

Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead

Film Discussion Questions

1. What do you make of the opening credits? As the play opens in a place “without visible character,” the film begins with credits on a black screen. However, the film introduces “audible character” in the form of a western-themed soundtrack. How does this contrast with your expectation of “two Elizabethans”?
2. Unlike a play, film can cut from scene to scene instantaneously. It can completely change the setting and mise-en-scene without limitation. Does the film take advantage of this fact, or does it try to respect the story’s original medium by forcing characters around in circles so that they repeatedly end up in the same room of the castle?
3. How are sound effects used in the film? Extradiegetic chimes are added at crucial moments – first after Guildenstern brings up the question of suspense, then again when the coin is finally tails. The film inserts dramatic echoes to some of Guildenstern’s most excited moments that momentarily halt the flow of dialogue and narrative. Ambient animal noises can be heard throughout the film and are at one point revealed to be coming from Rosencrantz. Do these elements add anything to the narrative other than perhaps to emphasize moments of significance to the less sophisticated audience of cinema?
4. As discussed in Thursday’s class, two individuals on a stage or screen are far more distinguishable from one another than words on a page. It was mentioned that being able to visually tell them apart would make it easier to tell which character was which. After watching the film, was it clear who was Rosencrantz and who was Guildenstern? Or did the fact that you could differentiate them as Gary Oldman and Tim Roth (or the long-haired one and short-haired one) eliminate the necessity of thinking of each one specifically as Rosencrantz or Guildenstern?
5. What were the effects of having the question game played on an actual tennis court?
6. What is the significance of wind in the film? Hamlet is said to be “at the mercy of the elements,” but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are also plagued by their quest to find out the direction of the wind. As an example, the windmill toy spins after Rosencrantz insists that “there isn’t any wind.”
7. Let’s discuss the puppet show. The tragedians use puppets in addition to live action to enact the deaths from Hamlet. Why does the film version include this story-telling mode when the original play does not? Is it simply a way to visually emphasize the complex literary layers of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*?
8. The film ends with the Tragedians driving away in their caravan. What is the effect of ending with life rather than ending on a stage filled with death (as both Hamlet and the play of R&G do)?

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