

# ***The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark***

by William Shakespeare

Study Guide Questions for Act III—Complete on your own paper (word process or handwriting)

## Scene i

1. What plotting against Hamlet is indirectly revealed in the opening scene? What characters are involved?
2. On a separate sheet of paper, paraphrase then discuss the images and themes of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy. Compare it to the Acts I and II soliloquies.
3. Does the mood of the soliloquy carry over into his dialogue with Ophelia? How do you account for Hamlet's changes in mood in this scene? Is he mad? Out of control? Pretending? What accusations does he make against Ophelia? Is he right in accusing her? How does Ophelia react to him? What does she feel has been lost?
4. How do Claudius and Polonius react to what they eavesdrop? Does the king agree with Polonius' interpretation of Hamlet's behavior?

## Scene ii

1. Examine Hamlet's conversation with the actors about the plan for the play. What does Hamlet (arguably here, Shakespeare) reveal about his opinions about play acting, play directing, the effect of drama, and drama as a paradigm of life?
2. What does Hamlet reveal about himself to Horatio? Why does Hamlet trust Horatio? What does Hamlet not reveal?
3. What acting experience has Polonius had? What is implied by his statement and this second reference to Julius Caesar?
4. How does Hamlet treat Ophelia as he converses intimately with her before and during the play? What is his purpose? What effect do you think this behavior has on her?
5. What does Hamlet call the play? Why is it performed first in pantomime and then acted? What parallels are there between the performance and the actual play of *Hamlet*? How does this event develop the appearance vs. reality, "seems" vs. "is" motif? Look at Hamlet's response to Rosencrantz & Guildenstern at the end of this scene. How is his response "You would play on me," particularly appropriate at this point in the play?
6. How does Hamlet mock Polonius with his references to a cloud that is like a camel, weasel, and whale?
7. Why does Hamlet say it is the "witching time"? What values govern his plan for his behavior during his interview with his mother?

## Scene iii

1. What attitudes toward the role of the king are expressed by Claudius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern?
2. What does Claudius reveal about himself when he is alone? What error does Hamlet make in interpreting his behavior?

## Scene iv

1. In Hamlet's interview with his mother, find examples of the double meanings of words and phrases. What images and symbols are most important in this scene? What is revealed about the queen's character? Hamlet's?
2. What is Hamlet's judgment of Polonius?
3. Why does the ghost appear in this scene?
4. How does Hamlet feel about what he did to Polonius by the end of the scene?
5. What attitude toward Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern does Hamlet express in the last speech of this scene?