**Act III, Scene i**

* Setting
	+ Again, “The castle”
	+ Some sort of public area; a lot of characters are in this scene
* Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s interview with Claudius, Gertrude, and Polonius
	+ They are questioned as to their meeting with Hamlet
	+ They *lie* to Claudius
		- They say Hamlet was “Niggard of question” (line 13), but all Hamlet did was ask them questions
		- Stoppard has a lot of fun with this
	+ They tell Claudius about the players, and invite him to see the play that night
* Claudius and Polonius get ready to use Ophelia as “bait”
	+ Claudius asks Gertrude to leave; why?
	+ Polonius orders his daughter around: “Ophelia, walk you here” (line 43)
	+ Polonius has an interesting line about Ophelia’s appearance: “with devotion’s visage / And pious action, we do sugar o’er / The devil himself” (lines 46-48)
		- Gist: things are not always what they seem
		- This causes Claudius to remark in an aside that this line describes him
			* He talks about “my deed” (line 53)
			* This is his *first* mention of the murder in the play!
			* He feels *guilty*; he has a conscience about what he has done
* Hamlet’s most famous speech (“To be or not to be” – lines 56-90)
	+ Important thing to remember: this is technically *not* a soliloquy, because there are three other people onstage!
		- Ophelia reading her book
		- Claudius and Polonius “behind the arras”
	+ “To be or not to be” (line 56)
		- To act or not to act
		- To live or not to live
	+ Hamlet sees himself as having two choices:
		- Do nothing
			* “suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (lines 57-58)
			* Keep pretending nothing has happened, and let Claudius live
		- Act
			* “take arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing end them” (lines 59-60)
			* Take action against Claudius (i.e. – kill him)
			* If Hamlet does this, it will probably mean being killed himself by the king’s guards, or killed afterwards by the court for regicide
	+ Dying appeals to him; he has spoken of suicide before (remember that in Act I, Scene ii, he seems a bit suicidal, too, wishing that God [“the Everlasting” – I, ii, 131] had not made suicide a sin [“had not fixed / His canon ’gainst self-slaughter” – I, ii, 131-132])
	+ He says that death is like sleep
		- We can go to sleep and all our troubles will be over
		- Hamlet, though, must think through things, and he starts intellectualizing this problem as well: if death is like sleep, “what dreams may come” (line 66)?
		- This is another example of why he does not *do* anything! He over-analyzes the situation *again*!
	+ Speculation about this speech: does Hamlet know Claudius and Polonius are there?
		- This certainly colours how we might read the speech
		- If it is meant for them, it might not be his true feelings

**Act III, Scene i, cont’d**

* Hamlet’s most famous speech (“To be or not to be” – lines 56-90), cont’d
	+ He comes up with a long list of things that make life hard
		- “the whips and scorns of time” (line 70)
		- “Th’oppressor’s wrong” (line 71) – the bad things that people in power do to us
		- “the proud man’s contumely” (line 71) – being insulted
		- “The pangs of despised love” (line 72) – loving someone who does not love you back
		- “the law’s delay” (line 72) – justice deferred
		- “The insolence of office (line 73) – the rudeness and smarminess of people in positions of power
		- “the spurns / That patient merit of th’unworthy takes” (lines 73-74) – when people who have “patient merit” (i.e. – good qualities) get flak or grief from people who are “unworthy”
		- We could get rid of all of these things with “a bare bodkin” (line 76) – a knife with which to kill ourselves
	+ Why *don’t* we kill ourselves?
		- “the dread of something after death” (line 78)
		- We don’t know what comes after we die
		- We would rather “bear those ills we have, / Than fly to others that we know not of” (lines 81-82)
		- This is the idea that “the devil you know” is better than the one you don’t
		- What scares us: uncertainty! (cf. – the mention of “security” in Roma’s monologue in *Glengarry Glen Ross*)
	+ He calls himself a coward *again* (cf. – “I am pigeon-livered and lack gall” – II, ii, 588)
	+ Again, thought wins over action; Hamlet *thinks* himself out of having to *do* something
* Hamlet and Ophelia
	+ Things start very tenderly
		- She is “The fair Ophelia” and a “Nymph” (both line 89)
		- He greets her politely
	+ Ophelia, as ordered by her father, tries give back some letters (“remembrances” – line 93) to Hamlet; it is at this point that things start getting tense and nasty
	+ Hamlet is horrible to Ophelia in this scene; why?
		- General hatred against women? (This trait is on display in other parts of the play)
		- The “madness act?”
		- He knows Claudius and Polonius are watching?
	+ Hamlet starts telling Ophelia that he “did love [her] once” (line 115), but he does not anymore
		- Is this true?
		- Again, why is he being so cruel?
	+ He starts ranting against all women
		- Some repressed issues about his mother here, of course
		- Hamlet feels that beauty corrupts, that it hides the true nature of people
			* This is a big theme in the play: appearances can be deceiving
			* Hamlet has come to the realization early that he cannot trust the appearance of anything
			* Female beauty is, to him, a good example of this
		- He tells Ophelia repeatedly to go to a nunnery
			* Face value meaning: take religious orders and go into seclusion, keeping yourself pure
			* Double meaning: “nunnery” was Elizabethan slang for a brothel
				+ Ophelia has been corrupted (through association with her father and Claudius, perhaps?), so she should complete the corruption by becoming a prostitute
				+ This sexual crudeness will continue in Ophelia’s mad scene later in the play

**Act III, Scene i, cont’d**

* Hamlet and Ophelia, cont’d
	+ Hamlet’s ranting against women, cont’d
		- He also says that men are scum, too
			* “You should not have believed me [when I said I loved you], for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it” (lines 116-117)
			* Hamlet is saying all of the things that Laertes and Polonius warned Ophelia about in I, iii
				+ Men are jerks
				+ They lie to get sex
				+ They will tell you they love you and not mean it
			* “We are arrant knaves all; believe none of us” (lines 129-130)
		- He lists all of the things he hates about women in the speech on lines 144-152
			* He hates makeup, because it is false (“God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another” – lines 145-146)
			* He does not like how casual girls are (“You jig and amble” – line 146)
			* He does not like how girls sometimes speak in a silly way (“you nickname God’s creatures” – line 147)
			* He does not like how girls sometimes pretend to be stupid to get out of trouble (they “make [their] wantonness [their] ignorance” – lines147-148)
	+ At one point in the scene, Hamlet says, “Where’s your father?” (line 131)
		- In *many* productions (e.g. – Branagh), this moment is marked by Hamlet realizing that Claudius and Polonius are there
			* Sometimes they make a noise or something
			* At this point, Hamlet ramps up the raving to the point of savagery
		- In *some* productions (e.g. – BBC with Jacobi), Hamlet knows much earlier (sometimes from the start of the Ophelia scene, sometimes right from the entrance before “To be or not to be”) that Claudius and Polonius are there
	+ At the end of the encounter, there is a definite hint that Hamlet knows Claudius is listening
		- “I say I will have no moe marriage. Those that are married already—*all but one*—shall live. The rest shall keep as they are” (lines 149-151, italics added)
		- This is a direct threat to Claudius
	+ Poor Ophelia!
		- Polonius uses her to curry favour with Claudius
		- Claudius uses her to try to find out what is wrong with Hamlet
		- Hamlet rips her apart in front of Claudius and Polonius to make a point
		- She is used by *everyone*!
		- “O woe is me / T’have seen what I have seen, see what I see!” (lines 163-164)
* Claudius knows *exactly* what he has just seen and heard
	+ He cannot say what, though, because it is too public (Polonius and Ophelia are there)
	+ What he *does* say, though, is that Polonius could not be more wrong (“Love? His affections do not that way tend” – line 165)
	+ He has already decided to send Hamlet to England “For the demand of [Denmark’s] neglected tribute” (line 173)
		- Remember that in medieval times England was partly ruled by the Danes
		- He will have Hamlet killed in England
* Polonius tries to comfort Ophelia, but it is laughable (“How now, Ophelia? / You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said; / We heard it all” – lines 181-183)
* Polonius advises Claudius to wait on his England decision until after the play, when Gertrude can try to talk to Hamlet
* Claudius has a great exit line: “Madness in great ones must not unwatched go” (line 191)
	+ In other words, we are going to have to keep an eye on this Hamlet character

**Act III, Scene i, cont’d**

**Homework Questions**

1. Why do you think Rosencrantz and Guildenstern lie to Claudius about their meeting with Hamlet?
2. What is the gist of Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” speech (lines 56-90)? A good Shakespearean monologue has three parts: the presentation of the problem, an outline of the pros and cons of the problem, and a solution. Identify each of these three elements in this famous speech.
3. What does Hamlet have against women? Why is he so cruel to Ophelia?

**Act III, Scene ii**

* Setting
	+ Again, “The castle”
	+ This must be in some public room
	+ This is the play scene, so we will have to have a playing area on the stage (a stage on a stage! – metatheatre!)
* Hamlet’s advice to the actors
	+ Be natural!
	+ This advice is still practical to modern actors
	+ References in section to medieval mystery play characters
		- Termagant
			* Actually “Tervagant”
			* A fictitious idol god supposedly worshipped by Muslims
			* Really over-the-top god
		- Herod
			* Judean king who tried to kill the baby Jesus
			* Portrayed in mystery plays as yelling and screaming
			* To “out-Herod Herod” would be to be so over-the-top and insane that one is more over-the-top and insane than the *real* Herod
	+ The bit about the clowns (lines 40-47) was a reference to Will Kemp, a clown in Shakespeare’s company who liked to improvise
		- Writers do NOT like actors who improvise
* Hamlet lets Horatio into his plan
	+ His speech shows Horatio’s value to Hamlet
	+ Horatio is a man who is “not passion’s slave” (line 74); he is a reasonable, honest man
	+ The plan is that they will *both* watch Claudius; Hamlet wants someone who is dispassionate to verify his suspicions
* Metatheatrical joke about Julius Caesar
	+ Polonius says that he “did enact Julius Caesar” (line 105)
	+ The actor who played Caesar probably also played Polonius (*possibly* Shakespeare himself, though lore has it that Shakespeare played the ghost of King Hamlet in this play)
	+ Richard Burbage, the man who would have first played Hamlet, played Brutus
	+ Foreshadowing: Brutus killed Caesar, and the man who played Brutus will again kill the man who played Caesar (Hamlet kills Polonius)
* Hamlet is *very* crude to Ophelia
	+ “Lady shall I lie in your lap?” (line 115)
	+ “Do you think I meant country matters?” (line 119)
	+ Revenge for allowing her father to use her against him?
	+ Foreshadowing of Ophelia’s vulgar behaviour during her mad scene
* The “dumb show”
	+ A mimed version of the play about to follow
	+ We might assume that Claudius is not paying attention at this point, as he makes no reaction
* The actual play itself
	+ The verse is much more artificial and bombastic
	+ It contains lots of rhyming couplets to emphasize its artificiality
	+ Shakespeare is trying to make sure the audience knows that this is a play within a play
* Gertrude’s line “The lady doth protest too much, methinks.” (line 236)
	+ Often misinterpreted
	+ The misinterpreted meaning of “protest” as “put up a fuss” is certainly there, but it is a secondary meaning, unconscious by Gertrude
	+ “Protest” in this sense means “act;” Gertrude is saying that the person playing the Queen in the play is a bad actor
* Hamlet now begins to interrupt the play with increasing frequency; he is very excited about catching Claudius
* Claudius gets up right after the depiction of the murder, after Hamlet says “You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago’s wife.” (lines 269-270)
	+ He asks for light (line 275)
	+ Cf. – Lady Macbeth
	+ Guilt!
* Horatio has seen Claudius’ reaction!

**Act III, Scene ii, cont’d**

* Hamlet appears almost drunk in the scene that follows the play; he is exuberant about finally getting the evidence he says he needs to nail Claudius
* He toys with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
	+ They are obviously under the command and control of the King at this point
	+ The metaphor of the recorders
		- He is comparing their attempts to “play” him (actually in the modern sense of the word!) with playing on a recorder
		- When Guildenstern will not play the recorder, Hamlet says, in effect, “If you can’t play this simple instrument, you can’t play something as complicated as me.”
* Hamlet, at the end of the scene, appears ready *finally* to avenge his father’s murder and to kill Claudius (“Now could I drink hot blood” – line 398)
* He resolves to go and see his mother, but to be careful *not* to hurt her
	+ The reference to Nero in line 402 is to a Roman emperor who had his own mother executed
	+ “I will speak daggers to her, but use none” (line 404)
		- He is *pissed* at her!
		- He needs to keep his temper under control
		- This murderous nature will come out in his murder of Polonius

**Homework Questions**

1. What is Hamlet’s basic advice to the actors? Is it still good advice today for modern actors? Why or why not?
2. Why does Hamlet cherish Horatio’s friendship so much?
3. What is the purpose of the play-within-a-play, *The Mousetrap*? Who are we meant to be watching during its performance?