***HAMLET***

**Questions on Style and Structure**

1. The opening scene presents a great number of questions. How do these contribute to the mood of the scene and, ultimately, of the play itself?

2. Hamlet’s first three lines (I.ii.65, 67, 74) are evasive answers using puns or other wordplay. What does this behavior reveal about his character and his state of mind?

3. How would you describe Claudius’s opening speech (I.ii.1–39) and his reply to Hamlet (I.ii.87–117)? What does his use of imagery and juxtaposition in the first speech reveal about his purpose? What is the nature of his argument in the second?

4. How does the diction and imagery in the Ghost’s speech to Hamlet (I.v.42–91) create a comparison between the two “gardens” before and after the entrance of the “serpents”?

5. In lines 270–82 of act II, scene ii, Hamlet delivers a lengthy explanation to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, ending with a rhetorical question. What is the substance of this speech? How does the imagery that Hamlet uses transition his speech from an assessment of himself to that of mankind as a whole?

6. The king’s aside in act III, scene i, lines 49–54, is the first definitive evidence of his guilt. Structurally, why do you think this revelation takes place halfway through the play as opposed to earlier (or later)?

7. Notice Hamlet’s behavior toward Ophelia in act III, scene i. Why do you think—in dramatic, structural, and thematic terms—we have not observed a scene between Hamlet and Ophelia until this point?

8. In act II, scene i, Polonius says, “By indirections find directions out” (l. 64). What does he mean by that? How does such a comment reveal his character? Find another such witty or clever remark by another character, and explain how it reveals the character of its speaker.

9. Hamlet’s four soliloquies (I.ii.129–59; II.ii.474–533; III.i.56–90; IV.iv.32–66) are remarkable for their style as well as their substance. Choose one of these monologues and discuss how its diction, figurative language, and imagery contribute to Hamlet’s meaning and purpose.

10. Shakespeare occasionally gives two characters very similar lines or phrasings, the second instance reminding the reader or viewer of the first. In act IV, scene iv, for example, Hamlet wonders if he might be “thinking too precisely on th’ event” (l. 41). In act V, scene i, Horatio says to Hamlet, “’Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so” (l. 155). What is the effect of these types of echoes throughout the play?

11. Do a close reading of one of Ophelia’s songs in act IV, scene v, exploring how its form and content relate and respond to the action of the play (both actual and implied) and to Ophelia’s state of mind. In your response, consider what has occurred offstage, as well as the possible or implied events to which she alludes. Why is she given song, as opposed to speech, in this instance?