

Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead By Tom Stoppard

Posted on October 30, 2018

The play, 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead' by Tom Stoppard is a spin-off of the most famous and arguably the greatest piece of English literature, 'Hamlet' by Shakespeare. But the play by Tom Stoppard was quite different from Hamlet, as the play by Shakespeare was a tragedy with very few comic scenes and moments, whereas the play Tom Stoppard wrote was mostly comical and funny, and some parts of it were serious and heart-rending.

The reader has a hard time reading and understanding the tone and theme of the play. The play deals with the existential crisis of the two men and their confusion because of their inability to comprehend this unfathomable universe. The confusion and difficulty start when one of the two characters starts to flip the coin, and every time he flips it, it is always his head. One hundred times he flipped, 100 times it his head. There are many different scenarios where it is hard to discern what exactly the writer wants to convey, for instance, the verbal tennis game played by the two characters. The game was that both of them were to ask questions from each other, but the catch was that whoever answered lost the game. The play completely deviated from the expectations of the reader because the reader, from the first few scenes, thought it would be going to like a play similar to 'Hamlet,' but not only was it on the contrary, but the theme and tone of the play were completely different. The whole play was to resolve the identity crisis and the purpose of one's life in this vast universe.

Many readers have regarded Tom Stoppard's play as the perfect example of the 'Theatre of the Absurd', mainly because the themes of the Theatre of the Absurd and Tom Stoppard's play were similar. For example, the theatre of the absurd mostly deals with existentialism and identity crisis. The play and the theatre of the absurd both involve an inability to communicate with people or the incapability of making profound statements and sticking to clichés. The fundamental features of the theatre of the Absurd are to strive for the truth, people's futile effort to control their lives, resort to small talks, the impending demolition of the world, and incongruity (van Waarden).

Both plays have a common theme, which is death. In Hamlet, both main characters in Tom Stoppard's play die, and Tom exaggerates the theme and concept of death in his play because the audience knew that the characters would eventually die, and they also know the way they would die. There is a quotation from Hamlet, "To die, to sleep. No more; and by a sleep to say we end" (Sugg). Shakespeare wrote these lines to elucidate his audience about what the concept of death is like. What is it like to face death or to die? Or is it possible that we can survive and escape death, or is it that we will escape after death? Shakespeare says in Hamlet that quite possible, it might be the case that death is similar to be asleep. He says, through these lines, that it will be more relaxing than experiencing the drudgery of a job or encountering tribulations in every corner of the world. It will be

easier to face death and go through that process than to get up every morning and face the hardships of life. Shakespeare is trying to find an answer to whether or not there is any escape after death. Escape from the sufferings, trials, and tribulations of life. In the very next lines of this quotation, he writes that we are all moving towards impending destruction. There is little chance of us surviving.

Tom Stoppard, in his play, focuses on the theme of death. One of his quotations is, "Whatever became of the moment when one first knew about death?" (Pfaff) Tom Stoppard, through his characters, says that death is something people are aware of, but they tend to forget it, or they like to live in a delusional state. He explains, through the example of the coin scene, that the world will always win. The absurdity of the coin always falling to give heads is not absurdity but the confirmation that death will eventually win. There is no escaping from death. Through one of his characters, Tom describes that there is no real difference between a real death and a fake one. The moment a child is born, he or she knows nothing about the world, but they already know that death exists and it will succumb to every single soul on this earth. As the man grows up, he seems to forget about death, but the concept of death and mortality is always lingering and looming at the back of his mind.

Works Cited

Pfaff, Agnes. A Structural Clash of Perspectives. Irreconcilable Contradictions in Tom Stoppard's Drama "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead." 2016.

Sugg, Richard. Shakespeare's Anatomies of Death. Oxford University Press, 2016.

van Waarden, Betto. Theatre of the Absurd. 2014.