The Big Question: At the end of the play, is Hamlet supposed to be heroic or hopeless? (Does Shakespeare see him as the solution or the problem?)

BODY COUNT

1. The play ends with a whole lot of dead people. List everyone who dies in the play. The list the person most directly responsible for the death.
   1. Which of these deaths are clearly “just” in the eyes of the play? Which are not? What conclusions does that lead you to draw?

KEY CHARACTERS

1. Make a chart comparing Laertes to Hamlet. How are they similar? How are the different?
   1. What obvious contrast does Shakespeare provide in 4.7.125-6?
   2. What are Laertes’s final lines to Hamlet? (What is he saying?)
   3. What does Laertes teach us about Hamlet?
2. Now do the same thing with Fortinbras.
   1. Hamlet says of Fortinbras, “He has my dying voice” (5.2.357). Why might this word choice be significant? What does it say about what Hamlet thinks of Fortinbras?
   2. Fortinbras gets the final words of the play. Read them carefully.
      1. How does he describe Hamlet?
         1. Is his praise serious of ironic? How can you tell?
      2. What does he say about the scene in the palace?
      3. What does this speech reveal about Fortinbras’s potential as a king?
3. Horatio has been the one character beyond reproach. What do his final words tell us about him?

KEY LINES

1. At the end, is Hamlet resolved to do right? At peace with himself? Still divided? Depressed and indifferent?
   1. What exactly is Hamlet’s state of mind as he enters the final scene in the play?
   2. Pull together three key moments from after Polonius’s death. Just as we traced his earlier soliloquies, trace his changes here. Where is he at emotionally as he enters the throne room?
   3. My three lines are
      1. 4.3.20 (“not where he eats” to exit attendants)
      2. 5.1.211 (No, faith…flaw)
      3. 5.2.220 (Not a whit…let be.)
   4. Explain these plus two of your own
2. How would you characterize him once the fighting starts? Provide three specific passages that support this interpretation.