



"HAMLET" AND "ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD" - A TEXTUAL STUDY

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Tom Stoppard's "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" and William Shakespeare's "Hamlet" are complimentary tragedies. Turning around utterly disparate backgrounds, customs, and cultures, they each address comparable topics, ideas, and concerns. Tom Stoppard composed and staged many draughts, and earlier versions of the play eventually became Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead. Both texts disclose the environment in which they have been generated, and each piece tests the audience's patience against the other. Readers of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" delight in Shakespeare's "Hamlet," demonstrating the environment in which Stoppard wrote his play. William Shakespeare's Hamlet, which was first published in 1601, is a combination of assumptions and changes taken straight from the ancient Greek tragedies. Stoppard wrote the play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, from which sections of "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*" by Shakespeare are borrowed. In this study, the plays "Hamlet" and "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" are compared. The paper also discusses the connections between the two plays and lists each piece's standards, along with observations and thoughts.

1.2 Background

"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" emphasizes these two characters' plight despite their minor roles in Shakespeare's Hamlet. They portray two courtiers at Elsinore who, unable to flee the situation, become entangled and eventually pass away without discovering the cause of their death in both plays. As the two companions are known informally in Stoppard's play, Ros and Guil are depicted in the play questioning the course of events as it brings the audience behind the scenes of Hamlet. Ros & Guil's version of the Hamlet plot is the only subject on which the entire work is focused (Mancewicz, 2022). They question their purpose in life when Claudius summons them to court. The audience of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" enjoys Shakespeare's "Hamlet," demonstrating the environment in which Stoppard wrote his play. Shakespeare's play Hamlet, which was first published in 1601, synthesizes speculations and adaptations taken directly from ancient Greek tragedies. Stoppard wrote "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead", from which Shakespeare's Hamlet appropriates some of its plot points. Because Shakespeare is primarily focused on the Hamlet topic, Stoppard is forced to address the themes of death, meaning in life, the order in society, and honesty simultaneously as Shakespeare does. But the approaches the two authors take to these issues are utterly unlike.

1.3 Research Rationale

Readers of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" delight in Shakespeare's "Hamlet," demonstrating the environment in which Stoppard wrote his play. William Shakespeare's Hamlet, first published in 1601, combines assumptions and changes taken straight from ancient Greek tragedies. Stoppard wrote the play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, from which sections of *"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead"* by Shakespeare are borrowed. The endings of the characters in "Hamlet" and the play's title both notify the audience immediately of this. However, neither Rosencrantz nor Guildenstern themselves is aware of this outcome. Most of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" concepts and themes are communicated through words (Dunlap *et al.*, 2021). The title pair gives very little in the way of action. Most of their time is spent deciphering the mysterious significance of what is happening on stage around them. Like many other elements of this play, the language and imagery raise many questions without providing any answers.

1.4 Aim and Objectives

This study aimed to compare and contrast Tom Stoppard's "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" with William Shakespeare's "Hamlet." The research's objective is to combine all the facts and data gleaned from secondary data sources to produce a thorough comparative essay or study. The study's second goal is to accurately pinpoint the two authors' most important works and contrast them in terms of their literary contributions, unique reading preferences, and specific genres that they fall under. A brief synopsis of each of their works will also be included, emphasizing the best-known.

The objectives of this investigation are as follows:

- To discover more about William Shakespeare's literary brilliance and writing style in his finest works
- To understand more about Tom Stoppard's writings and literary style.
- To compare the two authors' respective literary works for similarities or differences, evaluate each writer's unique writing style, and fill the knowledge gap regarding this specific subject matter.
- To draw attention to the importance of William Shakespeare's Hamlet and Tom Stoppard's "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" from the perspective of literature.
- To produce a unique and outstanding comparison study in the field of literature; to assess the extent of their contributions to world literature.
- These are the study's aims and objectives, which will help people comprehend its significance and approach.

1.6 Research Significance

The primary significance of this study is the establishment of the comparative connotation between the original masterpiece Hamlet by William Shakespeare and Tom Stoppard's "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*" which will help the audience understand the different viewpoints of considering the main characters in the storyline and correlating between the two literary works. The endings of the characters in "Hamlet" and the play's name both alert the audience to this immediately. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern themselves are unaware of this outcome, nevertheless. Most of the ideas and topics of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" are expressed verbally. Minimal action is presented in the title pair. They spend most of their time trying to understand the enigmatic meaning of the events happening around them on stage (Patchkoria, 2020.). Like many other aspects of this drama, the vocabulary and images pose numerous questions without conclusive answers.

1.7 Research Structure

The following research will be structured to establish a comparative parameter among the two masterpieces of literature, "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*" by Tom Stoppard and the timeless excellence of drama "Hamlet" by William Shakespeare. The literature analysis will be done based on understanding the point of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern being dead and how it is relevant to the literary piece by Tom Stoppard. This will be further followed by discussing the main summary of each of the literature pieces and establishing how Tom Stoppard's "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*" relate to Shakespeare's "*Hamlet*". The discussion will also emphasize the significance of the two characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and the irony of the mention of the two characters in both the drama by two different authors, entailing completely different perspectives and angles of storytelling. The symbolic importance and the central theme of the two characters and the storyline of the two literary works will also be highlighted and discussed further in the study to establish the comparative line of distinction of each and how each literary pieces complement the other.

1.8 Summary

The irony of "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*" is that the protagonists are the ones who directly participate in Hamlet's murder through a letter that they discover from Claudius, in which he asks the King of England to execute Hamlet after he arrives. This incident is included in Stoppard's play even though "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern" are oblivious to Hamlet's plans. Even though Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the main characters the reader is expected to identify with, are uninformed of some of those aspects, there is a tragic scenario and a fight. This is so that the reader of Stoppard's play would understand both Hamlet's reasons for trying the play and the negative effects of its efficacy (Shamina *et al.*, 2019). Even though "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's" failure to take any initiative for themselves would ultimately result in their deaths, the play demonstrates that this is a foolish and dangerous attitude. Guildenstern concludes that boarding the boat was a mistake after realizing that abandoning their freedom meant losing all control over their lives. There are many different ways to define the relationship between Hamlet and "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*", as well as the two texts separately using the word "transformation." It can be utilized as a scenario involving "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern", in which transformation is especially examined to attempt to impose order on a discourse that otherwise risks being as disordered as the Ghost of Hamlet.



Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

With their insignificant roles in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*" concentrates on the predicament of these two characters. In both plays, they play two courtiers at Elsinore who, unable to escape the situation, become entangled in it and ultimately die without ever learning the reason why. In Stoppard's play, which takes the audience behind the scenes of *Hamlet*, Ros and Guil—as the two friends refer to one another informally—are shown questioning the course of events. The entire work focuses solely on Ros & Guil's interpretation of the *Hamlet* plot. When Claudius orders them to court, they start to wonder what the point of their existence is. Shakespeare's "*Hamlet*" is indulged in by the readers of "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*," which illustrates the context in which Stoppard produced his drama. Written in 1601, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a composite of suppositions and adaptations lifted directly from classical Greek tragedies. Shakespeare's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, which Stoppard created, merely borrows parts of its storyline. Stoppard addresses the themes of death, meaning in life, the order in community, and honesty at the same period that Shakespeare does so because he is mainly restricted to the *Hamlet* theme. However, the two authors take entirely different perspectives on these themes. Philosophical and metaphysical concerns are addressed in "*Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern Are Dead*," but they are too complicated to explore and resolve in a single play adequately. Instead, if any conclusions can be drawn, Stoppard urges the audience to think about the concepts presented and draw their conclusions. The performance serves as a mirror for the audience, reflecting the uncertainty and lack of control in their own lives.

2.2 What is the point of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern being dead?

It is challenging to examine "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead". It has a great deal of complexity and raises many complex problems, yet it never offers conclusive solutions. But one of Tom Stoppard's greatest achievements in writing the play can be credited to this. To not devalue the experience, *Stoppard does not seem to want to offer any conclusive answers to the issues he raises*. In "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*," philosophical and metaphysical issues are addressed, but they are far too complex to properly explore and resolve in a single play (Fleming, 2021). Instead, Stoppard challenges the audience to reflect on the ideas put forward and come to their conclusions, assuming that any conclusions can be formed at all. A mirror is held up to the audience in the performance, reflecting the ambiguity and lack of control in their lives.

"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern" are headed for an unavoidable demise from the very opening of the play (Hegel, 2020). The fates of the characters in "*Hamlet*" and the play's name inform the audience of this immediately. However, this fate is unknown to Rosencrantz as well as Guildenstern themselves. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern toss coins at the start of the play* (Wilson). It is shortly discovered that every coin has just been pulling up heads and has been doing so consistently. *Stoppard establishes this fact at the play's outset*,

showing that this reality defies conventional wisdom (Rogobete, 2020). The standard implementation of logic and probabilities usually imply that it is either unattainable or at least exceedingly improbable for something like a series of flipped coins to rest upon heads eighty-five repetitions; however, the actual scenario here does not match any expected outcomes.

"*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*" later play a game of questions as they attempt to figure out why they are where they are and what is happening after *Claudius* and *Gertrude* ask them to spend some time with Hamlet and "*glean what afflicts him*".

The tragedians give Rosencrantz and Guildenstern a play in the second act that, unbeknownst to them, tells the story of Hamlet and foretells their demise. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cannot comprehend the play's meaning and what it means for them, even though the two actors representing them are dressed precisely like them.

In some sense, each of these occurrences demonstrates the irrationality of life or its impending demise. Despite Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's actions or inactivity, things keep happening to them throughout the play (Mancewicz, 2022). They can never articulate the meaning of any particular incident or reach any understanding, but in the end, it doesn't matter.

To convey its concepts and themes, "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*" mostly uses language. In terms of action, the title pair offers very little. They spend most of their time analyzing the enigmatic significance of the happenings around them on stage. Similar to many other aspects of this play, *the language and visuals provoke several queries without offering any solutions.*

2.3 How do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead relate to Hamlet?

The word "transformation" can be used in various ways to describe the relationship between Hamlet and "*Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern is Dead*", as well as the two texts individually.

It can be used as a scene involving "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*", where the topic of transformation is explored explicitly as a starting point and as a means of attempting to impose some order on a conversation that otherwise risks being as disorderly as the *Ghost of Hamlet* itself. When calling on his two friends to help him and his step-son, Hamlet, Claudius describes his step-son and nephew as follows:

*"Something have you heard
Of Hamlet's transformation — so call it
Sith nor the exterior nor the inward man
She resembles that it was"*

Hamlet is not what he was, either in terms of appearance or essence, is Claudius's argument in this instance. Given that Hamlet previously advised Horatio not to reveal him if "*he will think to meet/To put an antic disposition on,*" the audience is aware of a little discrepancy. According to Claudius, the ability to recognize similarities and differences between occurrences is what allows for transformation.

"usurp'st this time of night

Together with that fair and warlike form

In which the majesty of buried Denmark

Did sometimes march."

Here, political change and a decline in society's morals are closely related to the bodily alteration of the state's supreme leader. In *Hamlet*, **there are two highly significant ways in which the king's image is altered**. Two things happen: **first**, the murdered man now occupies the throne, challenging one of history's most profound transformations: from life to death.

To better understand the differences between "*Hamlet*" and its most well-known offshoot "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*", can be compared to the two plays. This is because it can be seen as one of their most notable differences.

Hamlet wrestles with whether action is preferable to inaction, as alluded to in the speech "*To be, or not to be*." The terrifying thought that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern may not be able to take any further action beyond what has already been decided for them is what Rosencrantz and Guildenstern find most horrifying.

Whereas *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*'s experience is characterized by ontological doubt, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's ordeal is characterized by moral uncertainty (should they act?). The forces driving change, however, are relevant to both situations.

In a universe damaged by human responses to fortune's inconsistencies and worldly inconsistencies, "*Horatio*" serves as a paradigm of consistency for *Hamlet*. It is the lack of a different form of constancy, the regularity of change, that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* regret. Few individuals could approach the play, also known as *Hamlet*, for the first time without understanding its tragic aspect because of its long history and cultural significance over the globe. On the other hand, the title of R & G indicates its humorous position and the opening scene, which employs repetition to establish its anarchic hold, both of which signify the film's eccentricity in making minor individuals into stars and margins into centres.

2.4 What do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern symbolize?

The Coins

The world's randomness and the play's examination of opposing forces are symbolized by the coins that "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern" toss at the play's opening. The consistent pattern of heads-up landings on all the coins contradicts the notion that the laws of probability are valid and the universe is rationally consistent. The coins instead imply that chance and the happening of improbable events govern the planet. The manner in which "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*" find themselves involved in a series of unlikely circumstances that, at least from their perspective, happen entirely at random and make no sense at all serves to further the argument made by the coins.

In "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*", *randomness and determinism are combined to imply that chance appears to be predetermined*. In the same way that they are powerless to prevent the coin from landing

face up, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* believe they oppose the determinist force of chance. The coins also represent the play's examination of conflicting forces. Coins are two-sided, as the audience is informed when one lands tails up, despite the fact that the coins appear one-sided because they land heads up so frequently. This duality reflects the play's various sets of opposites, from the conflict between *Rosencrantz's pragmatic optimism and Guildenstern's philosophical pessimism to the duality of language, which can be a source of both amusing humour and painful irony.*

The Boat

Act III almost entirely takes place aboard a boat travelling to England, and *Stoppard uses the boat to represent the sensation of living in a universe outside human control.* First impressions of being on the boat are overwhelmingly good for "*Guildenstern*", who remarks that it is enjoyable to relinquish control and let life carry one along. "*Guildenstern*," thinks that accepting the unpredictability of life is liberating because it removes the need to question whether or not one is making the proper choices and instead allows one to unwind and observe what happens. Although "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*"'s inability to take any initiative for themselves would ultimately lead to their deaths, the play shows that this is a foolish and hazardous attitude. Knowing that giving up their independence meant losing all control over their life, *Guildenstern* concludes that going on the boat was a mistake. Giving in simply to the world's chaos and thinking that giving in brings freedom are damaging actions. These actions make humans appear helpless, helpless men on a boat they cannot control.

2.5 What is ironic about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?

The irony of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" is that the primary protagonists are the ones who directly deal with Hamlet's execution through a letter from Claudius that they discover, in which he asks the King of England to kill Hamlet after his arrival.

Guildenstern starts to assess the situation after making this discovery and concludes that they cannot do anything to prevent death from occurring sooner or later. Ironically, Hamlet alters the letter to state that they will now die; this is where the plot lines converge, as destiny strikes all regardless of all denials of fate.

This incident is preserved in *Stoppard's* play, although "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*" are unaware of *Hamlet's* intentions. As Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the central characters from whom the reader is meant to empathize, are unaware of that information, there is tragedy and conflict because the reader of *Stoppard's play is predicted to be knowledgeable of Hamlet's motivations for attempting the play completed but also the unfavourable result of its efficiency.* As Rosencrantz and Guildenstern see the performance of "*The Murder of Gonzago*", the disparities between the viewpoints of the characters and the audience are highlighted.

Many foreshadowing elements are present throughout the play, such as the frequent mentions of death hinting at "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern"'s ultimate demise. Shakespeare's "*Hamlet*" is referenced throughout the play to help the audience predict what will happen next in the plot. Since it gives the audience a hint as to the play's final result, *the title "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" compels them to recognize*

foreshadowing when it would otherwise not. It may seem strange or even paradoxical that the play would use foreshadowing, given that foreshadowing is a technique of putting an order on the reality being depicted, given that the play portrays the universe as an entirely random and ludicrous play.

However, "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*" in the play lack this information and, therefore, cannot see anything other than randomness in the world. *Guildenstern's* downcast response to the *Tragedians' appearance in Act I* underscores this idea. He claims that although he was prepared for a sign or omen, the hideous *Tragedians* altogether made fun of the concept of an omen. "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*" view the *Tragedians' presence as nothing more than an annoyance, and a shamefully shameless one*, while the audience might take it as a sign of what is to come at Elsinore.

2.6 What are the significant themes in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*?

Isolation

"*Ros*" and "*Guil*", the play's major characters, frequently experience emotions of loneliness when they are left alone with "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*". The only characters on screen throughout the story's starting and ending episodes are "*Ros*" and "*Guil*". It's unclear whether these two's isolation level or another way through is to blame for such protracted inactivity and apathy. But it does seem as though "*Ros*" and "*Guil*" are marked from the very beginning of the play, as if they are advancing toward their deaths, merely going through the play's actions.

Manipulation

In "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*", people utilize one another quite a deal, and the fact that the main characters, "*Ros and Guil*", never seem to be in control of their circumstances may be attributable to their naive inability to know how to do so. In many ways, manipulation is like directing a play in that it involves having the power to influence how things turn out. *To influence the audience's thoughts and feelings, a play is investigated as a form of audience manipulation.*

Fear

A few of the main protagonists, *Guil*, are scared when a series of coin flips, as in the introduction of "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*", all result in heads. Following forward, he attempts to illustrate how and why the probabilities laws may appear to be interrupted and that, at this level concludes that "*The scientific approach to the examination of phenomena is a defence against the pure emotion of fear.*" *Guil* refers to our dread of the uncertain (such as death).

Foolishness and Folly

In many ways, the titular characters' deaths result from their actions in "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead". They are sometimes willfully mistreated yet are often easily tricked. Not to add, "*Ros and Guil*" waste a significant amount of their time playing games and teasing each other, mispronouncing each other's

names, and mistaking one another for another. They are a source of humour partly because of their folly, but it also seems like a natural way to pass the time when there isn't much to do.

Passivity

"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" puts "Ros and Guil" in the middle of the action, although they are by no means the one who initiates it. How they are just left to wait around until someone else crosses the stage or instructs them to do something is particularly evident in Act II. Guil appears to disagree with the Player, another major character, who feels that they should act more quickly and stop spending so much time thinking about things. Guil is more concerned with the freedom to act than with taking action. *But ultimately, the fact that "Ros" and "Guil" betray "Hamlet" renders their inaction ethically meaningful; their inaction may influence their destiny.*

3.0 Summarisation

When a succession of coin flips, like at the beginning of *"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead,"* all result in heads, one of the main characters, Guil, becomes alarmed. He then makes an effort to explain how and why the laws of probability can appear to be broken. At this point, he concludes that "The scientific approach to the examination of occurrences is a defence against the pure feeling of terror." Guil talks about the fear of the unknown (such as death) (Megna, 2019). Guil is more interested in having the option to act than really doing something. However, in the end, the fact that "Ros" and "Guil" betray "Hamlet" makes their inaction ethically significant; their inaction may likely have an impact on their fate. Although they are by no means the ones who start the drama, "Ros and Guil" are placed in the middle of it in " Act II is a perfect example of how they are merely allowed to wait around until some *"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead"*. One else crosses the stage or tells them what to do. The Player, a significant figure, feels that they should move faster and quit taking their time to ponder things, but Guil seems to disagree.

The paradox of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" is that the main characters are the individuals who directly engage with Hamlet's assassination through a letter from Claudius that they find, in which he requests that the King of England kill Hamlet after he arrives. Even though "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern" are unaware of Hamlet's intentions, this incident is kept in Stoppard's play. There is a tragic situation and conflict even though Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the main characters the reader is supposed to empathize with, are unaware of some of those details. This is because the reader of Stoppard's play is expected to be aware of Hamlet's motivations for actually trying the play and the unfavourable outcome of its effectiveness. After discovering this revelation, Guildenstern continues to evaluate the issue and concludes that there is nothing they can do to stop death from happening sooner or later. Contrarily, Hamlet changes the letter to say that they will now perish; this is the point at which the story threads converge because fate strikes everyone regardless of their denials of luck. In "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead," the main character's demise is primarily the product of their deeds. Despite frequently being readily duped, they are occasionally intentionally abused (Kang,

2020). Not to mention that "Ros and Guil" spend a lot of time joking around, mispronouncing each other's names, and confusing one for one another. Due in part to their foolishness, they are amusing, but it also appears to be a reasonable way to spend time when there is not much to do.

3.1 Conclusion

In "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead," the main characters' deaths are mostly the product of their deeds. Despite frequently being readily duped, they are occasionally intentionally abused. Not to mention that "Ros and Guil" spend a lot of time joking around, mispronouncing each other's names, and confusing one another. Due in part to their foolishness, they are amusing, but it also seems like a natural way to spend time when there isn't much to do. The relationship between the natural world and the theatre is heavily emphasized throughout the play. In the sequences from "*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*" that were chosen, Hamlet, the main character of Shakespeare's play, merely plays a minor part without slipping out of character like Ros & Guil do. He stops short of entering the new text. In his chats and monologues, he serves as a shallow character who initiates the action and is a component of the reality that Ros and Guil are trying to make sense of. He also alludes to the thematic connections between the two plays. Shakespeare's and Stoppard's plays both come to a violent conclusion, with many court members dying at each other's hands. Only Horatio and Fortinbras, who naturally arrives to conquer the kingdom, live to tell the tale. Everything in Hamlet also seems to have been for nothing, and Stoppard's excellent comedy masterfully focuses on this reality about the essence of Shakespeare's tragedy.

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