**Reading Extract**

Read the passage below in detail. If you print it out, make sure you gloss over the text to add details related to characterization, plot, setting, theme and importance devices such as symbolist, simile, metaphors, etc.

If you choose to do this online, use the “Ctrl + Alt + M” command prompt on the keyboard to add your comments.

If you have any questions, feel free to ask me or e-mail me at mr.heidarbozorg@gmail.com

**Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead By Tom Stoppard**

ROS stands for Rosencrantz

GUIL stands for Guildenstern

**Act Two.**

HAMLET, ROS and GUIL talking, the continuation of the previous scene.

Their conversation, on the move, is indecipherable at first. The first

illegible line is HAMLET's, coming at the end of a short speech ? see

Shakespeare Act II, scene ii.

HAMLET: S'blood, there is something in this more than natural, if

philosophy could take it out.

(A flourish from the TRAGEDIANS' band.)

GUIL: There are the players.

HAMLET: Gentlemen, you are welcome in Elsinore. Your hands, come then.

(He takes their hands.) The appurtenance of welcome is fashion and ceremony.

Let me comply with you in this garb, lest my extent to the players (which I

tell you must show fairly outwards) should more appear like entertainment

than yours. You are welcome. (About to leave.) But my uncle-father and

aunt-mother are deceived.

GUIL: In what, my dear lord?

HAMLET: I am but mad north north-west; when the wind is southerly I

know a hawk from a handsaw.

(POLUNIUS enters, as GUIL turns away.)

POLONIUS: Well be you gentlemen.

HAMLET (to ROS): Mark you, Guildenstern (uncertainly to GUIL) and you

too; at each ear a hearer. That great baby you see there is not yet out of

swaddling clouts... (He takes ROS upstage with him, talking together.)

POLONIUS: My Lord! I have news to tell you.

HAMLET (releasing ROS and mimicking): My lord, I have news to tell

you... When Rocius was an actor in Rome...

(ROS comes down to re-join GUIL.)

POLONIUS (as he follows HAMLET out): The actors are come hither my

lord.

HAMLET: Buzz, buzz.

(Exeunt HAMLET and POLONIUS.)

(ROS and GUIL ponder. Each reluctant to speak first.)

GUIL: Hm?

ROS: Yes?

GUIL: What?

ROS: I thought you...

GUIL: No.

ROS: Ah.

(Pause.)

GUIL: I think we can say we made some headway.

ROS: You think so?

GUIL: I think we can say that.

ROS: I think we can say he made us look ridiculous.

GUIL: We played it close to the chest of course.

ROS (derisively): "Question and answer. Old ways are the best ways"! He

was scoring off us all down the line.

GUIL: He caught us on the wrong foot once or twice, perhaps, but I

thought we gained some ground.

ROS (simply): He murdered us.

GUIL: He might have had the edge.

ROS (roused): Twenty-seven - three, and you think he might have had the

edge?! He murdered us.

GUIL: What about our evasions?

ROS: Oh, our evasions were lovely. "Were you sent for?" he says. "My

lord, we were sent for..." I didn't where to put myself.

GUIL: He had six rhetoricals -

ROS: It was question and answer, all right. Twenty-seven questions he

got out in ten minutes, and answered three. I was waiting for you to delve.

"When is he going to start delving?" I asked myself.

GUIL: - And two repetitions.

ROS: Hardly a leading question between us.

GUIL: We got his symptoms, didn't we?

ROS: Half of what he said meant something else, and the other half

didn't mean anything at all.

GUIL: Thwarted ambition - a sense of grievance, that's my diagnosis.

ROS: Six rhetorical and two repetitions, leaving nineteen of which we

answered fifteen. And what did we get in return? He's depressed!...

Denmark's a prison and he'd rather live in a nutshell; some shadow-play

about the nature of ambition, which never got down to cases, and finally one

direct question which might have led somewhere, and led in fact to his

illuminating claim to tell a hawk from a handsaw.

(Pause.)

GUIL: When the wind is southerly.

ROS: And when the weather is clear.

GUIL: And when it isn't he can't.

ROS: He's at the mercy of the elements. (Licks his finger and holds it

up - facing audience.) Is that southerly?

(They stare at the audience.)

GUIL: It doesn't look southerly. What made you think so?

ROS: I didn't say I think so. It could be northerly for all I know.

GUIL: I wouldn't have thought so.

ROS: Well, if you're going to be dogmatic.

GUIL: Wait a minute - we came from roughly south according to a rough

map.

ROS: I see. Well, which way did we come in? (GUIL looks around

vaguely.) Roughly.

GUIL (clears his throat): In the morning the sun would be easterly. I

think we can assume that.

ROS: That it's morning?

GUIL: If it is, and the sun is over there (his right as he faces the

audience) for instance, that (front) would be northerly. On the other hand,

if it's not morning and the sun is over there (his left)... that... (lamely)

would still be northerly. (Picking up.) To put it another way, if we came

from down there (front) and it is morning, the sun would be up there (his

left), and if it is actually over there (his right) and it's still morning,

we must have come from up there (behind him), and if that is southerly (his

left) and the sun is really over there (front), then it's afternoon.

However, if none of these is the case -

ROS: Why don't you go and have a look?

GUIL: Pragmatism?! - is that all you have to offer? You seem to have no

conception of where we stand! You won't find the answer written down for you

in the bowl of a compass - I can tell you that. (Pause.) Besides, you can

never tell this far north - it's probably dark out there.

ROS: I merely suggest that the position of the sun, if it is out, would

give you a rough idea of the time; alternatively, the clock, if it is going,

would give you a rough idea of the position of the sun. I forget which

you're trying to establish.

GUIL: I'm trying to establish the direction of the wind.

ROS: There isn't any wind. Draught, yes.

GUIL: In that case, the origin. Trace it to the source and it might

give us a rough idea of the way we came in - which might give us a rough

idea of south, for further reference.

ROS: It's coming up through the floor. (He studies the floor.) That

can't be south, can it?

GUIL: That's not direction. Lick your toe and wave it around a bit.

(ROS considers the distance to his foot.)

ROS: No, I think you'd have to lick it for me.

(Pause.)

GUIL: I'm prepared to let the whole matter drop.

ROS: Or I could lick yours, of course.

GUIL: No thank you.

ROS: I'll even wave it around for you.

GUIL (down ROS's throat): What in God's name is the matter with you?

ROS: Just being friendly.

GUIL (retiring): Somebody might come in. It's what we're counting on,

after all. Ultimately.

(Good pause.)

ROS: Perhaps they've all trampled each other to death in the rush. Give

them a shout. Something provocative. Intrigue them.

GUIL: Wheels have been set in motion, and they have their own pace, to

which we are... condemned. Each move is dictated by the previous one - that

is the meaning of order. If we start being arbitrary it'll just be a

shambles: at least, let us hope so. Because if we happened, just happened to

discover, or even suspect, that our spontaneity was part of their order,

we'd know that we were lost. (He sits.) A Chinaman of the T'ang Dynasty -

and, by which definition, a philosopher - dreamed he was a butterfly, and

from that moment he was never quite sure that he was not a butterfly

dreaming it was a Chinese philosopher. Envy him, in his two-fold security.

(A good pause. ROS leaps up and bellows at the audience.)

ROS: Fire!

(GUIL jumps up.)

GUIL: Where?

ROS: It's all right - I'm demonstrating the misuse of free speech. To

prove that it exists. (He regards the audience, that is the direction, with

contempt - and other directions, then front again.) Not a move. They should

burn to death in their shoes.

(ROS takes out one of his coins. Spins it. Catches it. Looks at it.

Replaces it.)

GUIL: What was it?

ROS: What?

GUIL: Heads or tails?

ROS: Oh. I didn't look.

GUIL: Yes you did.

ROS: Oh, did I? (He takes a coin, studies it.) Quite right - it rings a

bell.

GUIL: What's the last thing you remember?

ROS: I don't wish to be reminded of it.

GUIL: We cross our bridges when we come to them and burn them behind

us, with nothing to show our progress except a memory of the smell of smoke,

and a presumption that once our eyes watered.

(ROS approaches him brightly, holding a coin between finger and thumb.

He covers it with the other hand, draws his fist apart and holds them for

GUIL. GUIL considers them. Indicates the left hand, ROS opens it to show it

empty.)

ROS: No.

(Repeat process. GUIL indicates left hand again. ROS shows it empty.)

Double bluff!

(Repeat process - GUIL taps one hand, then the other hand, quickly. ROS

inadvertently shows that both are empty. ROS laughs as GUIL turns upstage.

ROS stops laughing, looks around his left, pats his clothes, puzzled.)

(POLONIUS breaks that up by entering upstage followed by the TRAGEDIANS

and HAMLET.)

POLONIUS (entering): Come, sirs.

HAMLET: Follow him, friends. We'll hear a play tomorrow.

(Aside to the PLAYER, who is the last of the TRAGEDIANS.)

Dost thou hear me, old friend? Can you play "The Murder of Gonzago"?

PLAYER: Ay, my lord.

HAMLET: We'll ha't tomorrow night. You could for a need study a speech

of some dozen or sixteen lines which I would set down and insert in't, could

you not?

PLAYER: Ay, my lord.

HAMLET: Very well. Follow that lord, and look you mock him not.

(The PLAYER crossing downstage, notes ROS and GUIL. Stops. HAMLET

crossing downstage addresses them without a pause.)

HAMLET: My good friends, I'll leave you till tonight. You are welcome

to Elsinore.

ROS: Good, my lord.

(HAMLET goes.)

GUIL: So you've caught up.

PLAYER (coldly): Not yet, sir.

GUIL: Now mind your tongue, or we'll have it out and throw the rest of

you away, like a nightingale at a Roman feast.

PLAYER: Took the very words out of my mouth.

GUIL: You'd be lost for words.

ROS: You'd be tongue-tied.

GUIL: Like a mute in a monologue.

ROS: Like a nightingale at a Roman feast.

GUIL: Your diction will go to pieces.

ROS: Your lines will be cut.

GUIL: To dumbshows.

ROS: And dramatic pauses.

GUIL: You'll never find your tongue.

ROS: Lick your lips.

GUIL: Taste your tears.

ROS: Your breakfast.

GUIL: You won't know the difference.

ROS: There won't be any.

GUIL: We'll take the very words out of your mouth.

ROS: So you've caught up.

GUIL: So you've caught up.

PLAYER (tops): Not yet! (Bitterly.) You left us.

GUIL: Ah! I'd forgotten - you performed a dramatic spectacle by the

wayside - a thing much thought of in the New Testament. How did yours

compare as an impromptu?

PLAYER: Badly - neither witnessed nor reported.

GUIL: Yes, I'm sorry we had to miss it. I hope you didn't leave

anything out - I'd be furious to think I didn't miss all of it.

**Key Questions**

**Once you are done with the reading, answer the questions below. Make sure each answer is in paragraph format and that you use specific examples to support each response.**

1. Explain both protagonists (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern). What characteristics do they share? How are they different from one another?
2. A play uses purely dialogue and action prompts to progress the plot forward. Is this better than a novel? Why or why not?
3. Explain the quote in detail: “We cross our bridges as we come to them and burn them behind us, with nothing to show for our progress except a memory of the smell of smoke, and the presumption that once our eyes watered.” What ‘bridge’ have you burnt down in the past?
4. Research the background of the novel and the author. Explain how the biography of the author and the era it was written, may have influenced different aspects.
5. Make a couple intertextual connections between the text and either another book (passage), scene from a TV show or movie, or from your personal life / news.