**Hamlet: Characterisation**

**Rosencrantz and Guildenstern**

These two servants of Claudius have no interest or significance as personalities: in their case, role predominates completely over character.

It is impossible to distinguish between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They operate as a pair, each reinforcing the efforts of the other.

Their main function in the play is to act as loyal and willing servants of the king; in fulfilling this function they illustrate the corrupting influence of Claudius on those associated with them.

They will do most unpleasant things to show their loyalty. They cannot, for instance, find the first task he gives them very congenial.

He asks them to use their friendship for Hamlet as a cloak fro probing his secrets and revealing these to Claudius.

Their performance in the role of concerned friends is not sufficiently skilled to deceive Hamlet, who causes them considerable embarrassment by exposing their pretence “there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties have not craft enough the colour.”

After this, they cannot expect to enjoy Hamlet’s trust or his respect. He treats them as he treats Polonius, with contemptuous indifference, ridicule and sarcasm, giving dusty answers to their questions, misleading tem whenever he can, and pretending to misunderstand what they are saying.

Much of Hamlet’s evident dislike for his former schoolfellows, whom he comes to distrust as he would “adders fanged”, springs from their association with the cause of Claudius. To his mind, such an association must inevitably contaminate.

Their deaths are the result of too great a subservience to Claudius, too great a willingness to take risks on his behalf, as Hamlet explains to Horatio after he has sent them to their deaths in England: “Why man, did they make love to their employment.” (5:2, 57)

Hamlet is telling oration tat what has happened to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is what always happens to fools who willingly permit themselves to be caught up in affairs too great for their capacities to cope with.

There is nothing in the text to suggest that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern knew that the commissions they were carrying to England contained instructions for Hamlet’s death, although Hamlet may have assumed that they did.

It appears that their willingness to be the king’s dedicated agents, to do the worst Claudius asks of them, is a sufficient crime in Hamlet’s eyes to warrant their deaths.