QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: HAMLET (10 POINTS)

1. What is the political situation in Denmark at the beginning of the play? What crises have already occurred, and what crises seem to be looming?

2. When and why does Hamlet decide he needs to avenge his father’s murder by killing his uncle? Might he have other reasons for wanting to murder Claudius?

3. Why does Hamlet delay taking action? What reasons does he cite for his uncertainty about how, or whether, to proceed with his plans? When and why does he change his plans?

4. What strategies does Hamlet employ to try to assure himself of Claudius’s guilt? How effective are these strategies?

5. How would you describe Hamlet’s relationship with Ophelia? Does he, or did he at any point, love her? What does he seem to want from her?

6. What do you think motivates Gertrude? Do her actions and expressions of feeling seem consistent over the course of the play? Do you think she was in on the plot to kill Hamlet’s father? How sympathetic is she to Hamlet?

7. How does Hamlet react when he kills Polonius? What might this reveal about his state of mind, or his character generally?

8. Laertes and Fortinbras are often understood as foils for Hamlet (a “foil” is a character who underscores the qualities of another character through contrast). What do they have in common with Hamlet? How does their behavior contrast with Hamlet’s? With each other’s?

9. Do you notice any moments of humor in Hamlet? Do you think any characters are intended to serve a primarily humorous function? How can you tell?

10. Who dies at the end of Hamlet? Who survives? What are we supposed to think happens to the governance of Denmark as a state?