofa happen at the same time.

The abundance of corn in *Buried Child*, and plenty of artichokes in *Curse of the Starving Class* evokes the proliferation of corks in Ionesco's *Amédée* (1954). What Halie says about Dodge is a sort of brief definition of an existential character in an absurd world very much similar to Gregor Samsa, who finds himself as a gigantic bug turned over powerless, in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, or the growing dead body in *Amédée*: "You sit here day and night, festering away! Decomposing! Smelling up the house with your putrid body! Hacking your head off till all hours of the morning! Thinking up mean, evil, stupid things to say about your own flesh and blood!" (76)

In *Curse of the Starving Class* the father is confused because he cannot realize how irrecoverably they have been estranged. Though the father tries hard, the whole family, notably Wesley, the son, is difficult to convince for a new start. It is not easy for them to believe him after so many years of frustration and destruction. Weston, the father, however, has no intention to withdraw and wants to go as further as possible. He believes that it cannot be that terrible, and he simply underlies the disease inflicting on the family in a rebellious tone:

You couldn't be all that starving! We're not that bad off, goddamnit! I've seen starving people in my time, and we're not that bad off! (*pause, no reaction from WESLEY, who continues to eat ravenously*) You just been spoiled, that's all! This is a paradise for a young person! There's kids your age who'd give their eyeteeth to have an environment like this to grow up in! You've got everything! Everything! (192).

The family has a similar end to that of the story of eagle and cat which die helplessly tearing each other crashing to the earth. The Tate family is starving, not in its literal meaning, but emotionally and spiritually. Their home is very much similar to a cold motel room where the inhabitants use it only for sleeping and other physical needs. Even in meeting these basic needs, they do not act as a group, and they cannot stand this common activity, either. They have fed up with anything common. Disorder has permeated every aspect of life: they sleep on table, on the ground, or in car, and not in due time, and eating occurs in a similar monotonous and disordered way. There is either nothing in the refrigerator, or only one kind of food, such as artichoke, at home. The front door is broken leaving the household unprotected against the outsiders, the dangers that might come from outside world. Catering is not performed kindly, for example, when there is no food, the father brings insipid, tasteless food and simply throws there and leaves, like feeding farm animals. And he does this complainingly: “We’ve done it again! We’ve gone and left everything up to the old man again! All the upkeep! The maintenance! Perfect!...It’s only me! Mr. Slave Labor himself come home to replenish the empty larder!” (157). The fact that the son Wesley brings home a lamb with maggots also gives the impression that they are living an animal-like life. The special days and rites have been totally lost, for instance, Emma’s first menstrual period passes by in a careless manner far from any meaning and understanding. In such a critical period when she is in a desperate need of care and love, she is treated mercilessly, and is even humiliated by Wesley. The Tate family in this play violates the limits of marital, parental, and personal rights and traditions. The family is, in every aspect, in marginal dimensions. (Boehnlein 567-569).

*Curse of the Starving Class* includes long monologues revealing psychological realism, physical actions on stage and powerful images. A traditional setting, plot and characters are peculiar to the playwright: kitchen, a father who only pays short visits, an unreliable and disloyal mother, a daydreaming son and a maddened daughter. The son dreams to go to Alaska, and the daughter to Mexico. Both the parents think, separately, to sell the ranch and go away. Thus, all the members are in dream to escape from home. Whatever formerly existed to connect the family members have been lost. The only thing left behind is a physical structure,



the house, to keep them together. However, this last tie is about to break and the family is to be destroyed. Losing emotional ties, the family cannot bear living in the same environment. Not only has the warmth of the family gone, but also hatred has replaced it. The disintegration and decadence of American family is dramatized. We are shown the tragedy that the consumer society has placed material on the values and even on human beings. Writing family plays, Shepard says that he enters into “the earthquake zone” (Boehnlein 568-70). There is tension and anger in the family and this is not a secret. Tough and eccentric attitudes are features of a typical corrupt American family. Shepard sees the nuclear family as a “war zone where blood (heredity) begets blood (homicide)” (Boehnlein 568).

Shepard’s characters have rather narrow world views, and they see the world from a single perspective. They do not see the world outside their own since they waste most of their time and energy conflicting within their inner worlds. They do not listen, but they just react with prejudices and illusions. Furthermore, the reactions are rather fierce recalling brutal instincts. As in the story of the father, instead of being the source of life, the family members tear one another like the eagle and cat which are to crash the ground after fighting and holding themselves tight in the sky. The individuals do not pose a positive stance; furthermore, they preclude any constructive attitude which is seen not very often. Wesley’s attitude to Emma’s preparations, and the family members’ way of behaving towards the father’s last efforts are typical examples: Wesley urinates on the posters Emma prepared, and the mother cooks the chick Emma bred for her club; the father’s proposal to start a new life is strictly turned down.

The families have lost their unifying functions and the goals of life. They have no more a unifying role. The values, such as loyalty and devotion, have been replaced by self interests. Selfish feelings have increased. The children, who will carry the things they get from present, have been inoculated depression and aimlessness. The child, brought up away from moral values, lives an isolated and lost life in future. He cannot give because he has not been given, he cannot take care because has not been taken into account, cannot devote because has not been loved, cannot see any value or morality because he has never been shown those values. He

reflects what he gets from life. The following generations survive the same mood and rootlessness, so the life creates a monotonous and aimless world in its vicious circle.

As individuality develops, social life, notably the family, loses its necessity and importance. As a result, mankind becomes divided, confused and cut from his past roots. He sees himself torn, and struggles between contradictions: between himself and society, child and parents, husband and wife, unity and separation. Family members cannot take reasonable decisions because they do not think carefully, or do not consult one another before reaching a critical decision. Sudden, reckless actions and reactions lead to a catastrophic end. The individual, who suffers from all those troubles, and who experiences bitter results following the wrong decisions, is filled with fears, and soon becomes impotent, feeble and even cannot find any courage to take decisions. Later they develop the tendency to get psychiatric help, for they cannot find the power to stand on their feet. When such individuals assume the role of parents, they become weak in authority within the family. Naturally, the children in such a family begin to question this problematic condition (Boehnlein 574).

In *A Lie of the Mind* Beth's childish behaviours are met with approval by her mother's similar childish reactions. Both women do and speak absurd things; nonetheless, they seem to be the only couple to be able to communicate. Meg, Beth's mother, has plans for Beth, such as having a garden wedding: "I think it would be wonderful up on the high meadow. We could invite the whole family. We could even have a picnic up there. Cake and lemonade. We could have music. We haven't had a real wedding in so long" (120). What she dreams for her daughter is a typical plan made by a traditional mother. The life has become so monotonous and mechanic that even the daily expectations have become dreams the households long for. For example, when he folds American flag, Beth's father, Baylor has kissed his wife for the first time for twenty years. The bleak atmosphere at home has become so widespread that there is no way that the play has a happy ending: the father goes upstairs alone; Jake and Mike, Beth's brother, remain outside; Jake is exposed to sadistic and brutal tortures of Mike; and what happens to Beth and Frankie remains mystery. Meg heads towards the porch from the house.

In his plain and natural plays, situations, which we all are likely to encounter in daily life, are revealed: secrets of the families, which are known by only a few of the households, and intended to be kept forever; and the universal, never ending quarrels between spouses, father and son, or other family members. Abrupt feelings and emotions rather than ideas or thoughts dominate his world of plays.

Shepard often uses motel rooms in his plays. Cold, isolated, ugly and dull motel rooms reflect the estrangement and separation of the family members. It is an insecure and temporary place of the aimless and bewildered wanderers, and the next accommodation is obscure. No other residence can better represent the rootlessness of the American world than a cold motel room. In one of his stories, *Hail from Nowhere*, a man looks for his wife who has left him after a bitter quarrel. The spouses do not remember what they quarrelled about. His wife complains to her mother about his habit of carrying gun, and that he even attempted to shoot her on one occasion. This description obviously fits Shepard well since the playwright is known to carry gun, and one day he threatens a journalist from *Herald* with using his gun and warns him not to follow him and Jessica Lange before marrying her. Carrying gun may have possibly been handed down to him from his father. Telling stories like *Hail from Nowhere*, Shepard confesses that he reflects his own past: “The short tale is the perfect medium for reminiscing about yourself and your ancestors” (qtd. by Brustein 28).

Shewey argues that in the play *Action*, “the ominous isolation of the characters and their impaired ability to articulate their thoughts also suggest the atmosphere of a drug rehabilitation centre as well as a politically traumatized, if not post apocalyptic, society” (*Sam Shepard* 92).

In 1984 his father dies. This affects the writer badly. He experiences serious conflicts with his father. For a while their relationship tends to improve. He begins to respect and care for him, and in many ways to identify himself with him. For a period Shepard begins to behave like his father: he leaves his wife with his son in the middle of the desert, and lives with another woman. He acts similar to his father and begins to develop empathy for a poor old man, whom he criticised harshly throughout his life, and consequently, this led him to have affectionate feelings.

After all these experiences he feels the emptiness of the universe more than ever before. In his father's funeral he broods on the nothingness of his own life: "...I even attempted a passage from the Bible but choked on the words, 'All is vanity' because I suddenly saw my own in reading this as though I understood its true meaning. I couldn't speak at all for a while. Nothing came out..." (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 149).

Shepard had never felt a sorrow like that before. He sees himself cast aside and thrown in an uncertain future, cutting from his roots and family. He is as lost and alienated as the characters in plays portrayed by existentialist and absurd writers. He undergoes one of these terrible conflicts he reflects in his plays: ignoring his wife and son, Shepard begins to live with another woman and another man's child. Who knows how painful a life his own family was leading, or in what misery his father had been dying while he was leading a life far from them as a successful writer. All these contradictions were destroying him.

#### 4. DILEMMA

Shepard frequently makes use of dilemmas, notably those between reality and illusion in such plays as *A Lie of the Mind*, *Buried Child*, *Fool for Love*, *True West*, *Curse of the Starving Class*, *The Tooth of Crime* and *Simpatico*. Bigsby argues that what keeps Shepard writing is the contradictions, and he adds that his insisting on hope in a hopeless world not only constitutes a contradictory atmosphere but it is also one of the main ingredients and a definitional aspect of absurdity (*Critical Introduction* 246). As the title of the play *Savage/Love* implies, Shepard not only gives the play such a title, but in practice he often uses dilemmas both in his plays and real life.

Although Shepard's works are realistic, they are also full of dreams and visions. His plays are given in a mixture of reality and illusion. Both of them are so intensive that one cannot distinguish one from the other. Characters are in a dream-like condition, so they cannot differentiate between what is real and what is not.

Therefore, fantasy becomes a necessary means for life even going beyond reality. Powerful emotions are such essential features that they are out of control, so they simply burst out. However, what is being questioned is reality rather than illusion. Shepard claims that writing a play, he is in search of truth, so he does not care where the flux takes him to and what the outcome is (Shewey, *American Theatre* 82).

Shepard's most plays point out two major gaps: the reality which grasps the whole America as a cancer, and the ideals which the playwright has dreamed to be true (Gardner 1). Shewey suggests that Shepard may have been influenced by the ideas of G. I. Gurdjieff born in Russia (*Sam Shepard* 67). Gurdjieff, who is a spiritual master, argues that man should reach the pure knowledge by separating the illusory and real world, without questioning the values of the world.

Shepard lives the conflicts he applies abundantly in his plays, and this gives him a deep grief: he lives in the city but is rooted in a rural life; he is married and has a son but lives with another woman. Particularly, the second one has afflicted him badly. Before long he concluded that drug taking was killing him, which caused him to leave New York. There is a similar contradiction between Shepard and his close friend Chaikin, with whom he collaborates on some works. Shepard is a western farm boy, but Chaikin an Eastern Jew, and the playwright is a determined heterosexual but the actor is a calm gay. Although they are almost at the same age, Shepard looks young, but Chaikin gives the impression of an old wise man. Shepard suggests that conflicts make life colourful, revealing the paradoxical nature of life in an interview in 1988:

Life is made up of contradictions. The tricky part is to stay in the middle of a contradiction that is where life is. Exactly where it is... It's when you're torn that things start to fall apart...But to be right in the middle of a conflict...and let it play itself out where you can see...well, that's where things begin to get exciting. You can't avoid paradoxes (Bigsby, *Modern* 176).

Bigsby suggests that when Shepard's characters encounter troubles and tension they tend to simplify, resembling them computers which return to the primary function when faced excessive burden. He adds that they focus and intensify on one point, which makes them sensitive, but the reality they are involved does not

exclude fantasy. Reality and dream go hand in hand and they are intermingled with each other (*Modern* 167). In *Action* the main character, Shooter describes how misleading it is to assume to have a sweet home and the paradox between the appearance and the reality:

Just because we're surrounded by four walls and a roof doesn't mean anything. It's still dangerous. The chances of something happening are just as great. Anything could happen. Any move is possible. I've seen it. You go outside. The world is quiet. White. Everything resounding. Not a sound of a motor. Not a light. You see into the house. You see the candles. You watch the people. You can see what it's like inside. The candles draw you. You get a cold feeling being outside. Separated. You have an idea that being inside it's cozier. Friendlier. Warmth. People. Conversation. Everyone using a language. Then you go inside. It's a shock. It's not like how you expected. You lose what you had outside. You forget that there even is an outside. The inside is all you know. You hunt for a way of being with everyone. A way of finding how to behave. You find out what's expected of you. You act yourself out (283-284).

Shepard has never been interested in politics because he does not believe in anything that could change the world, so it would be contradictory to rely on such a thing. *The Unseen Hand* (1969) and *Forensic and the Navigators* (1967) indicate Shepard's attitude towards politics: "It's pointless to try to change the world because it either goes on as usual or destroys itself despite the best efforts of the right or the left, the young or the old, the square or the hip" (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 67). In *Operation Sidewinder*, Shepard feels the agony of the American people and the uselessness of politics, so makes the hero cry the dilemma and despair the American youth had in the 1960s:

This is how it begins, I see. We become so depressed we don't fight anymore. We're losing only a little, we say. It could be so much worse. The soldiers are dying, the blacks are dying, the children are dying. It could be so much worse. ...Let's wait till four years from now when we can take over the Democratic Party. Teddy Kennedy is still alive. Let's not do anything at all. It can only get worse. Let's give up...you can't win all the time. You can't always have everything your own way. You'll be arrested. You'll be arrested, accosted, molested, tested, and re-tested. You'll be beaten,

you'll be jailed, you'll be thrown out of school. You'll be spanked, you'll be whipped and chained. But I'm whipped. I am chained. I am prisoner to all your oppression. I am depressed, deranged, decapitated, dehumanized, defoliated, demented, and damned. I can't get out. You can get out. You can smile and laugh and kiss and cry. I am! I am! I am! I am! I am! I am! I am! I am! I am! I am! I am! I am! I am! I am! I am! I am! Tonight. In this desert. In this space. I am (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 63).

This is not only the cry of the youth of that time, but it also includes the modern man's despair, revolt and pessimism in today's chaotic environment.

In 1967 he goes to Italy to play a role in the film *Zabriskie Point*, and uses this experience in *Operation Sidewinder*. In the play he ridicules American nationalism. To express his thoughts he uses monologues which is one of his common techniques. He makes his character The Young Man, in *Operation Sidewinder*, talk: "I am truly an American. I was made in America. Born, bred and raised. I have American scars on my brain. Red, white and blue. I bleed American blood. I dream American dreams. I fuck American girls. I devour the planet. I'm an earth eater..." (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 63).

Jack Gelber calls him the playwright as "shaman, suggesting that Shepard delves into the mysterious regions of a collective American psyche and brings back news that the rest of us are afraid to encounter" (Hart 70). He shows how our darker forces of our imagination threaten us.

Instead of evading paradoxes, he tries to study them in detail. Such contradictions as attraction and repulsion form some of his plays, which can be best seen in *Fool for Love*. In this and some other plays, attraction and pushing between male and female is a kind of ritual prayer which goes on and on endlessly because attraction and repulsion contain one another. An abrupt change from one to the other creates a feeling of irony and absurd. The conflict between both attitudes deepens the already present fracture.

*Fool For Love* (1983) is set in a cheap motel room very close to Mojave Desert. Shepard's several plays are set in desert. The use of desert is not aimless: a bare place nowhere to find a shelter. It constitutes a stark contrast with the social life.

On the other hand, it is a pure, natural place far from artificiality where there are no tricks or manipulations of human beings. The play tells the love story of half-siblings. The power of love is implied despite treachery, or attachment-detachment sequences. Eddie is a rodeo cowboy, May is a cook. The feelings expose a sort of pull and push relationship. Their emotions and desires are as unstable as their deeds. The motel where May lives also evokes the temporariness of their lives.

Two estranged lovers, Eddie and May, meet in a cold motel room in *Fool for Love*. May lives a contradiction in her feelings and behaviours. She either damns Eddie or weeps for his going. May has just made a boyfriend, and wants Eddie to leave, but on the other hand she is not sure that she really wants him to leave. She seems to be caught in the disease of dilemma. This contradictory mood reveals itself in the play: either the couple come closer or distance; kiss or swear; flirt or attack one another. That absurd situation continues throughout the play. Eddie tries to mend May's broken bed; May changes clothes wearing sexually attractive ones; or they shout each other. Love stands not for affirmation of a happy life, but sorrow and grief. Passion is something which moves towards calamity.

Shepard describes the setting with a detailed realism. The room has a cold atmosphere where two lovers have an unfriendly dialogue. The acts and speech reveal how contradictory they lead a life. Both blame each other, and in fact, though they try to turn accusations of each down, seemingly their dreams or fantasies stem from real fears and anxieties. Like their feelings, the existence of characters is also central to our doubt. For example, their imaginative father sitting in the corner of the stage has a semi-presence. The couple ignore him most of the time, act as if there are only both of them there. But at times they are aware of his presence talking or listening to him. The old man is both present and absent at the same time. His existence has a surreal position. This presence and absence goes on and on throughout the play, and in the attitudes of the couple. They attract and repel one another respectively. As Bigsby emphasizes: "The gentle touch and the violent blow are two possibilities present in the same movement." (*Modern* 188). The characters are confused and even cannot separate fantasy from fear. For example, May has two contradictory fears: either Eddie's decision to go or to stay frightens her. Therefore, she sometimes tells him to go, sometimes to stay. Both love and hatred for Eddie



constitute another inner contradiction of May. Bigsby defines this elusive situation with a balanced situation of contradictions of fears:

There is no gentleness in any of the pairings in his work. They are all touched with doom, driven by a need which language can neither define nor contain. Two fears of equal force create a terrible balance—the fear of presence and the fear of abandonment. These people cannot survive together and cannot exist apart (*Modern* 169).

In *Fool for Love* and other plays there is usually a threat and a source of anxiety. Suddenly flame rises out of the window as soon as an explosion is heard. There is a continuous violence, and the catastrophe of the man is near. Triumph and success are rare but failure and frustration never come to an end in these frightful plays and life. However, this is exactly the real life itself, in fact, the definition of life. Of all the experiences, love is still the most special and the most different one although it is the source of absurdity and sufferings.

In the play the old man sitting on one corner of the stage throughout the play is seemingly nothing more than an imagination, or a feeling of guilt or anger. His presence is not clear; he is in between presence and absence. This old man, thought to be the lovers' father, is a victim of love like the couple, and the cause of the suffering of the lovers at the same time. Reality and illusion are mixed in this play, too. The line between what is real and illusionary is blurred, as in the case of his presence and his speech: "I thought you were supposed to be a fantasist, right? Isn't that basically the deal with you? You dream things up. Isn't that true?" (26). The Old Man and Eddie talk about an illusionary picture which is supposed to be hung on the wall:

THE OLD MAN: Take a look at that picture on the wall over there. (*He points at wall stage right. There is no picture but* EDDIE *stares at the wall.*) Ya' see that? Take a good look at that. Ya' see it?

EDDIE: (*staring at the wall*) Yeah.

THE OLD MAN: Ya' know who that is?

EDDIE: I'm not sure (27).

In *States of Shock*, the contradictions in the American society are emphasized. On one hand, individuals suffer from losses and grief; on the other hand, the society is proud of its false victories. The reality of loss, violence and the dream of fake triumph construct a dilemma which marks most of Shepard plays. The author longs for the past values, which are not held dear any more. He is both sad and angry in such an environment. The lost values inflict on him. Furthermore, the American society is not aware of the losses. The present does not appeal to him, but repels him instead, for existing American values are fragmented, less effective and weakened. Two sources of dilemma, the American flags and lost lives are deliberately put in the same scene. The play shows how deep this gap of dilemma is. The way the wheelchair is portrayed is another irony. A decorated wheelchair with flags can never eliminate, or at least, relieve the irrecoverable pains. The sorrows cannot even be put in words compared to a material, superficial victory (Biggsby, *Modern* 193).

Shepard implies that we have no more alternatives or colours in life, so we are entitled to the restricted characteristics and rights. For example, in *True West*, we seem to be shown several different features, such as an orderly, disciplined, educated male versus disorderly, undisciplined, uneducated male figure. However, in the end what remains is only male violence. Other qualities, in fact, are nothing but false appearance. *True West* tells the story of two brothers: Austin, a seemingly successful screenwriter, and Lee, a drifter and wanderer who has spent his recent years roaming the desert. While their mother has a vacation in Alaska, the brothers come together at their mother's home where they grew up. Austin has gone there to be left alone to concentrate on his writing while Lee is in search of burglarizing the neighbours. As their dialogue progresses, Lee is convinced that he should write a story of his experiences in the desert. Thus, Lee manages to make a deal with the Jewish producer who was supposed to make it with Austin instead. That makes Austin extremely a different person far from his previous intellectual appearance. He begins to assume Lee's personality as a result of this reversal, which constitutes a conflict throughout the play.

*True West* reveals the brothers who are seemingly in contrast with each other, but later on, the characters exchange identities. Austin's reversal is rather disturbing because his transformation is for the worse. The authenticity of Lee is versus

Austin's fragile carrier. Lee is authentic, original, and loyal to his usual way of life though that is not a preferable and accepted one. Austin is not sincere in his world since he has easily turned to the opposite. Obviously, here Shepard criticises Hollywood, its artificiality, and its taste. He implies that Hollywood is ruining the natural and the original lives and values. Austin has worn a mask and his naturalness is lost due to Hollywood's hypocritical world which preaches a consumer society with its all affairs (Schulman 58).

Shepard deepens the irony by changing both of the brothers into the same personality. Disorder wins over order, anarchy over discipline, illegal over legal, spontaneity over planning, surreal over real, natural over pretension, fiction over reality, danger over safety, exciting over calm.

As soon as the play begins we encounter absurdities and dilemmas in the opening stage of *Curse of the Starving Class*. The son, Wesley, tries to clean up the mess and repair the broken door, but he is scolded, instead of being appreciated, by the mother who is expected to be constructive in a traditional family. Cleaning a mess is not the duty of a son, but of the mother in a familiar family. Therefore, the conflicts are seen as soon as the play starts. The gate between the family and outside world has been destroyed not by an outsider, but by the father himself, who is expected to protect the family from the dangers. Thus, we come across queer parents and children.

Though the father, in *Curse of the Starving Class*, prefers an isolated life, this isolation is not a permanent one; at times the father comes, makes a short visit and goes back. This is obviously a dilemma in that family, and the males neither can leave forever, nor stay with the family. They cannot do alone, nor can they do together. This indecisiveness is the weakness and the missing aspect of the family. It is also a sign of an unconscious community. To live away from home is a desire, but it is a fear at the same time. The same action is both a source of desire and fear. The existential man cannot break this dilemma of wish and fear cycle. However, the playwright implies that this absurd behaviour is to continue with later generations in the Tate family, the representative of the modern families. Seemingly, this is also true in the case of the playwright himself and his father.

The vegetables, carried from the garden which was not cultivated for years, are a mysterious source of dilemma in *Buried Child*. Only a single kind of food, though much in quantity, like artichokes in *The Curse of Starving Class*, does not stand for abundance or fertility, but on the contrary, one gets the impression of insipidity and a chaotic life.

*A Lie of the Mind* is another play in which we are introduced to the conflict between men and women. Although Beth is beaten to death by Jake, she expresses her love for him taking Frankie as Jake because of her brain damage. The play opens with a lie: Jake insists that his wife Beth is with him, yet she is not there. This lie is also an illusion of Jake. Shepard's characters are confused in this or that way. For example, Jake is so perplexed that he cannot distinguish between reality and illusion. He is situated in a dreamy world. His wife, Beth is an actress, so she performs and presents the unreal as real. The distinction between real and illusion is blurred. Therefore, Jake does not believe her because he is not sure of her loyalty. He is suspicious of her way of clothing and behaving. He is so jealous of her that he even takes her perfume choice as a sign for betrayal. His delusions produce several scenarios that would sustain his already growing suspicions. Jake is suspicious of Beth's behaviours, and makes up an imaginary theory about her disloyalty, and he tells Frankie over the phone:

Woman starts dressin' more and more skimpy every time she goes out. Starts puttin' on more and more smells. Oils. She was always oiling herself before she went out. Every morning. Smell would wake me up. Coconut or Butterscotch or some goddamn thing. Sweet stuff. Youda thought she was an ice-cream sundae. I'd watch her oiling herself while I pretended to be asleep. She was in a dream, the way she did it. Like she was imagining someone else touching her. Not me. Never me. Someone else (14).

Therefore, whatever she does or wears adds to his illusions, by attributing further accusations against Beth. Jake's assumption of being cheated is groundless because he himself produces all those things as a result of his schizophrenic dreams (Hall 109).

Jake beats her for his jealousy, and though we get a strong understanding that it is not true what Jake thinks of Beth, and it is groundless, her attitude towards Frankie gives the impression of immorality. As a result, we get confused and develop a doubtful thought about her. We also become suspicious of her. She wears trappings, odours, and clothes like a 'whore' as Jake calls it. However, she lives in a dream state, and is mentally ill, so she cannot be held responsible for her actions because of her brain damage. And thus, her excessive behaviours could be justified. Having a serious brain damage, Beth's mind is confused which leads to the feeling of absurdity. We are left with a dilemma and elusive situation in attributing her absurdities to an immoral or lunatic state. At this point Shepard leaves it to us to make the final decision. We get an impression of the playwright saying, "it is you, either audience or reader, who is to make the choice."

Jake claims that Beth has changed in time, and this change has been into an immoral one, so justifies his action. However, Beth has not changed and she has acted as she used to do. Furthermore, she is an actress, and does what is required for her job. Jake has reached some inferences from Beth's behaviours which may be the symbols of sexuality. For example, he associates Beth's touching herself with the presence of a hidden lover. However, some feminist writers, such as Luce Irigaray, claims that women do not need man for sexual fulfilment, which is another threat to male authority (Hall 110). Yet, Jake ignores this possibility seeing women as ones who are desperately in need of men, and cannot think a different possible alternative other than the existence of another man. In other words, Jake's knowledge about women and their capacity is rather narrow, and he sees women from a single perspective. For Jake, man's presence in a woman's life is an obligation which has no other alternative, so if this man is not Jake himself, than there must be another man, that is the only alternative. And consequently, that means he is cuckolded by his wife Beth, which shows that Jake's schizophrenic inference is that simple.

Hall argues that another threat to the male authority is the career of a woman who works outside home (Hall 111). Beth is an actress, and tries to convince Jake that what she is doing is acting, just pretending, there is nothing truth in it. However, obviously Jake takes it as truth, and is quite perplexed in taking which one as real and finally he associates her acting with reality:

JAKE: Yeah, a play. That's right. Just a play. "Pretend." That's what she said. "Just pretend." I know what they were doing! I know damn well what they were doin'! I know what that acting shit is all about. They try to "believe" they're the person. Right? Try to believe so hard they're the person that they actually think they become the person...

FRANKIE: What person?

JAKE: The person! The—whad'ya call it? The—

FRANKIE: Character?

JAKE: Yeah. The character. That's right. They start acting that way in real life. Just like the character. Walkin' around—talkin' that way. You shoulda seen the way she started to walk and talk. I couldn't believe it. Changed her hair and everything. Put a wig on. Changed her clothes. Everything changed. She was unrecognizable. I didn't even know who I was with anymore. I told her. I told her, look—"I don't know who you think you are now but I'd just as soon you come on back to the real world here." And you know what she tells me?

FRANKIE: What?

JAKE: She tells me this is the real world. This acting shit is more real than the real world to her... (15-16).

Shepard is quite familiar with this kind of emotion, because he and his wife or other women in his life have been all from the acting world. And he might have sensed a similar feeling. He knows this mimetic world of arts and draws attention to the realities and illusions. His heroes are stuck and bewildered between these conflicting worlds. Furthermore, the world he lives in is drama which justifies the dimension of confusion. Even the actors experience a similar bewilderment in their own identities, as Stoppard's characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern undergo in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Therefore, it is not easy for Jake, as an audience, to differentiate between real and imitation.

The power of acting is also influential on Jake who is aware of the fact that acting is as real as the life itself. Shepard uses a technique which evokes images either directly or indirectly. He implies that his drama is a theatre of images:

When you talk about images, an image can be seen without looking at anything—you can see something in your head, or you can see something on stage, or you can see things that

don't appear on stage you know. The fantastic thing about theatre is that it can make something be seen that's invisible, and that is where my interest in theatre is—that you can be watching this thing happening with actors and costumes and light and set and language, and even plot, and something emerges from beyond that, and that is the image part that I'm looking for, that's that's the sort of added dimension (qtd. by Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 223).

The rationality he uses on stage threatens any reality in daily life, and it is this danger appeals to him. In the opening scene of *The Tooth of Crime*, Hoss, a rock and roll star and a hired killer, who wears like a 'combination of rock star and cowboy' enters singing the song, 'The Way Things Are' which epitomizes Shepard's world of plays of reality and illusion:

You may think every Picture you see as a true history of  
 the way things used to be or the way things are  
 While you're ridin' in your radio or walkin' through the late  
 late show ain't it a drag to know you just don't know  
 you just don't know  
 So here's another illusion to add to your confusion  
 Of the way things are  
 Everybody's doin' time for everybody else's crime and  
 I can't swim for the waves in the ocean  
 All the heroes is dyin' like flies they say it's a sign a' the  
 times  
 And everybody's walkin' asleep eyes open—eyes open  
 So here's another sleep-walkin' dream.  
 A livin' talkin' show of the way things seem  
 I used to believe in rhythm and blues  
 Always wore my blue suede shoes  
 Now everything I do goes down in doubt...  
 So here's another fantasy.  
 About the way things seem to be to me (203-204).

*Simpatico* is also the battlefield of the clash between reality and illusion. In the play, there is much talk and interest about horse racing, another issue Shepard has been involved in. Carter is in the horse-racing business. He lives in luxury, and is called by his former partner Vinnie who lives in a shabby and cheap rental flat. They are in a dirty business kept secret for fifteen years. After Carter runs off with Vinnie's wife Rosie, their partnership drops out. Carter from then onward permanently gives hush money to Vinnie whose economic situation has worsened.

Vinnie threatens Carter with submitting the secret documents to the police. Carter goes to Vinnie's girlfriend Cecelia and wants her to convince Vinnie. Meanwhile, Vinnie goes to Kentucky to sell these documents to Simms who was harmed terribly for that dirty business years ago. But Simms ignores him. Then Vinnie talks to his former wife and tries to persuade her to go to Mexico with him. Carter, supposing that Vinnie has given the proofs to Simms, sends Cecelia to Simms to buy the negatives, but Simms shows the same indifference to her. Simms seems to have forgotten whatever has happened in the past. In the end, Vinnie turns to his former life, and Carter catches a strange disease and tells Vinnie that he is dying.

Carter, in fact, has a weak personality despite his wealth, money and power. His only goal is to maintain his luxury life and not to go to prison. Implying how deceiving the outer appearance might be and what the dangers it might carry, the playwright reveals that such characters as Vinnie or Simms, who have no much to lose, can relatively lead a fearless life. At the end of the play, Carter's lying in bed trembling and Vinnie's standing up before him is a clear implication of the message. This also reflects the contradictions between reality and appearance in life. Carter has all he wants in life: money, wealth, luxury, and women even if they are married or not, as in the example of his running away with a married woman or easily taking Cecelia under control. His worries about his past deeds kill Carter. Whereas, Vinnie or Simms who were exposed to injustices have nothing to worry about and they do not have fears, and thus they have chosen a new life burying the past, instead of being buried by it. In one of his speeches, Simms says "How many lives do you think a man can live? How many ones within this *one*? Say for instance, you could put the past to death and start over. Right now" (247). A similar secrecy, which ruins its keepers day by day, takes place in *Buried Child*. Many questions remain unanswered preoccupying the minds of the audience as *Buried Child* ends. The message in the play is that no secret can remain uncovered, and finally a hidden mysterious power reveals all secrets. These secrets give rise to such a powerful pressure on the characters' psychology that they cannot keep them any more, and one day these secrets explode from where they have been buried. The later these confessions are made, the more painful the process becomes. Their insistence on the wrong by keeping the secrets might be destructive and even fatal. Here the



destructive force is fear. The fear that the secrets will be revealed and the continuation of it systematically destroys all those involved. It is like a continuous fear of death, which kills every moment, which is much worse than a single death.

Shepard's characters are extremely unhappy in their isolated worlds since their expectations are not met, and they experience bad luck. Living reality gives them only trouble and sorrow. Therefore, they run away from reality, and prefer fantasy. They take refuge in dreams, and try to find happiness there. The desire to escape is the main theme of *Curse of the Starving Class*, and this escape is escape from the reality. Reality begins to assume a new meaning equal to grief in life, becoming synonymous with it. The characters do not want to live it anymore and move towards the dreams. The inability to realize leads them to survive an aimless, ambiguous life. Consequently, they act in an absurd way. In a dreamy world they try to find happiness, which they could not find in the past and presumably will not be able to find in the future as well. Fantasy partly connects them to life. Otherwise, the worst ends, including suicide, become the final solutions a desperate individual can seek.

## **5. IDENTITY**

The search of true identity is one of the subjects of absurd and existential writing. In general, what absurd playwrights reveal is an alienated identity isolated from its roots and past. Therefore, we will try to show how the alienated characters in Shepard and Stoppard form an identity in the context of absurd drama in a hostile universe.

Socialization is a process through which man learns how to become a member of the society and to take over his role in it. The process of socialization begins from childhood when the child begins to develop a consciousness of being individual. In these early years if the individual cannot get close relationship in society in later years he cannot develop a sense of identity, cannot interact and communicate. Socialisation begins in the family. Here child develops essential

abilities to have a healthy life in future, such as speaking, interacting and communicating. Then interactions outside the family begin, which help individuals to complete their socialization process. Anything, which does not function properly in this process, results in sociological or psychological disorders which end up in terrible consequences including suicides. Socialisation could last until death. With the beginning of the formal education, the control of parents decreases but the real influence comes from outside, the school, streets, clubs, and etc (Fulcher 124).

Identity and socialization are almost inseparable terms. One develops his sense of identity only through social process. An individual is identified with social identity when he is said to take part in a group. Therefore, one feels that he is that kind of person. But this label is not a specific different personal character like cleverness, or honesty. Social identities refer to social roles, or categories, such as woman, child, father, Jew, teacher, gay, lesbian and the like. The individual identifies himself with these groups or other people identify him with a social group. And the social type one is identified with may be more than one identity. For example, one may be woman, teacher, Jew and homosexual at the same time, which means multiple identities in a contemporary society. For example, a woman could be a mother at home, teacher at work, and etc. as she changes the environment.

According to Hegel human beings need a social identity apart from physical and psychological existence. He develops an idea of individual he calls "Volk", which is something between particularity and universality. It is not a complex or mystic idea as Marx complained because Hegel's idea simply suggests a unity of both individual's inward and outward situation. To Hegel the unity of self and social identity is essential for the individual to have self-realization. The absence of either of them means self-alienation as well as social alienation; and finally such a collapse would lead to chaos and disaster (Geyer 3). The characters in Shepard's plays experience a similar absence, alienation and disaster process. His characters are loners and act independently of the society. Shepard believes that his characters are in a dilemma as to who they are and who they think they are. The identities are shattered, estranged and become monstrous as a result of a kind of metamorphosis.

Shepard's characters are in a continuously changing habit and are not easy to define. They do not belong to any social or psychological classification that can be

explained. His characters find themselves in a fractured world, and they cannot realize what is happening to them. The characters who crowded the plays are caricature types. They are popular cultural figures: cowboys, rock stars, drifters and gangsters. The society they form has no centre (Bigsby, *Modern* 174-178).

Shepard stresses an unbridgeable gap between male and female characters who see the world from different angles. These characters also carry two divided and contradictory personalities. This leads them to a double-faced identity, the first of which is the apparent and the normal one, but the real or the inner one is psychotic, deep in personality. The self is in an insurmountable conflict which afflicts the character all along his life and causes an unreliable and insecure world. Therefore, they suffer both psychologically and socially. These problematic individuals, who do not have a reconciliation and peace in mind, are always drawn in conflicts, either with themselves or with their environments.

Shepard's characters are not reasonable, nor are the actions they perform. The father in *Curse of the Starving Class* may smash the door of his house; on the other hand, he might bring home food the other day. Furthermore, they, unlike traditional characters, do not carry out deeds in reasonable settings.

His characters and their deeds are unusual, and they tend to be neurotically sensitive. Tendency to exaggeration or magnifying is their obsession. His characters are likely to fracture into opposites, and they are mostly social outcasts, who are metamorphosed and are in search of a purpose restlessly but in vain. Their goals always seem to escape them. They prefer marginal poles, either a deathly silence or a neurotic talkativeness. As Tilden in *Buried Child* puts: "you gotta talk or you'll die" (78).

His characters show a rapid change in identity, transforming from one personality to another one easily. They do not have a control over their identities. They cannot think, hence act violently. The female remains back, letting the male occupy the centre and destroy everything around. Bigsby epitomizes such a typical alienated Shepard character:

Character is hollowed out in these plays as women and men alike fight to deny the past and inhabit a present drained of symbolic content. There is no consistency. Moods, dress,

identity can switch in a second; characters are fractured, divided, doubled until the same play can contain, as independent beings, what are in effect facets of a single self (*Modern* 168).

Shepard's plays present a similar father model that is generally portrayed as an easily irritated, drunken, independent figure, and carrying genes of primitive wild man. Similarly, he has some recurring images in most of his plays, such as the image of a bed-tempered old man, quarrelsome brothers, and indifferent mothers. Obviously, he is obsessed with such characters in his real life. The plays become an exhibiting field of his subconscious realm. Shepard is very much fused in his plays and characters. There is no other author who is blended with his heroes better than Shepard, who is sometimes Eddie, Jake, Lee, Wesley or Vince each of whom carries something from his creator, so he sees himself in his male heroes, but the females are always out there as in his real life. Most of his characters are from his real life. For instance, when he talked about his uncle, we are reminded Vince's uncle Bradley, the amputee, in *Buried Child*:

The uncle who died in a motel room on his wedding night.  
His wife who died with him. The uncle who lost a leg at the  
age of ten. The uncle who married into the Chicago Mafia.  
The uncle who cut timber in the Great North Woods. The  
uncle who drove for Berkins. The uncle who raised Springer  
Spaniels (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 22).

And his grandfather who always sits on his couch, feeling depressed, covered by a blanket watching TV on a ranch appears in *Buried Child* (Bigsby, *Modern* 169). We come across the name of Dodge, the bad-tempered drunk in *Buried Child*, in playwright's past: his great-great-great-grandfather, Lemuel Dodge, who lost one of his ears in the war he fought for the North, and an arm when he fought for the South. Shepard might also have taken these amputated organs as an inspiration for Bradley's prosthetic leg in *Buried Child* and for Stubs's lost legs in *States of Shock*. However, most possibly Dodge is Shepard's own father (Brustein 28).

Bigsby suggests that the grandson, who comes to visit his grandfather and looks at the family photographs in *Buried Child* "is obviously close kin to Sam Shepard who did the same thing," and his companionship with the actress Joyce

Aaron who once experiences a terrible shock due to the violence she is exposed “surfaces in *A Lie of the Mind* where a character is plunged into an autistic silence by violence rather than drugs” (*Modern* 169).

In *Simpatico*, nothing can be seen to have a positive, an optimistic side: the past is dirty and full of intrigues, the present is temporary, and the future is unpredictable, ambiguous. The characters are full of immoralities: tricky, dishonest, and unreliable. Husbands, wives, friends, darlings, partners may easily betray one another, any time. Their identities are similar, exchangeable and finally vanish. Talking about *Simpatico*, the playwright theorizes his ideas about the false appearance of personal identities:

Identity is a question for everybody in the play. Some of them are more firmly aligned with who they are, or who they think they are. To me, a strong sense of self isn't believing in a lot. Some people might define it that way, saying, 'He has a very strong sense of himself.' But it's a complete lie (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 228).

In this and many other plays, the writer suggests that people carry the same traits, and what they reflect is nothing but different characteristics of one single identity, as Austin, in *True West*, puts it: “we all sound alike when we're sloshed. We just sorta' echo each other” (39).

Restraining family ties leads the members to take refuge in individuation. Individuation is a universal issue, but in Shepard's families it is matter of fantasy, a fantasy associated with flight which ends up in destruction which comes in the forms of alcoholism, losing the property, explosions and finally death. The complexity is also seen with the identity of the family members who have almost the same names, like Weston, Wesley, Ella, Emma, Ellis in *Curse of the Starving Class*. The similarities between the same sexes, that is, between the father and the son, the mother and the daughter are meaningful. Not only the names, but the identities and personalities are surprisingly close to each other. Each one reflects the other's image. The son wearing his father's clothes openly admits that this is the case, that is, he is an exact copy of the father. However, having similar identities does not work to unite

them; but instead, it pushes them to the opposite poles, or tears them apart (Boehnlein 569).

Shepard is interested in the psychology of the individual, and the suppressed worlds of desires, images, and myths. Quick shift in psychology in his characters is one of his most typical methods. And he uses this feature in male characters. The male characters change identity to get power, to gain superiority. Such a fluid method of characterisation is not applied to the female types. The female has a fixed personality compared to the male characters.

At the beginning of *True West*, Austin represents objectivity, will, order, discipline and wisdom; whereas, Lee stands for anarchy, intuition, and imagination. While rationality dominates Austin's behaviours, feelings determine Lee's actions. The brothers, whom the playwright introduces as different and opposite characters in the opening stage, are very much like Edward Albee's Peter and Jerry in *The Zoo Story*. But as the play develops, Shepard prepares an atmosphere to show how misleading it is to think the brothers as opposite characters. In the end, the differences disappear completely, and we have almost identical characters unlike their initial appearances. Lee's firmly fixed natural behaviour dominates over Austin's false tactful and kind attitude which is rather fragile. Austin cannot endure Lee's continuous pressures and is obliged to drop his mask. Removed from the fake appearance which the society dressed him, Austin comes closer to his elder brother, Lee who is from the same origin, the same blood as Austin. They were fed from the same source, which Shepard believes is the unique feature determining the characteristics of the whole offspring without any exception (Hall 103).

The brothers are so similar that the Hollywood producer Saul Kimmer drops one brother's deal and make a new one with the other as if they were the same personalities. The brothers are not satisfied with their own situations and envy one another's lifestyle. Both are in need of something, suffer from lacks, and seek satisfaction. In the end, they try to enjoy their new life and identity.

In fact, they constitute one person's identity, that is, they are two different sides of one character. Both in this, and in his other plays, the characters are missing, half human beings. Moreover, they are not stable or balanced, but changeable

characters. Since two brothers compose a single identity, trying to destroy the other means that the individual is ruining himself.

After moving to Duarte, Shepard begins to realize what identity difference means: “It was the first place where I understood what it meant to be born on the wrong side of the tracks, because the railroad tracks cut right down through the middle of this place: and below the tracks were the blacks and Mexicans” (qtd. by Shewey, *Sam Shepard* 19). Split identities and the tense actions and quarrels between them is what makes Shepard’s plays moving, and these struggles between these identities also form the story of Shepard. He very well knows how elusive the nature of personal identity, particularly a publicized one. Both as an actor and playwright he recognizes the multiplicities in one character, which repeatedly occur in his plays and own life. So, in order to be affected as little as possible, he shuns publicity.

From the 1970s onward, a primitive view pervaded identity, culture and the history. The famous American socialist Daniel Bell indicates this shift as a result of his experiences and analyses. He adds that there is a need to change to regain a cultural past and a traditional identity which was lost in the whirlpool of capitalism. For him, the focus shifted from class to ethnicity and culture and from rationality to the need for religion (Friedman 79). History, as in the example of Europe and America, turned its face to a historical anthropology in order to recreate a society and culture which belong to our own roots. In a television interview, French historian Jacques Le Goff indicated three main reasons when he was asked why the ordinary people in French became much more interested in books about the French societal and cultural past: “the emergence of a new primitivism; an interest in discovering cultural roots; and a renewed interest in the exotic” (Friedman 79). This description exactly fits Shepard in terms of his hopeless longing for past values. However, in Shepard’s plays, family members find not the past as valuable; the past is almost forgotten, replaced by the present. An excessive interest in the new and present values leads to disinterestedness in the past. In a changing consumer based society, goals become meaningless and lost. Shepard shows that the uprooted American society is condemned to sufferings and pains (Boehnlein 568). Shepard implies that the spiritual and moral development can only be possible with a return to past models, the natural and genuine society, which is the very thing primitivism is after.

Though he does not clearly express, he is a moralist author. The characters he creates look for a lost meaning and value. In doing so, they prefer a picaresque lifestyle. Vince in *Buried Child*, Lee in *True West*, and Eddie in *Fool for Love* are the examples. The lost things have gone so deep that the search is in vain. Shepard's longing for past, and the fact that nothing can have the same meaning and taste as in the past are epitomized in Hoss's questions and in the answers to them in *The Tooth of Crime*:

HOSS: What about the country. Ain't there any farmers left,  
ranches, cowboys, open space? Nobody just livin'  
their life?

BECKY: All that's gone. That's the old time boogie... (219)

Schulman argues that Sam Shepard's *True West* draws a picture of authentic western identity of "the Marlboro Man" and "lost but real frontier," writing mystical plays which expose a rootless America and its obsolete sensibility (57). He has usually been interested in characters of American popular culture, such as Hoss, the quarrelsome rock star in *The Tooth of Crime*; Dodge, the alcoholic father in *Buried Child*; Colonel, a veteran in *States of Shock*.

It is clear that Shepard is attracted by a rural and traditional world of America, and he is against any kind of corruption, like that of horse racing in *Simpatico*. So he keeps his longing for nostalgia of a pure and innocent rural America. Shepard feels a special interest for American Indians because he adores what remains natural. For him, the Indians stand for purity, mystery, and reality. But the fact that they are also under the threat of decadence, money, power and corruption of the materialist world annoys him. As *New York Times* reviewer Frank Rich puts it: "...As Shepard's people race verbally through the debris of the west, they search for the identities and familial roots that have disappeared with the landscape of legend" (qtd. in *Contemporary Authors* 6).

His four family plays *Buried Child*, *Curse of the Starving Class*, *True West*, and *A Lie of the Mind* put the savagery of modern American family life on stage. *New York Times* contributor Benedict Nightingale thinks of these plays crowded with a "legion of the lost," whose "essential tragedy...seems...to be that they are



simultaneously searching for things that are compatible and possibly not attainable anyway: excitement and security, the exhilaration of self-fulfilment and a sense belonging, freedom and roots” (qtd. in Contemporary Authors 5).

Having looked for the roots of his identity after many years of wandering, Vince, in *Buried Child*, decides to stay because he thinks he belongs to this family, which shocks Shelly and causes her to leave there. Vince tries to explain her why he takes such a decision, but she does not understand.

Vince runs away from his family to find his own identity, and this identity search brings him back to his original family to which he is related innately. At the end of his identity search, he comes to a conclusion that no one can escape from his own roots; all his struggles have led him to an obligatory destination. He reaches this conclusion only after an experience of years. Although this decision is a dangerous one, Vince comes up with this inescapable solution which is beyond the understanding of Shelly who chooses to live a better and reasonable life.

Escaping from responsibilities and families, the male characters feel free to hang around, wander in the desert and meadows as their frontier fathers did earlier. Thus, they turn to their true identity which rooted deep in their genes. Therefore, we get an image of frontier and spirit that never disappears. But, meanwhile they are torn apart between their true nature and responsibilities which the society imposes on them, as a father, husband, or caterer (Hall 96). The hero Travis, like most of Shepard’s characters, undergoes a similar lifestyle in *Paris, Texas*. He travels throughout the film. He does it to punish himself after repentance. He has treated his wife violently and unfairly. Love has turned into jealousy, a strict guarding precautions which exceed the normal limits a woman can bear. His wife Jane’s life changes into tortures and oppressions by binding and chaining. Soon Travis realizes his mistake, but it is too late. And he realizes that being with his wife means, in a way, a painful life to her. Therefore, he decides to leave not to hurt her anymore. Thus, he begins a series of travel tours in order to be purified from previous guilt and repentance. Trying to possess her is afflicting her, so he is determined to be away from her, which seems the best solution, and he goes on to live without women in a vast country where there are no crowded streets or any noise. The reason for using

the image of cowboy both in his life and plays may derive from similar excuses, but it is also likely to symbolise irresponsible and free individual running away from people who are close family members, father, mother, wife, son or daughter.

Shepard, on one hand, turns the traditional playwriting upside down and destroys metaphysical categories, on the other hand, by longing for the past, he insists on a nostalgic lifestyle. David Savran suggests that “Shepard reinforces, even glorifies, the American past, law and order, *machismo*, and the traditional mode of production in which he has found success” (Hart 72). Shepard knows that there is no such thing as old myths of American past; nevertheless, he does not give it up.

## CHAPTER IV – TOM STOPPARD

Thomas Straussler was born on 3 July in 1937 in Zlin, Czechoslovakia. He comes from a partially Jewish family. The wars left an immense impact on his life. He never liked wars, his early years, which coincide with the World War II, were spent eschewing the war and its consequences. His family was forced to move to Singapore because of the German invasion of Czechoslovakia. They again had to flee from Singapore after Japan attacked there. Stoppard's father was killed during this attack. The playwright recalls that time in a cold blooded way: "It was women and children first, and [my father] remained behind while my mother and brother and I were evacuated to India...My father died in enemy hands, and that's it" (qtd. by Hunter 1).

He took the name Stoppard from his stepfather when his mother got her second marriage in India. After moving to England, Stoppard's mother preferred not to say much about their past to keep Stoppard and his brother off the problems and dangers. Stoppard was also happy for remaining distant from his past until recently. His well adaptation to his new name and environment; his taking England as his original home; his reluctance, or at least little interest, in searching his Jewish identity or his birth place from where he was dislocated are the clear indications that Stoppard has been absorbed in English lifestyle and traditions. Moreover, he usually saw English as his own language which he learnt when he was almost a baby. Although, in the later life, Stoppard discovered some information about his origin, such as the confirmation of his Jewish identity, it hardly had any impact on him. He openly expresses his indifference to his past and it does not bother him at all (Nadel xvi).

In 1954, Stoppard ends his education and becomes a journalist as he always had dreamed to be a travelling reporter in troubled regions. He writes novels and short stories reflecting his early years of journalism and partly of his own real life as a semi-autobiography. His early experience as a journalist contributes to the richness of his playwriting because he learns to be an objective observer of the society.

Consequently, he tried to be an artist both as a citizen living among people and as a detached observer at the same time (Kelly 3). He works for different newspapers and in different columns: news reports, humorous columns and reviews of films and plays. Towards the end of the 1950s he develops an interest in drama and writing plays.

In 1960, he wrote his first play, *A Walk on the Water*, which was later changed into *Enter a Free Man* (1968), immediately after ceasing full-time journalism, which ends up with disappointment. Throughout the 1960s Stoppard wrote several plays most of which were written for BBC Television or Radio, such as *If You're Glad I'll be Frank* (1965), *Guildestern and Rosencrantz are Dead*, *The Gamblers*, and *Albert's Bridge*. In 1967 he won the John Whiting Award the *Evening Standard* drama award. *Guildestern and Rosencrantz are Dead* became hit in London and New York Stages and the playwright began to be known both in and outside England. His career peaked and his other internationally acclaimed plays, such as *After Magritte*, *Dogg's Hamlet*, *Artist Descending Staircase*, *Jumpers*, and *Travesties* were written and staged in the early 1970s. In 1976 he wrote *Dirty Linen* and *New-Found-Land* parodying the naturalisation procedures of the director Ed Berman.

Later he became interested in Russian dissidents, and met Victor Fainberg who was sent into exile after 5 years of imprisonment in the Soviet prison-hospital system. He addressed one of rallies condemning human rights violations in Russia. In 1977 Stoppard visited Moscow and Leningrad with an International Amnesty committee. The same year in Czechoslovakia, the dramatist Vaclav Havel who is thought to inspire Stoppard, notably in writing *Jumpers* was arrested. These events and his visit to Soviet Russia were influential on him writing *Professional Foul*, *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, and *Jumpers*. He met Havel in Czechoslovakia and dedicated *Professional Foul* to him (Hunter 12-13).

Stoppard has been interested in science in general, despite his short formal education. It is quite unnatural to see a literary figure, like Stoppard, who is indulged in many fields, such as physics, astronomy, and mathematics. For example, the moon landings in *Another Moon Called Earth*, and physics in *Hapgood* show his

fascination with sciences. However, he does not believe that past can be revealed accurately either by biographies or other sources. For him, the historical facts are buried, gone by as the past itself. He clearly suggests it in *Travesties*. Personally he has been interested in philosophical ideas, and as a style he produces characters to express these ideas. For the playwright aesthetics is more important than the politics though he often deals with the political topics.

Stoppard's plays are inclined to write for two people rather than for a single character as in the example of Ros and Guil who are like two sides of an individual. Brassell argues that Stoppard's plays are essentially not very serious plays although they play with very important subjects that are parodied and undermined (I). The playwright does not want the readers or audience to scrutinize what is hidden beneath what they read or watch, but rather he expects them to enjoy the time without brooding much about it because the playwright thinks that entertaining the audience comes first, so his plays are full of the tricks of theatricality. There is often a serious point in his plays, and all other events are played around this serious core. Stoppard's interest in philosophies is clear in *Jumpers* and in *Travesties*, in which he brings the leading philosophers together, and argues Logical Positivism and the principles of Dada movement respectively.

For Stoppard, a play is a means to discuss views about life. The writer presents his discussions concerning his humanistic values in a quite amusing environment. Challenging the traditional forms, he tries hard to convey his messages of individual freedom to the readers and audiences. While doing this, he employs a highly theatrical method. He demonstrates his manoeuvre ability in presenting comic with serious. He rejects being categorised because he is not happy with a single category. He applies and brings many categories together in his works, so it is not easy to imitate him. It is possible to see various things in his plays: comedy, politics, philosophy, history, criticism, parody, irony and the like. He himself admits that this is the case in one of his interviews: "If the mixing up of the ideas in farce is a source of confusion, well, yes, God knows why I try to do it like that – presumably because I *am* like that" (qtd. by Brassell 268).

To generate a social change, Beckett's absurd theatre and Brecht's Epic Theatre have been the most influential factors from the Second World War onward. Katherine E. Kelly argues that the late Kenneth Tynan placed Tom Stoppard's work between these two powerful dramas (3). However, he does not want to be seen squeezed in a narrow ideological position. Reluctant to write about poverty, race or class clashes of his time, Stoppard not only exposes his ability of absurd playwrighting and challenges the pressures imposed by the politics but also does not restrict his writing with the temporariness of daily problems.

## 1. THEME & STYLE

Stoppard approaches life from different perspectives. Turning his back to the existing world views, he tries to break with the traditional and the habitual. He brings historical events back to life, breaks them into pieces, revises them and the thoughts about them, and finally creates a new kind of story out of these events. Thus he urges the reader or the audience to develop a new sense towards them. Like an instructor, he teaches how to look from multiple and different dimensions. The former beliefs, the heroes, antagonists, and even the readers have changed. The protagonist is no more a protagonist, and the direction of our sympathy has been shifted from once popular but outdated hero to the ordinary, the ignored. Therefore, a new sense of justice has developed. We begin to show anger and remorse not only towards the writer of original play whom we feel deceived by, but also towards the hero who turns out to be a selfish cruel, like the prince Hamlet and his creator Shakespeare after we read or watch *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. We also feel a sense of regret for misjudging the original play and to have been deluded by the former writer and the hero.

Stoppard takes historical events, and changes the known course of these events, playing with them, as in *Travesties* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. In order to shake the readers' traditional ideas and make them think, the powerful becomes ordinary or vice versa. And this reverse may happen anytime.

All characters, the hero or the others, are on an equal platform. The hierarchical order is subverted. He brings the historical figures back to the scene, and aims to make a change, or to conceive a new plan, and thus he sort of puts them in a bowl, mixes and pulls them randomly, and composes a new environment and a new plot. This situation conjures up Tristan Tzara's Dada movement. In *Travesties*, the character Tzara cuts the words of known poems, puts them into a hat, randomly pulls the words, and finally he rearranges the poem by making new lines which end in an absurd poem. He examines some philosophies in his plays. He exposes the rules of these philosophies; sometimes takes the positive sides from each; and forms a new kind of colourful collage. He manages to stay quite objective, so gives no privilege to any, and has no obsessions. He tries to make us see the rights and wrongs. Sometimes he praises, and sometimes ridicules certain features of the philosophies. His purpose is not to come up with a new subject or fiction, but to give a true message, and to show the world from various perspectives however disturbing or shocking it could be.

There is no free will, no independence and no individuality. Two figures constitute only a single identity, single personality, so in every way they are limited, powerless existential creatures. However, the troubled and hopeless situation of man should not cause him to live a mournful life since such a life is not a solution but rather it aggravates the already disturbing situation. Therefore, Stoppard blends comic elements throughout the play which helps ease the predicament. A sheer reality would only worsen the characters' psychology, so Stoppard does not supply them with a full consciousness. Having a half consciousness strengthens the idea of their being missing, half characters (Colby 40). Nonetheless, this being semi-awareness alleviates their grief and tragedy. Furthermore, all these indicate an ambiguous life. Applying formerly existing plays in his works could be a message showing what can be said on human condition has already been said by the masters of the literature such as Shakespeare, Beckett, Wilde, and Pirandello. Therefore, what is being said is nothing but a repetition. Representing anyone living in this world in the middle of uncertainties, the existential hero, like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, whether he is Rosencrantz or Guildenstern, is not sure even of his identity. Using recurrent talks and situations is another point emphasizing the

monotonous life. Repetitions in Stoppard's plays, such as in *The Real Inspector Hound* and *Travesties*, are meant to show the life consists of the repeated actions, same cycles.

While his plays are full of wit and intellect, there is a lack of feelings in them. He is an intellectual writer, and takes the clashes of oppositions as his subject matter. He is a sophisticated playwright who manages to bring different disciplines together and moulds them into a single form, which has turned out to be his authentic form. He is indulged deeply in the subjects, such as philosophy, culture, history, and politics. Despite his stance as a serious writer, his playwriting is full of parodies, puns, and comic elements. Having left high school, he worked as a journalist and wrote drama criticism. Later, he developed an interest in playwriting. His experiences provided him with the quality of examining people's behaviours, so he began to be interested in studying individuals' behaviours philosophically, socially and psychologically. He examines the situation of an individual in the society that is trying to establish an emotional and rational balance in life. In his plays, the main characters try to realise the moral values and beliefs in a confusing world. Stoppard argues this perplexity most strikingly in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* which is his first international success. He tells the troubled story of two ordinary characters in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. These two courtiers are not aware of the fact that the prince Hamlet has been steered by the ghost of the murdered king, Hamlet's father. They do not know what the social, political, moral or sexual implications and consequences could be, either. Killing his brother, Hamlet's uncle, the new king, Claudius not only ascends the throne, but also becomes the husband to Hamlet's mother. The only thing they know is that they have been summoned to the court of the Danish king to help understand what has happened to their old school and childhood friend Hamlet who has developed crazy behaviours recently. These two minor characters are given an enormous task which is very much beyond their abilities. Stoppard portrays them so powerfully that the heroes become symbols of anyone confused. In the life they lead, they themselves are players as lost as the tragedians who have come to entertain the court, but Ros and Guil have difficulty realizing it even though they are shown clear clues to see. This play within play technique is Stoppard's one of the most influential achievements, which he applies



best in *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968). Play within play technique is a post-modern technique which may also be called multi-layered structure, which the playwright uses masterfully in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *Travesties* as well as in *The Real Inspector Hound*. Suddenly, two drama critics find themselves in the mid of the complexity of the thriller they have been examining in *The Real Inspector Hound*. The probable message this play intends to give is that man is surely to fall in a chaos happening around him which he sees himself, or tries to remain, outside (Cahn 1-3).

Stoppard witnesses a tragicomic age and a new realism in theatre. Like most of the absurd playwrights, he, too, combines seriousness with comic. He knows well that readers or audiences welcome not an entirely serious playwright. And he gives his messages in a funny way. He criticizes, gives moral lessons, teaches philosophical ideas, warns and informs as well as entertains.

Stoppard, unlike many fashionable playwrights, has developed an authentic style and has carried it even further. He began a new form of comedy in which past meets with present and with contemporary ideas. No doubt his style and technique are totally original. As Enoch Brater justifiably says: "What he has found in his theatre is not only a special way of saying something, but something, at last, that needed very much to be said" (129).

Before Stoppard wrote *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, there were several works rewriting Shakespeare's plays from a different point of view, so this was not a new thing. For example, Gordon Bottomley's *Gruach* (1921) is a sort of prehistory of *Machbeth*, similarly his *King Lear's Wife* (1915) was a rewriting of *King Lear*; Gerhart Hauptmann wrote a play, *Hamlet in Wittenberg* (1935); W.S. Gilbert wrote a burlesque with the same title as that of Stoppard: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* (1847) (Schwanitz 135).

Brater argues that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is both a parody and a travesty of *Hamlet* (119). Parodies and travesties imitate a work of art to provide comic and ridicule. But in parody there is an aim to criticize the original one; on the other hand, travesty has no evaluative or analytical purpose. It is a kind of burlesque made arbitrarily. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* Stoppard

has tried to fill the gaps he thought to be left missing. Stoppard provides as much information as possible about two attendant lords, thus completing the unanswered questions, such as who are they? And what are their roles?

Before writing *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Stoppard was determined to write a burlesque of *Hamlet* as he told in the magazine, *Author*:

My agent picked up my interest in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and suggested a comedy about what happened to them in England...The possibility appealed to me and I began working on a burlesque Shakespeare farce. By the autumn of 1964 I had written a bad one, but had got interested in the characters as existential immortals. I scrapped the play and in October 1964 started *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, set not in England but within the framework of *Hamlet*...(qtd. by Brassell 35).

Alfred Emmet, in *Theatre Quarterly*, puts forward that the full version of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* grew out of Act IV, Scene 4 of *Hamlet*, and “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are shown as suspended in a moment of time, not knowing the what or why of their existence” (qtd. by Brassell 36). Though it is originated from *Hamlet*, it transcends its origin. It is far more than a mere burlesque. On one hand, Stoppard keeps the context of Shakespeare, on the other hand, develops the characters in a very different dramatic situation. One feels that there are two separate plays going on in a single play: one is Hamlet centred, and the other is Ros and Guil centered. And the first one is Shakespeare’s play while the later is that of Stoppard. Furthermore, both plays are intermingled with each another. The second one is substituted with the first play.

With *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the writer puts Elizabethan and modern drama in the same play, mixing the royal with the ordinary. While doing this, he plays with and parodies the historical play, and criticises it in terms of modern, humanistic and egalitarian points. Thus, he breaks with the traditionally accepted, but as he believes, unfair matters. However, he does not act in an angry way; on the contrary, and his work is always witty and hilarious. To take an example, the pair look for Hamlet after the King asks Ros and Guil to find Hamlet and bring the corpse of Polonius into the chapel, which is a scene from *Hamlet*:

ROS: Give him a shout.  
 GUIL: I thought we'd been into all that.  
 ROS (*shouts*): Hamlet!  
 GUIL: Don't be absurd.  
 ROS (*shouts*): Lord Hamlet!  
     *Hamlet enters. ROS is a little dismayed.*  
     What have you done, my lord, with the dead body?  
 HAMLET: Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin.  
 ROS: Tell us where 'tis, that we may take it thence and bear  
     it to the chapel.  
 HAMLET: Do not believe it (90).

This parody, which combines two different styles in one, summarizes Stoppard's style and technique (Brassell 42).

Assessments about *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* should be made independently from *Hamlet* which is just the source from which *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is derived. A detail is borrowed from Shakespeare and it has been developed. And as a result a totally new play has emerged. Therefore, it would be wrong to study the characters in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* in the shade of *Hamlet*, which should not be taken as the main criterion. This is true not only for *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, but also for *Travesties*, the parody of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In both plays Stoppard has his own technique and style and a masterly structured comedy.

According to Jonathan Bennett, who studies *Jumpers* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* in a philosophic concern, "Stoppard works intensively at a small cluster of intimately connected concepts...identity, memory, activity and death" (qtd. by Brassell 47).

Stoppard brings a new and fresh outlook to the original work which is originated from multiple sources from Shakespeare to Beckett, Pirandello and Kafka. Taking his subject from an already existing story has raised the question of originality. Some critics, such as Kenneth Tynan, believe that despite the multiple sources, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is a genuine original, while some others believe it is not. Stoppard takes the original work, blends it with his daring theatricality and unique humour, and thus makes up a brand new original-like work with a new direction which makes the earlier forgotten. It is true that one reads his

play under the shadow of the original play, but as the play develops, the play is directed to a different atmosphere, and towards the end of the play the reader or the audience is convinced that he has read totally a new play which he encounters for the first time. Hearing these criticisms related to the originality, Stoppard confesses, in a conversation with Giles Gordon, that “it would be very difficult to write a play which was totally unlike Beckett, Pirandello, and Kafka” (Delaney 21).

Stoppard’s style and method are so authentic that it is not easy to realise the influence of absurdist playwrights other than that of Beckett. Particularly, he is quite different from Pirandello and Kafka in the way he presents his play. But not only Beckett’s impact alone, but also the debt to the Theatre of the Absurd in general is clear as Cahn argues about *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*: “Stoppard confronts absurdity head-on and at the same time takes the initial steps towards moving beyond absurdity” (qtd. by Brassell 61-62). Stoppard’s starting point is absurdity, and he uses dramatic boldness of the absurd theatre fully. Furthermore, he goes beyond it, turning it into a new Stoppardian one. Then the audience celebrates a real original tone as Jim Hunter puts it: “Stoppard both celebrated *Waiting for Godot*, and largely got it out of his system, in *Rosencrantz*” (149). The influence of *Waiting for Godot* is deeply felt in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Stoppard neither parodies nor imitates it, but his admiration is obvious because it is one of the most daring plays rejecting realism in the history of theatre.

*Jumpers* is fictionalized on a Whodunnit mystery. Jonathan Bennett calls the play, “a mildly surrealistic farce which lacks structure and seriousness” (Brassell 116). *Jumpers* seems to be a naturalistic play mixed with comic elements which may be intended to hide Stoppard’s serious philosophical thoughts. In an interview in *Theatre Quarterly*, Stoppard reveals the nature of his intentions for *Jumpers*:

*Jumpers* is obviously not a political act, nor is it a play about politics, nor is it a play about ideology...On the other hand, the play reflects my belief that all political acts have a moral basis to them and are meaningless without it...For a start it goes against Marxist-Leninism in particular, and against all materialist philosophy...*Jumpers* was the first play in which I specifically set out to ask a question and try to answer it, or at any rate put the counter-question (qtd. by Brassell 117)..

The setting of play interestingly alternates between Dotty's bedroom and the room where George studies. The play is about a murder and the events in the wake of it. George is a work-obsessed philosophy professor. His wife Dotty is a former cabaret star. She gives a party to celebrate the election victory of the Radical Party at their home. A group of university gymnasts perform in the party, and one of them is shot dead while they form a pyramid of human bodies. Then their lives are complicated. Then this man is understood to be another professor in Philosophy Department, Professor McFee. Then the question of Whodunnit, as in *The Real Inspector Hound* and *After Magritte* arises. The suspect is Dotty who seemingly is busy with hiding the corpse in her bedroom. She is helped by Archie, the University's Vice-Chancellor and also a regular visitor to Dotty. Meanwhile an inspector, Bones arrives in search of the murder. According to Michael Hinden, *Jumpers* is a critical play which criticizes logical positivism, and *Travesties* tries to expose the real world of the revolutions in politics and arts, and both plays are given in a carnival atmosphere (403).

*Travesties* advances Stoppard's unconventional style further. The play is regarded as one of the most complex plays ever written in the English language. It is knit around *The Importance of Being Earnest* in a manner which shows Stoppard's broad imagination and inventiveness. The theme of *Travesties*, Schwanitz argues, is "the relation of art and politics, or literature and solid, existential and cruel reality" (145). In *Travesties*, constructing a parallel play with *The Importance of being Earnest*, Stoppard borrows both characters and some quotations from that play, by making some crucial changes as he did in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. He invents a sister for Carr, Gwendolen and a librarian Cecily, in addition to some changes such as turning Bennett, the British consul, into Carr's servant. In the production of *The Importance of being Earnest*, Henry Carr plays the role of Algernon Moncrief, and he can remember it accurately. This is the starting point where Stoppard arranges the whole play. Brassell indicates at least three functions this play aims at, "a verbal tribute to Joyce's art, a cementing of Joyce's role within *The Importance of Being Earnest* structure and an opportunity to fill out the audience's understanding of the history and beliefs of Dadaism" (147).

The playwright makes pastiches from Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Lenin and Tzara. Stoppard borrows characters as well as lines from history and Wilde's play: "Oh pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring anyone anywhere?" (qtd. by Brassell 149) which is the opening line in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is uttered in *Travesties* more than once. In Stoppard's play Tzara and Carr are close friends just as Algernon and Worthing are in Wilde's play. But, in Zurich Public Library, Carr pretends to be Tzara who is to meet a beautiful girl, Cecily just as Algernon impersonates Worthing in Wilde's play to see his young ward with the same name. In some scenes the act slips to the real dialogues between Lenin and Nadya when Cecily gives information about them.

In *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, the serious figure of Alexander, the imprisoned dissident, is put in the same frame with a lunatic, accompanied with an orchestra. Brassell describes the play as a "work for actors and orchestra jointly composed with André Previn and set in a psychiatric prison in Soviet Russia" (182). This is not the first play in which Stoppard uses two men in cell. In an unpublished play, *The Gamblers*, in Bristol in 1965, he made up two prisoners. At the end of the play one dies, the other is reprieved.

The author uses different characters, ideas, philosophies and technical devices in mixing comedy and seriousness masterfully. As he openly carries out in *Travesties*, he gives his messages by using historical figures, like Lenin or Dadaist Tzara, but on the other hand, his theatre of comedy continues in its full force, and in *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* he applies the same technique though serious and comic attitudes are intermingled at times.

*Professional Foul*, dedicated to the imprisoned Czech playwright Vaclav Havel, is a play which handles the disturbance of a dissident by the Czechoslovakian authorities. The play tells the story of a professor and what happened to this professor of ethics. Professor Anderson, a Cambridge don, is invited to Prague to attend an international conference. One of his former students, Povel Hollar visits him on his arrival at his hotel in Prague. Hollar is a Czechoslovakian who has been able to complete a doctoral thesis while working in trifle jobs. This thesis would not be welcomed by Czechoslovakian authorities because of its concerns with politics

and human rights violations. What Hollar wants the professor to do is to take his thesis to a friend of his in England to be published. Professor Anderson agrees only on keeping it for a while to return it in a short time because Hollar is watched by the secret police. Meanwhile Anderson is taken under custody for a false charge, currency smuggling. Anderson, who, at first, does not want to be involved in such a political matter, is convinced, and manages to hide the thesis. Affected by this event he changes his conference speech and uses this unfair imprisonment as the basis of his speech, irritating the chairman who abruptly ends the conference under a false excuse. Secretly, Anderson hides the thesis in the bag of one of his colleagues, McKendrick whom he believed the policemen would not suspect. Then he manages to pass it through the customs.

Anderson's other colleague Chetwyn is arrested for hiding letters to be sent to Amnesty International and to the United Nations. As in *Jumpers*, ethical and philosophical thoughts which take place in parallel with the actions in the play are the focal point of *Professional Foul*. The subject of this play and *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* is closely related to *Travesties*.

Stoppard's *Dirty Linen*, a funny Parliamentary parody, includes another play, *New-Found-Land* as a complementary play. *New-Found-Land* takes the expatriate Ed Berman, the director of *Dirty Linen* and his application for British nationality as the starting point. His naturalisation is the subject matter of *New-Found-Land*. These both plays share the same setting: a Parliamentary Committee Room in the Palace of Westminster. In *Dirty Linen* a committee is gathered to talk about the moral standards in public life. And at breaks two officials try to find an empty room to discuss the naturalization of Berman before it is approved by the Home Secretary.

*New-Found-Land* begins with the arrival of two Home Office Civil Servants, Bernard and Arthur, and with the return of the Members of the Parliament it gives way to *Dirty Linen*. The Select Committee of the MP discusses the situations of some senators who fell into disrepute because of love affairs with a mysterious woman who is described in a newspaper as "a staggeringly voluptuous, titian-haired green eyed beauty" (92). This woman turns out to be the clerk to the Select Committee, Miss Maddie Gotobed.

In *Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979) the perplexed actors are threatened by a lunatic police inspector who builds a wall of bricks around the room where they act. He speaks an incomprehensible and absurd language the actors have never heard before.

Stoppard makes the description of some artistic movements and introduces their founders, such as Dadaism and its founder Tristan Tzara, in some plays, like *Travesties* and *Artist Descending a Staircase* in a funny way. Occasionally, the playwright makes his characters talk about the nature of art and artist, which, in fact, reflects his own ideas, comment and criticism about it. For example, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Guil and Ros argue and make definition of art:

ROS: I want a good story, with a beginning, middle and end.  
 PLAYER (to Guil): And you?  
 GUIL: I'd prefer art to mirror life, if it's all the same to you  
 (80-81).

Similarly, in *Travesties*, Tzara tells us what the aim of the artist is:

In point of fact, everything is chance, including design. It means, my dear Henry, that the causes we know everything about depend on causes we know very little about, which depend on causes we know absolutely nothing about. And it's the duty of the artist to jeer and howl and belch at the delusion that infinite generations of real effects can be inferred from the gross expression of the apparent cause (37).

In the same play, Cecily, reflecting Lenin's views, talks about the nature of art "The sole duty and justification for art is social criticism...Art is society!...Art is a critique of society or it is nothing" (74).

Stoppard's method of explaining theories by using dialogues and dramatic irony is at its best in the discussion of art and artist in *Travesties*. Carr, who is a traditionalist, reacts to Tzara, who says that art is not restricted with a class, and art is whatever an ordinary individual does in his daily life:

CARR: An artist is someone who is gifted in some way that enables him to do something more or less well which can only be done badly or not at all by someone who is not thus gifted...Don't you say my dear Tristan you are simply asking me to accept that the word Art



means whatever you wish it to mean; but I do not accept it.

TZARA: Why not? You do exactly the same thing with words like *patriotism*, *duty*, *love*, *freedom*, king and country, brave little Belgium, saucy little Serbia— (38-39).

Carr is sometimes more critical than Tzara about art and artist: “What’s an artist? For every thousand people there’s nine hundred doing the work, ninety doing well, nine doing good, and one lucky bastard who’s the artist” (46). He continues his comment and criticism about art and artists as the play progresses: “Artists are members of a privileged class. Art is absurdly overrated by artists, which is understandable, but what’s strange is that it is absurdly overrated by everyone else...The idea of the artist as a special kind of human being is art’s greatest achievement, and it’s a fake!” (46-47). Lenin shares the same beliefs with Carr and he adds that romantic feelings should be removed from art under communism and that artist should be at the service of communist values. Thus, Stoppard tries to show that the leading figures in art and politics feel extremely different from each other. Stoppard makes Tzara say: “Well as a Dadaist myself I am the natural enemy of bourgeois art and the natural ally of the political left, but the odd thing about revolution is that the further left you go politically the more bourgeois they like their art” (45).

The other question raised by Stoppard is whether art is for entertainment or under the service of politics. And the playwright’s preference regarding this choice is clear since he is never impressed by art which is political, but instead, he is quite angry with such a practise. Thus, he reveals his disturbance about art being misused by the politics. In *Travesties*, Tom Stoppard wishes to defend artist’s rights and he is against the oppression and imposing dogmatism upon them.

As suggested in *Travesties*, both political activity and philosophical-artistic theory are reflected as the main subjects, which is the same subject matter of *Jumpers*. Stoppard is interested in how artistic ideas can be related to the revolutions and the influence of each on one another. Lenin is shown as a man of action and revolution striving to practise the theories he had believed throughout his whole dedicated life. Tzara suggests an artistic model to destruct the false and outmoded

styles of the existing forms. He puts forward some ideas on revolution while Lenin on art.

Stoppard intends to give as much information as he can, so he risks the repetitions that occur in the play. Two opposing art views appear in the dialogues Stoppard makes up. As the argument concerning these confronting arts between Joyce and Tzara arises, Joyce takes his hat off and begins to produce a long line of streamers, a flag and a rabbit like a magician while Tzara uses the same hat to produce a spontaneous poem by pulling each word randomly from it. These both actions give implications about their ideas and beliefs about what art is:

TZARA: Your art has failed. You've turned literature into a religion and it's as dead as all the rest, it's an overripe corpse and you're cutting fancy figures at the wake. It's too late for geniuses! Now we need vandals and desecrators, simple-minded demolition men to smash centuries of baroque subtlety, to bring down the temple, and thus finally, to reconcile the shame and the necessity of being an artist!...

JOYCE: You are an over-excited little man, with a need for self-expression far beyond the scope of your natural gifts. This is not discreditable. Neither does it make you an artist. An artist is the magician put among men to gratify—capriciously—their urge for immortality (62).

Joyce ignores the Dada rebellion which emerges as a reaction against the frightening results of The First World War. He is in a search of a holy art to be replaced with a lost religious sense (Brassell 149). Tzara frequently repeats the word 'dada' which provides not only a comic impact but a sense of passion and energy of any revolution. He produces several random poems by picking words taken from the old poems. Tzara goes on saying: "Nowadays, an artist is someone who makes art mean the things he does. A man may be an artist by exhibiting his hindquarters. He may be a poet by drawing words out of a hat" (38).

In *Artist Descending a Staircase* the playwright intends to give a serious discussion concerning the function of art and the duty of artist in a comic framework while satirizing the modern trends in art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Like Tzara, in *Travesties*, his characters in *Artist Descending a Staircase* are in search of the nature

of art and are in a critical position of developments in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Beauchamp, one of the characters in the play, makes an interesting description and function of artist, which reminds mostly Tzara's views, and which are also exactly the same words of Carr in *Travesties* (46):

He (the artist) cannot, and should stop boring people with his egocentric need to try. The artist is a lucky dog. That is all there is to say about him. In any community of a thousand souls there will be nine hundred doing the work, ninety doing well, nine doing good, and one lucky dog painting or writing about the other nine hundred and ninety-nine (144).

Stoppard moulds a serious argument into an entertaining and adventurous dramatic form, which provides a sort of cooperation and consistency between these seemingly contradictory elements to form an integrated picture. His style can be summed up as game-playing, sudden changing of action, sudden flashbacks, unreal, imaginative narration, parody, pastiche, leaving the conventional styles, and funny references to various dramatic, literary, artistic and historical figures and events such as Oscar Wilde, Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, William Shakespeare, Tristan Tzara, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin, and their achievements. Because of this wide range of eclecticism, it is hard to determine his own style, yet not a single, but all these together constitute his post-modern and elusive style and technique.

The interaction of seriousness and frivolity is already felt in his work. As a result of his distinctive ability, a fusion of creative comic invention with scientific and philosophic inquiry forms his plays. When asked about the seriousness of his play he answers: "In my mind, my plays perfectly express my own being in that they are serious plays, seriously compromised by their own frivolity, or frivolous plays redeemed by their seriousness, according to the audience's own attitude toward them" (qtd. by Brassell 265). His theatre is a kind of marriage of many forms and styles, which seems an impossible task to create. Thus, it preaches not a single but different subjects and classes.

Stoppard's some plays inform their sources with their titles, and it is obvious that these plays have an intertextual relationship with their sources. These are *Dogg's Hamlet*, *Cahoot's Macbeth*, *After Magritte*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* and the

like. Stoppard's reference to other plays is not an inadvertent attitude; on the contrary, he deliberately refers to them instead of creating a new world, and characters residing within that world. Stoppard admits that writing a play one cannot escape from the works he likes most though that may not be an intentional attitude:

A first play tends to be the sum of all the plays you have seen of a type you can emulate technically and have admired. So *A Walk on the Water* (which later turned into *Enter A Free Man*) was in fact flowering *Death of A Salesman*—though of course I didn't think that when I was doing it (qtd. by Brater 119).

This method is intertextuality which firmly rejects the idea that a text is independent, autonomous, and different. It demonstrates that any text is in a close relationship with other texts, and all texts overlap with other texts. This view was formulated by Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes in the 1960s. Texts occur only after a sort of cooperation between authors and readers. That is, writing and reading are seen as equally producing agents. Reading has left its former passive situation and has assumed an active creative role. Besides, there is no longer a theological meaning, or 'Author-God's message,' as Barthes puts it, because a text is not only a single compilation of the sentences exposing a meaning (Barthes, *Death of the Author* 156). Each reading means a new text, and even each reading by the same reader in different times means a new and different text after the reading activity because every time a text is read, a different view and interpretation the text gets. Placing the text among other texts removes the borders between them, which blurs the lines among them and their meanings. And therefore, "there are no clear and stable denotative meanings since all meaning contains traces of other meanings from other places" (Barker 72). Intertextual analysis rejects the application of New Criticism which examines inner elements of a text and focuses on that single text. With Intertextuality, traditional criticism which sees reader a passive receiver and the text a transmitter has been destroyed.

According to Barthes, the relation between the reader and text is something like sexuality they attract one another. Every reader is a writer at the same time. There cannot be a hierarchical order between the text and its interpretation. There are no super or meta-texts. The text and its interpretation have become equal texts and

they have developed an intertextual relationship like all other texts. There are no more critics but writers because of the intertextual relationship which has swept the lines between the both. Kristeva and Barthes have destroyed the former traditional point of view the critics clung to for a long time, and provided us with a new outlook (Barthes, *Theory of the Text* 42-44).

Writing in connection with other works, Stoppard prefers an ironic, sophisticated and entertaining style. Meanwhile he reveals his views about art and politics and shows artistically, philosophically and politically where he stands. Via Intertextuality, the unique wit, amusement and multi-meanings of his plays are exposed. Moreover, encouraging the reader or audience, he makes them go further from these plays. His conscious or unconscious references, particularly in plays which deal with art, politics and philosophy, such as *Travesties* and *Jumpers*, lead the reader or audience to access new and endless meanings.

## 2. ABSURD ELEMENTS

The writer and critic Dietrich Schwanitz argues that Stoppard has written in a form very much indebted to the theatre of the absurd together with a many-dimensional perspective, and that he seems to be obsessed with techniques and concerns typically and genuinely surrealistic, which is the source of his interest in Dada and Surrealism. Schwanitz goes on saying that Stoppard is obviously not as fierce as the leading absurdist playwrights, such as Pirandello, Beckett and Genet. Thus, he differentiates him from them, and attributes originality to him in writing plays because of his combining philosophical and intellectual sophistication with entertaining comedy (149).

No matter how Stoppard's plays serve a moral end, it is a mistake to classify them into didactic plays as well as into farce. Despite Stoppard's authentic approach and high comedy he presents, Stoppard's plays openly reflect the influence of absurd. Most of his works have followed absurd principles, for example *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* applies the structural elements of *Waiting for Godot*, and

*Jumpers* shows an absurdist approach, like that of Beckett, towards the good-bad problem in the existence of man (Esslin 434). Apart from politics, Stoppard's most remarkable aspect is his using absurdism, through which he tries to reach what is assumed to be real. Stoppard's adventurousness, which is derived from absurd theatre, is one of the characteristics of his works. This is mainly seen in his plays written in the 1970s and early 1980s, such as *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, *Travesties*, *Jumpers*, *A Professional Foul*, and *Squaring the Circle*.

There are no heroes any more in Stoppard's plays as in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Hierarchical order has been broken down, and a new dimensional scene comes to life. No character has a constant or guaranteed place, including the heroes. Everyone stands on a sleepy base, and any time he might collapse and fall down from any place however high it is.

*Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are Dead*, considered by some critics to be a pastiche of *Waiting for Godot*, is an expression of existential angst though Stoppard applies comedy and fun to a great extent. Throughout the play there are many references to death which cannot be confined to a physical one. The characters tend to live an illusionary life rather than a real one in the world. In the play there is a search for the truth and the probable conclusion is that truth is changeable, truth is what anyone thinks it is, so there is no an objective, a single truth on which everybody agrees. Everybody has his or her own truth.

The theme of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is living a restricted and pre-determined life indifference to the unseen forces controlling it. From the beginning onward, Ros and Guil play games throughout the play. The opening scene is a coin-spinning game and every time Ros bets on 'heads,' and wins 69 times consecutively without any exception, which turns the law of probability upside down, and this may be because Rosencrantz and Guildenstern live in a world where the normal laws do not work out, as expected, and the pair are to lose their 'heads' at the end of the play.

On one hand, we are convinced that the pair are living in an absurd world far from a rational one, on the other hand, the implication behind this is deep rooted in a philosophical thought. Heads and tails on a coin might symbolize hierarchical orders

which classify people. And seemingly the author simply divides them into two groups: heads and tails. The powerful kings, princes, rulers, presidents, commanders, bosses, and other material owners or authorities are above the line and are always the winners, while the employees, subjects, ordinary people, and the ruled ones are below the line, and are the losers in this unfair world. And there is no way out for the tails except for losing. Not Hamlet, one of the heads in society, but the pair are the victims. The execution decree, which is given originally for Hamlet, is directed towards the pair, two typical examples of the tails, that is, the losers, in this hostile deterministic world. Losing is associated with tails, and it is not surprising, and what is more, it is not even worth being news. Therefore, in the original play, *Hamlet*, the execution of the pair is given in such a very simple way that we do not get the slightest feeling of pity for them. However, Hamlet's death is given as the most tragic scene at the end of the play.

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the coin spinning game and other deeds and events Rosencrantz and Guildenstern experience are clearly the products of the fate determined by Shakespeare and Stoppard. This is true for all characters and their creators, the playwrights. They are limited, given roles, and their destinies are predetermined by the writers. They are like existential characters, who are thrown out of their own will and consent, and predetermined by a hidden hand (Colby 35). There is no alternative for the characters other than following the routes determined by the playwrights as Guildenstern says:

We've been caught up. Your smallest action sets off another somewhere else, and is set off by it. Keep an eye open, an ear cocked. Tread wearily, follow instructions. We'll be all right (39-40).

Without any exception, every single event happens according to the script Shakespeare and Stoppard wrote: two courtiers are to be summoned to the court of the Danish King; they are to be commanded to accompany Hamlet to England; and they are to be executed on carrying their own declaration of death. As the name of the play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* suggests, the end has been foretold from the beginning, but the couple are not aware of it though sometimes Rosencrantz

seems to have a suspicion: “They had it in for us, didn’t they? Right from the beginning...” (122).

Sometimes Stoppard carries them outside the text, and makes them talk from a different dimension. We get the impression that the actors have a break during the performance of the play, and the actors have repeatedly performed it many times (Colby 37). For example Guildenstern acknowledges that is the case: “... we are brought round full circle to face again the single immutable fact—that we, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, bearing a letter from one king to another, are taking Hamlet to England” (101).

Their powerless situation throughout the play inflicts on them, and to be controlled by an unseen hand gives them insecurity. This imprisoned life gives them an existential weakness. They have no freedom, they cannot act upon their own free choice, and they have no opportunity to escape. They have already died spiritually before a physical one. The last act of the play implies some important clues about the inability to control their own fate: they are in a rather restrictive setting, in a boat in which they have no chance to go anywhere else. Moreover, this boat is heading towards a pre-arranged destination, England. They have a confined world, the boat, symbolising a prison, and a unique route, England where they are to be executed. They have no second alternative other than a voyage in this boat which will lead them to their destiny to which they helplessly consent.

The images of imprisonment of man, shrinkage and reduction take different forms, follow different routes in different styles of absurd playwrights: A room with a handleless door and no windows in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Huis Clos* (1944), the narrow upper floor of an apartment where the family members are squeezed and reduced in numbers in Boris Vian’s *The Empire Builders* (1959), conformist rhinos to whom people are reduced to in Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros* (1959), dustbins where characters end up in Becket’s *Endgame* (1958).

For the absurdist and existential writers the world itself is a prison. As a matter of fact the idea of a confined prison lies beneath this seemingly massive world. The absurd characters confine themselves in a small world very much similar to a prison. In Ionesco’s *Amédée, or How to Get Rid of It*, the flat from which the



middle-aged couple never left for some fifteen years; or the room, in *The Chairs*, where the old couple occupy themselves in filling chairs until there is no enough space even to move; the village road, in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, on which the tramps are kept waiting for a saviour; the cold and isolated motel room, in Shepard's *Fool for Love*, or the chaotic home in his many plays, such as *Buried Child*, *True West*, or *A Lie of the Mind*, where the couple are cut off from the rest of the world, and do nothing but degrade and beat one another; the ship, in Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, where Ros and Guil find themselves stuck and cannot escape, or the Asylum, in *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, where a political dissident is detained for political reasons, are all the symbolic prisons whether the characters restrict themselves willingly, or put in there by an outer force. Absurd drama also postulates that man is restricted and controlled by an outside force, and that man lives in a world out of his will power.

Stoppard seems to suggest that, like actors in plays, people living in the world are confined and dependent upon a determiner, like the playwright in the play. So whatever happening in this world is far from being real, but it is an illusion or a temporary staging like drama. Shakespeare, both expressing the truth in this idea and giving privilege to drama, makes his character Jacques recite a poem in *As You like It*:

All the world is a stage  
 And all the men and women, merely players;  
 They have their exits and their entrances,  
 And one man in his time plays many parts... (58)

This suggests a man rather limited, weak, and should not be held responsible for his actions. This idea of confined actors in a play or men in the universe is best exemplified in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Considering on-stage and off-stage position of Ros and Guil and 'play-within-play' technique, Stoppard forms a perfect environment modelling such a world. Furthermore, this weakened character in the play implies the superiority of his creator, the playwright who controls the play throughout the play without exception. This determiner also assumes a superpower by deciding what will happen next. This super human obviously represents the power that controls and governs universe, the God. From this we may conclude that

Stoppard is close to Kierkegaard, the existentialist writer in terms of believing in God. The doomed characters or human beings have no chance in general to change anything predetermined, how hard they protest or revolt against it. What he is expected to do is to play his part, whether it is major or minor, as best as he can. Schwanzitz associates this picture and submission of the actors with Stoppard's conservative consent. And he shows Stoppard's plays as a consolation of the sufferings (131-132).

Stoppard openly suggests that there is difference between the dreamy or transitory reality of the play world or this world and the fundamental reality of the playwright or the unchangeable reality of God. He also reveals that the individual is surrounded by a feeling of helplessness which he hardly understands, but which he has to endure. However, though Stoppard acknowledges a brutal universe and the desperate individuals in it, he is not happy with it. That is why his sympathy is with the sufferers in the plays. He is in a great desire for change though he believes it is almost impossible. What he does is to remind the individual of his predicament, the hostile fate he has to survive and the impossibility to escape, in an authentic method.

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the pair's carrying their own death letter to England is an important and interesting sign of comedy as well as absurdity by which they are grasped. What Stoppard struggles to achieve is shifting sympathy and pity felt for Hamlet to Ros and Guil because the couple are innocent victims as well as comic in their conversations and actions. Stoppard is a real master in creating humorous situations. The playwright, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* as well as in his most plays, applies misunderstandings and repetitions as a means for comedy. This brings about an atmosphere of absurdity and comic situations:

PLAYER: Why?  
 GUIL: Ah. (To ROS:) Why?  
 ROS: Exactly.  
 GUIL: Exactly what?  
 ROS: Exactly why?  
 GUIL: Exactly why what?  
 ROS: What?  
 GUIL: Why?  
 ROS: Why what, exactly?

GUIL: Why is he mad?!

ROS: I don't know!

PLAYER: The old man thinks he's in love with his daughter.

ROS (*appaled*): Good God! We are out of our depth here.

PLAYER: No, no, no—*he* hasn't got a daughter—the old man thinks he's in love with *his* daughter.

ROS: The old man is?

PLAYER: Hamlet, in love with the old man's daughter, the old man thinks.

ROS: Ha! It's beginning to make sense! Unrequited passion! (68-69).

Such misunderstandings in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* evoke, and possibly follow, the dialogues in *Waiting for Godot*.

POZZO: Are you friends?

ESTRAGON (*laughing noisily*): He wants to know if we are friends!

VLADIMIR: No, he means friends of *his*.

ESTRAGON: Well? (79)

The strange situation of combining two remote worlds of Elizabethan and modern era increases the bewilderment of Ros and Guil. These 16<sup>th</sup> century Elizabethan characters speak both the language of their own age and the modern language, which brings about an absurd atmosphere. Despite the comic tone, the setting is hostile, and the language is alien. This creates a pessimistic and frightening world where everybody is in despair and anxiety. Ros and Guil are not vicious and hostile characters. Although they are assigned by the instructions of the King, they intend no harm to Hamlet, but on the other hand, Hamlet has no good intentions for the pair. Moreover, both heroes are humiliated by him.

What appeals to Stoppard is the pair's being chosen as the victims of the prince Hamlet. The world they live in is an unjust one. This is a world where always the 'heads' tend to win breaking all the laws of nature such as that of probability. Stoppard's intimidated and baffled characters are in an impossible task to seek their independence due to the deterministic life. Ros and Guil represent all humanity in displaying this effort to be in vain. The inability to understand the meaning of the predicaments and forces controlling their fate and lives is not only the pair's, but the whole humanity's inherent characteristic. The controlling forces and determinism

which direct the pair and all humanity are clearly shown throughout the play and in the words and actions of the Players. However, the couple cannot see the enigma behind their trouble, and as such, we the human beings cannot see the “design” behind our lives although we can see that of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who, we suppose, stand for the ‘others’ than us. Their lives, in fact, are the mirrors of our own. Ros and Guil represent the confused characters both in drama and in real world which does not make sense and which breaks all the expected rules.

When boarding the vessel, they do not know that the voyage will end up in their death, but somehow Guil feels something pessimistic:

GUIL: It’s autumnal.

ROS (*examining the ground*): No leaves.

GUIL: Autumnal—nothing to do with leaves. It’s to do with a certain brownness at the edge of the day...Brown is creeping up on us, take my word for it...Russets and tangerine shades of old gold flushing the very outside edge of the senses...deep shining ochres, burnt umber and parchments of baked earth—reflecting on itself and through itself, filtering the light. At such times, perhaps, coincidentally, the leaves might fall, somewhere, by repute. Yesterday was blue, like smoke (94).

Guil feels that they are approaching their final destiny; the brightness of summer, the liveliness of spring is gradually giving way to the browns of autumn. Again with semi-consciousness, “We’ll be cold. The summer won’t last” (93) says Rose.

The fear of death is one of the most terrifying anxieties in absurd and existential writers. Their works are full of references to this inescapable end. Ros and Guil know that they die at the end of each performance, and revive again at the beginning of a new production, for example Guil says, “And it *has* all happened hasn’t it?” (108). They give unconsciously several clues for their murderous end as Ros says, “He (Hamlet) murdered us” (56). All these predictions and clues have references to death, and sometimes they become aware of the existential fact that they will die. The heroes wait for their ends quite calmly, and even they make plans for afterwards, after this stage when Guil says, “Well, we’ll know better next time.

Now you see me, now you—(*and disappears*)” (126). Seemingly, with the word ‘next time’ they mean the next play production after a theatrical death.

Colby argues that with the reference to the boat, the playwright tries to expose the limited world of the man (39). The freedom given to man is as restricted as one in a confined boat, and with no exception. He has no enough freedom or power to save himself from the deadly enemies. Ros is aware of the fact that the boat represents the means leading to death: “We might as well be dead. Do you think death could possibly a boat? (108). Not only is the boat a vehicle taking them to death, but also the boat itself is a symbol of death because a life in it is nothing but a confined, a spiritually dead one.

They stand for human beings in general who are like living dead bodies just wandering here and there aimlessly waiting desperately for death to come. The vagabonds Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* are, in fact, waiting for death which they suppose to be Godot the lifesaver. Thus, death assumes the role of the saviour, possibly by saving the sufferer, the humanity from this inflicting life. Thereby, man is understood to be living in a dilemma by preferring to live a chaos which the life provides without alternatively, instead of choosing suicide which puts an end to that painful and hostile existence.

The play has several references to the death of the courtiers. The playwright even gives clues concerning how the pair will be murdered in detail. We get another clue for the end of the play when Ros says that, “They’ll have us hanging about till we’re dead. At last. And the weather will change. (*Looks up.*) The spring can’t last forever” (93). Rosencrantz knows that they have no enough time left, so just before they were attacked by the pirates, he complains about it revolting their desperate and powerless situation: “Incidents! All we get is incidents! Dear God, is it too much to expect a little sustained action?! (118).

There are two characters, in the play performed by the Players, who are identical to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: The SPIES. These SPIES wear the same clothes as those of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. But still, they cannot see what is happening. What happens to the SPIES is a clear indication for the imminent end of the couple:

*What brings ROS forward is the fact that under their cloaks the two SPIES are wearing coats identical to those worn by ROS and, GUIL whose coats are now covered by their cloaks. ROS approaches 'his' SPY doubtfully. He doesn't quite understand why the coats are familiar. ROS stands close, touches the coat, thoughtfully. He doesn't quite understand why the coats are now covered by their cloaks. ROS approaches "his" spy doubtfully. He doesn't quite understand why the coats are familiar. ROS stands close, touches the coat, thoughtfully...*

ROS: Well, if it isn't—! No, wait a minute, don't tell me—it's a long time since—where was it? Ah, this is taking me back to—when was it? I know you, don't I? I never forget a face—(he looks into the SPY's face)... not that I know yours, that is. For a moment I thought—no, I don't know you, do I? Yes, I'm afraid you are quite wrong. You must have mistaken me for someone else (82).

The spies are executed just as Guil and Ros are hanged at the end of the play. Drama functions as the mirror reflecting the real life of Ros and Guil, but they fail to understand it. Stoppard implies, Colby suggests, we, the human beings also play our roles predetermined by the fate. We do not have a control over our lives because we are condemned to be directed by the wheels of the fate, and what is more, spiritually we are dead. We are caught in every action we take. We just seem to have free will, but this is only an illusion. Like Ros and Guil, we are characters predestined in a play, and forced to replay the same roles and thus experience the same. Finally, we, too, are “condemned to the Wheel of fate, and are spiritually dead.” (Colby 43-45).

The characters cannot control their lives though they see their unfortunate fate coming by reading the letter. The inability of the human being is clearly shown. Death is seen as the ultimate reality though it is the tragedians who are privileged again even if death matters. As if the actors are given immortal characteristics:

PLAYER: In our experience, most things end in death.  
 GUIL (*fear, vengeance, scorn*): Your experience!—Actors!  
*He snatches a dagger from the Player's belt and holds the point at the PLAYER's throat: the PLAYER backs and GUIL advances, speaking more quietly.*

I'm talking about death—and you've never experienced *that*. And you cannot *act* it. You die a thousand casual deaths—with none of that intensity which squeezes out life...and no blood runs cold anywhere. Because even as you die you know that you will come back in a different hat. But no one gets up after *death*—there is no applause—there is only silence and some second-hand clothes, and that's—*death*—

*And he pushes the blade in up to the hilt. The PLAYER stands with huge, terrible eyes, clutches at the wound as the blade withdraws: he makes small weeping sound and falls to his knees, and then right down.*

*The TRAGEDIANS watch the PLAYER die: they watch with some interest. The Player finally lies still. A short moment of silence. Then the TRAGEDIANS start to applaud with genuine admiration. The PLAYER stands up, brushing himself down.*

PLAYER (*modestly*): Oh come, come, gentlemen—no flattery—it was merely competent—(123)

Ros and Guil sometimes make philosophical comments on death, which seem to be far beyond their comprehension, surprising us, for example when Ros asks Guil whether boat is death or not, Ros, unlike what we expect from him, makes an extraordinary prediction, and as an exchange, Guil also answers philosophically “No, no, no...Death is...not. Death isn't. You take my meaning. Death is the ultimate negative. Not-being” (108). They, at times, go very much beyond the ignorance of the ordinary individuals. In one of his speeches Guil again shows that is the case:

Actors! The mechanics of cheap melodrama! That isn't *death!* (*More quietly.*) You scream and choke and sink to your knees, but it doesn't bring death home to anyone—it doesn't catch them unawares and start the whisper in their skulls that says— “One day you are going to die.” (*He straightens up.*) You die so many times; how can you expect them to believe in your death? (83)

Although *Waiting for Godot* is obviously the main source for *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, they are two different plays, the pairs are different, and they seek meaning in different ways. While we get a meaningful plot in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the same is not possible for *Waiting for Godot*. Stoppard's play has *Hamlet* as a source of understanding though the implications

take the readers or the audience to a meaningless and absurd environment. In the case of *Waiting for Godot*, the characters' ambiguous plights remain as a mystery not only for the vagabonds but also for us:

VLADIMIR: ...you don't know how to defend yourself. I wouldn't have let them beat you.

ESTRAGON: You couldn't have stopped them.

VLADIMIR: Why not.

ESTRAGON: There were ten of them.

VLADIMIR: No, I mean before they beat you. I would have stopped you from doing whatever it was you were doing.

ESTRAGON: I wasn't doing anything.

VLADIMIR: Then why did they beat you?

ESTRAGON: I don't know (55).

Who their enemies are is not clear even to them. They do not give any clue about it and presumably they themselves do not know, either. However there are clear implications of the predicament of Ros and Guil in a way. What is certain in *Waiting for Godot* is that the characters have never run away from a bleak life. The audience or the reader of Beckett is much more independent than that of Stoppard in giving meaning. Predicaments in general are felt in *Waiting for Godot* because the audience or the reader is not restricted in a specific plot. Sorrows and grief throughout the life are reminded.

Every now and again, Rosencrantz says something interesting and thought-provoking about life, even though it seems absurd: “(cutting his fingernails) Another curious scientific phenomenon is the fact that the fingernails grow after death, as does the beard... The fingernails also grow before birth, though *not* the beard” (18). The subject of growing organs after death recalls the increasingly growing dead body in *Amédée, or How to Get Rid of It?*

The characters portrayed are not those living in a rational, but an absurd and lost world. And this world is a ‘mysterious’ one. In *Real Inspector Hound*, Lady Muldoon is left alone because her husband is lost and is never seen again. As explained in a telephone conversation in the play, they are ‘cut off from the world.’ Lady Muldoon’s brother-in-law Magnus is wholly encompassed by an existential fate. He is not only crippled, but also has a half relationship in familial terms.



With *Travesties*, Stoppard applies a different technique from his earlier ones, by putting historical figures in the same setting. The setting of the play is Zurich in 1917, and some of the exiled historical figures are gathered there fictionally by the playwright: Lenin, just before the successful revolution in Russia; James Joyce studying on his masterpiece *Ulysses*; and the artist Tristan Tzara with his Dadaist supporters attacking all established movements, most notably realism. Revolutionary is the most characteristic feature shared by these historical figures. The revolutionary characters and their achievements are central to the play. Their efforts are told as if they share the same atmosphere and have a close connection between them. Stoppard treats them not as significant historical figures, but as ordinary, and even as comic characters dealing with ordinary routine issues. They are, as the title suggests, the ‘travesties,’ that is, the false imitations of the original ones. The fourth historical character is Henry Carr, a man wounded in an action in France and staying at the British Consulate waiting for recovery in Zurich. There is no evidence that Henry Carr, Tristan Tzara and Lenin ever met there. However, Stoppard prepares an imaginative milieu in which these figures convene in a humorous way. Carr acts as the central figure and the source of the action in the play while he is the least known among these figures. However, as in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the playwright gives priority to this unknown character trying to draw attentions to him. Obviously, Stoppard feels sympathy with the ordinary and the oppressed, and reflects this feeling in his plays. Ironically, Stoppard attributes great importance to Carr on purpose instead of the historical figures. Turning historical records upside down, he puts the famous figures aside and focuses on minor characters as he handles the characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Thus, privileging the secondary characters over the famous ones, he challenges the traditional writers and their known heroes.

In real life, Carr experiences a real relationship with Joyce. According to the historical records, they come across in the production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, in which Carr performs as a player to play the role of character Algernon Moncrief, and Joyce as the business manager. This meeting does not end with a happy one for both of them. They have a bitter quarrel about some details of the production of the play. Carr sues Joyce for the compensation of the clothes he had bought for the performance of his role, and reciprocally, he is sued by Joyce for

selling play tickets and not paying them back. Thus, he conjures up imaginative settings and roles for the real characters that marked the history. Carr, who has no importance in history, is attributed importance and is placed at the centre, given the role of the biographer who narrates the whole story. Thus, the play is based on his missing memory either as an old man recollecting the past or as a young man making the central character in the play. The fact that all these historical characters are put in the same imaginative context giving and attributing them interesting roles and significance is another irony.

Stoppard ironically combines absurdities with comic elements in some stages in *Travesties*, for example, Joyce's reputation for trying to borrow money from people is ridiculed in the play, and Joyce admits that is the case: "I am an Irishman. The proudest boast of an Irishman is—I paid back my way" (50). When Lenin and his wife Nadya talk in Russian in Public Library, the only setting where Lenin appears, at the beginning of the play, he is informed about the outbreak of revolution in Russia. The conversation in Russian increases the absurdity which Tzara declaim in connection with Dada, which is also the repetition of the word 'da' meaning *yes* in Russian. We are shown that while artists play humorously, the politicians act brutally. And actually Lenin is about to act soon after he appears for the second time again in the library to pick their luggage for departure from Switzerland for Russia.

*The Boundry* (1975) was written in collaboration with Clive Exton as a radio play for the BBC. It tells the story of 2 middle aged lexicographers Bunyans and Johnson, and what disaster happened to them. These two writers work in an atmosphere of chaos and disarray for no apparent reason. These two dismayed men's predicament derives from two subjects: one is about the hard task they have taken and the other is whereabouts of Brenda, their secretary and Johnson's wife as well, whose seemingly dead body is found as their heated conversation goes on. After realising the body under the papers, they talk about the errors she made on papers and suddenly she rises and defends herself. Soon a cricket ball comes from outside breaking the window, and hits her on the head which makes her fall again. She is an object of the rivalry between those men: Johnson is married to her, Bunyans is attracted to her. Apart from the chaotic situation, comedy, humour, confusions and misunderstandings are aimed throughout the play.

By bringing two characters, one of whom is a real lunatic, a triangle player and has an imaginary symphony orchestra and the other one is a dissident and idealist imprisoned for ideological reasons, in *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, Stoppard creates an absurdly comic situation. Coincidentally these two characters have the same name: Alexander Ivanov. There is no way to get logical understanding although the playwright gives political messages. Either Alexander or Doctor has great difficulty in coming to an agreement with the comic madman Alexander Ivanov. But still Ivanov is the source of laughs and is the popular character who acts medium-like controlling character. The dialogues made with him produces highly comic, but hard situations:

IVANOV: ...What is your instrument?  
 ALEXANDER: I do not play an instrument.  
 IVANOV: Percussion? Strings? Brass?  
 ALEXANDER: No.  
 IVANOV: Reed? Keyboard?  
 ALEXANDER: I'm afraid not.  
 IVANOV: I'm amazed. Not keyboard. Wait a minute—flute.  
 ALEXANDER: No. Really.  
 IVANOV: Extraordinary. Give me a clue. If I beat you to a pulp would you try to protect your face or your hands? Which would be more serious—if you couldn't sit down for a week or couldn't stand up? I'm trying to narrow it down, you see. Can I take it you don't stick this instrument up your arse in a kneeling position?  
 ALEXANDER: I do not play an instrument (103).

The dominance of each character shifts from one to another from time to time. Sometimes Alexander is the dominant character declaring serious issues about human right violations in Russia. For instance, when he delivers a speech on a serious subject, he is not interfered by Ivanov. When comedy matters, then it is Ivanov's turn. He directs the work performing his task as the dominant character. The doctor responsible for both man follows and insists on a method which seemingly does not work, on the contrary, it contributes to the level of comedy:

DOCTOR: Now look, *there is no orchestra*. We cannot make progress until we agree that there is no orchestra.  
 IVANOV: Or until we agree that there is.

DOCTOR: (*Slapping his violin, which is on the table*) *But there is no orchestra.*

(IVANOV *glances at the violin.*)

I have an orchestra, but you do not.

IVANOV: Does that seem reasonable to you?

DOCTOR: It just happens to be so. I play in an orchestra occasionally. It is my hobby. It is a real orchestra. Your is not. I am a doctor. You are a patient. If I tell you do not have orchestra, it follows that you do not have an orchestra. If you tell me you have an orchestra, it follows that you do not have an orchestra. Or rather, it does not follow that you do have an orchestra (107).

The similar comic but, at the same time, logical dialogue takes place in dialogues between Doctor and Alexander, too:

DOCTOR: The idea that all the people locked up in mental hospitals are sane while the people walking about outside are all mad is merely a literary conceit, put about by people who should be locked up. I assure you there's not much in it. Taken as a whole, the sane are out there and the sick are in here. For example, *you* are here because you have delusions, that sane people are put in mental hospitals.

ALEXANDER: But I *am* in a mental hospital.

DOCTOR: That's what I said. If you're not prepared to discuss your case rationally, we're going to go round in circles. Did you say you *didn't* play a musical instrument, by the way? (113).

The playwright sees life both from a comic and a serious point simultaneously. Though his early plays are comically absurd, beneath all these strange and confusing states, the question concerning how we can cope with existential predicaments in such an absurd universe arises. However, we live in a world which cannot be corrected by mere human struggle, which is openly dealt with in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Hence, his early plays show escapism as the only way, so they are "a playfully diverse pot-pourri of various kinds of escapism" (Brassell 265). Consequently, we take this as exaggerations and eccentricities of a comic play. What lies beneath these eccentricities is a sense of estrangement and disillusionment, highlighted in its best meaning in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, in which Stoppard expresses the futile endless eschewing

attempts. Ros and Guil are stuck in a hostile and chaotic environment, and finally their attempts to escape lead them to the indispensable fate: the death. This elimination is so natural that there is no even an announcement or ceremony for the couple's death.

### 3. ALIENATION

Like other absurdist writers Stoppard, too, feels and lives alienation deeply in life from his earlier age. He remembers the time he left school to be a journalist at the age of seventeen: "...I'd been totally bored and alienated by everyone from Shakespeare to Dickens" (qtd. by Hunter 2). Most of Stoppard's characters are depicted as if they had no past, and they remember almost nothing about their background, and one feels some parts of their live account have been taken out of the picture of the whole life. Their knowledge about the past contains only very little information given by the others in the play. They have no option but to rely on what they are told. For example, when Ros shows the signs of weariness, Guil tries to calm him saying: "There's logic at work—it's all done for you, don't worry. Enjoy it. Relax...(40). Unfortunately this unconscious reliance prepares their catastrophic end. As Jonathan Bennett says: "They are in touch with no past, and so they can neither construe the present nor direct themselves purposefully towards the future" (qtd. by Brassell 48).

The powerlessness of alienated humanity is reflected marvellously in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, and no other contemporary work, serious or comic, could convey this message more powerfully than that of Stoppard. Stoppard's intention is essentially humanistic, and he seeks the consequences of a given deterministic universe, which the play *Hamlet* stands for as the restricting and controlling circle. *Jumper* focuses on the same problem. The professor of philosophy, George Moore's condition, in *Jumpers*, is similar to that of Ros and Guil in that he is unaware of what happens around him. George desperately struggles against deterministic and logical positivist pragmatism, which evokes Don Quixote's

challenge to windmills, which proves futile. Though he is resolute in what he defends, and seemingly his efforts are humanistic, he cannot find a reliable support and a starting point. Seemingly this is Stoppard's own debate with himself over the problem of all humanistic attitudes.

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, once the friends of the prince Hamlet, are summoned to the Danish court by Hamlet's uncle, the new king Claudius, to search for Hamlet's strange behaviours. Soon Hamlet assumes that these courtiers are the hired men of Claudius rather than his companions. He implies that is the case, but still the couple continue to accompany him in his voyage to England. On finding a letter to the English king demanding his execution, Hamlet manages to flee from the vessel. Before escaping, he replaces a new letter which commanded the execution of Ros and Guil instead. As a result, the courtiers are executed, which is later announced as insignificant news. Stoppard challenges to this injustice feeling sympathy for these characters in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. He thinks that they were mistaken by Hamlet, and Hamlet was wrong for taking them as foes led by Claudius. To Stoppard, they were innocent, and ignorant for what they were doing, and were told almost nothing about what was going on. In an interview in 1968, Stoppard expresses his thoughts about the issue:

Hamlet's assumption that they were privy to Claudius's plots is entirely gratuitous. As far as their involvement in Shakespeare's text is concerned, they are told very little about what's going on and much of what they are told isn't true. So I see them much more clearly as a couple of bewildered innocents rather than a couple of henchmen, which is the usual way they are depicted in productions of *Hamlet* (qtd. by Brassell 37-38).

Stoppard seems to criticise Shakespeare due to the characters he handles because Shakespeare, in *Hamlet*, gives privilege to the highborn and brings them to the fore, and has considers Ros and Guil as the 'others.' Stoppard defies this and other existential injustices. As a retaliation, the playwright promotes not the noble but the 'others' as the main characters for his play, and gives Hamlet and the other nobles secondary roles. Thus, the playwright portrays Ros and Guil sympathetic but perplexed characters, who try to have an understanding about the happenings in vain.

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the pair cannot realize that their world is the play-world and it is depended upon another play-world and they are confused against a world where natural laws do not operate. They do not even get the clue in the prelude to *The Murder of Gonzago*, the short play performed by the players in the Danish court, in which two spies, wearing cloaks similar to those of the couple, are executed at the end of the play. Ros is perplexed before this scene and wonders why the cloaks are same, but does not understand it, behaving in a curious and absurd way.

Not only does the play *The Murder of Gonzago* remind Claudius his murderous past, but also foretells news about the future of the pair. However, while Claudius gets the message and takes measures, the couple cannot get it, and remain non-reactive. The chaos, which is derived from their restrained existence, dominates the play.

Dramatic irony is one of the most dominating techniques Stoppard applies in his plays. The simplicity of the couple is not changed even when they learn about their final doom. They are circumscribed simple characters whose destiny was drawn without their consent. Being Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is enough, and there is no further explanation for anything else. The courtiers are always in a questioning position because they are bewildered, and are in search of their identity:

GUIL: Operating on two levels, are we?!...

PLAYER: Uncertainty is the normal state. You're nobody special.

*He makes to leave again. GUIL loses his cool.*

GUIL: But for God's sake what are we supposed to do?!

PLAYER: Relax. Respond. That's what people do. You can't go through life questioning your situation at every turn.

GUIL: But we don't know what's going on, or what to do with ourselves. We don't know how to act.

PLAYER: Act natural. You know why you're here at least.

GUIL: We only know what we're told, and that's little enough. And for all we know it isn't even true (66)

In the boat heading for England, the play comes closer to *Waiting for Godot* in that 'waiting' is emphasized, they wait for their end, their death either trying to pass the time or passing time for a given mission. Waiting is the major theme of the

absurd plays, notably of *Waiting for Godot*. The tramps in *Waiting for Godot* are in a deadly waiting process (Colby 38). In an interview on Thames TV in 1976, Stoppard talks about *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*:

One of the reasons that the play turned out to work so well, I think, is that the predicament of the characters coincides with the predicament of the playwright. In other words I have these two guys in there and there is no plot until somebody comes in three pages later and they have to fill three pages and I have to fill three pages, and there's nothing. So they end up playing word games, spinning coins, speculating on eternals as well as the immediate situation, getting nowhere, and one finds that there becomes a sort of empathy, a circular one, between an audience watching somebody killing time watching somebody killing time, surrounded by somebody killing time (qtd. by Brassell 62).

This also true for *Waiting for Godot*, in which the two tramps wait for somebody who seemingly has a power to solve whatever problems they have.

At times they even forget who is Ros and who is Guil, and they are not aware of the fact that they act in a play. Ambiguities dominate the entire surrounding of the couple in the play, and this is the core of Stoppard's play. Ros and Guil fail to understand the situation clearly. Therefore, they are always in confusion, bewildered and unconscious, playing games and not remembering why and how they came to the court:

GUIL: ...What's the first thing you remember?

ROS: Oh, let's see...the first thing that comes into my head, you mean?

GUIL: No—the first thing you remember.

ROS: Ah. (*Pause.*) No, it's no good, it's gone. It was a long time ago.

GUIL (*Patient but edged*): You don't get my meaning. What is the first thing after all the things you have forgotten?

ROS: Oh I see. (*Pause.*) I've forgotten the question. (16)

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern insist on certainty and a clear answer which can never be found in an existential world. They are after something which does not exist, for they do not understand it, so they finally become losers. Their questionings never get satisfied answers in the play. The critic John Weightman describes them as “haven't



yet been adequately briefed about their parts” (qtd. by Brassell 52). Seemingly Stoppard is fascinated by the aspects of the victims: bewildered, innocent, and second-rate. The characters are deliberately driven to the world of high class society, the kings and princes where they are oppressed, punished, and even sentenced to death for no apparent reason.

In *The Real Inspector Hound*, two critics surprisingly find themselves, or are thrown, in a play which they watch. They shift from the role of audience to the role of actors. A telephone conversation in the play not only sums up the background of the play but also shows how alienated, alone and cast aside the humanity is:

MRS DRUDGE (*into the phone*): Hello, the drawing room of Lady Muldoon’s country residence one morning in early spring? Hello!-the draw-who? Who did you wish to speak to?...I’m afraid there is no one of that name here, this all very mysterious and I’m sure it’s leading up to something. I hope nothing is amiss for we, that’s Lady Muldoon and her house guests, are here cut off from the world, including Magnus the wheelchair-ridden half-brother of her ladyship’s husband Lord Albert Muldoon who ten years ago went out for a walk on the cliffs and was never seen again-and all alone, for they had no children (15).

The estranged characters also crowd the play *Jumpers*. In this play alienation has increases immorality particularly among the university professors. Furthermore, these academicians are from the philosophy department where one expects to see men of virtues. For example, George Moore, as the husband at home, ignores what is going on around him and is also ignored by anyone participating in the party. He is busy preparing his paper which is to be presented in a symposium titled ‘Man: good, bad or indifferent? The implication is a deep moral concern particularly in a university, a respectable institution which is expected to be an excellent model for the community. Moreover these characters are experts, not in an ordinary department, but in philosophy where wisdom, morality and other universal values should be taught. The situation is also contradictory and alarming in George Moore’s case. He is preoccupied with the paper that he would present in a conference. The title of his paper is another conflict with his own reality: the professor himself is indifferent to his own family. He undergoes many conflicts in his personal life. His

lifestyle is in a contrast with his beliefs and science. The alienation he experiences encircles him both from outside and inside. He is alienated to his environment, to his family, and the community with which he lives. He does not take them into consideration or communicate with them. Above all, he is not living a life which is supposed to be appropriate by himself, either. Thus, he is alienated to his own personality. Stoppard shows us how this alienation is inflicted on the individuals. He goes even further by drawing a picture which puts an end to the last hopes for recovery: the alienated person is not aware of this fact and that he is living an unfortunate fate. The existential character is not in a position to face the responsibility of what he experiences in real life. Man is in a danger in the midst of an existential jungle, and he is not even in the know of that destiny. Stoppard's character, the academician George Moore who stands for all humanity, is in fact a weak person though seemingly is supposed to be a powerful scientist as a member of academia and not an ordinary citizen. Let alone being a leading figure that should be a perfect model, he cannot manage his marriage, not even himself. George is isolated to such a great extent that no shock can reactivate him. There is an extraordinary event happening at home: a murder, and his wife is suspected. Nevertheless, he keeps on working on his paper, continuing his usual attitude as if nothing has happened. A similar theme is seen in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. A couple suffers from an unfriendly and immoral marriage. There is another George together with his shrew wife Martha. George is, like his namesake in *Jumpers*, an academician, too. The play tells the terrible night when the couple host another couple, who are like the young version of their hosts. The young couple are in every way a copy of the older ones. That same night George is cuckolded by his male guest in his own house. Obviously the same disgusting scene happens in Stoppard's George's house in *Jumpers*. Both Georges and their wives live alienated and immoral lives, and they cannot control anything about their own fates.

The social reality that the established values are turned upside down is one of the themes of *Jumpers*. Within the house which should be privy only to the family, and even in the bedroom which is expected to be of the utmost privacy, strangers idle freely. And the host is quite indifferent to these happenings. The behaviours of George and Dotty are suggested to bear the traces of individual alienation, and those

of Archie and his students present a social alienation (Brassell 123). In a way, all these characters have been alienated in their materialistic world.

In some ways *Jumpers* is similar to *Enter a Free Man*. We have another George, almost the same as the George in the first one. George, in *Enter a Free Man*, is preoccupied with his work and leads a life avoiding from his eerie wife Persephone who is as much alienated as Dotty. In the second play the action alternates between Persephone's sitting room and George's pub. But in *Jumpers* the subject is more serious. There is philosophical dispute between university professors. George tries to repudiate the rational solutions of Logical Positivism. His efforts are seemingly to find meaning, and to seek the source of values. He dedicates himself to prove his ideas and to show that rationality cannot determine everything, and it lacks, and it is not enough by itself. He tries hard to convince Dotty about it:

The National Gallery is a monument to irrationality! Every concert hall is a monument to irrationality! – and so is a nicely kept garden, or a lover's favour, or a home for stray dogs! You stupid woman, if rationality were the criterion for things being allowed to exist, the world would be one gigantic field of soya beans!...The irrational, the emotional, the whimsical...these are the stamp of humanity which makes reason a civilising force. In a wholly rational society the moralist will be a variety of crank, haranguing the bus queue with the demented certitude of one blessed with privileged information 'Good and evil are metaphysical absolutes!' ... (30-31).

The double faces of man and injustice are what Stoppard attacks in the play. The authorities, politicians and executives, whoever promoted to rule the humanity, are nothing but hypocrites. Archie, a professor in the university and Bones, the inspector are widespread representatives of this world of pretensions. Archie, seemingly for his sensual relations with Dotty and Bones former admirer of her are ready to behave immorally to save her just for their either interests or feelings. When the corpse is revealed, they go into collaboration in harmony with each other:

BONES: My advice to you is, number one, get her lawyer over here–

ARCHIE: That will not be necessary. I'm Miss Moore's legal adviser.

BONES: Number two, completely off the record, get her off on expert evidence—nervous strain, appalling pressure, and one day—snap!—blackout, can't remember a thing. Put her in the box and you're half way there. The other half is, get something on Mad Jack McFee, and if you don't get a Scottish judge it'll be three years probation and the sympathy of the court.

ARCHIE: That is most civil of you, Inspector, but a court appearance would be most embarrassing to my client and patient; and three years' probation is not insignificant curtailment of a person's liberty.

BONES: For God's sake, man, we're talking about a murder charge.

ARCHIE: You are. What I had in mind is that McFee, suffering from nervous strain brought on by the appalling pressure of overwork—for which I blame myself entirely—left here last night in a mood of deep depression, and wandered into the park, where he crawled into a large plastic bag and shot himself...

*(Pause. BONES opens his mouth to speak.)*

*...leaving this note...(ARCHIE produces it from his pocket.)... Here's the coroner's certificate. (ARCHIE produces another note, which Bones takes from him. BONES reads it.)*

BONES: Is that genuine?

ARCHIE: Of course it's genuine. I'm a coroner, not a forger (54-55).

It is clear that Archie is lying, and it is also clear that Bones knows that Archie is not telling truth. In this way both are both acting: Archie pretends to tell the truth, and Bones pretends to be convinced. In this world of pretensions what is missing is human life. A man is dead over there, which is either ignored or underestimated by the others, including George Moore, the philosopher of morality. In this absurd world, nothing, even death, counts, nor can anything have an effect on man to behave honest. When George learns about the killing, he goes on studying his paper without hesitation, and the others seek a way to get rid of the corpse. Consequently, they succeed, and afterwards, the indifferences, ignorance, lies, pretensions, in short, all the immoral attitudes crowd the play. Particularly Archie's philosophy that if something works, whether it is ethical or not, then it is all right is criticised. Archie even goes further by trying to persuade Dotty to make up a conspiracy theory against

Bones by blackmailing him for involving an attempt to rape Dotty. Archie's relationship with Dotty is much more than an ordinary one which evokes the question of marital fidelity of Dotty to her husband.

While working on his study, George utilizes some strange things, such as a bowl and arrow, a pet hare and a tortoise. Because of the flair of Archie, Dotty manages to get rid of the corpse and the inspector at the end of the play. Archie participates in the seminar as an opponent speaker against George, and seemingly it is he who is the winner either in real life or in the seminar. The rivalry of the professors in the seminars suggests two dimensional debates: one is personal, a debate between two men and a debate based on a philosophical subject: Logical Positivism, which Archie or McFee defend, and which George is against. Archie and McFee defend a materialistic, pragmatic of view of man and universe. Stoppard does not suffice by just presenting this debate, but also tries to give information about the philosophy both in theory and in practise.

His work echoes a desperate need for a society of moral, social and political values. The desire for a tolerant world is one of the main themes of *Travesties*. And this tolerance is demanded not only for an artist but for all human beings. Stoppard makes it clear that we should respect and practise some values, and thus we might feel relaxed against the disturbing thoughts and wrong values although we seem to be controlled and ridiculed by a mysterious force, which is not within the reach of any human power.

#### **4. DILEMMA**

Stoppard sets a puzzle or trap in almost all his plays, waiting to be solved not only by the characters alone, but in cooperation with the audience or the reader. The whole story is centred on that riddle. And the characters are bewildered and have hard times because of the difficulty and complexity of the puzzle. Trying to unfold the problem results in more confusion, and the characters cannot get rid of it. This task is so demanding that it requires the characters to work patiently and to

distinguish between the appearances and the reality. This is one of the most troublesome dilemmas of the humanity in general.

Stoppard likes paradoxes and confused situations because his own life has been full of confusions and contradictory experiences. Therefore, he uses them in his plays effectively. From his birth, conflicts and change have been the unchanging parts of his life: to have a Jewish origin; immigrations; the murder of his father who was a man of medicine; to have a stepfather; a different ethnicity and naturalized citizenship; and different lives in different countries: Czechoslovakia, Singapore, India, England. He was engaged in several jobs, such as a journalist, drama critic, and playwright. Stoppard has surely been affected by these conflicts and changes. He identifies himself as “the kind of person who embarks on an endless leap frog down the great moral issues,” and continues emphasizing the dilemma in his life and writing, “I put a position, rebut it, refute it, refute the rebuttal, and rebut the refutation. Forever. Endlessly” (qtd. by Nadel xi).

The playwright is always doubtful about the biographies or other accounts to render a pure reality, and he has usually been a sceptic about their reliability. He tells a reporter that he wants his own biography to be as inaccurate as possible, and he does not believe the accuracy in a biography because he is not sure of his own biography, so often tries to escape the idea of writing his life, he strictly refuses it (Nadel x-xi). He reflects this thought in *Travesties* through the character Carr who is the narrator of the play, but, with a confused memory, tells many things contradicting.

Stoppard, as a method, usually takes his characters and plots from an imaginative condition. As he does in *Travesties* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, his characters are from history or literary world but are placed totally in a new and authentic medium. His historical play *Travesties*, in which he draws a conflict between art and a totalitarian state, tells an imaginary environment in which some historical figures, such as Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin, Tristan Tzara, and James Joyce, meet in Zurich during the World War I, which no historical document has confirmed. Stoppard is already has no intention for the play to give an accurate

history. In order to strengthen how imaginary it is he uses an old man, whose memory is full of contradictions, to tell what had happened then.

As a consequence of a strange coincidence, those historical figures, who left a remarkable mark behind and whose common characteristics are revolutionary, hard-working, ambitious and patient for success, converge in Zurich. Each has his own different goals which they see right and crucial. This picture is a good example for Kierkegaard's philosophy that truth is subjective and truth is changeable according to each person's condition, unlike Hegel's idea that truth is universal and objective. The single truth for Lenin is to accomplish a revolution in Russia; for Tzara to develop and spread Dada; for Joyce to complete his masterpiece *Ulysses*; for Carr to carry out his formal mission (Polgar 1).

The message is clear in his works. What we think to be real, in fact, is not real, and an illusionary world replaces the real one. This message is also almost all absurdist writers' message. Seeing this confused old man telling the story, one cannot rely on what he says an inch because of his missing memory. Stoppard wants us to know that what we read and live is not much different from the story of that senile old man. Karwowski claims that what we may infer from Stoppard's work is that "we can know anything, truth is available to all, but only so long as we are selfless, in scientific terminology: open-minded; in religious terminology: humble" (Karwowski 4).

His characters' existence is largely sustained by self-deception and illusion: Old Carr speaks about his past, when he was young, as if he were an important and respectable man, which the historical records deny. Therefore, most of what he says is not reliable as Stoppard implies. In the play young Carr is the British Consul and he has close relationships with great artists and political leaders who are in exile in Zurich. And he is also the central figure around whom the play is structured. Stoppard makes up a setting, as Carr informs, which mingles truth with fiction. It is, therefore, almost impossible to discover which is historically correct though, in fact, there is no historical account showing all these figures meet and even exist at the same time in Zurich. Old Carr also does not deny the fact that he may possibly have been mistaken in recollecting the past: "Incidentally, you may or may not have

noticed that I got my wires crossed a bit here and there, you know how it is when the old think-box gets stuck in a groove and before you know where you are you've jumped the points..." (64). Old Carr's monologues are full of contradictions, wrong quotations and humorous wordplays which are the mixture of second-hand memoirs, events, news and even gossips. In most of his plays, what is most obvious in his characters is their absence of memory. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* the couple, who are often lost in anything around, represent a perfect model for such a dilemma:

ROS: ...We're his friends.  
 GUIL: How do you know?  
 ROS: From our young days brought up with him.  
 GUIL: You've only got their word for it.  
 ROS: But that's what we depend on.  
 GUIL: Well, yes, and then again no...(110)

The confused old man, Carr in *Travesties* or the pair in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* stand for any human-being, and Carr's story represents a story anyone has in mind pertaining to any subject from history, politics to literature. What Stoppard implies is clear: the accounts, documents or narrations are not reliable, and all of them may have been fabricated, so one should be sceptic about anything which is supposed to be correct and objective. Therefore, the question of reliability of the official history arises. One begins to ask a rather disturbing and puzzling question: Is what I know all about history, whether they are written records or in books, nothing but a lie?

When Ira Nadel asks him for writing his biography, he replies with a question that who would read such an account because he likes to remain elusive and ambiguous. He prefers to hide his personality and feelings. Interestingly, the accuracy of any knowledge does not matter to him; on the contrary, he enjoys being left mysterious. So unlike the common thought, he never attempts to correct any inaccuracy even it is about himself: "I never demand corrections. I quite like it really. If enough things that are untrue are said about you, no one will know what really is true" (Nadel xi-xiii).



*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* begins with two characters' wasting time playing heads and tails. Summoned by the King, in the meantime, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not have anything better to do. They occupy themselves in a harmless gambling. As soon as play begins dualities make themselves felt. Rosencrantz always wins while Guildenstern loses without exception; and the sack of the first is full while that of the later is empty. As the play progresses, Ros continues to win and Guil keeps losing. All the time Ros bets on heads and wins. There is usually a one-sided earning, and one-sided losing. There is a clear reference to the injustice of the world. Ros makes a total of ninety-five estimations, and all his estimations happen to be true, and thus he succeeds the improbable. This is a symbolic event which represents the fact that always the powerful wins. This symbolic situation is also a clue for the later development and end of the play. The message is that in the end, the weak are to lose both in this play and in real life.

The use of coin also has a symbolic meaning. Although the source of the play is the play *Hamlet*, the emphasized theme, characters, and events are much more different. As one coin has two sides, these two plays reflect two different sides of one coin. While the princess Hamlet is in the focus in the play *Hamlet*, Ros and Guil are the central characters in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, though the playwright attributes a mysterious atmosphere to it, reflects how misleading the individuals live believing that there is an absolute truth for everyone and that an objective truth is something seen by everybody. At times Ros and Guil assume that they are led and controlled by unseen forces although most of the time they forget about it. Throughout the play not only the playwright implies, at different times and events, that is the case, but also the characters can see it, for example Guildenstern says in a predictive way: "Wheels have been set in motion, and they have their own pace, to which we are... condemned. Each move is dictated by the previous one—that is the meaning of order. If we start being arbitrary it'll just be a shambles: at least, let's hope so" (60).

In the play the couple try to pass time doing various things such as spinning coins, watching the tragedians, and playing a sort of question game; they answer each question with another question or the repetition of the same question without

any answers or explanations. In this way, many questions are asked with no answers, which sum up the existential world we live in. As a result of the uncertainties, numerous mysteries remain unsolved. Their game is interrupted by encountering a group of tragedians. Clearly there is something special with this group which seeks to perform a play, *The Murder of Gonzago* in the court upon the invitation of Hamlet. First they are prepared to perform a wayside play, and in this point right afterwards, as if there is a jump in time, we see the pair arrive at the court. And the players, in the middle of the performance, realize that there is no audience. This illusionary mystery creates a feeling that something supernatural controls all those happenings.

The players' rehearsal in the court contains an additional part to that of *Hamlet*; in this scene, two spies, who resemble Ros and Guil, are put to death. This is a clear sign of the catastrophic end of the courtiers. One easily gets the impression that the players already have a prophecy concerning what the play will turn out to be. The players are expelled from the court for offending the king due to the rehearsal they performed. Finally the players appear in the ship which is to take Hamlet and his companions to England.

Stoppard aims to reveal the hidden sides of the play *Hamlet* by trying to expose the inner world of the two courtiers whom Shakespeare dealt with only superficially. He shares what he sees as missing and neglect with the audience. It is not possible to remain unaffected after reading or watching *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* which provides a new and different perspective for a second reading of *Hamlet*. Commenting on *Hamlet*, two different moods occur before and after reading *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. These two characters seem to revolt against Shakespeare by getting rid of the limited world set by him. They live a different life and in a different dimension than that in the play *Hamlet*. As if they walked out of and resigned from Shakespeare's world and play to get into the world of a new play. Stoppard believes that every exit is an entrance at the same time as he makes the Player say: "...if you look on every exit being an entrance somewhere else" (28), which also evokes Stoppard's belief in god and the world hereafter, approaching him to Kierkegaard.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have dual functions in this many dimensional play. They are both characters who take part in the play, and audiences who watch the Players playing an inner play in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Here the playwright seeks to provide various meanings and dimensions with this way. Besides, the characters are human beings living in a real world, like us. Furthermore, various different relationships are revealed in the text:

their (the characters') double identity indirectly suggests that we, the audiences of Stoppard's play, are also characters in some all-encompassing, cosmic drama the characters in the play-within-a-play (that of the tragedians) are being watched by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the spectators; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in turn, are characters in a play who are being watched by us, the audience; we, in turn, are *dramatis personae* in a larger drama (Colby 42).

Guildenstern implies this situation by saying "...there are wheels within wheels, etcetera" (110).

Seemingly Guil is the cleverer one, and poses a philosophic attitude, but he is rather weak in answering the questionings of Ros who is, in contrast with Guil, a man of panic and alarm. Ros and Guil stand not only as conflicting characters to each other, but they, as a pair, are in contradiction with the tragedians in the play. For example, in terms of awareness there is a contradictory situation between the players and the pair. Although Ros and Guil do not realize the world of the play, the tragedians have this knowledge and the direction the play is to take. They are different from the players. They are not actors by profession. It is not clear what they are in search of, and besides, their existential struggle is futile. Players are in a privileged position since acting gives them superiority. They can distinguish role-playing from reality, which the pair cannot. The player poses a teacher role while the couple are the learners.

Although the events take the pair to their tragic death step by step, comic elements dominate the whole play. Two opposite genres, tragedy and comedy meet in the same point. The real life which is a combination of sorrow and humour is presented in a clear way. And Stoppard's characters have the ability to move as well as to amuse the audience masterfully. When the Players perform the play, which

presents their final death scene, Ros and Guil do not get the message and applaud their own deaths (Schwanitz 137).

When Ros and Guil watch the tragedians' final show of death of anyone in the play, Guil reacts with a sensible shock reminding us what death is philosophically: "...Death is not anything...death is not...It's the absence of presence, nothing more...the endless time of never coming back...a gap you can't see, and when the wind blows through it, it makes no sound..." (124).

As the play progresses we are shown more contradictory aspects of the characters. Guil's seriousness and the actor's role playing contradict one another. Guil and Ros are direct characters while the actors are flexible. The couple see the world through a narrow and rough perspective, but the players through a playful one. Although the playwright feels sympathy for the pair, he gives the tragedians superiority over the rest of the characters. He associates weakness with the courtiers, but a mysterious power with the actors. In many respects the pair are missing. When Guil stabs the player in the stomach, he thinks he has killed the Player because he has a murderous passion in him, which is very true to life, but the Player thinks in broader terms, and does not take anything serious, even the death: his knife has a retractable blade, which is designed for acting like the Player himself. However, attributing seriousness to life brings nothing but death to the couple.

*Jumpers* is a play of both comic surface and philosophical depth. It is a play of multi-levels because it also deals with the contrasting philosophies and dilemmas. For example with its ruthless and immoral positivism, the Radical Liberal Party has assumed the control of the state; an English astronaut has landed on the Moon and ignores the life of his fellow traveller in order to secure his own life, and a former Minister of Agriculture, an agnostic, becomes Archbishop of Canterbury. These conflicts give the play a feeling of absurdity. The fact that an intellectual debate and comic gymnastics appear in the same stage is another absurd element. There is no centre in the play, just like when one of the jumpers is shot dead, their balanced pyramid collapses and connections break up (Brater 123).

Another contradiction which gives the play a sense of absurdity is the situation of George Moore. Though he is a moralist philosopher who warns people

against immorality, he cannot preclude it even in his own house. He himself is an example of what he is going to lecture on: 'Man-Good, Bad, or Indifferent.' Though he should be a model for the 'good', a guide, in practise he is clearly 'indifferent' to the happenings around him, and particularly to his wife, Dotty, which is 'bad.'

Dotty is a dependable character and her vulnerability increases after her career comes to an end. Seemingly she finds a solution with Archie and feels an emotional dependence upon him, which she could not get from her husband as an estrangement between the spouses. Both characters see something lack in each other: George cannot find any intellectuality in her, and she cannot get an emotional relationship from him. Like the other characters in the play, she experiences dilemma in every way. For example, though she is in a desperate need of tender feelings, she unconsciously pays lip service to Logical Positivism which does not work for her:

There's no question of things getting better. Things are one way or they are another way; 'better' is how we see them...They can be green, or square, or Japanese, loud, fatal, waterproof or vanilla-flavoured; and the same for actions, which can be *disapproved of*... Things and actions, you understand, can have any number of real and verifiable properties. But good and bad, better and worse, these are not real properties of things, they are just expressions of our feelings about them (31-32).

These words are said, of course, under the influence of Archie, and so they are not original words of her. She is not aware of the fact that she lives a terrible contradiction within her life. Though she acknowledges supporting rationality, she experiences an irrational life and mental disorder. What she needs is strong emotional ties and affection instead of what Logical Positivists preach. Furthermore, unlike her assumptions, most of her utterances are intuitive and by heart rather than thoughtful and logical. For example, she is confused with a corpse in her bedroom and bewildered and cannot behave logically and passes most of her time in her bedroom throughout the play.

Ironically, in *Jumpers*, the writer shows his mistrust for reason or logic and he favours intuitive understanding. In much of the play Stoppard deals with the absurdity of reason, and its appearance as the essential ingredient of a philosophy

which ignores the role of intuition. Intuition comes first in his opinion, and reason may only serve to the intuition as a helping factor. In *Jumpers* he argues the question of God, and comes to a conclusion that whether there is God or not is quite a matter of intuition (Karwowski 2-3).

In *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, Although Alexander can get rid of his troubled situation just by acknowledging what is expected from him, he still defies the system and its injustices. He may save himself by being obedient, but this means his defeat and the defeat of human rights supporters and the victory of oppressors. This altruistic and heroic attitude arouses a feeling of sympathy in the reader and audience. Faced with cruelties, humiliations of male nurses, beatings, locked in barred cells, injections of various debilitating drugs, bindings, Alexander loses his consciousness and passes out. At last he insists on his struggle and decides to go on hunger strike: “Then I went on hunger strike. And when they saw I intended to die they lost their nerve. And now you think I’m going to crawl out of here, thanking them for curing one of my delusions? Oh no. They lost. And they will have to see that is so” (115). The Doctor then uses his son as a threat and emotional object to make him recant what he does and says: “What about your son? He is turning into a delinquent. He is a good boy. He deserves a father” (115).

Sacha, the ten-year-old son of Alexander, losing his mother, has a strong emotional tie with his father and has no intention to lose him, so tries hard to convince his father:

SACHA: Tell them lies. Tell them they’ve cured you. Tell them you’re grateful.

ALEXANDER: How can that be right?

SACHA: If they’re wicked how can it be wrong?

ALEXANDER: It helps them to go on being wicked. It helps people to think that perhaps they’re not so wicked after all.

SACHA: It doesn’t matter. I want you to come home.

ALEXANDER: And what about all the other fathers? And mothers?

SACHA: (*shouts*) It’s wicked to let yourself die! (121).

Apparently Alexander cannot convey his thoughts and reason for hunger-strike to his son and cannot get his son’s message reciprocally. Sacha cannot understand that

deadly stubbornness which could be turned down with a childish play of telling lies. It is really beyond the comprehension of what a child can get. Therefore both father and son have a challenging task, and they seem to contradict one another. Here a conflict occurs between father and son. They have opposite views for starving to death. It is, in a way, victory for the father because he will reach his goal in either way. But for the son it will end in loss. They will be the losers in both ways: either his father will go on hunger striking and die, or he will be exposed to more pressure and oppression. And in both situations, Sacha and Alexander will suffer.

Seemingly Sacha has learnt to survive in a country like Soviet Russia, where his father has not. These opposite characters stand for the two different people living there: the intimidated or the obedient whose representative is Sacha, but dissidents, like Alexander, have too broad and uncontrollable souls to be suppressed. But, it is not easy for Sacha; he suffers at least as much as his father does. He is alone, powerless and too young; furthermore, his isolation amplifies by being pressured at school. His teacher frequently harasses him for his father's dissidence and for Sacha's refusal to play triangle in the school orchestra.

Alexander himself also lives a dilemma within his psychology. A dilemma occurs between his ideals and emotions, between his own or son's rights, and the rights of general public, the humanity. However, again such a serious subject is surrounded by comic elements thus making people ponder and laugh at the same time.

The Doctor responsible for Alexander in that prison-like mental hospital claims two things; one is that he has got an orchestra while Ivanov has not. Brassell argues that his orchestra might symbolize the state he serves because similarly Sacha is asked to play in the school orchestra, which is imposed by the authorities (188). Thus, the doctor threateningly implies that he is strong, not Ivanov: "I play in an orchestra occasionally...It is a real orchestra. Yours is not. I am a doctor. You are a patient. If I tell you, you do not have an orchestra, it follows that you do not have an orchestra" (107). Furthermore, what the doctor claims forms another paradox: only the insane are imprisoned in the mental hospital while all sane men are set free.

Stoppard's concern for philosophical and moral debates is a recurrent theme in his plays, as in *Professional Foul*. Several academic philosophers are invited to Czechoslovakia to attend a conference there. In this play the characters and their actions involve some dilemmas. The contrast is not only in the debates between the philosophers Anderson and his colleague McKendrick but also in their characters. While Anderson is a quiet, well-mannered and principled intellectual, McKendrick is just the opposite. McKendrick claims that the difference between moral and immoral behaviours is blurred, but it is rather ambiguous and relative:

MCKENDRICK: ...*(He uses a knife to score a line in front of him straight across the table cloth, left to right in front of him.)* 'Morality' down there; running parallel to 'Immorality' up here—*(He scores a parallel line.)*...They're the edges of the same plane—it's in three dimensions, you see—and if you twist the plane in a certain way, into what we call the catastrophe curve, you get a model of the sort of behaviour we find in the real world. There's a point—the catastrophe point—where your progress along one line of behaviour jumps you into the opposite line; the principle reverses itself at the point where a rational man would abandon it.

CHETWYN: Then it's not a principle.

MCKENDRICK: They aren't any principles in your sense. There are only a lot of principled people trying to behave as if there were (164).

We are introduced with a boy called Sacha, the son of Hollar, the political victim of a country of injustice, Czechoslovakia. Similarly, we come across an unjustly imprisonment of another character, and his son has the same unfortunate fate and name with the child in *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*. Sacha is 10 years old, at the same age of his namesake. He is struck for his father's unexpected detention. Giving the same names, the playwright might try to give the impression that the children in the Eastern European Communist countries live the same pressure and intimidation.

Hollar is one of Anderson's students living in Czechoslovakia and wants the professor to pass his doctorate thesis through the customs and take it to England. However, the thesis seems to include some disturbing issues for the state. While



searching Hollar's house, the Police pretend to uncover the foreign currency in order to lay false charges against him. All these make the professor change his mind in preparing a new speech title and in helping Hollar to pass his thesis to England. Anderson's prearranged paper's title is 'Ethical Facts and Ethical Fictions' which is replaced with a new one: 'The Conflicts Between the rights of Individuals and the Rights of the Community' after those unexpected events and due to their effects on him.

The professor undergoes dilemmas in his attitudes, by changing his paper, by smuggling the thesis through the customs, and doing this by putting his friend's life at risk, and finally applying the idea of McKendrick which he had previously rejected firmly: he secretly puts the thesis in his colleague's briefcase, and thus behaves unethically though he defends ethical behaviours:

ANDERSON: Last night. I'm afraid I reversed a principle.  
 (MCKENDRICK *opens his briefcase and finds HOLLAR's envelope. ANDERSON takes it from him. MCKENDRICK is furious.*)  
 MCKENDRICK: You utter bastard.  
 ANDERSON: I thought you would approve.  
 MCKENDRICK: Don't get clever with me. Jesus! It's not quite playing the game is it? (179).

Both Anderson and McKendrick undergo contradictory attitudes. Anderson, in fact, carries out McKendrick's formula to save Hollar, so McKendrick must be happy with it. However, McKendrick himself is at risk. If his briefcase is searched in detail, the thesis will be found and no doubt he will be in trouble. Theoretically such behaviour is what McKendrick is for, but being chosen as the actor, or the victim, for his own philosophy makes him angry. We are perfectly shown how contradictory decision or philosophy makers can act. Both philosophy professors behave in stark contrast with what they tell people as the truth.

*Dirty Linen* is also a parody which tells the conflicts and difficulties of a parliamentary committee who are responsible for the investigations about sexual morals while they themselves indulged in immoral sexual affairs in their private lives.

Stoppard's applying parody masterfully helps to create conflicting ideas on stage, too. Brater claims that what keeps Stoppard's technique to be in motion is his using "a series of conflicting statements made by conflicting characters," later he lets them play, as he calls it like "a sort of infinite leap-frog" (Brater 120-121). Thus, there is never an end for his world of contradictions and dualities.

## 5. IDENTITY

Stoppard's characters can be classified into four categories considering his whole plays: the selfish and cruel rulers, or power groups like Hamlet and Claudius in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Lenin in *Travesties*, and Professor Archie in *Jumpers*; the idealist but powerless ones like Alexander in *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, Tzara in *Travesties* and George in *Jumpers*; the innocent characters who stand for purity, sympathy and comic like Ros and Guil in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*; and the leftovers or the others directed and manipulated crowds who are too ignorant to stand on their food or to determine an individual life style and belief such as the feeble character Dotty in *Jumpers* and state-oriented Carr in *Travesties*. At times he favours the idealists or the innocents but never the rulers or the authorities whom the playwright clearly shows his anger at.

The double faces of man, cruelties and injustice are what Stoppard attacks in his plays. From the past kings and princes in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* to the political leaders and their policies in *Travesties* and *Jumpers*, he implies that the sadistic authorities, politicians and executives, whoever promoted to rule the humanity, mostly are hypocrites and liars.

Like the brothers in Shepard's *True West*, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are identified with each other so much that sometimes it becomes almost impossible to determine who is who in the play. In every way they resemble Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon. Even in one occasion in the play (22) they mistake themselves. They

are confused for their own identities. When they talk, we get the impression as if a single person is speaking, instead of two different characters:

ROS: Both your majesties  
 Might, by the sovereign power you have of us,  
 Put your dread pleasures more into command  
 Than to entreaty.  
 GUIL: But we both obey,  
 And here give up ourselves in the full bent  
 To lay our service freely at your feet,  
 To be commanded (36).

Telling news, they complete one another's speech, which strengthens this condition, so we are again convinced that as if the words are poured out of single mouth:

ROS: And talking to himself.  
 GUIL: And talking to himself...  
 ROS: He's the player.  
 GUIL: His play offended the king—  
 ROS: —offended the king—  
 GUIL: —who orders this arrest—  
 ROS: —orders his arrest—  
 GUIL: —so escapes to England—  
 ROS: On the boats to which he meets—  
 GUIL: Guildenstern and Rosencrantz taking Hamlet—  
 ROS: —who also offended the King—  
 GUIL: —and killed the King—  
 ROS: —and killed Polonius—  
 GUIL: —offended the King in a variety of ways—  
 ROS: —to England. (*Pause.*) That seems to be it (117).

Not only the readers or audiences, but also the characters in the play have difficulty differentiating between these two heroes:

CLAUDIUS: Thanks, Rosencrantz (*turning to ROS who is caught unprepared, while GUIL bows*) and gentle Guildenstern (*turning to GUIL who is bent double*).  
 GERTRUDE (*correcting*): Thanks, Guildenstern (*turning to ROS, who bows as GUIL checks upward movement to bow too—both bent double, squinting at each other*)...and gentle Rosencrantz (*turning to GUIL, both straightening up—GUIL checks again and bows again*) (36-37).

The similarity affects their actions as well. They are so much resemble each other that they are often mistaken. And once, they even themselves mistake each other in an absurd but funny way:

ROS: My name is Guildenstern, and this is Rosencrantz.  
 GUIL *confers briefly with him.*  
*(Without embarrassment.)* I'm sorry—*his* name's  
 Guildenstern and *I'm* Rosencrantz (22)

And seemingly Guildenstern stands for 'heads' while Rosencrantz, who accompanies him and at times repeating Guildenstern's words, and making absurd comments, represents 'tails' of a coin (Colby 34):

GUIL: He couldn't even be sure of mixing us up.  
 ROS: Without mixing us up.  
 GUIL *(turning on him furiously)*: Why don't you say anything original! No wonder the whole thing is so stagnant! You don't take me up on anything—you just repeat it in a different order.  
 ROS: I can't think anything original. I'm only good in support (104).

Stoppard gives Ros and Guil a new identity by resembling them to Vladimir and Estragon, thus meeting past and present, which gives an air of universality of what the playwright presents (Brater 120). They are not central but secondary characters who are expected to orbit the central one, Hamlet. They feel the ambiguity of identity. The difficulty to determine an identity for themselves gives the couple a disturbing and revolting grief:

GUIL: But, why? Was it all for this? Who are we that so much should converge on our little deaths? *(In anguish to the PLAYER:)* Who are we?  
 PLAYER: You are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. That's enough (122).

Brassell sums up the identity of the couple as follows:

It's 'enough' to identify Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (it is not even necessary to identify them from each other!) In order to define the nature and purpose of their existence: they exist for and in terms of *Hamlet*: to enter the Danish

court, to go to England with the prince, to arrive without him and to die (50).

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are very like Beckett's characters Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*, who are regarded as two halves of the same character, or two sides, heads or tails, of a single coin. *Endgame* is one of the most interesting absurd plays. Body language has been exploited skilfully: Hamm is the blind owner of the house; Clov is his servant, who cannot sit, and Hamm's parents have no legs and live in a dustbin. These people are left alone in the World after a disaster. Hamm, once rich and powerful, dominates and degrades Clov, who as a reaction, hates Hamm and is in a great desire to leave there, but cannot because Hamm has the only foot store in the World. Hamm is also in need of Clov because he is blind and needs his service. Both characters complete one another not only in terms of needs but in personality as well. Furthermore, they constitute two contrast characteristics of a person. Hamm is childish, selfish, sensuous, and has sympathies only for his own feelings and pities. He often plays with his three-legged dog toy and ignores and treats his parents as fools. In contrast to him, Clov is reasonable and affectionate. He wants to go away but usually defers his desire. Hamm sees himself a writer and tells some stories which are intermingled with their own lives. Hamm's mother urges Clov to leave there. In the end Clov is prepared to leave and makes all preparations, goes towards the door. He is about to go out but stands there, leaving us in an ambiguous result. The play ends in uncertainty as it begins. The indispensable recycle has been going on; neither the beginning nor the end is fixed. This is the focus on the existence of human being in the world where seemingly different, but in fact the similar things continue endlessly. That is something makes us frequently say 'déjà vu' in most events we come across in life (Haney 48).

Although Professor George, in *Jumpers*, is not aware of the murder to the last minute in his own bedroom, an outsider, Sir Archibald Jumper, who is in the know of the murder in the minutest details, tries to cover it with its all effects. Professor Archie functions as the coroner, solicitor and loving doctor of Moore's wife together with his main title, the vice-chancellor of the university. Schwanitz describes him as the "epitome of the modern secularism, nihilism, pragmatism, relativism and efficiency" (144). Archie and Bones, the inspector seem to stand for the officials who

exploit and benefit from their authorities to the fullest just for the sake of their interests. They help Dotty to get rid of the corpse in a practical way though their occupations do not require such an immoral behaviour.

Stoppard is also angry with some characters for their ignorance and dogmatic beliefs, and he criticises such characters as Carr and Dotty. Carr's uncritical acceptance of anything imposed by the power groups contains a typical disease of status quo and traditionalism. His words echo a global ignorance:

I went to war because it was my duty, because my country needed me, and that's patriotism. I went to war because I believed that those little boring Belgians and incompetent Frogs had the right to be defended from German militarism, and that's *love of freedom* (40).

In *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, the nonsensical and unjust laws of the intolerant state and its officials are parodied. They impose their absurdities as 'realities' or 'sane' on their people mercilessly, threateningly. The term 'equality' is also parodied. The doctor applies the sane procedures to both Alexander and Ivanov who share the same cell as 'equal' individuals. Here science of psychiatry, like any other science, is used as a tool for continuation of the prevailing ideology whether it is moral or not, right or not. As such Lenin suggests, in *Travesties*, that literature should be in the service of communism, showing how ideologies could abuse the power of the arts or sciences.

The personal identities of the characters in *Travesties* are based on the revolutionary features of historical figures, so it is of utmost importance to know about these figures and their achievements in history. The first conspicuous aspect they have in common, as Schwanitz argues, is their revolutionizing ability: Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin, very well-known to revolutionize the political; James Joyce, a revolutionary figure in the world of fiction; Tristan Tzara, the father of the Dadaist movement, who wanted to revolutionize art (145).

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin was a revolutionary figure from his childhood onward. He committed his life to this end. His brother was persecuted for involving in an attempt to the assassination of Czar Alexander III. After he got a degree in Law, he defended poor peasants. He was influenced by the revolutionary teachings

of GV Plekhanov and engaged in revolutionary groups. He went abroad to develop ideas to speed up a revolution, and worked in the libraries, one of which is also the setting in the play *Travesties* where Lenin works, and in newspapers in European countries, such as Switzerland, France, Germany, for a few months. He founded the League for the Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class which organized activities, such as preparing educational facilities for the workers, strikes, union affairs and spreading the ideas of Marx Literature. In 1895 its members including Lenin were arrested. Lenin was sentenced to fifteen months imprisonment. Because of keeping his writings during his imprisonment, an additional three years was enforced. He was exiled to a village in Siberia where he became the leading member of the peasant community (*Travesties* 3).

In 1917 he was in Zurich, and this is also the time when the setting of *Travesties* is fictionalized. Lenin claimed that the war was a capitalist one, and called for a protest against the war and capitalism by means of an international uprising. When the revolution in Russia broke out in February 1917, Germany let Lenin pass through Germany in order to provide Lenin's arrival in Russia to disrupt Russia's war plans. Lenin was sure that the opportunities were mature enough to achieve a social revolution. The most important of all was that though the government consisted mostly of citizens from upper class, people in general were working class.

In November 1917 the Bolsheviks led by Lenin took over the authority and formed a Soviet government. Then Lenin became the only leader of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) which later changes into USSR just before the death of Lenin in 1924 (*Travesties* 4). Lenin is shown to be in a stark contrast with other characters as a highly serious and decisive man. As Adam B. Ulam says: "Lenin imported to Bolshevism and Communism not only ideology and tactics, but also many of his personal characteristics. The cult of Lenin has always united communists of the most divergent views" (qtd. by Brassell 156). And with his personal characteristics Stoppard may imply the cruel leaders in general: not a warm man who does not laugh easily, posing a serious attitude both via the plot and making Cecily give lectures.

Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Konstantinova Krupskaya married to Lenin in an exile in 1898. She devoted her life to a Russian revolutionary and teachings of Marx. Throughout her life she was active in organizing Bolsheviks and their actions. After the Bolshevik triumph, she took an active role in academic and professional training of the women and workers. She died in 1939. Bolshevism is an important pillar of Russian Socialism. From the time Lenin got the power by gaining the majority votes onward his supporters were called Bolsheviks and opponents Mensheviks. Lenin defined the term as the revolution of the unity of workers and peasants to overthrow the regime of the upper class. In 1918 it changed into the Russian Communist Party. Today, it is referred to anyone who attempts to have a socialist revolution.

Born in 1882, Irish James Joyce was one of the most influential novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was a master in using English language. His masterpiece *Ulysses* is among the greatest novels in the world. He lived in different European countries with his family, including Switzerland where *Travesties* is set. Joyce and his family were in Zurich during the World War I. He completed *Ulysses* there in 1917. He suffered from glaucoma throughout the rest of his life until his death. While his *Ulysses* echoes Homer's *Odyssey*, a Greek poem of a long journey which lasts ten years, and full of Odysseus's adventures after a battle in Troy, Stoppard's *Travesties* echoes *The Importance of Being Earnest* (*Travesties* 8). Both *Ulysses* and *Travesties* are told in narration technique, and both works emphasizes the clash between reality and illusion.

Oscar Wilde was also an Irish like Joyce, and was born in Dublin in 1854. His masterpiece *The Importance of being Earnest* was full of artistic techniques, and well-knitted. In 1891 he was accused of homosexual practises, and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. After his release he went to France and lived there under a pseudonym for the rest of his life. The popularity of *The Importance of Being Earnest* lasted so long that it was also filmed in 2002. Two main characters in the play separately invent two imaginary characters to escape from their dull country lives. But later the invented stories cross paths, which endangers their loves. Stoppard applies a similar plot, characters, and subject with the same names to his play.



Like other characters, Henry Wilfred Carr is a historical character, but unlike the other characters, he was an ordinary official with less importance and fame. He was born in 1894, in Northern England. He was wounded in the war, and taken as a captive by the German. He was sent to a monastery because of his wounds. He found himself as an exchange prisoner in Switzerland. He met Joyce in Zurich to be cast as Algernon, one of the heroes in *The Importance of being Earnest* produced by Joyce. Joyce and Carr had a disagreement for the cost of the costumes Carr bought for the performance, and this quarrel ended in court.

At first everything starts happily for Joyce and Carr. Carr is an official in the Consulate. And he is happy with the invitation of Joyce concerning the role he has been offered in the production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. But after the production, Carr complains about Joyce' patronising attitude towards him and about not being paid for the expense of the clothes he bought for his role. Joyce also has a disturbance about Carr. He claims that Carr owes him the money for the tickets Carr has sold. At last their disagreement remains to be solved at the court. Carr is indignant for being only little paid though the show makes good money. Eventually, the court decides against Carr, reaching the verdict that the clothes bought are not stage costumes but for ordinary use (Brassell 143-146).

Joyce was so angry with him that he carried it into his novel *Ulysses* in which he gave the name Carr to an English brute (Travesties 12). The role of Carr as prompter and biographer is crucial either as an inside character within the play, the young Carr, or as an outside narrator, the old one out of the action.

## CONCLUSION

While the traditional and even modern genres successfully manage to convey the early popular issues such as love, poverty or contemporary science-fiction, they were ineffective in dealing with the real mood and diseases of the modern man. The adventurous journey of post-modern literature produced Absurd drama beginning with existential novel and filtering through Dadaism, surrealism and Brechtian theatre. Bearing traces from each of these genres, Absurdist theatre examines human being as powerless, passive and chained slaves. Men are prisoners or animals objected to cages, cells, or to a shrunken room. This shrinking process, as a result of an unfriendly determinism through loss of human control, is a dominant theme in Sam Shepard and Tom Stoppard as well as in most absurd playwrights.

Alienation and absurd were mainly products of the First World War. The uneasiness and chaos brought about by alienation peaked with the Second World War. Man felt completely unhappy and hopeless with the destroyed world in the wake of these wars. The wars bore not only such a pessimistic atmosphere but also the children of wars. And naturally this generation saw the world as an environment of nothingness.

Radioactive destructions, atomic and nuclear wars, incurable diseases such as cancer and Aids, psychological disorders, consumerism, anxieties and fears were what shaped humanity in the second half of the twentieth century. Although there was a stark contrast between the worries of this era and those in the first half of that century in general, the destructive effect of a world war was the common dread of the whole century. However, the major worries such as famine and starvation of the earlier era gave way to unseen and most destructive modern ones which were mainly depended upon psychological and man-made problems.

Wealth has been a stimulating and a determining factor in society. Technology, more money, television, motor vehicles, consumerism, owning separate homes, supermarkets, computers and internet have created an individualistic and a highly private life style away from the crowds of society. Today individuals and

families are more likely to lead isolated, independent lives where community has no function. However, affluence has also helped to divide society into classes, deriving their identities from differences of race, age or gender.

Their characters are quite ordinary people from the real life, but they are too natural to act reasonably. What makes them different from other characters of realist writing is their direct statements which are burst out from their deep psyche. They do not hesitate to utter what they feel. That is, what speaks is their hearts rather than the reason or mind.

Both Shepard and Stoppard apply the element of absurdity and alienation in their plays at best. Violence, weakness, aimlessness and meaninglessness are apparent in almost all of their plays. Yet, they apply these concepts totally in different environments and with different styles. Although their message and themes bear resemblances, they are in no way similar. The most common feature of them is the futile struggle of the individuals' seeking for meaning in a meaningless and aimless world, which epitomizes the absurd attempt of the humanity. In achieving their goals to convey this message they apply various means; for example, Shepard uses family tensions while Stoppard prefers political and philosophical environment in abundance.

Both writers are moralist writers. Shepard longs for a nostalgic past and its values, and Stoppard emphasizes the terrible need for moral individuals. While a moral life is the common point which both the playwrights favour, approaching past constitutes a certain conflict between them. Shepard is a writer longing and lamenting over the death of the past which dates back to the early frontiers; whereas, Stoppard is happy with the present and obviously indifferent to his adventurous past which involves a multiple and complex identities ranging from Czechoslovakian nationality to a Jewish identity.

Shepard's plays are full of castaways, isolated and alienated characters. He openly reveals an aspiration for nostalgia, past values and barren places not yet dirtied by the humanity, such as deserts. Abrupt changes, illogical behaviours, violent acts, sudden but ruthless reactions are what shape his characters. Unfinished projects and duties, and illusionary dreams crowd his chaotic world of plays. All

these situations have also afflicted the playwright's own life, notably his marital life and family. In his plays, excessive individuality puts an end to the family values. In such a family the households become alienated and divided. The individuals, feeling isolated, begin to suffer from contradictions. They are too powerless to escape from their chaotic way of life. As the existential creatures, what they can do is to wait for their final catastrophe to come.

Although the scene remains the same, the characters behave and speak as if they were someone else, becoming a wholly different person. And we get an impression that their plays are interdependent, forming a part of a single play as if all their plays have a connection between each other, which evoke a real life going on. Even before watching one of Shepard's plays, one feels the chaos, violence, death or an existential anxiety which the titles of the plays imply: *Curse of the Starving Class*, *The Tooth of Crime*, *Buried Child*, *Savage/Love*, *Killer's Head*, *Back Bog Beast Bait* and the like.

In Stoppard's plays, there cannot be certain borders of morality, and the principles can be reversed when needed. Reality is changeable and morality may show differences for different individuals in different conditions. Therefore, there cannot be unchanged realities due to the dependability of the conditions, which likens Stoppard to Descartes when combined with the scepticism of the playwright.

Alienation appears in the form of indifference, meaninglessness, powerlessness and aimlessness of the alienated and isolated individual in these playwrights' works. Both of the writers reflect how these states and the related behaviours are dominant in life. The despair of fragmented modern man is the main theme in their and absurd playwrights' plays in general. The uprooted modern man, leaving the social and interactive community, suddenly found himself alone, isolated and helpless. The modern man in solitude had no more primitive but friendly people around to share his sorrow or happiness. Although there were also crowds of modern men around the individual, these were numbed and selfish creatures stripped off their humanistic features as a result of apocalyptic metamorphosis. This demonic individual, exposed to non-human external conditions, was created by the modern society. And naturally, this hollowed human did not develop a healthy psychology

which is triggered by the already existing conditions, such as chaos and crisis. All these helped form social disorders and personal disorders which created a criminal and alienated identity. As a result, a world of violence, hatred, anger and anarchy occurred. This is what the playwrights try to reveal and convey as a message to inform us away from any pretension or illusion.

Consequently, it is clear that the playwrights write in a form very much indebted to the absurd theater. Particularly their using nonsensical and abrupt actions, sudden and unexpected changes in identity, illogical dialogues nullifying the validity of language, rejection of linear structure and reasonable procedures, inconsistency of the characters and using an absurd communicative way are what approach them to absurd drama.

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