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**BETWEEN LAUGHTER AND LAMENT:
EXPLORING DEATH, ART, AND FANTASY IN
TRAGICOMEDY AND DARK COMEDY**

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Abstract: This paper investigates the intricate collision between fantasy and reality in the realms of dark comedy and tragicomedy, with particular attention to the fairy-tale elements embedded in both genres. Drawing primarily on Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the study explores how these texts highlight the interplay of death, art, and human imagination. By placing grotesque humor side by side with existential despair, both playwrights invite audiences to confront life's paradoxes while reflecting on the fragility of human agency. The analysis shows that dark comedy employs grotesque and taboo subjects to force laughter amid horror, while tragicomedy balances despair with faint glimpses of hope, underscoring the instability of human emotions. Ultimately, the paper argues that art emerges as both a refuge from and a mirror of suffering, transforming trauma into creative energy. The conclusion emphasizes the necessity

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meditating on life rather than fixating on death, as genuine wisdom lies in appreciating the fleeting yet meaningful essence of existence.

Keywords: Reality, Art, Fantasy, Dark Comedy, Tragicomedy, Death

GÜLMEK VE AĞLAMAK ARASINDA: TRAJİKOMEDİ VE KARA MİZAHTA ÖLÜM, SANAT VE FANTEZİYİ KEŞFETMEK

Öz: Bu makale, kara mizah ve trajikomedî türlerinde fantezi ile gerçekliğin çarpışmasını, özellikle peri masallarının izlerini de kapsayacak şekilde incelemektedir. Analizin temelini Martin McDonagh'ın *The Pillowman* ve Tom Stoppard'ın *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* adlı eserleri oluşturmaktadır. Çalışma, ölüm, sanat ve insan hayal gücü arasındaki etkileşimi açığa çıkararak, grotesk mizah ile varoluşsal umutsuzluğun yan yana gelişini tartışmaktadır. Her iki oyun da seyirciyi hayatın paradokslarıyla yüzleşmeye ve insan iradesinin kırılganlığını sorgulamaya davet eder. İnceleme, kara mizahın tabu ve korkutucu konuları kullanarak acının ortasında kahkaha ürettiğini, trajikomedinin ise umutsuzluğu nadir umut anlarıyla dengeleyerek duyguların istikrarsızlığını ortaya koyduğunu göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, anlatıların gerçeklik ile kurmaca arasındaki sınırları bulanıklaştırdığı ve sanatçının etik sorumluluğunu gündeme taşıdığı vurgulanmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, sanat hem bir sığınak hem de acının aynasıdır; travmayı yaratıcı bir enerjiye dönüştürerek insana yeni bakış açıları kazandırır. Makale, yaşam üzerine manevi bir tefekkürün ölümden daha gerekli olduğunu vurgulamakta, hakiki bilgelik ve özgürleşmenin ise varoluşun kısa ama değerli anlarını fark ederek yaşamakta yattığını öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gerçeklik, Fantezi, Meditasyon, Kara Mizah, Trajedi, Ölüm

TRAGICOMEDY AND DARK COMEDY: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, PIONEERS, AND LITERARY EXAMPLES

Tragicomedy and dark comedy occupy two closely related but theoretically distinct places in the literary and theatrical traditions. Both genres play out a perpetual dialectic between laughter and suffering but with different aesthetics, philosophical presuppositions, and histories. Tragicomedy is often a concentrated middle ground between the dignity and poignancy of tragedy and the cataclysmic, irrevocable or ex cathedra resolution or the rowdy cheer of comedy, while in dark comedy (also black comedy) serious, taboo, and often repugnant subject matter is made the focus of ironic, satiric, or mordant humour. Together these make way for the exploration of literature to engage with moral ambivalence, existential anxiety, and social critique by disrupting the

conventional emotional responses that people expect from a work of literature. As Esslin (2004) observes, "The Theatre of the Absurd strives to express the sense of the senselessness of the human condition" (p. 6), a sentiment that applies equally to tragicomic and darkly comic modes. The first part of this research paper provides an extended historical background for each genre, identifies pivotal pioneers and theorists, and surveys canonical and representative literary examples, while also highlighting the cultural conditions that shaped their emergence. Furthermore, it examines how these genres evolved across different literary periods, tracing their transformation from classical origins through Renaissance adaptations to modern reinterpretations, thereby demonstrating their enduring relevance and capacity to illuminate complex intersections of humor, tragedy, and social critique.

Tragicomedy: Historical Background

The conceptual roots of tragicomedy run as deep as classical antiquity, though the explicit use of the term, as well as critical applications to it, appear later. Aristotle's *Poetics* also determines a binary between tragedy and comedy, between the respective good and bad moral effects, the appropriate objects and degrees of meter; however, the work itself does allow for hybrid effects and blending of tone when it talks about the complexity of plot and the cathartic modulation of pity and fear. In Roman comedy an instance of self-awareness is had in the prologues of Plautus; the occurrence in Roman comedy of the word "tragicomoedia" suggests earliest attempts to blend serious subject-matter from mythology with comic treatment. In the prologue to *Amphitruo*, Plautus explains: "I will make it a tragicomedy, for it would not be fitting to make it wholly comedy when gods and kings are involved" (Plautus, 2005, p. 3). These grains of very early instantiation of the formal hybridity demonstrate that this example is not just an invention of modern times, but has ancient precedents.

The term attains a recognized theoretical status during the Italian Renaissance. Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido* (1590) is frequently invoked as the establishing formulation in early modern thought of the genre: Guarini defended a dramatic form which represented high levels of melody, lacking the extremities of fate that characterized the classical tragedy of the ancients, while strengthened against the crudities of the pastoral comedy. In his defense, Guarini (1989) wrote that tragicomedy "unites danger with safety, affliction with pleasure,

and death with life" (p. 112). The Italian atmosphere gave importance to moral severity as well as to the resolution of the lyrics, in producing for example the ways in which drama was hand in hand with the dramatic practices of Europe (notably exemplified in Shakespearean and Jacobean theatres). In early modern England, John Fletcher and prefaces and writings to naturalize tragicomedy in the English Jacobean stage. Fletcher famously articulated the notion of the genre not as an "unequal mixture" of genres but instead as a genre that "wanted not for the touch of mirth nor the press of misery". In the preface to *The Faithful Shepherdess*, he clarified this balance: tragicomedy "wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy" (Fletcher, 1979, p. 497). This definition enabled the dramatists to create a dramatic situation of suffering that did not end in death, which destroyed the possibility for the audience for restored social order or emotional reprieve. Shakespeare, although predating him in time of authorship, realised plays that often fall within the much later definitions of tragicomedy. *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, for example, threaded the intertwining of loss and restitution, violence and forgiveness, to the point where they cannot be categorised as either tragic or comic. In *The Winter's Tale*, as the play hovers between tragic collapse and ultimate reconciliation, Leontes exclaims, "Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice" (Shakespeare, 1996, 3.2.146-147, p. 145). The Enlightenment and its following centuries complicated the category even more.

Tragicomic effects can be found in the narrative genres known as the picaresque and the sentimental novel, where the presence of pathos and ironic deflation extend side by side. By the nineteenth and twentieth century, playwrights and novelists took advantage of the play's ambiguity to capture social inconstancy and psychological divisions: the plays of Chekhov (e.g. *The Cherry Orchard*) illustrate how the tragic and the comic can coexist in modern theatrical realism thereby evoking disquiet rather than neat moral resolution. Samuel Beckett among modernist dramatists created what might be termed post-tragicomedy or existential tragicomedy - in which the comedic surface often heightens an existential insolence rather than providing a restorative closure. Scholarly treatments of tragicomedy focus on its ethical and aesthetic complexity: the thematic mixture leads to a complication of normative judgments and allows the spectator an inhabitation of indeterminate moral positions. Critics like Guarini's contemporaries and the later theorists

have sought to establish that the value of tragicomedy rests in its ability to create a representative of life's contradictions without forcing the combination of these elements to an artificial unity. Contemporary theorists have leapt at mine for this hybridity in the attempt to read modern works that resist binary categorizations between the comic and tragic.

Pioneers And Theorists Of Tragicomedy

Several numbers play an important role in any history of tragicomedy. Giovanni Battista Guarini formalised an aesthetic defence for the genre at the end of the sixteenth century; his model for pastoral tragicomedy was one that emphasised language, decorum and moral complexity. Fletcher and his collaborators conditioned the Jacobean market place reception of tragicomedy by creating plays and manifesting a dramaturgy consisting of suspense, bordering on tragedy, and comic relief. It bodied forth Shakespeare's exercise in matter: while Shakespeare never called his plays by Guarini's name, his play's drama of the unexpected and recognition anagnorisis, involved in a theatrical restitution, is in line with the tragicomic matrix. In the modern era, Samuel Beckett perhaps subverted the tragicomedy genre when he removed conventional plots and resolutions so that his dramatization of waiting, impotence, and repetitive comic gestures means laughter tends to register as an index of bleakness, rather than relief. Martin Esslin's founding scholarship on the Theatre of the Absurd (Esslin, 1961/2004) contextualized the works of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter in a tradition reaching from the intersection of tragic existential modes with comic forms of ritualized failures. Contemporary playwrights like Tom Stoppard and Martin McDonagh apply tragicomic sensibilities to the late twentieth century for their audience by mixing intertextual wit with violent thematic content, which contributes to the ethical high stakes of the genre.

Representative Literary examples Of Tragicomedy

A survey of canonical texts needs to make visible the range of tragicomedy across time and form. In the prose fiction of Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (1605; 1615) swings from satire to pathos, and the deluded knight evokes both - we laugh at his absurd missions but pity the extent of his self-delusion. This profound identification between narrator and Don Quixote is confirmed by the narrator: "For me alone Don Quixote was born, and I for him; his task is mine, his life is mine, his death is mine" (Vol. 2, Ch. 74, p. 940). In drama, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1596-1599), for example, plays out emo

tionally devastating issues of Shylock's humiliation and the ethical issues of mercy versus the law within a basically comic framework; the result is a tragicomic tension that has generated centuries of scholarly debate. Chekhov's *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard* are other significant examples of modern tragicomedy: the small-scale comic failures of characters are contrasted with economic disaster and with death, and the refusal of *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Seagull* to end happily insists on the sick concomitance of humor and tragedy. In *The Cherry Orchard* this irony is emphasized when Lopakhin says "If only my father and grandfather could rise from their graves and see what has happened, how their Yermolai, their beaten and half-literate boy has turned into the owner of this estate" (Act III, p. 76). Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) and *Endgame* (1957) are paradigmatic of the twentieth century's tragicomedies: ([the repeated comic action takes place]) in an atmosphere of suffering and imminent annihilation, creating in the process both the laughter that is at once involuntary and deeply implicated in the despair of the characters. In *Waiting for Godot* this is summed up when Estragon sighs "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" (Beckett, 2010, Act I, p. 27) .

Contemporary plays like Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966/1967) adopt a metatheatrical approach to stage characters stuck inside existing narratives - Stoppard's intelligence is used to create comedy and jokes while the thrust and insistence of his characters on reaching their fatal conclusion insists on tragic consequences, which were the hallmark of late tragicomedy. Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* (2003) carries the tradition into the twenty-first century: grotesque tales and torturous police interrogations make audiences laugh in the midst of ethical questions about authorship and culpability.

Dark Comedy: Historical Background

Dark comedy—also known as black comedy, black humor, or morbid comedy—is a comedy genre that explicitly anticipates such taboo topics as death, murder, morbidity, existential horror, and ethical atrocity. Even though the term gained popularity among a critique and writers of the 20th century, they are part of the earlier satiric practices. Neglected and grotesque sorrows of the carnival, thanks to which Mikhail Bakhtin describes the forced roots of people, demonstrate that the popular culture has always sought to laugh and cope with the hierarchic order, interacting with death and decreasing its flesh.

The hyperbolic proposal of Jonathan Swift in *A Modest Proposal* (1729) was regularly identified as a proto-dark comedy: the eating of Irish children as an offer of Swift operates as a type of hyperbole as a socially-expressive performance, creating the shock of a proposal, through which the object of the satire becomes opposed with the offer itself. Swift (1996) proposed, "that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food" (p. 3).

In the antiwar literature, the modernist satire as well as the existentialist dramas of the mid-twentieth century the black humor is manifested modernly. The depiction in Franz Kafka of bureaucratic nightmare and alienation (Good without Evil Case) can dark humor due to the absurdity of the system and human inability to do anything about it. As *The Trial* (1998) begins, "Someone must have been telling lies about Josef K., he knew he had done nothing wrong but, one morning, he was arrested" (p. 3). Black humor as a sense withering within the French tradition has found a recognizable expression in American writing: Nathanael West, J. D. Salinger (in certain passages), Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, and others exercised their irony, their absurdity, their coldness, on the historical trauma of the twentieth century, especially a few humiliating wars of the past century. Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) exemplifies how circular logic and bureaucratic cruelty produce comedic effects that also indict institutional violence. As Heller (1994) explains, "There was only one catch and that was Catch-22... Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them" (p. 46). Gallows humor used in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) is employed by Vonnegut to make the body of the Dresden bombing a subject of a story that fails chronologically and even moral comfort. The novel's fatalistic irony is driven by the refrain "So it goes," which appears over 100 times after every mention of death.

Even in the twentieth century, theatre remained among the faces of black comedy. The Theatre of the Absurd adds to neither tragicomedy nor black comedy: the humor of the play is inspired by its incoherence and by the lack of moral standards. Harold Pinter and Edward Albee explored in bitter, even threatening humor how power could be taken away and how cruel society could be, and the laugh itself became an art of moral dish. Comedy became a location of moral discomfort. More recently, in the plays of dramatists such as Martin McDonagh and Sarah Kane, black comedy has been pushed to an extreme of representing moment of violence and bodily pain with the belief

that humor and disgust can both range and that theatrical performance can compel viewers to question their own morale.

Pioneers and Key Theorists of Dark Comedy

The dark type of comedy might be seen as a reaction to this national poetic and so it is only through the influence of theorists and writers of the twentieth century that the shape of a unified approach to the categorical concept of a dark comedy has been established. The French Surrealists and Dadaists used grotesque and shocking juxtapositions to attack bourgeois sensibilities, while psychoanalytic readings in the twentieth century (Freud and later Freud-inspired critics) explained why laughter would appear in proximity to trauma and anxiety. Critically, the term "black humor" (humour noir) was popularized by Andre Breton and authors of the Surrealist milieu, and the mid-century essayistic and journalistic usage helped anchor the category for literary criticism. Breton (1997) defined it as "a means of revolt against a hostile world, a method of undermining accepted values through laughter" (p. 12). In English-language criticism, (a topic also discussed by Noel Carroll) aesthetic and philosophical consequences of the fusion of horror and comedy (especially the relation of moral disgust to aesthetic enjoyment) have been discussed by critics. The work of Martin Esslin on the subject of absurdism has been cross-pollinated with literature on black comedy because it brings out the role of humor in monitoring the loss of meaning in our contemporary society.

Representative Literary Examples of Dark Comedy

The investigation of the literary works exemplified by dark comedy can be valuable to outline its range and scope. Within prose fiction domains, two canonical text exempla are the works of Joseph Heller's *Catch -22* (1961) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). Both books are seen as transcending atrocity into absurdist interrogative and demonstrating how comedy can be used as a moral interpretive device. The satirical machinery that Heller uses to reveal the surrealist logic of war gruesomeness sheds light on black comedy as the medium that Vonnegut uses to undercut the traditional sense of progress in a narrative and render visible the long-lasting effects of the traumatic experience.

In theatrical literature, Samuel Beckett crafted *Endgame* (1957) and Harold Pinter wrote *The Birthday Party* (1957), both novels rely on black humor to illustrate interpersonal relations, full of threats, deceit, and mindlessness.

Later linear plays, such as *The Pillowman* (2003) by Martin McDonagh and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2001) by McDonagh, predestinate and project drugicidal violence and roman a sense of grotesque comedy to explore moral accountability and the exploring society.

Contemporary fiction writers like Cormac McCarthy and Chuck Palahniuk sometimes use elements of black comedy, pessimistic, ironic omissions, minor misinterpretations of accepted ethical dogmas presented to challenge the ethical certainties readership holds.

Theoretical Intersections:

Tragicomedy, Dark Comedy, and Moral Ambivalence

As much as tragicomedy and dark comedy can be differentiated based on their tone, the lack of tonal balance and possible restoration in tragicomedy and transgressive laughs in dark comedy distinguishes the genre bases, but the genres share many similarities in their approach to moral ambiguity. These two works have exposed the problematic assumptions of literature to administer moral clarity; they both demonstrate contemporary moral disorder. Introductions Critics have applied psychoanalytic, ethical, and reception-theory approaches to explain why casualties find reasons to laugh at the face of pain. The theories presentation of Freud on humor, the theory of release, and the theory of benign violation in the modern psychology contribute to cognitive processes of exploring the incorporation of humor and taboo issue into the same reality. Ironic, and yet implicating audiences in ethical problems, such as Noel Carroll and Linda Hutcheon, tie philosophical interpretation of aesthetic distance to aesthetic distance. Ethically, tragicomedy can be viewed as pedagogical: because antagonistic to the resolution of problems using simplistic morality, it can educate audiences in hypocrisy and sympathy. Instead, dark comedy may work as provocation: revealing and thus requiring an awareness of ills against societal norms, producing shock and so fueling uncomfortableness that critics have linked to desensitization. It is still debated whether black humor desensitizes or sensitizes audiences; many critics have claimed it is a subtle between the two, but success in the implementation of dark comedy varies with respect to cultural context, the position of authors and resources available to audiences to interpret the comedies.

Case Studies: Tragicomedy and Dark Comedy in Modern Drama

In order to get closer to the plays examined in the second part of the article

The Pillowman by McDonagh and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* by Stoppard, it makes sense to consider how the thrust paradigms of tragicomedy and dark comedy work in the texts as the paradigm instances involving both. Stoppard-*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a good example of a metatheatrical tragicomedy: the main characters are forced to act comically and engage in philosophic questions and provocations, but with death looming over their heads like the sword of Damascus. Stoppard is indeed a stylistic virtuoso whose Shakespearean plotlines are interwoven with absurdist motifs to create a tragicomic effect of verbal play concealing ontological dread. Abbotson (2010) and Perlette (1985) are among the critics who have examined how the moral accountability of the characters, as undertaken by Stoppard in his play, is in effect reinvented through an aesthetic form of theatrical intimacy that disenfranchises the characters in question. The Pillowman by McDonagh does not function as hard as that of the dark comedy: grotesque narration, overt violence, authorial figures who appear morally ambiguities instead of ethical ones. The narrative and the violence of the real, get mixed up with story telling in the play in question and, therefore, the inquiries therapy, are these tales causative, resultant in action or expressed in perfectly idle anticipations of their audience, and are storytellers morally responsible when their prose inspires atrocities in the actions of their readers? The gratification of transgression and the duties that suit aesthetic to which audiences are already accustomed are pushed by McDonagh willing to enact controversial entertainment and get a laugh.

Reception, Censorship and Cultural Variation

Both genres have gained and have often centered on controversies, usually involving censorship issues and various cultural's reactions to taboo content. Tragicomedy's opposition to tidy moral closure has on occasion garnered the ire of early modern critics seeking sharper boundaries between the genres; likewise, dark comedy has often met with public outcry where the satirical subject matter of the genre seems to rendered comedy from suffering. Reception studies show that cultural norms in the local context--in the form of religious sensibilities, wartime experience, and climates within institutions--determine whether tragicomic and darkly comic texts are received as morally instructive works or offensive provocations. Contemporary theater festivals and publishing houses continue to tinker with the marketplace for works to test audiences threshold for violent or transgressive humor.

Conclusion

Tragicomedy and dark comedy together register a long-standing human preoccupation: how to represent suffering without succumbing to nihilism, and how to extract meaning from the grotesque without committing moral indifference. Historically, tragicomedy evolved from Renaissance attempts to reconcile the elevated emotions of tragedy with the restorative possibilities of comedy; dark comedy grew from satirical, grotesque, and absurdist traditions that deliberately exploit taboo for critical effect. Their pioneers—from Guarini and Fletcher to Beckett, Swift, and Kafka, and into contemporary writers like Stoppard and McDonagh—each contribute to a spectrum of tonal practices that still challenge audiences and readers. The two genres' theoretical overlap—especially in modern drama—makes them indispensable for studies that seek to understand how literature mediates ethical complexity, aesthetic pleasure, and social critique. As Stoppard (1967) poignantly stages in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, "Life is a gamble, at terrible odds—if it was a bet you wouldn't take it" (p. 39), capturing the essence of both genres.

Art Against Death: Philosophical

Reflections in McDonagh's and Stoppard's Theatre

Children are often soothed to sleep with lullabies or fairy tales that promise a reward at the end, teaching them to discern good from evil. Many of these tales, such as *The Children's and Household Tales*, have endured and shaped people's understanding during their youth. Over generations, these stories have been retold to the point where fiction slowly dissolves into reality. However, as individuals mature and develop critical thinking, they realize that "not all fallen heroes wear capes". This realization can sometimes come too late to be purposeful. Therefore, it is crucial to assess the credibility of such preconceptions and accept the fine line separating tragicomedy and dark comedy. To illustrate this idea, the second part of this research paper particularly examines the impressions left by McDonagh's *The Pillowman* and Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, both of which offer significant qualities for this study, with a special emphasis on the themes of death, art, reality, and fiction.

Themes in Dark Comedy And Tragicomedy

The simple thrust to lump the two genres into one discussion might sound

intellectually incompetent to the ordinary viewer. And, as far as the vocal environment of drama or film is concerned, such aesthetic interference is seldom possible. Further reflection however, can show that there exists one point of intellectual departure: the same purpose, which is to question the paradoxes inherent in human life. Dark comedy makes use of the incongruity of the grotesque or the forbidden or the frankly tragic in creating the humor, thus forcing the audience to laugh, at the same time as accepting unpalatable truths. The laughter that emerges is not a defensive reaction to suffering but a coping mechanism of dealing with realities that are in other ways unassimilable. Compare tragicomedy, where moments of despair are being measured against rare moments of hope, whereas the seriousness of the subject matter is being seasoned with a touch of light-handedness to remind the reader/spectator of the unwillingness of emotions to be chartered into already established categories. By skillfully holding the contraries in tension, both genres call upon us to reconsider the highly contested binary of God and the Devil, good and evil, life and death, to finally mirror the ambivalent, highly complexly woven status of their species, that is, human beings.

The Concept of Death

Art is frequently created during times of overwhelming pain. The human mind is drawn to inexplicable, somber subjects that transcend rationality. Artists contemplate the mysteries connecting life and death. The understanding of death's proximity to life provides a foundation for endless discussion inseparable from human existence. This is one of the existential questions that will persist as long as life exists. While religion can offer refuge and faith provides answers, achieving such refuge requires extensive spiritual investigation, as faith is not established overnight but built upon doubt.

Death in art is depicted through various forms and allegories, often shown with skulls and decaying creatures, reflecting the horrific yet fascinating process of human decomposition. This reflects diverse cultures and endless perceptions of death as an inevitable end. Kiran (2017), in a study of death in Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* and McDonagh's *The Pillowman*, states, "Death like Art is a mode to control life, to shape the destiny. Art has the power to recreate and reshape life by highlighting its selected shades and by controlling the plot of the story" (p. 104). The power of art is evident not only in expressive paintings but also in the revival of fundamental aspects of existence through written

words. Sometimes, death serves as a poignant reminder of life's precious moments, whether they are short or long-lasting. Conversely, this perspective can also cast doubt on the worthiness of life, knowing it will eventually end.

In *The Pillowman*, McDonagh explores the "magical effects of dark comedy". Art is presented as a refuge from various forms of torture. This theme is concretized through Michal's character, representing the consequences of physical torture. The protagonist, Katurian, illustrates the impact of abuse and how traumatizing realities can intensely develop a child's imagination. Such injuries become deeply ingrained in a child's personality and are only buried with them. Despite the tragic and dark nature, the uniqueness of the play lies in the comedy used to convey this darkness, reminding people that unhappiness can be sarcastically funny. Like life itself, people often find themselves laughing at trivial, unexpected moments amidst tragedies. These grotesquely described moments ultimately define a person's life and contribute to the plot's construction. At one point, Katurian starkly tells his brother, "The only thing you have to do in this life is die," encapsulating the fatalistic humor at the core of McDonagh's dark comedy (McDonagh, 2003, Act I).

Similarly, in Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, as indicated by the title, there is a unique evocation of the theme of death. Death can be considered the play's central plot. It is a problematic enigma that is both tempting and impossible to solve, an unfinished puzzle that accompanies people during their time on earth. The period between birth and death forms the foundation of the human condition, with death being the only apparent fact of existence. This philosophical quest enhances the tragicomedy of Stoppard's work. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern embark on a metaphysical journey toward death, constantly discussing the confusion of life and death. Draudt (1981) explains, "In Stoppard's 'comedy', just as in Shakespeare's tragedy, death is the central problem, appearing in almost every conversation until its final physical impact is felt with the disappearance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern" (p. 348). This theme has consistently found its way into various art forms. While dwelling on such mystic reflections may not be healthy, this is best portrayed by the characters' passivity and easygoing attitude toward their circumstances. If the audience can embrace this tragicomedy positively, it is through reversing the idea that life is long and that forever is infinite. "Forever is an overstatement of what life truly is; life was never supposed to be that

long but it still can be enjoyed thoroughly". Spinoza clarified, "A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is not a meditation upon death and life". Death is the only unalterable truth, which can only be exaggerated. Human beings should train their souls to meditate on life as it is happening, and appreciate the privilege of living and breathing. For instance, the character Guildenstern muses that death is merely "the absence of presence," reducing it to a void stripped of all meaning (Stoppard, 1967, Act II).

Reality and Fantasy

As a tragicomedy, Stoppard's play highlights the depiction of reality through fantasy. The stage itself provides the first hint of this, as everything about theatre is unreal, except for the themes treated artistically. Abbotson (1998) notes, "Though the blurring of fiction and reality was an issue in the play, it is only one of a number of issues Stoppard explores in that text" (p. 183). Focusing on a single issue would neglect other themes. In *The Pillowman*, Katurian's story about the pillowman eventually becomes real, with him murdering his brother Michal. This demonstrates the power of words and how writers can become what they write and believe, approximating the relationship between reality and fantasy. A recurring example is the endless coin tosses that land on heads, defying probability and underscoring the sense of cosmic absurdity (Stoppard, 1967, Act I).

These points lead to the theme of certainty and uncertainty, particularly in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, as evoked by Perlette (1985) : "This certainty of uncertainty certainly carries over to Stoppard's creatures. Throughout the play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are haunted by a nagging uncertainty that is pervasive and characteristic, and which takes many localized forms (from the inexplicable run of heads to the confusion of their identities to the mysteries of Hamlet). But this uncertainty centers ultimately on what Rosencrantz refers to as his "intuition of mortality" (p. 669). Sometimes, making a choice triggers fear that only manifests under the pressure of the unknown, as people fear consequences more than the decision itself. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were so torn between the absurdity of death and life that they could not confront what was before them and take control of their destinies. The "intuition of mortality" makes death a focal point, depriving life of its precious essence.

From a different perspective, *The Pillowman* emphasizes the frightening

danger of fairy tales through the supernatural. Infusing life into a false belief, into something that will never materialize, compels both children and adults to place their faith in the extraordinary. Michal, through reading his brother's fairy tales, had his criminality awakened; the stories influenced him, and his horrific childhood memories intertwined with his brother's twisted stories, ironically leading him to murder children with the intention of saving them. This remains a controversial subject, as some claim fairy tales aid the imaginative skills of those who already possess them. For those lacking such skills, this interaction with fiction can have a significant impact on their lives, as they rely more on what they are told and cling to what aligns with their expectations. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether right and wrong are always black and white. Considering a person's experiences and lessons learned, there would be no room for judgment; there is only gray in all matters. However, murder is certainly unjustifiable; it is against the laws of nature and cannot be justified. Ferguson states, "Martin McDonagh's work also suggests that even when a Pillowman kills for a noble reason, violence begets violence. The eponymous Pillowman in McDonagh's play, despite being the hero in the story Katurian tells his brother, is a significant revision of the strong and powerful hero of many children's stories – his job is to gently assist children in committing suicide". McDonagh illustrates this when Michal recalls stories so vividly that he enacts their violence, revealing how fantasy can seep dangerously into lived reality (McDonagh, 2003, Act II).

In fairy tales, killing the villain, who represents evil, is seen as a heroic deed, signifying the end of all evil. This differs from real life, where all people are composed of both good and evil, and it is an individual's responsibility to forge a steady personality. Conversely, murder revives evil within the murderer. The pillowman considered himself a hero for helping children preserve their innocence and a hopeful view of life. However, one cannot predict how people will react to the same occurrences, making it unfair to kill them with the intention of saving them.

The honest conversations between Katurian and Michal reveal the nuances of culpability and responsibility. Katurian, as a literary figure, recognizes the power of his words and their impact on others, including his brother, even if he does not openly admit it. Words are a powerful force, capable of both mending and injuring; they can be constructive or deconstructive. Carroll

explains, "Through the exchanges between Michal and Katurian, McDonagh raises the question of the causal efficacy of literature, along with the related issue of authorial culpability. If, like Katurian, one writes works of grisly violence, does one share in the responsibility for that violence, if only indirectly? Katurian argues that he is not responsible for the interpretations that readers make of his work, especially readers of limited intelligence, like Michal. Ultimately, Katurian's actions and confessions proved he accepted his responsibility and fulfilled the demands of justice. His realization of the damage his words caused led him to justice. While killing his brother seems irrational and dark, his intentions stemmed from his culpability.

The Importance of Art and Meditation

Unlike the soul, art is immortal and timeless. Katurian's final wish to preserve his literary achievements emphasizes the priceless value of human creativity, underscoring that art is unstoppable. Butler suggests that this conclusion might lead some to view the play as a celebration of art's undying spirit, presuming Katurian is portrayed as a martyr for his art and that the art is worth the sacrifice. His remarks demonstrate the intelligibility of art, considering McDonagh's play as a network of interpretations of the twists within the performed story and the story beyond the performance. One important intellectual question it raises is the human values it promotes. Both plays highlight the long-standing meditation on the cultural and existential significance of creative power and value. Stoppard's *Player* insists, 'There's a design at work in all art,' highlighting the deliberate shaping of experience through storytelling (Stoppard, 1967, Act III).

In a feeling of freedom and absoluteness, nearly everything happens involuntarily. Painstakingly dwelling on the shortness of life and constantly praying for a long life, distracts individuals from living fully and hinders their development of a sense of morality. Therefore, the awakening of profound moralistic creativity requires limiting meditation on death. Art is as important as meditation; meditation is the theoretical inclusion of the creative and imaginative, which together have the power to alter humanity's self-understanding.

The Interplay of Agency and Absurdity

The characters in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *The Pillowman* grapple with a lack of agency in worlds ruled by unpredictable logic and

existential dread. Stoppard's protagonists are continually bewildered by the events unfolding around them, echoing the existential crisis central to absurdist theatre. This lack of control mirrors the postmodern condition where traditional narratives collapse and leave individuals questioning the meaning of life and death. According to Esslin (1961), "Theatre of the Absurd strives to express the sense of the senselessness of the human condition" (p. 98). McDonagh's Katurian similarly exists in a narrative where fate, trauma, and authority shape his life more than his own choices. These characters, placed in grotesquely stylized circumstances, compel the audience to reflect on human vulnerability within systems of power and irrationality.

Narrative Structure and Meta-Theatricality

Both plays function as self-aware narratives that interrogate their own form. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is particularly rich in meta-theatrical devices, as it continuously references its Shakespearean source while undermining dramatic conventions. This layering of fiction over fiction draws attention to the artificiality of theatre and narrative. Abbotson (1998) observes that Stoppard's work "deconstructs dramatic illusion and compels spectators to re-examine theatrical norms" (p. 204). Similarly, McDonagh's play employs storytelling within storytelling, especially through Katurian's tales, to question the boundaries between fiction and reality. These recursive structures mirror the thematic content of uncertainty and disorientation, emphasizing how stories shape—and sometimes distort—our understanding of reality.

Trauma, Memory and Storytelling

A critical intersection in *The Pillowman* is the relationship between trauma and storytelling. The protagonist's imaginative prowess is born from deeply scarring experiences, highlighting how creativity can be both a coping mechanism and a reflection of pain. Katurian's stories serve as a means to process, reshape, or even escape from trauma, mirroring broader psychological models. As Caruth (1996) suggests, trauma "is not experienced as a mere repression or defense, but as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment" (p. 11). Katurian's stories do not merely reflect violence—they are recursive echoes of his own abuse, offering insight into how narrative attempts to make sense of what remains senseless.

Ethical Implications of Representation

The body of work by McDonagh proposes a series of ethical questions, which are still relevant to the current cultural discussion: to what extent does an artist become responsible to the outcome of his or her imaginative efforts? This dilemma of the playwright, Katurian, who wonders whether, as an author, he is directly responsible, with his own words creating a situation with its attendant consequences, is a replica of the very subjects of concern that fill the newspapers and magazines, that is, the scope of freedom of the press, censorship and so on. In Carroll's reading, "the ethical dimension of McDonagh's work resides in its confrontation with the implications of literary influence" (Carroll, 2011, p. 170). McDonagh has appropriately defied the sense of moral certainty that narrative discourse has usually claimed by combining unthreatening fairy-tale elements with an unnervingly violent language. Stoppard, in his turn, answers rather the same moralist questions by seemingly passive obedience of his characters who leave the events to develop without any proper opposition, and, therefore, raises the questions of complicity and moral inactivity.

Conclusion

The analytical descriptions of *The Pillowman* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* reveal their confusing nature, arising from the complexities of comedy, whether tragic or dark. This disquisition also explored the double-faced nature of fairy tales. Overall, the study was based on the absurd nature of death, art, and life. The provocation of death through its artistic articulation is best achieved through art, but meditation on life is a more urgent subject compared to death, considering that life is too short to mourn its end while it is still happening. Art serves as a beautiful refuge from mystery but also its main source. The ultimate aim is to learn as much as possible, as the fear of death and its certainty will not prevent it.

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Extended Abstract

This extended abstract provides a comprehensive overview of the research paper titled "Between Laughter and Lament: Exploring Death, Art and Fantasy in Tragicomedy and Dark Comedy." It delves into the theoretical framework, methodology, key findings, and concluding discussion of the study, which examines the complex interplay of fantasy and reality within the genres of tragicomedy and dark comedy.

Purpose

The primary aim of this study is to examine the complex intersection of fantasy and reality within two dramatic genres often regarded as opposites yet deeply connected: tragicomedy and dark comedy. By analyzing Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the research highlights how both playwrights, despite their differing styles, employ humor, despair, and fantasy to question existential dilemmas. The study emphasizes themes of death, art, imagination, and moral responsibility, ultimately arguing that art serves not only as a means of processing trauma but also as a medium for transforming suffering into meaningful reflection.

Method

This research adopts a comparative literary and philosophical analysis. Close textual readings of the two plays are combined with critical perspectives

from scholars such as Susan C. W. Abbotson, Noël Carroll, and Martin Esslin. Furthermore, philosophical frameworks—particularly Baruch Spinoza’s notion of meditating on life rather than death—are used to contextualize the characters’ existential anxieties. The study employs qualitative interpretation to analyze how genre conventions, narrative structures, and meta-theatrical devices blur the boundaries between fiction and reality. McDonagh’s use of nested storytelling and Stoppard’s meta-theatrical strategies are examined to demonstrate how theatrical form becomes central to the plays’ philosophical meaning.

Findings

The analysis yields several key findings. First, both tragicomedy and dark comedy rely on paradox: they use humor not to diminish suffering but to process otherwise unbearable truths. Laughter, in these contexts, becomes a coping mechanism rather than a rejection of pain. Second, both plays dramatize the dangerous permeability of fantasy and reality. In *The Pillowman*, Katurian’s stories directly influence his brother Michal’s violent actions, showing how narrative can blur into lived experience. In Stoppard’s play, the endless coin tosses and the protagonists’ predetermined deaths reveal the absurd instability of a world governed by chance and inevitability. Third, death is not only a recurring theme but the central existential problem driving both narratives. Characters’ passive attitudes toward their fate emphasize the futility of meditating exclusively on death. Finally, art is portrayed as double-edged: it offers solace and meaning but also raises ethical dilemmas about the responsibility of the artist for the consequences of their creations.

Discussion

The findings suggest that tragicomedy and dark comedy destabilize traditional moral categories by presenting ambiguous situations where good and evil, life and death, agency and passivity intersect. In McDonagh’s play, the act of storytelling emerges as both liberating and destructive, complicating notions of artistic responsibility. In Stoppard’s work, the protagonists’ inability to escape predetermined fate reflects the absurdist crisis of modern existence. Together, the plays illustrate how narratives are not merely reflections of life but forces that actively shape human perception and behavior. Moreover, the study argues that the grotesque humor found in both genres encourages audiences to confront rather than evade existential anxieties.

Conclusion

This research concludes that tragicomedy and dark comedy function as mirrors of the human condition, reflecting its contradictions and complexities. While death dominates both narratives, the ultimate lesson is the necessity of shifting perspective: wisdom lies not in obsessing over mortality but in meditating on the fleeting yet profound essence of life. Art plays a crucial role in this process by transforming suffering into creative expression and inviting reflection on human fragility. Thus, both McDonagh and Stoppard demonstrate that laughter, even when born out of pain, serves as a deeply moral gesture, enabling audiences to embrace life's paradoxes with greater clarity and resilience.

Genişletilmiş özet

Bu genişletilmiş özet, "Gülme ve Ağıt Arasında: Trajikomedi ve Kara Mizahta Ölüm, Sanat ve Fanteziyi Keşfetmek" başlıklı araştırma makalesine kapsamlı bir genel bakış sunmaktadır. Trajikomedi ve kara mizah türleri içinde fantezi ve gerçeğin karmaşık etkileşimini inceleyen çalışmanın teorik çerçevesini, metodolojisini, temel bulgularını ve sonuç tartışmasını ele almaktadır.

Amaç

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, genellikle karşıt olarak görülen ancak aslında derin bağlara sahip olan iki dramatik türde—trajikomedî ve kara mizah—fantezi ile gerçeklik arasındaki karmaşık kesişimi incelemektir. Martin McDonagh'ın *The Pillowman* ve Tom Stoppard'ın *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* adlı eserleri üzerinden yapılan analiz, her iki yazarın da farklı üsluplarına rağmen mizahı, umutsuzluğu ve hayal gücünü kullanarak varoluşsal ikilemleri nasıl tartıştığını ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, ölüm, sanat, hayal gücü ve etik sorumluluk temalarını vurgulamakta; sanatın yalnızca travmayı işleme aracı değil, aynı zamanda acıyı anlamlı bir tefekküre dönüştüren güçlü bir mecra olduğunu savunmaktadır.

Yöntem

Araştırmada karşılaştırmalı edebî ve felsefî analiz yöntemi benimsenmiştir. İki oyunun yakın okuması, Susan C. W. Abbotson, Noël Carroll ve Martin Esslin gibi eleştirmenlerin görüşleriyle desteklenmiştir. Ayrıca, Baruch Spinoza'nın "ölüm üzerine değil, yaşam üzerine düşünmek" anlayışı gibi felsefî çerçeveler, karakterlerin varoluşsal kaygılarını anlamlandırmak için

kullanılmıştır. Çalışma, nitel ve yorumsal bir yaklaşım benimseyerek, türün konvansiyonlarının, anlatı yapılarının ve meta-tiyatral stratejilerin kurgu ile gerçeklik arasındaki sınırları nasıl bulanıklaştırdığını tartışmaktadır. McDonagh'ın iç içe geçmiş hikâye anlatımı ile Stoppard'ın meta-tiyatro teknikleri, oyunların felsefi anlamlarını öne çıkaran yapısal unsurlar olarak değerlendirilmiştir.

Bulgular

Analiz birkaç önemli bulguya ulaşmıştır. İlk olarak, hem trajikomedî hem de kara mizah, acıyı küçümsemek için değil, katlanılamaz gerçekleri işleyebilmek için mizaha başvurmaktadır. Bu bağlamda kahkaha, bir reddediş değil, başa çıkma mekanizmasıdır. İkinci olarak, her iki oyunda da fantezi ile gerçeklik arasındaki geçirgen sınırlar tehlikeli sonuçlar doğurmaktadır. *The Pillowman*'da Katurian'ın öyküleri, kardeşi Michal'ın şiddet eylemlerini doğrudan etkilemiş, kurmacanın yaşamı nasıl şekillendirebileceğini göstermiştir. Stoppard'ın oyununda ise sürekli yazı-tura atışlarının imkânsız tekrarı ve karakterlerin önceden belirlenmiş ölümeleri, kaotik ve absürt bir dünyanın göstergesidir. Üçüncü olarak, ölüm yalnızca tekrar eden bir tema değil, her iki oyunun da temel varoluşsal sorunudur. Karakterlerin pasifliği ve ölüme saplantılı bakışları, bu takıntının verimsizliğini ortaya koymaktadır. Son olarak, sanat hem bir teselli kaynağı hem de etik sorumluluk doğuran bir güçtür; sanatçının yarattıkları üzerindeki etkisi ciddi ahlaki sorular doğurmaktadır.

Tartışma

Bulgular, trajikomedî ve kara mizahın geleneksel ahlaki kategorileri istikrarsızlaştırdığını ve iyi-kötü, yaşam-ölüm, irade-pasiflik gibi zıtlıkları iç içe sunduğunu göstermektedir. McDonagh'ın oyununda hikâye anlatımı, özgürleştirici olduğu kadar yıkıcı bir unsur olarak da öne çıkmakta ve sanatsal sorumluluk kavramını karmaşıklştırmaktadır. Stoppard'ın eserinde ise kahramanların önceden belirlenmiş yazgıdan kaçamaması, modern varoluşun absürd krizini yansıtmaktadır. Her iki eser de anlatıların yalnızca yaşamı yansıtmadığını, aynı zamanda insan algısını ve davranışlarını aktif biçimde şekillendirdiğini göstermektedir. Dahası, grotesk mizahın seyirciyi varoluşsal kaygılarla yüzleşmeye davet ettiği savunulmaktadır.

Sonuç

Araştırma, trajikomedî ve kara mizahın insanlık durumunun aynası işlevi gördüğünü, onun çelişkilerini ve karmaşıklıklarını yansıttığını ortaya koymaktadır. Her ne kadar her iki oyunda ölüm merkezi bir rol oynasa da, asıl

ders bakış açısını değiştirmekte yatmaktadır: Bilgelik, ölüme saplanmak yerine yaşamın kısa ama derin özünü fark etmekte bulunur. Sanat bu süreçte kritik bir rol oynar; acıyı yaratıcı ifadeye dönüştürür ve insan kırılğanlığı üzerine derin bir tefekkür sunar. Böylece hem McDonagh hem de Stoppard, acıdan doğan kahkahanın aslında ahlaki bir işlev taşıdığını ve seyirciyi hayatın paradokslarını daha bilinçli bir şekilde kucaklamaya yönlendirdiğini göstermektedir.

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