

Response to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*
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Throughout the absurdity of Tom Stoppard's 1967 *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* two ideas recur: the inevitability of the protagonists' fate and the consequent futility of their existence.

The first point is perhaps best emphasized by the play's title, which, in giving away the ending, causes the audience not to wonder how the characters will end up but merely how the action will arrive at the specified ending. The audience thus shares the attitude that Ros and Guil convey of merely waiting for things to happen. Guil states this sentiment explicitly: "There's a logic at work—it's all done for you, don't worry. Enjoy it. Relax. To be taken in hand and led, like being a child again [...]" (40). For them, life is like a script that they merely have to follow, without improvisation or independent thought.

Probably because of this realization, the protagonists accomplish little more than futile persiflage. Though they may attempt to reach a goal—such as accounting for the improbable run of heads or discerning what afflicts Hamlet—they never really succeed, and their discussion merely dissolves into useless absurdity. This idea is illustrated in one exchange between Ros and Guil:

GUIL. Words, words. They're all we have to go on.

ROS. Shouldn't we be doing something—constructive?

GUIL. What did you have in mind? ... A short, blunt human pyramid ...? (41)

When Ros attempts to point out the uselessness of verbal banter, Guil simply responds with more of it.

These two characteristics—fatalism and futility—do not apply to humanity as a whole. Fate does not exist in the real world (and even if it does to the extent that materialistic determinism is accurate, it is impossible for anyone to know it). As a result, real individuals are not constrained by a predetermined future and can take actions to change its actual course. Certainly, if people choose to believe that they have a particular destiny and are helpless to change it, their existence may resemble that of Ros and Guil. Others may adopt the play's attitude of futility as a means of escaping responsibility. But humanity does not have to trap itself in such a mentality, for—unlike Ros and Guil—real people can choose how they live their own lives.