

Q2 Rewrite: Hamlet

William Shakespeare's play, "Hamlet", follows Prince Hamlet's journey to avenge his father's murder. As part of this journey, Hamlet must play the role of a fool in order to seem ignorant of his enemies' conspiring and deceit. In this passage, Hamlet proves his cleverness in his ability to simultaneously maintain his character before Claudius while subtly revealing his underlying emotions.

During this exchange, Hamlet intentionally uses humor to mislead Claudius. When asked about Polonius' body, he cryptically declares that Polonius is at supper before revealing the dark humor behind his words: "Not where he eats, but where he is eaten." The punchline of the joke is that Polonius' body *is* the supper for the worms that will eventually feed on his corpse. When asked a second time where the body is, Hamlet again answers with a joke, telling Claudius that if his messenger can't find Polonius in Heaven, the King can find him himself in Hell. Hamlet's nonchalant, even giddy behavior following the accidental murder – possibly his first ever kill – forces Claudius to question Hamlet's mental state. Although Claudius perceives this as madness, the audience recognizes that this was a deliberate move by Hamlet in order to build upon his character as the fool.

Under the guise of the fool, Hamlet is able to take digs at Claudius without consequence. After joking about Polonius, Hamlet pursues the topic of worms and goes on to say, "A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm." He uses the analogy of the circle of life to tell Claudius that no matter what he has done or what he has gained in his lifetime, in the end, death is inevitable and everyone ends up the same. Later, Hamlet makes another insult to both Polonius and Claudius by insinuating that they would both end up in Hell. On their own, Hamlet's words are clearly meant to offend and even threaten Claudius. However, Hamlet's facade of madness again causes Claudius to doubt whether or not his insults are genuine and allows Hamlet to take satisfaction from his well thought out snubs.

Hamlet uses a mask of false affection to achieve a similar effect. His insult to Claudius' manhood by calling him "dear mother" is quickly smoothed over by what appears to be affectionate words. He insists that "father and mother is man and wife; man and wife is one flesh; and so, my mother." This saying makes it seem as though Hamlet considers Claudius his true family – his true father – again, playing into the role of the ignorant, loving prince. Though Claudius clearly detects the jibe, Hamlet's innocent front acts as his jokes did, shielding him from direct consequences as Claudius struggles to understand how genuine his words truly are.

Hamlet's role as the ignorant and mad prince helps aid his quest for revenge by misleading Claudius and providing Hamlet a safe outlet for his emotions. His well-crafted behavior around Claudius, from his witty language to his carefully placed insults, reveal how intelligent, cunning, and committed Hamlet truly is.