

Hamlet Discussion Questions, Act 4

Scene 1:

1. When Gertrude speaks with Claudius for the first time since her encounter with Hamlet, she tells Claudius that Hamlet is “mad as the sea and wind when both contend / Which is mightier” and killed Polonius (lines 7 & 8). Did she betray Hamlet? Do you think that she really believes that Hamlet is mad or is she trying to protect his secret?
2. How does the King react to hearing that Hamlet killed Polonius? (lines 13 – 24 & 29 – 33). Does he show any grief over the death of Polonius?
3. How does this scene end?
4. What have we learned about Claudius’ character in this scene?

Scene 2:

1. After taking care of Polonius’s body, Hamlet runs into Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. What does he call them and why? (lines 1 – 24).
2. Considering that Hamlet has just killed someone and hid the body, does that make him no better than Claudius? Do you consider Hamlet to be a hero at this point? Is he a hypocrite for calling his “friends” names?

Scene 3:

1. In lines 1 – 11 speaks to a few of his men about Hamlet. Claudius remarks “How dangerous is it that this man goes loose! / Yet must not we put the strong law on him.” Why does he feel this way? What does he decide to do with Hamlet?
2. What does Hamlet tell Claudius he has done with Polonius? (lines 19 – 41)
3. How do you feel about the way that Hamlet talked about Polonius’s dead body with Claudius?
4. Why is Claudius' last speech in this scene a soliloquy? (lines 63 – 77) What does Claudius ask of England and why does he think England will help him carry out his plan?

Scene 4:

1. What information do we learn about Fortinbras from the conversation between the Norwegian captain and Hamlet? (lines 1 – 30)
2. Hamlet’s soliloquy at the end of this scene shows the effect this this conversation had on him in lines 33 – 69.
 - a) Why does Hamlet admire Fortinbras?
 - b) What does Hamlet believe has kept him from acting decisively against Claudius?
 - c) What is Hamlet’s resolve at the end of this scene?

Scene 5:

1. Take a look at the discussion between the Gentleman, Horatio, and the Queen in lines 1 – 25.
 - a) According to the Gentleman and Horatio, what is going on with Ophelia?
 - b) Why do you think the Queen does not wish to see Ophelia?
 - c) Why does the Queen finally agree to speak with her?
2. The fear of Polonius and Laertes has prevented Ophelia from sharing her true feelings throughout the play; however, in her insanity, she speaks freely. Do Ophelia's explicit songs give us a better sense of her relationship with Hamlet? (lines 26 – 71)
3. Is the death of Polonius the only reason for Ophelia's insanity, as Claudius believes in lines 80 – 81? To what extent do you think her betrayal of Hamlet weighs on her mind?
4. What are the problems Claudius lists in lines 82 - 103?
5. What news does the messenger bring Claudius? (lines 108 – 118)
6. Describe what Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude speak about after Laertes storms in (lines 122 – 177).
7. What is remarkable about the political deal Claudius offers Laertes at the end of his scene? (lines 226 – 245).
8. Laertes and Fortinbras are both considered to be foils of Hamlet. How is Laertes seen as a foil to Hamlet in this scene?

Scene 6:

1. Horatio receives a letter from Hamlet (lines 13 – 31).
 - a) What happened to Hamlet during his voyage to England?
 - b) What does he ask Horatio to do?
2. It is plausible that Hamlet's encounter with the pirate ship was part of the counter plot Hamlet alludes to earlier when talking with Gertrude at the end of Act 3 when he spoke of Claudius' plan to send him to England.
 - a) Do you think Hamlet's capture truly a coincidence?
 - b) If Hamlet did have a counter plot ready, why would he not reveal it to Horatio?

Scene 7:

1. After Claudius has convinced that Laertes that Hamlet killed Polonius and that Hamlet wants to kill him (Claudius), Laertes asks why Claudius didn't take immediate action against his Hamlet.
 - a) What is Claudius' response? (lines 11 – 26 & 32 – 37)
 - b) What does this show us about Claudius' character? Why does he need Laertes on his side?
2. Claudius reads the letter from Hamlet and learns that he is alive. Laertes says, "It warms the very sickness in my heart / That I shall live and tell him to his teeth,

/"Thus diddest thou"" (lines 61 – 63). We know that Laertes wants revenge for his father's murder. Think about how Claudius uses this for his own gain.

- a) What does Claudius initially say about his plans for getting rid of Hamlet? (lines 69 – 76)
- b) How does Claudius flatter Laertes? Why does he flatter him? (lines 80 – 86 & 108 - 120)
- c) Claudius asks Laertes if he loved Polonius; how does Claudius manipulate Laertes in lines 126 – 143?
3. Claudius tells Laertes that "revenge should have no bounds" in line 146.
 - a) What scheme is Claudius's scheme for Laertes? (lines 145 – 158)
 - b) What does Laertes add to the plan? (lines 159 – 168).
 - c) And what is Claudius' back-up plan? (lines 169 – 186)
 - d) To what degree do you feel that Claudius is using Laertes?
4. What news does the Queen bring? Recount the scene she describes.
5. Do you believe Ophelia's death was an accident or suicide? Explain.
6. At the end of the scene, Laertes is obviously upset over hearing about his sister's death. Claudius tells Gertrude: "Let's follow, Gertrude. / How much I had to do to calm his rage! / Now fear I this will give it start again. / Therefore let's follow" (lines 218 – 221). Do you think that Claudius is concerned over Laertes' feelings? Could he have any other concerns?