

Hamlet: Act 1, Scene 5

Summary (Shannon):

Hamlet follows a ghost to the outer walls of the castle. He comes to find that the ghost is actually his dead father, King Hamlet. The ghost has an urgent message for his son saying, “**So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear,**”(7). The ghost warns his son that after hearing what he has to say, he will want revenge. The ghost of King Hamlet then reveals the cause of his tragic death to his son. He says, “**But know, thou noble youth, The serpent that did sting thy father’s life, Now wears his crown,**”(39-40). Hamlet has now been made aware that his uncle, Claudius, killed his father and took over the throne. Claudius killed King Hamlet by dropping poison into his ear while he was sleeping in the orchard. Once the ghost leaves, Horatio and Marcellus approach Hamlet in the forest. They bombard Hamlet with questions about what has happened, but Hamlet does not reveal what he has just seen and heard. He then demands Horatio and Marcellus to swear on his sword that they will not speak of this night again. Before the men leave, Hamlet explains that from here on out he is going to pretend to be insane. “**As I perchance hereafter shall think meet, To put an antic disposition on,**” (172-173). In this quote, Hamlet explains he might go crazy (whether intentional or not, we as readers do not know). The men leave.

Style (Kenneth):

Act 1, Scene 5 follows Hamlet’s discourse with the spirit of his murdered father. Shakespeare employs archaic English in order to fully convey the emotions of both characters in full. Throughout scene 5, Shakespeare utilizes **metaphor** and **zoomorphism** through the Ghost’s speeches to effectively convey the treachery of his wife and his brother. This is most aptly seen when the Ghost says, “**The serpent that did sting thy father’s life now wears his crown**” and “**Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast**”. In this circumstance, Shakespeare reveals that Claudius, the dead king’s brother, was his murderer and further fleshes out the evil of Claudius by claiming that Claudius slept with the queen in addition to murdering her husband. The ghost’s comparison of Claudius to a snake is especially potent as snakes are perceived as deceptive creatures and to compare one to a snake is akin to claiming that one is untrustworthy. Again, the mention of the snake is alluding to the biblical devil, the deceiver of man. Calling Claudius a snake is a serious insult which must not be overlooked.

Another example of a rhetorical device is **repetition**. When the ghost of King Hamlet says “List, list, O, list”, it’s a perfect example of Shakespeare’s capturing the attention of the audience before he reveals a shocking development; the murder of the king - by his brother. He further uses repetition to commend the murderer by writing “O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!” This masterfully conveys Hamlet’s frustration and anger about his uncle’s treachery. The man says villain multiple times as if to adequately convey his anger about the situation and to further remind the audience of his uncle’s most definite criminal nature and the urgent need for Hamlet to avenge his father.

Shakespeare also takes every opportunity to promote the divinity of kings through diction. The King constantly makes allusions to this belief saying “So the whole ear of Denmark/ is by a forged process of my death/ rankly abused”. This line claims that because the king who sits on the throne is not

of divine choosing, the entirety of Denmark is being abused. This claim maintains that Denmark is not at peace if the king appointed by God is not on the throne. This is Shakespeare's subtle way of pandering to King James' belief that the throne is blessed by God and everyone's fate is set in stone by virtue of their birth and they can never and should never ascend from their current position to a lower position.

Shakespeare again sets out to prove the divinity of kings through diction when he writes "So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd, / will sate itself in a celestial bed." This belief that adultery is made worse as it dares to defile the blood of the royalty. As the king's brother is of a lower station, his adultery should have been with someone instead of the Queen, another being employed by God Himself, to create the lineage of the Kings as is referenced by the words "celestial bed". This sacrilege is so disturbing that the dead king makes more of a fuss about this than his wife's infidelity.

Another literary device Shakespeare readily employs is that of the paradox. Shakespeare writes "O Villain, villain, Smiling, damned villain". On this occasion the paradox is "smiling damned villain". This makes reference to the fact that the murderer had both killed the king and stolen the queen and still continued his life as if nothing was wrong. Unlike Macbeth, this villain appears to have no mental breakdown and is not accused of any wrongdoing. Even though he is not supposed to be the next king, no one seems interested in challenging him and furthermore, no one even seems remotely suspicious apart from Hamlet, who seems more bitter than suspicious.

Shakespeare's masterful employment of English is further evidenced by Shakespeare's use of alliteration in the line "Those are but wild and whirling words" This repetition is effective as it creates the opinion that the words Hamlet said were vapid and said in anger - the words could also be "wild and whirling" because they hint at his thoughts - are Hamlet's thoughts also "wild and whirling", which could make the audience infer that his mental state is not stable. It's said gracefully however as that of those below the king would admonish him.

Characterization (Moe):

Indirect characterization through is actions: Act 1, scene 5 is the act which starts off Hamlet's descent into madness and is the first scene where character development is present in the play. When he sees the ghost of his father, the readers have their first glimpse into Hamlet's mind. **Hamlet starts going crazy screaming and shouting trying to do whatever he needs to do in order to convince Horatio to let him go talk to the ghost of his father.** This hints at Hamlet's manic state - his rational mind is clouded by his duty to his father and his grief.

Indirect Characterization through the Effect Hamlet has on Others: But Horatio, as well as the viewers, are **worried about Hamlet's mental state** as seeing the ghost of his father might drive him mad with fear. But on the contrary, the king's ghost drives Hamlet mad with anger, rage, and revenge.

Indirect Characterization through speech: Hamlet decides that the best course of action would be to pretend that he's mad due to his depression to get close to the King and his court without any of them getting suspicious. While at this point Hamlet is not driven mad yet, the audience knows that he will be driven to madness by the end of the play due to his so called "pretend" madness turning into real madness.

Connector (Natasha):

The ghost of Hamlet Sr. asked Hamlet to seek revenge on Claudius, which was custom for ghosts in this time period. This is the pivotal event so far.

Firstly, Hamlet Sr. explains what he has lost by Claudius's action, and Shakespeare communicates this in a way so that the audience will sympathize with Hamlet as opposed to Claudius. In the Elizabethan period, they would relate this to how the Bible engenders sympathy for Abel and condemns Cain for the fratricide. For the Elizabethan/Jacobean audience who attended the first performances of Hamlet, murder of a king was in itself disturbing because the English people believed that their monarchs ruled by Divine Right (that God Himself appointed them to rule the land). The Church of England even gave the monarch the highest order of executive power in the church. Murder was even then seen as barbaric as it didn't align with biblical teachings. The medieval custom of a blood feud where the closest relative of a murdered man had to avenge this was a thing of the past. Claudius has committed a sin, and now to restore balance in the kingdom, the sin must be punished. This is a reference to retributive justice: the notion that sin must be returned with punishment. This establishes the pressures on Hamlet. The audience would understand the duty that Hamlet has to avenge his father's death, but they would also recognize the moral dilemma that Hamlet faces when he contemplates that act of murder.

Next, it seems that Hamlet is either becoming mad at this turning point or deciding he will act mad (which could become a character trait).

Thirdly, this act, reveals that *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy. Another example of a revenge tragedy is the *Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd. *Hamlet* distinguishes itself from other revenge tragedies by concentrating on thought and moral questioning rather than gore and action. For example, Hamlet is contemplative and questioning when encountering his father's ghost.

Throughout, there is a reference to the Garden of Eden. For example, the ghost is tempting Hamlet to have revenge like the snake tempted Adam and Eve: *A serpent stung me (36)*. He is to Claudius the serpent. *And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed That rots itself in ease on Lethe wharf... 'Tis given out that, sleeping in mine orchard. (32-34)*. These are referring to poison and a garden, much like the Garden of Eden. There is more garden of Eden imagery connecting to Ophelia: *Against that mother aught; leave her to heaven, And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge, To prick and sting her. (87-98)*. He is telling Hamlet to let his mother feel guilty as punishment. The fact that the ghost could be tempting Hamlet makes Hamlet's moral dilemma even greater because he is torn between the idea of obeying filial piety or obeying his individual moral compass.

Incest was believed to be a crime- like it is today so this would also lead the audience to sympathize with Hamlet and Hamlet Sr, even if this means he would have to kill Claudius.

There is also a pun which could be hard to miss but is referring to the Globe Theatre: *In this distracted Globe. Remember thee! (98)*. The Globe Theatre is an Elizabethan playhouse Shakespeare wrote his plays for. Could this be Shakespeare calling on the audience to find parallels between their own state and the state of Denmark? Could this be Shakespeare challenging his audience to reflect on their loyalties so

that, in the end, they will avoid temptations and be true to their own moral compass “to thine own self be true” ?