

were in profile, our eyes searched you out, first confidently, then hesitantly, then desperately as each patch of turf, each log, every exposed corner in every direction proved uninhabited, and all the while the murderous King addressed the horizon with his dreary interminable guilt.

... Our heads began to move, wary as lizards, the corpse of unsullied Rosalinda peeped through his fingers, and the King faltered. Even then, habit and a stubborn trust that our audience spied upon us from behind the nearest bush, forced our bodies to blunder on long after they had emptied of meaning, until like runaway carts they dragged to a halt. No one came forward. No one shouted at us. The silence was unbreakable, it imposed itself upon us; it was obscene. We took off our crowns and swords and cloth of gold and moved silent on the road to Elsinore.

(*Silence. Then Guildenstern claps solo with slow measured irony.*)

GUILDENSTERN. Brilliantly re-created—if these eyes could weep! ... Rather strong on metaphor, mind you. No criticism—only a matter of taste. And so here you are—with a vengeance. That's a figure of speech ... isn't it? Well let's say we've made up for it, for you may have no doubt whom to thank for your performance at the court.

ROSENCRANTZ. We already have an entry here. And always have had.

GUILDENSTERN. You've played for him before?

ROSENCRANTZ. Yes, sir.

GUILDENSTERN. What will you play?

ROSENCRANTZ. *The Murder of Gonzago.*

GUILDENSTERN. Full of fine cadence and corpses.

ROSENCRANTZ. Pirated from the Italian. ...

ROSENCRANTZ. What is it about?

ROSENCRANTZ. It's about a King and Queen. ...

GUILDENSTERN. Escapism! What else?

ROSENCRANTZ. Blood—

GUILDENSTERN. —Love and rhetoric.

ROSENCRANTZ. Yes. (*Going.*)

GUILDENSTERN. Where are you going?

ROSENCRANTZ. I can come and go as I please.

GUILDENSTERN. You're evidently a man who knows his way around.

ROSENCRANTZ. I've been here before.

GUILDENSTERN. We're still finding our feet.

ROSENCRANTZ. I should concentrate on not losing your heads.

GUILDENSTERN. Do you speak from knowledge?

ROSENCRANTZ. Precedent.

GUILDENSTERN. You've been here before.

ROSENCRANTZ. And I know which way the wind is blowing.

(*The Player's grave face does not change. He makes to move off again. Guildenstern for the second time cuts him off.*)

GUILDENSTERN. The truth is, we value your company, for want of any other. We have been left so much to our own devices—after a while one welcomes the uncertainty of being left to other people's.

ROSENCRANTZ. Uncertainty is the normal state. You're nobody special.

(*He makes to leave again. Guildenstern loses his cool.*)

GUILDENSTERN. But for God's sake what are we supposed to do?

ROSENCRANTZ. Relax. Respond. That's what people do. You can't go through life questioning your situation at every turn.

GUILDENSTERN. But we don't know what's going on, or what to do with ourselves. We don't know how to act.

ROSENCRANTZ. Act natural. You know why you're here at least.

GUILDENSTERN. We only know what we're told, and that's little enough. And for all we know it isn't even true.

ROSENCRANTZ. For all anyone knows, nothing is. Everything



has to be taken on trust; truth is only that which is taken to be true. It's the currency of living. There may be nothing behind it, but it doesn't make any difference so long as it is honoured. One acts on assumptions. What do you assume?

Ros. Hamlet is not himself, outside or in. We have to glean what afflicts him.

GUIL. He's—melancholy.

PLAYER. Melancholy?

Ros. Mad.

PLAYER. How is he mad?

Ros. Ah. (*To GUIL.*) How is he mad?

GUIL. More morose than mad, perhaps.

PLAYER. Melancholy.

GUIL. Moody.

Ros. He has moods.

PLAYER. Of moroseness?

GUIL. Madness. And yet.

Ros. Quite.

GUIL. For instance.

Ros. He talks to himself, which might be madness.

GUIL. If he didn't talk sense, which he does.

Ros. Which suggests the opposite.

PLAYER. Of what?

(*Small pause.*)

GUIL. I think I have it. A man talking sense to himself is no madder than a man talking nonsense not to himself.

Ros. Or just as mad.

GUIL. Or just as mad.

Ros. And he does both.

GUIL. So there you are.

Ros. Stark raving sane.

(*Pause.*)

PLAYER. Why?

GUIL. Ah. (*To Ros.*) Why?

Ros. Exactly.

GUIL. Exactly what?

Ros. Exactly why.

GUIL. Exactly why *what*?

Ros. What?

GUIL. *Why*?

Ros. Why what, exactly?

GUIL. Why is he mad?!

Ros. I don't know!

(*Beat.*)

PLAYER. The old man thinks he's in love with his daughter.

Ros. (*Appalled.*) Good God! We're out of our depth here.

PLAYER. No, no, no—he hasn't got a daughter—the old man thinks he's in love with *his* daughter.

Ros. The old man is?

PLAYER. Hamlet, in love with the old man's daughter, the old man thinks.

Ros. Ha! It's beginning to make sense! Unrequited passion!

(*The PLAYER moves.*)

GUIL. (*Fascist.*) Nobody leaves this room! (*Pause, lamely.*) Without a *very* good reason.

PLAYER. Why not?

GUIL. All this strolling about is getting too arbitrary by half—I'm rapidly losing my grip. From now on reason will prevail.

PLAYER. I have lines to learn.

GUIL. Pass!

(*The PLAYER passes into one of the Wings. Ros cups his hands and shouts into the opposite one.*)