

Two women in Elizabethan-style clothing are standing against a bright yellow background. They are wearing red nooses around their necks, which are suspended by red ropes from above. The woman on the left is wearing a striped vest over a white shirt and dark trousers, and she has a surprised expression. The woman on the right is wearing a quilted vest over a striped shirt and checkered trousers, and she has a neutral expression.

# **ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD**

**BY TOM STOPPARD**

**DIRECTED BY GLYNIS LEYSHON**

**A SHAKESPEARE COMPANY AND HIT & MYTH PRODUCTION**



**EDUCATOR RESOURCES**



**RBC  
Emerging Artists  
Project**





# **Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead**

by Tom Stoppard

Directed by Glynis Leyshon

## **A SHAKESPEARE COMPANY AND HIT & MYTH PRODUCTION**

**STUDENT MATINEE Thursday Oct 11<sup>th</sup> | Wednesday Oct 17<sup>th</sup> 11:30 am**

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## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AT ALBERTA THEATRE PROJECTS



### YOUth Belong at ATP!

Our Youth Engagement programs aim to deepen the theatre experience for young audiences and emerging artists through our plays, varied practical learning opportunities, and professional mentorship. These programs foster community, engage the inquisitive mind, and bring young audiences and artists together in an exchange around our work.

### FREE PROGRAMS

Our free programs bring the excitement of live theatre, professional artists and the youth of Calgary together. These programs are stand-alone but can also be paired together with our Student Matinees to provide a totally immersive experience in live theatre.

**The following Youth Engagement Programs are provided by Alberta Theatre Projects FREE of charge to youth, students, emerging artists, youth groups, educational institutes and organizations.**

#### Conversations with Artists

Capture your students' imaginations through an in-classroom conversation with an ATP Season Artist about the artistry and skills that go into making live theatre.\*

*\*Visits are based on the availability of artists involved in our productions and are subject to change due to illness or show requirements.*

[Conversations with Artists – Request Form](#)

#### Backstage Tours

Discover backstage secrets with an educational and interactive, behind-the-scenes tour of the Martha Cohen Theatre. Learn how math, science, language, technology and art are brought together to create new works of theatre in our scenic carpentry shop, costume shop, fly gallery, lighting grid and on stage.\*Tours are open to all ages and abilities.

[ATP Backstage Tour Request Form Fillable](#)

**For More Information about all of our Youth Engagement Programs Contact:**

**TALORE PETERSON** [TPETETRSON@ATPLIVE.COM](mailto:TPETETRSON@ATPLIVE.COM)

, Artistic Associate Community & Youth Engagement

[ATPLIVE.COM](http://ATPLIVE.COM)



**Alberta Theatre Projects Presents:**  
***Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead***  
by Tom Stoppard  
**A Shakespeare Company and Hit & Myth Production**

**CREATIVE TEAM**

**Director-** Glynis Leyshon

**Set Designer-** Scott Reid

**Lighting Designer-** David Fraser

**Costume Designer-** Hanne Loosen

**Sound Designer-** Allison Lynch

**Voice & Text Coach-** Jane MacFarlane

**Fight Director-** Haysam Kadri

**Stage Manager-** Ailsa Birnie

**Assistant Stage-** Manager Ian Lane

**CAST**

***Guildenstern-*** Myla Southward

***Rosencrantz-*** Julie Orton

***Polonius/Ensemble-*** Mark Bellamy

***Player/Ensemble-*** Christopher Hunt

***Tragedian/Ensemble-*** Daniel Fong

***Gertrude/Ensemble-*** Natascha Girgis

***Horation/Ensemble-*** Braden Griffiths

***Claudius/Ensemble-*** Robert Klein

***Ophelia/Ensemble-*** Natasha Strickey

***Hamlet/Ensemble-*** Tenaj Williams



## A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Glynis Leyshon

**“We do on stage the things that are supposed to happen off. Which is a kind of integrity, if you look on every exit being an entrance somewhere else.”**

- Tom Stoppard

When it premiered at the Edinburgh Festival in 1966, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* electrified audiences with its daring blend of broad physical comedy, Shakespearean wordplay and poignant Existential angst. The young Tom Stoppard was immediately hailed as a theatrical sensation and his “R&G” has become one of the true classics of 20th century literature.

The boldly non-naturalistic structure of the play obviously owes much to the traditions of European Existential drama, most notably that of Samuel Beckett. But clearly Stoppard was not simply writing a pale imitation of Existential theatre. Rather, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* stands alone as a brilliant exploration of existence viewed through, and from, the prism of theatrical reality.

Two minor characters in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* are given centre stage by Stoppard. But it is a deeply confusing place to be as they have no memory of an existence beyond that of receiving a Royal Summons that morning to appear at the Danish court. In very different, and often astonishing ways, each character valiantly strives to bring some sort of meaning and purpose to their existence.

As the play unfolds, we come to realize that Stoppard is masterfully juggling three colliding realities – the isolated and directionless world of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; the court of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and perhaps most extraordinarily of all – the world of a travelling group of “tragedians” led by the enigmatic Player who freely acknowledge that they are not people, but rather actors!

With wit and a genuine love of theatre (and all things theatrical) Stoppard’s play engages us with both manic wit and a rigorous intellectual thirst for meaning.

The Shakespeare Company has brought this classic to Calgary audiences with an important twist. In this production, these iconic but traditionally male roles are being played by women: two of Calgary’s finest actors, Myla Southward and Julie Orton. And this new element has already enriched the rehearsal process and inspired a deeper exploration of an already complex text.

Our entire ensemble has delighted in entering into Stoppard’s masterful evocation of all things “theatre.”

And so now – friends all – we invite you to be, as Stoppard himself so wisely points out – the one indispensable element to any theatrical performance – the audience!

Enjoy!

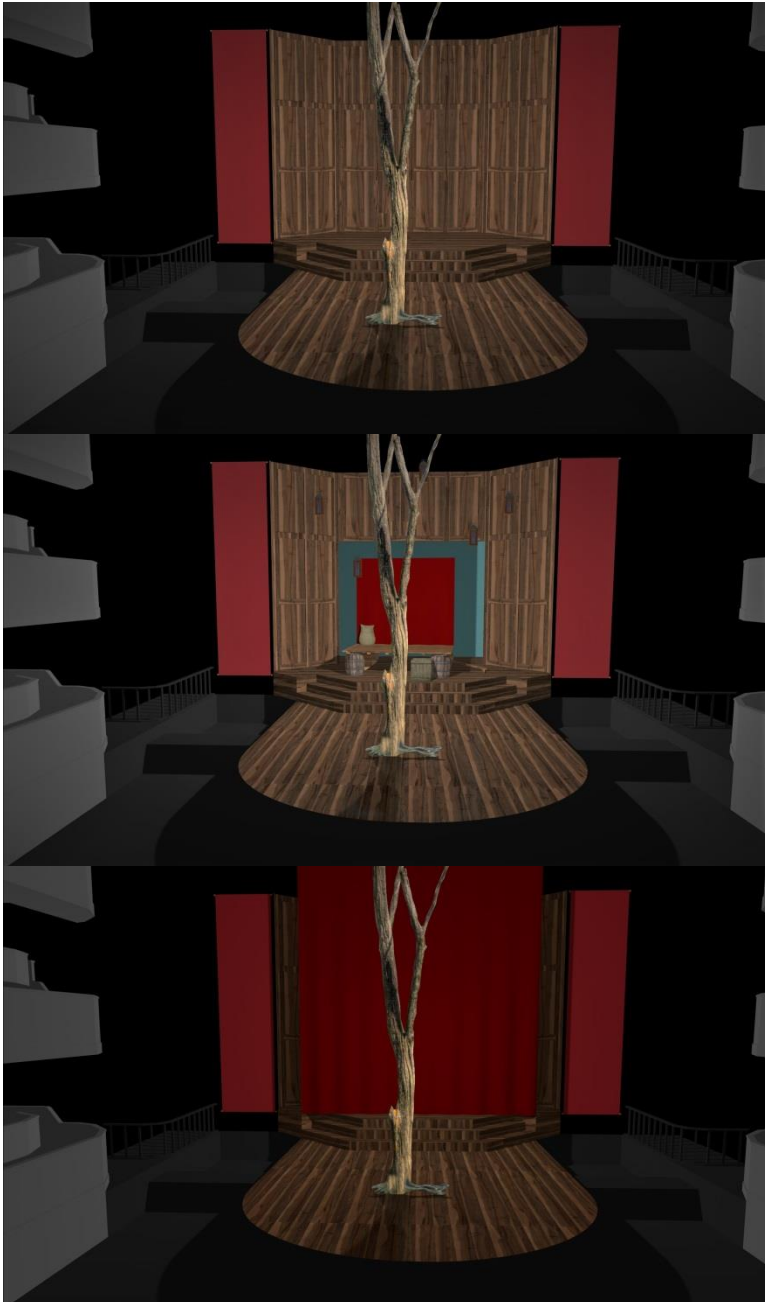
Glynis Leyshon, Director



## DESIGN

### Set Design

*by Scott Reid*





## ABOUT THE PLAY

### SYNOPSIS

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern wander through a featureless wilderness, flipping coins, which keep coming up heads. Each time a coin lands on heads, Rosencrantz wins it. While Guildenstern worries about the improbability of a coin landing on heads so many times in a row, Rosencrantz happily continues flipping. Guildenstern wonders if they have entered a world where the laws of chance and time are absent. The pair struggles to recall why they are traveling and remember only that a messenger called them.

They encounter a troupe of actors, known as the Tragedians. The leader of the group, called the Player, indicates that the Tragedians specialize in sexual performances and gives Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the chance to participate for a fee. Guildenstern turns the improbable coin-flipping episode to their advantage by offering the Player a bet. The Player loses but claims he cannot pay. Guildenstern asks for a play instead. Guildenstern starts to leave as the Tragedians prepare, and Rosencrantz reveals that the most recently flipped coin landed tails-up.

The scene changes suddenly. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are now inside Elsinore, the royal castle of Denmark, watching as Hamlet and Ophelia burst onstage and leave in opposite directions. Mistaking Rosencrantz for Guildenstern, Claudius explains that he sent for the pair so that they could ascertain what is bothering Hamlet, their childhood friend.

Bewildered, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discuss how they might probe Hamlet for the cause of his supposed madness. They play a game of question-and-answer, further confusing themselves about their purpose and even their identities. Guildenstern suggests that he pretend to be Hamlet while Rosencrantz questions him. They realize that Hamlet's disturbed state is due to the fact that his father, the former king of Denmark, has recently died, and the throne has been usurped by Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, who also has married Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern overhear Hamlet speaking riddles to Polonius.

Hamlet confuses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with an enigmatic speech. Polonius comes in to tell Hamlet that the Tragedians have arrived. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern despair about how little they learned of Hamlet's feelings. They cannot decide whether he is insane.

Polonius, Hamlet, and the Tragedians enter, and Hamlet announces that there will be a play the next day. Hamlet leaves, and Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and the Player discuss the possible causes of



Hamlet's strange behavior. The Player departs while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discuss what happens after death.

As Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, and Ophelia enter, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern explain that Hamlet wants them all to attend the play. The group leaves, but Hamlet enters. Not noticing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet wonders whether he should commit suicide. Ophelia enters, praying. After a short conversation, she and Hamlet exit.

Alfred, one of the Tragedians, arrives dressed as Gertrude. The other Tragedians enter to rehearse their play, which parallels Claudius's rise to power and marriage to Gertrude. Ophelia enters, crying, followed by an angry Hamlet, who tells her to become a nun, then quickly departs. Claudius and Polonius enter and leave with Ophelia. The Player explains the tragic aspects of the Tragedians' play, which metaphorically retells the recent events at Elsinore and foreshadows the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They discuss whether death can be adequately represented on stage. The scene goes black.

In darkness, voices indicate that the play has disturbed Claudius. The next day, Claudius and Gertrude ask Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find Hamlet, who has killed Polonius. Alone again, the pair concocts a plan to trap Hamlet with their belts, but they fail as Hamlet enters from an unexpected direction and immediately leaves, carrying the dead Polonius. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern call Hamlet back, but he refuses to say what he has done with Polonius's body. Hamlet accuses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of being Claudius's tools. Hamlet escapes as Claudius enters, only to be brought back onstage under guard. The scene shifts outdoors, where Guildenstern tells Rosencrantz that they have to escort Hamlet to England. Hamlet arrives in conversation with a soldier. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern reluctantly depart.

On the boat to England, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern wonder where they are and whether they might be dead. They notice Hamlet sleeping nearby, remember their mission, and consider what to do when they arrive. Guildenstern has a letter from Claudius, which reveals that Hamlet is to be executed in England. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cannot decide what to do.

As the pair sleeps, Hamlet switches the letter they were carrying with one he has written. The next morning, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern awake and hear music coming from barrels onboard the ship. To their surprise, the Tragedians emerge from the barrels just before pirates charge the ship. Hamlet, the Player, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern jump into the barrels, and the lights go down.



When the lights come back up, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and the Player come out of the barrels. Hamlet is gone. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern tell the Player about the letter and rehearse what they will say to the English king. Guildenstern discovers that the letter now states that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are to be executed. The Tragedians encircle the pair. Despairing about his fate, Guildenstern takes a knife from the Player and stabs him. The Player cries out and falls, apparently dead. The Tragedians clap as the Player jumps up. He says that his death was a mediocre performance while showing Guildenstern that the knife was actually a stage prop.

The Player describes the different deaths that his troupe can perform while the Tragedians act out those deaths onstage. Rosencrantz applauds, and the light shifts, leaving Rosencrantz and Guildenstern alone. Rosencrantz breaks down and leaves as he realizes his death is near. Guildenstern wonders how they were caught in this situation, lamenting that they failed to seize an opportunity to avert their fate. Guildenstern exits.

The light changes, revealing the dead bodies of Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet, and Laertes. Horatio arrives and delivers the final speech of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as the music rises and lights fall.

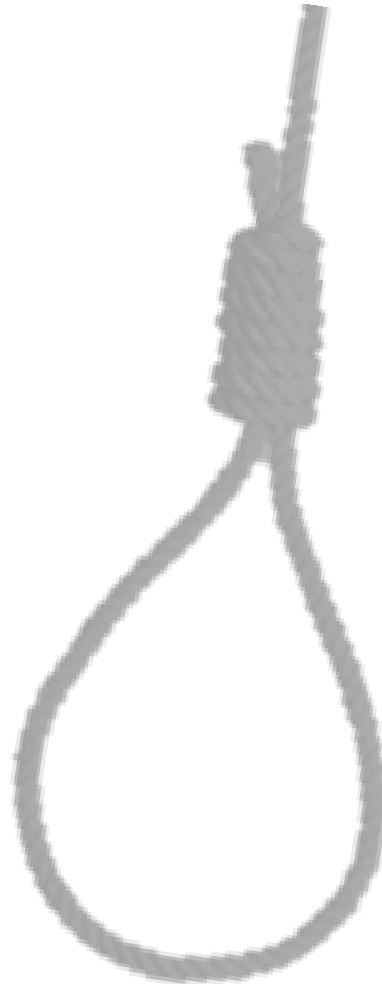


## SETTING

The play takes place in 1500s Elizabethan England. The action of the play takes place in three distinct locations; the middle of nowhere, Hamlet's court, and a boat. The play itself is set inside the story of Hamlet, told through the perspective of two minor characters in Hamlet, Rosencranz and Guildenstern.

## STYLE

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are two minor characters in *Hamlet*, a play written around 1600. Stoppard borrows heavily from Shakespeare, not only re-imagining the play's plot but also quoting directly from *Hamlet* whenever his Rosencrantz and Guildenstern characters speak to Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet, or Polonius. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* mines the Elizabethan era for dramatic and comedic effect and although the play was written in the 1960's the language of the play imitates the old style of English used by Shakespeare.





## **CHARACTERS**

**Rosencrantz** - A gentleman and childhood friend of Hamlet. Along with his companion, Guildenstern, Rosencrantz seeks to uncover the cause of Hamlet's strange behavior but finds himself confused by his role in the action of the play. Rosencrantz has a carefree and artless personality that masks deep dread about his fate.

**Guildenstern** - A gentleman and childhood friend of Hamlet. Accompanied by Rosencrantz, Guildenstern tries to discover what is plaguing Hamlet as well as his own purpose in the world. Although frequently disconcerted by the world around him, Guildenstern is a meditative man who believes that he can understand his life.

**The Player** - The leader of the traveling actors known as the Tragedians. The Player is an enigmatic figure. His cunning wit and confident air suggest that he knows more than he is letting on. The impoverished state of his acting troupe makes him eager to please others, but only on his own terms.

**Tragedians** - A group of traveling male actors. The Tragedians specialize in melodramatic and sensationalistic performances, and they are willing to engage in sexual entertainments if the price is right.

**Hamlet** - The prince of Denmark and a childhood friend of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet is thrown into a deep personal crisis when his father dies and his uncle takes the throne and marries Hamlet's mother. Hamlet's strange behavior confuses the other characters, especially Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

**Claudius** - Hamlet's uncle and the new king of Denmark. Claudius is a sinister character who tries to exploit the friendship between Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern and Hamlet to learn what Hamlet believes about the king's marriage to Gertrude.

**Gertrude** - Hamlet's mother and the queen of Denmark. Although she has disgraced herself by marrying Claudius so soon after her husband's death, Gertrude does seem to care for Hamlet's well-being and sincerely hopes that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can help her son.

**Polonius** - A member of the Danish court and adviser to Claudius. Polonius is a shifty man, willing to interrogate Hamlet and even spy on him to learn what he wants to know.



**Ophelia** - The daughter of Polonius and Hamlet's former beloved. Ophelia spends the play in a state of shock and anguish as a result of Hamlet's bizarre conduct.

**Laertes** - The son of Polonius and brother of Ophelia. Laertes does not appear in the action of the play, but his corpse appears in the final scene.



## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

### Tom Stoppard

Tom Stoppard is a Czech-born British playwright whose work is marked by verbal brilliance, ingenious action, and structural dexterity.

Stoppard's father was working in Singapore in 1938/39. After the Japanese invasion, his father stayed on and was killed, but Stoppard's mother and her two sons escaped to India, where in 1946 she married a British officer, Kenneth Stoppard. Soon afterward the family went to live in England. Tom Stoppard—he had assumed his stepfather's surname—quit school and started his career as a journalist in Bristol in 1954. He began to write plays in 1960 after moving to London. His first play, *A Walk on the Water* (1960), was televised in 1963; the stage version, with some additions and the new title *Enter a Free Man*, reached London in 1968.



His play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1964–65) was performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1966. That same year his only novel, *Lord Malquist & Mr. Moon*, was published. His play was the greater success: it entered the repertory of Britain's National Theatre in 1967 and rapidly became internationally renowned. The irony and brilliance of this work derive from Stoppard's placing two minor characters of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* into the centre of the dramatic action.

A number of successes followed. Among the most-notable stage plays were *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968), *Jumpers* (1972), *Travesties* (1974), *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1978), *Night and Day* (1978), *Undiscovered Country* (1980, adapted from a play by Arthur Schnitzler), and *On the Razzle* (1981, adapted from a play by Johann Nestroy).

Stoppard wrote a number of radio plays, including *In the Native State* (1991), which was reworked as the stage play *Indian Ink* (1995). He also wrote a number of notable television plays, such as *Professional Foul* (1977). Among his early screenplays are those for *The Romantic Englishwoman* (1975), *Despair* (1978), and *Brazi* (1985), as well as for a film version (1990) of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* that he also directed. In 1999 the screenplay for *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), co-written by Stoppard and Marc Norman, won an Academy Award. He later penned scripts for a lavish miniseries (2012) based on novelist Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy *Parade's End* and for a film adaptation (2012) of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

Stoppard's numerous other honours include the Japan Art Association's Praemium Imperiale prize for theatre/film (2009). He was knighted in 1997.



## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

Below is the preface printed in the published script for *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead*.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

This play-text is perhaps unusual in that it incorporates a good many speeches and passages enclosed in square brackets, and the material thus bracketed consists of optional cuts. There is no definitive text of "*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*": the New York production differed in many small textual ways from the London production, and the text performed for the American tour differs from both. I doubt that the same text has been performed in two different places anywhere in the world. This seems to me only sensible. A joke that is funny in London might be meaningless in Milan (or New Orleans), and there is no virtue in preserving it just because it was in the original script. Again, an expensive and visually exciting production using thirty-six actors might hold up well over three hours, while a very simple and small production might well work better in a version lasting two. So, on the one hand, I would like each director to control the length and complication of each production (as is usual), and, on the other hand, I would like to define the area in which he has a free hand with the text.

Of course, a director who feels he needs every word of the script even though he might be working with only a dozen actors in rehearsal clothes, and no set, also has my full support. Other directors are welcome to use any or all of the cuts.

One of these cuts needs a little explanation. An entire scene, enclosed in *double* square brackets, did not exist when the play received its very first production at the Edinburgh Festival; it was written for the first London production. There has been at least one subsequent production without that scene, and other productions have used the scene in a shortened form, which, as elsewhere, is indicated by single brackets inside the scene.

The relevant pages are 67 to 72.

There are things to be said for and against the inclusion of this "new" scene, but of course the arguments mainly depend on the individual production, and here in this major decision as in the minor ones, I think it is desirable for the director to have the option. But I will say that the scene occurs at a kind of critical point—it follows a "false ending" to the Second Act, and I have seen one or two productions where without an exact control in the pacing of the act, the audience has been half lost and has had to be won back before the act's real end.

Finally, I'd like to permit myself a general observation. "*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*," whatever else it is, is a comedy. My intention was comic, and if the play had not turned out funny I would have considered that I had failed. Quite a lot of solemn and scholarly stuff has been written about it, which is fine and flattering, but it is worth bearing in mind that among the productions staged all over the world, two were comparative failures, and both of these took the play very seriously indeed.

*Tom Stoppard*



## THEMES AND TOPICS

Themes
<p>The Incomprehensibility of Life</p> <p>The Difficulty of Making Meaningful Decisions</p> <p>The Relationship between Life and Death</p>
Post Show Discussion Topics
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) <i>What is the significance of the play that the Tragedians perform? How does it affect the audience's understanding of Stoppard's play as a whole?</i></li><li>2) <i>How do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern develop as characters over the course of the play?</i></li><li>3) <i>How does the play use foreshadowing in light of its representation of the world as essentially random and chaotic?</i></li><li>4) <i>The director chose to perform this in the Elizabethan Era. How do you think it would change if it were set in a different era?</i></li><li>5) <i>What do you think about the choice to have Rosencrantz and Guildenstern played by women? Does it change the story? If so, how?</i></li></ol>



## ADDITIONAL READING

- *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare
- *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* Movie (2005) Directed by Tom Stoppard
- *Stoppard's Theatre: Finding Order Amid Chaos* by John Fleming

