

Death and destiny in rosencrantz and guildenstern are dead

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Death Clock

Given the title of Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* the reader will know that the principal characters are destined to die; it's just a matter of time as to when the two will meet their inevitable end. There is no chance of the two changing their fate. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern show little to no interest in the circumstances they are put into and move from scene to scene without much choice nor question into their literal roles in Stoppard's play. Their passive approach to their lives reflects the difficulty in making decisions in a complex world. Unfortunately, their decisions in continuing onward and solely relying on spoken and written words concerning their circumstances seal their fate. In the end, Guildenstern ponders over a moment where the two of them could have chosen not to continue with their mission. His doing this is an attempt to change his predetermined fate. Meanwhile, Rosencrantz accepts it. The result would be him exerting some control during his final moments by no longer questioning death given how he has thought more to reflect upon concept of death.

Throughout the play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discuss their individual views of death; an "eternity" of "silence and some second-hand clothes", "destiny", or the "absence" of thought and memory (Stoppard 72, 97, 123). As a rationalist, Guildenstern aims to analyze his life, a life he can't remember all too well and lived passively in drifting from one occurrence to another. Guildenstern wants to desperately understand their situation, and tries to reason his way through incidents troubling him. Guildenstern's

beliefs of rational explanations for their predicaments lead him to frustration when the subject of death and dying come into play.

Being confronted with his morality only makes Guildenstern attempt to further disassociate himself with something everyone is subject to. The irony is Guildenstern thinking nothing of dying—simply shrugging it off—until he's confronted with his own fate. He knows that his death is, in his own words, “failing to reappear, that's all.” His desire to not be killed causes him to reflect and wonder if there was a moment in the play where he could have made a different choice—saying no, turning away, or knowing what he was sent to do before accepting the task—or if he had done something wrong in the past to deserve to die. His realization that he and Rosencrantz are about to die without him having understood anything leads Guildenstern to attack the Player in a fit of fury and hopelessness. (Stoppard 84, 125).

Guildenstern's logical and methodical approach toward morality differs significantly with Rosencrantz's ideals.

Rosencrantz is pragmatic and seeks simple, efficient solutions to problems rather than philosophical explanations of them—a trait leading Guildenstern to assume his friend is complacent and unwilling or unable to think deeply. Out the two, Rosencrantz is the most open about talking about death. Rather than viewing death as an absolute fact, he views it as more of a universal experience. He states how it's “silly” to fear morality considering how in death, one doesn't “truly know” if they're asleep in a coffin or dead, but when you're dead, it's “the end” for the person in question (Stoppard 70, 71). Though Rosencrantz's views about dying come across as simplistic, it's

these beliefs that cause him to accept his morality and be at ease when he and Guildenstern are put to death.

Like his friend, he went about life one day to the next without memory and relying on the word of others to know what he and his friends were sent for and what will become of them. Saddened with having no recent memories and no longer having a carefree and artless façade masking a deep dread about his fate, he is the one who welcomes death. According to Rosencrantz, he is “relieved” and “tired” of being confused by the happenings around him and his friend’s reactions to not solving their situation (Stoppard 125). On the surface, Rosencrantz may not be philosophical like Guildenstern, but he is nevertheless capable of perceptive and complex thought.

Stoppard’s play might ultimately suggest that the blatant role of chance in our lives, coupled with the difficulty of discerning true intentions and desires of other people, leads to virtually paralyzing confusion. Although the experience of trying to piece together instances in life, which could have changed for the better, may be amusing when it happens to others, in the end it is one of the most dreadful aspects of existence. Not having control in life is a scary thing. Events either happen as a result of destiny or luck of the draw. Continuing a path merely for the reason of it being laid out for you exposes the lack of control one would have; what happens next is chance and there is no going back from it. You could leave out of free will, but whatever occurrence happens next is out of your control. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s choice in not questioning their roles in life leads them to death. Stoppard reveals the danger of their passiveness by giving the two

the chance to make a very meaningful choice, but it doesn't cause them to escape their fixed fate.