

Hamlet

Act II Study Questions

1. What does Polonius ask Reynaldo to do? How does he teach Reynaldo to manipulate words? We know Claudius poisoned King Hamlet by pouring poison into his ear, but he also poisons “the whole ear of Denmark” with his words (I.v.36). What is the theme reflected in this quote?
2. How does Hamlet act when he meets Ophelia? How do we know? Why does he act in such a manner?
3. According to Voltmand, what has Fortinbras’ uncle forbidden Fortinbras to do? What has he allowed him to do? Is Cladius worried that a hostile army will cross Denmark? Compare his concern about the presence of Fortinbras in his country with his concern for Hamlet’s apparent madness- what weighs more?
4. Polonius tells Gertrude and Claudius his suspicions about Hamlet’s “madness.” Is he after preferment? How does he sound in his conversation with the King and Queen?
5. Describe the imagery Hamlet uses in his conversation with Polonius in II.2.190-237. What does Hamlet say about women? How does Polonius respond? What does he mean when he says “Though this be madness, yet there is method in it” (II.2.225)?
6. Does Hamlet appear to be mad in his conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? Why does he declare “I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southernly, I know a hawk from a handsaw”(II.2.402-403)?
7. When the players arrive, what is Hamlet amazed by regarding the power players have? How does he compare himself with the actors?
8. What does Hamlet decide to do? Do you think it wise to consider a spectator’s reaction to a play proof of his guilt? Could this be Hamlet’s hamartia? Explain.