Hamlet – Final Discussion

Discussion questions

○ What is at the essence of Hamlet's delay in action against Claudius?

○ What is the nature of the ghost – a spirit of good or of evil? Why can Hamlet see the ghost but not his mother in Act IV?

○ Summarize and support Hamlet’s evolution and progression of understanding as it pertains to life, death, and human mortality from Act I to Act V, paying special attention to the soliloquies.

○ Does Hamlet (or Shakespeare) ever answer the purpose of existence?

○ What sends the play on its course of inevitability?

○ In what ways is Hamlet responsible, and in what ways is he a victim of circumstances?

○ What is Hamlet’s central tragic flaw? Does he have one?

○ Hamlet, other central characters, the court as Elsinore, and the play overall are all clouded in varying ways with mysteriousness and ambiguity. Explain the role, function, and purpose of these mysteries and ambiguities and how they contribute to the overall theme.

○ Who is responsible for casting this cloud of corruption over Elsinore and the events of the play? Is anyone?

○ One question all viewers/readers have in watching/reading a play is “why?” – we want to understand characters’ rationale for their actions. However, Hamlet is full of what one scholar deemed “a lack of casual logic” in the instability and seeming irrationality of many characters’ choices. Why is the play so full of this “lack of casual logic”?

○ Are there admirable characters throughout the play who show strength and resolve of the human spirit? Why do the majority of the characters highlight varying human weaknesses and frailties?

○ Note examples and quotes of corruption, rot, and disease.

Quotes/Arguments/Criticisms to Ponder and Discuss

○ “...the play’s lack of a rigorous type of casual logic seems to be part of its point”

○ “...every major personage in the tragedy is a player in some sense, and every major episode a play”

○ “Hamlet is painfully aware of the baffling human predicament between the angels and the beasts, between the glory of having been made in God’s image and the incrimination of being descended from fallen Adam...in fact, he exemplifies it. Thus, Hamlet’s problem appeals so powerfully to us as it is an image of our own.”