


Investigate!

Hamlet: Act V


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❖ Act V, Scene i:

- This is the first time we have seen Hamlet since his return. Look again at how he behaves in this scene:
 - How would you assess Hamlet's words, manner and actions here?
 - Would you agree with some critics who feel that he has changed and has returned with renewed confidence?
- Hamlet insists that his love for Ophelia infinitely exceeds that of Laertes
 - If that is so, why might he have treated her so harshly in Act III scene i?
- Instead of simply having characters discuss death, Shakespeare presents us with both the grave of a newly-dead young person (into which the living leap) and the bones of the long-dead
 - What ideas is Shakespeare trying to present here?
 - How does the 'stage picture' strengthen his presentation of these ideas?
 - Consider also the use of a play-within-a play in Act III to present ideas about false appearances and acting.

❖ Act V, Scene ii:

- Critics and commentators have differing views about Hamlet's request that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern should not have time to confess
 - Is it justice, in return for their betrayal of him?
 - Do we have any evidence that they knew what was in the letter they were carrying (i.e. a request for Hamlet's execution?)
 - Even if they did, is he right to pursue vengeance beyond the grave?
- Look back to Hamlet's first soliloquy in Act I scene ii. Is Hamlet more grieved by the re-marriage of his mother than by the death of his father? (See also  Texts in detail > *Hamlet* > Characterisation > Hamlet).
- At the end of the play, Fortinbras is to rule in Denmark. Of the three young men seeking revenge, only he gave it up
 - Is this significant, or is he only successful because he is a man of action ('strong in arm')?
 - What are your views about the morality of revenge by the end of the play?