Every Exit Is An Entrance Somewhere Else

Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*
Introduction to 
Rosencrantz and 
Guildenstern Are Dead

- Written by Tom Stoppard
- Made into a film in 1990

Nature of play
- What happens offstage in *Hamlet* happens onstage in *Rosguil*, and (with several exceptions) vice versa
Within *Hamlet*

Jonathan Hyde as Rosencrantz and Geoffrey Bateman as Guildenstern in the BBC’s 1980 Version of *Hamlet*

Within *Rosguil*

John Stride as Ros and Edward Petherbridge as Guil in the 1967 National Theatre Production of *Rosguil*
Key Concepts Within Rosguil

- Passivity
  - Ros and Guil simply do not act

- Metatheatre
  - Play draws attention to its status as a play
  - Emphasizes artificiality of theatre
Occur when action from *Hamlet* intrudes into *Rosguil*

Foremost examples within *Rosguil* itself of play’s inherent metatheatricality and Ros and Guil’s inherent passivity

Iain Glen as Hamlet in the 1990 film version of *Rosguil*
Ros and Guil have frozen… A flourish—enter Claudius and Gertrude, attended.

Claudius: Welcome, dear Rosencrantz… (he raises a hand at Guil while Ros bows…) and Guildenstern…
Moreover that we did much long to see you, The need we have to use you did provoke
Our hasty sending… Something have you heard
Of Hamlet’s transformation, so call it, Sith nor th’ exterior nor the interior man Resembles that it was.
Ros: Both your majesties
    Might, by the sovereign power you have of us,
    Put your dread pleasures more into command
    Than to entreaty.
Guil: But we both obey,
    And here give up ourselves in the full bent,
    To lay our service freely at your feet,
    To be commanded.
Claudius: Thanks, Rosencrantz (turning to Ros who is caught unprepared while Guil bows) and gentle Guildenstern…
Gertrude (correcting): Thanks Guildenstern (turning to Ros…) and gentle Rosencrantz…Exeunt—leaving Ros and Guil.
Invasions As A Whole

- Crystallize central concepts within the play
- Passivity
  - Ros and Guil do not move while invaders are onstage
- Metatheatricality
  - Makes an exceptionally metatheatrical concept more metatheatrical
Conclusion

- Ros and Guil spend the play acting as little as possible
  - Leads to their demise
- Inaction is preordained
  - Play calling attention to its status as a play reminds the audience the action is scripted
- Metatheatre adds an additional level to passivity
  - Even Ros and Guil’s inaction is essentially inactive
Selected Bibliography


