

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN



A tragic episode founded on an old Danish legend

Heather Lynn

Adapted from the play by W.S. Gilbert

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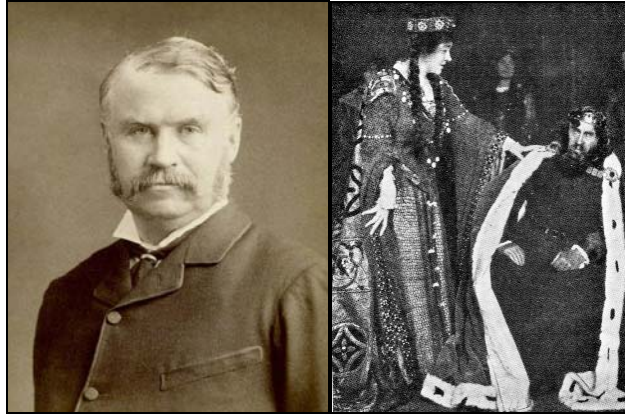
ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN was first performed at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, June 1891.

KING CLAUDIUS: Mr. Alexander Watson
QUEEN GERTRUDE: Mrs. Theodore Wright
HAMLET: Mr. Frank Lindo
ROSENCRANTZ: Mr. S. Herberte-Basing
GUILDENSTERN: Mr. C. Lambourne
FIRST PLAYER: Mr. C. Stewart
SECOND PLAYER: Miss Bessle
OPHELIA: Miss Mary Bessle

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

CLASSIC. Adapted for young actors from the play by W.S. Gilbert. To prevent Hamlet from soliloquizing, Queen Gertrude has summoned two merry knaves, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to provide court revels to cheer up the morose prince. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive, they learn that Ophelia is betrothed to Hamlet, who she thinks is "idiotically sane with lucid intervals of lunacy." The trio devises a plan to get rid of Hamlet by persuading him to perform the tragedy *Gonzago* before the King and his court. Unknown to Hamlet, King Claudius is the author of the ridiculous play, which was laughed off the stage opening night, and King Claudius has decreed that any reference to it is punishable by death. This spoof of *Hamlet* will have your audience roaring with laughter!

Performance time: Approximately 20-30 minutes.



L to R: W.S. Gilbert, 1878; Gilbert as Claudius in 1908.

ABOUT THE STORY

English dramatist Sir William Schwenck Gilbert (1836-1911) is best known for his 14 comic operas he produced with Sir Arthur Sullivan that include the *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, and *The Mikado*. Gilbert was born in London and wrote more than 75 plays in addition to poems and lyrics during his lifetime. His work inspired other dramatists including Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* was published in 1874 and first performed in London in 1891. Gilbert played the role of Claudius in two performances in 1902 and 1908.

DRAMATIS PERSONS

(5 M, 2 F, 1 flexible, extras)

KING CLAUDIUS: King of Denmark and aspiring playwright; male.

QUEEN GERTRUDE: Queen of Denmark who worries that Hamlet soliloquizes too much; female.

HAMLET: Queen Gertrude's son who loves to soliloquize; betrothed to Ophelia; plays a mad archbishop in the tragedy *Gonzago*; male.

OPHELIA: Betrothed to Hamlet but thinks he's insane; female.

ROSENCRANTZ: Courtier in love with Ophelia who has been summoned by Queen Gertrude to prevent Hamlet from soliloquizing; male.

GUILDENSTERN: Courter summoned by Queen Gertrude to prevent Hamlet from soliloquizing; male.

PLAYER 1: Actor; male.

PLAYER 2: Actor; female or can be a male playing a female character; flexible.

EXTRAS: As Courtiers, Pages, etc.

SETTING

Elsinore, the Danish royal castle.

SET

Interior of Elsinore. There is a throne, a stool, and two chairs.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Tableau I: Elsinore, the Danish royal castle.

Tableau II: Elsinore, a short time later.

Tableau III: Elsinore, weeks later, the evening of the performance.

PROPS

Plastic dagger
Toy revolver
Thick manuscript
Bishop's robe and hat, for Hamlet

SOUND EFFECTS

Music to announce Hamlet's entrance
Footsteps
March

"IT MUST BE PATENT
TO THE MEREST DUNCE,
THREE PERSONS
CAN'T SOLILOQUIZE AT ONCE!"

-HAMLET

FIRST TABLEAU

(AT RISE: Interior of Elsinore, the Danish royal castle. Claudius is seated on his throne and is in a particularly gloomy mood. Queen Gertrude is seated on a stool at his feet, consoling him.)

QUEEN: Be not sad, my lord!

CLAUDIUS: Sad, loved Queen?

QUEEN: There be something that gives thy soul unrest.
Tell it to me.

CLAUDIUS: Well, loved and faithful wife,
Tender companion of my faltering life,
Yes, I can trust thee! Listen, then, to me. Many years ago,
when but a headstrong lad, I wrote a five-act tragedy.

QUEEN: (*Surprised.*) Indeed?

CLAUDIUS: A play, writ by a king—

QUEEN: And *such* a king!

CLAUDIUS: (*Continuing.*) The day approached...all
Denmark stood agape. Seats were booked a year in
advance. The first night came...

QUEEN: And did the play succeed?

CLAUDIUS: (*Sadly.*) In one sense, yes.

QUEEN: Oh, I was sure of it! And how long did it run?

CLAUDIUS: About ten minutes. Then the curtain fell,
never to rise again!

QUEEN: And did the people hiss and boo?

CLAUDIUS: No, worse than that. They laughed.

QUEEN: Was it, my lord, so very, very bad?

CLAUDIUS: (*Sadly.*) My trusting Queen, it was.

QUEEN: And when the play failed, didst thou take no steps
to set thyself right with the world?

CLAUDIUS: I did. I wrote an act by way of epilogue—an
act by which the penalty of death was meted out to all
who sneered at it. The play was not good, but the
punishment for those who laughed at it was death.

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QUEEN: (*Sighs.*) Think on it no more, my lord. (*Changing the subject.*) To cheer our son, whose solitary tastes and tendency to long soliloquy have much alarmed us, I, unknown to thee, have sent for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—two merry knaves—who will devise revels in our Court and antic schemes of harmless merriment to distract his meditative mind. (*Sound of footsteps approaching.*) Ah, here they are!

(*Guildenstern and Rosencrantz enter and kneel before the King and Queen.*)

GUILDENSTERN: (*Kneeling.*) My homage to the Queen!

ROSENCRANTZ: (*Kneeling.*)

In hot obedience to the royal 'hest

We have arrived, prepared to do our best!

QUEEN: We welcome you to Court. Our Lord Chamberlain shall see that you are suitably deposed. (*Ophelia enters. Introducing.*) Here is his daughter.

(*King and Queen exit, lovingly.*)

ROSENCRANTZ: Ophelia!

(*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern embrace Ophelia. Ophelia is delighted and surprised to see them.*)

OPHELIA: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern! We have not met since we were babies!

ROSENCRANTZ: The Queen hath summoned us, and I have come in a half-hearted hope that I may claim once more my love!

OPHELIA: (*Sadly.*) Alas, I am betrothed.

ROSENCRANTZ: Betrothed? To whom?

OPHELIA: To Hamlet!

ROSENCRANTZ: (*Shocked.*) Oh, incomprehensible! Thou lovest Hamlet?

OPHELIA: (*Demurely.*) Nay. I said we were *betrothed*.

GUILDENSTERN: What's he like?

OPHELIA: Sometimes he's tall; sometimes he's very short. Sometimes he has black hair and sometimes he wears a blond wig. Sometimes he speaks with an English accent and then a French accent. One day, he's an Italian, then a Frenchman, but Danish...never! And strange to say, though we're in Denmark, he always dresses like King James the First!

GUILDENSTERN: Oh, he is surely mad!

OPHELIA: Well, there again, opinion is divided. Some think that he's the sanest of all sane men. Some think that he's really sane, but pretending to be mad. Some think that he's really mad, but pretending to be sane. But on the whole, as far as I can make out what they mean, the favorite theory is this: Hamlet is idiotically sane with lucid intervals of lunacy.

ROSENCRANTZ: We must devise some plan to stop this marriage!

GUILDENSTERN: (*Gets an idea.*) Many years ago, King Claudius wrote a five-act tragedy. The play was damned, and none may mention it...under the penalty of death. We could convince Hamlet to perform this play before the King...and take the *consequences*.

[END OF FREEVIEW]