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Rogue Soliloquy, Hamlet

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13/07/2015

Literary Analysis of Hamlet’s Famous Rogue Soliloquy

In occasion, madness can lead to sadness, while in others madness can lead to anger. In act II of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, through the words of Hamlet’s long Rogue soliloquy, Shakespeare uses a series of poetic devices such as: mood, understatement, rhythm, simile, and symbol to identify that Hamlet is indeed going mad, specifically mad at him-self.

Primarily, mood can be identified in the following passages: ‘“O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!”’(II, II, 577) and ‘“For Hecuba!”’(II, II, 585). From Hamlet’s sudden outbursts, it is identifiable through the Shakespeare’s use of words and exclamation marks that Hamlet’s soliloquy is not going to be pleasant. The mood is set when Shakespeare uses words such as “Rogue”, “Slave” and “Hecuba” because Hamlet is not having it. Therefore, in dues of Hamlet’s frustration, as he speaks to himself alone in an agitated tone, it can be anticipated that as his soliloquy progressing along, the feeling of this soliloquy will only be bitter and full of distress. To the contrary, it is identifiable that through these outbursts Hamlet is mad at himself, because not only do the exclamation marks at the end of his words puts emphasise on his overall annoyance. But he calls himself “a rogue and peasant slave” like he is alright to insult himself for his actions and for his feelings that are intertwining together to create this madness within him. Therefore, the mood is only heightened to be bitter and non-pleasant and it is to be believed that Hamlet here is agitated with himself.

Next, an understatement is shown in the following passage: “Upon whose property and most dear life, a damned defeat was made. Am I a coward? Who calls me ‘villain’? ” (II, II 597-599). In this case, calling Hamlet a villain would be considered an understatement because although Hamlet has thoughts and has wicked ways up his sleeve to confront Claudius to make him look like the criminal. He really hasn’t done anything life threatening yet to Claudius, that would provoke the audience to think of him as the villain. In the opposite hand, calling Hamlet a coward would be more accurate, because not only is he torn in between what to do next and how a play is going to help his next motive, Hamlet has so much upon his shoulders like the ghost of his father, Claudius taking the throne before Hamlet. That he wants to be able to do something according to seeking vengeance against his uncle, but wouldn’t want it to be so malicious that he becomes known as the noble villain rather the sulking, mad noble son. Furthermore, as Hamlet is torn in between what to do next and whether his inquiries will make him a coward or a villain, Hamlet is even more mad, because not only is it hard for him to come to a conclusion, but Shakespeare empathises that Hamlet wants to see his uncle be pleaded guilty, through actions like a play which can toy with human emotions. But by doing so, Hamlet doesn’t to be identified as neither a villain nor a coward, like he is too weak to do something bold.

Moreover, rhythm can be identified in the following passage: “Bloody, bawdy villain! Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kind-less villain.” (II, II, 607-608) Before Hamlet even says this line, we see that he is lacking the courage to seek revenge against his uncle. However, if Hamlet decided to seek out revenge in a way that is dishonouring and heartless, he’d be automatically being considered the villain. Though, he knows that the true villain is his uncle, why Shakespeare emphasises here that what makes a villain is one who does actions that are “Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kind-less.” (608) meaning his uncle did the act with like he had no heart whatsoever. In this case, Hamlet is still mad and Shakespeare has help to indicate that by the way Hamlet is describing his uncle as the villain and using exclamation marks to further put emphasise on Hamlet’s tone. Nonetheless, we see here too that Shakespeare also stresses the “ess” and “uss” part to further indicate Hamlet’s overall agitation and anger.

Simile can be identified in the following lines of Hamlet’s soliloquy: “Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell, Must like a whore unpack my heart with words, and fall a-cursing like a very drab.” (II, II, 613-615). In this case, Hamlet is comparing himself to a prostitute because he is caught in not knowing what to do about seeking revenge against Claudius. Like a prostitute, if she was refused for her service it’s possible she’d be mad and start cursing to let out her frustration in where things went wrong. Akin to Hamlet, he is not refraining from seeking in revenge, but because he’s frustrated and he’s criticising one thing after another, as well as madly expressing himself, Shakespeare made his actions mimic a prostitute as he “unpack my heart with words” (614), in other words, unloads his feelings by expressing what is on his mind. As well, madness within Hamlet himself is identified when he bluntly compares himself to a prostitute. He says it because his behaviour honestly mimics what a prostitute would do. Likewise, Hamlet has a lot coursing through his mind and the number one thing on his mind is getting Claudius to confess his sin. Therefore, because Hamlet has to think so much and he is genuinely not happy, his current madness is turning to anger in which his outbursts, continues.

Finally, symbolism is identified in the following passage: “The play’s the thing wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King.” (II, II 633-634) This passage here indicates that Hamlet wants to use the play to his advantage so that he can use it to see whether Claudius will react to the play and confess that he is the villain, the one who killed Hamlet’s father. The play itself that Hamlet is talking about acts as a symbol of Claudius’s guilty conscience in pouring poison into his ear while he was peacefully sleeping in the garden, because that is the story that Hamlet perceives to believe as the ghost he had encountered earlier had revealed to him. Anyhow, Hamlet knows that the actors whom are coming to act out a play for him and his royal family, has the ability to manipulate the audiences’ feelings as they can “drown the stage with tears and cleave the general ear with horrid speech, make mad the guilty and appal the free, confront the ignorant and amaze indeed the very faculties of eyes and ears.” (II, II, 589-593). Thus by having the play be performed, it acts as a symbol in relevance to Claudius’s guilty deed. In this case, with Shakespeare’s writing at the end, Hamlet seems pleased with himself that he has come up with this plan to confront Claudius, though his behaviour is still mad, as Shakespeare uses words like “horrid”, “guilty” and “ignorant” to create this bitter tone in Hamlet’s voice.