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*Hamlet* A1 Analysis Essay

In Act I of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, the ghost of King Hamlet confronts his son to reveal that Claudius has murdered him. The Ghost, with no chance to ask forgiveness for his sins, is trapped in a state of purgatory. With an urgent and despairing tone, the Ghost beseeches Hamlet to seek vengeance for his untimely death and expose the corruption that lies in the state of Denmark. Throughout the Ghost's dialogue regarding his own murder, Shakespeare makes effective use of the literary devices of imagery to illustrate his profound sense of injustice, allusion to portray his murder as a sinful corruption of innocence, and diction to convey his feelings of resentment.

Shakespeare's illustration of the Ghost's appearance shows that the Ghost sees the murder as a terrible injustice that necessitates vengeance. In the first scene of the play, Shakespeare describes the Ghost as a "dreaded sight" (1.1.30). When Horatio sees him, he remarks, "Such was the very armor he had on / When he the ambitious Norway combated" (1.1.71-72). Shakespeare's terrifying imagery of a warlike ghost serves to show that the Ghost has taken up arms against the injustice of his murder. Speaking to his son Hamlet, the Ghost paints a portrait of the murder itself – "Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand / Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched" (1.5.81-82). In the first line, Shakespeare establishes an image of King Hamlet being unfairly murdered as he was sleeping peacefully in his orchard. In the next, Shakespeare

uses anaphora to describe how Claudius treacherously robbed him of life and brought Denmark to ruin. In this way, Shakespeare shows the Ghost's perception of the murder as a truly wretched and unnatural one.

Throughout the Ghost's speech, Shakespeare uses numerous allusions in order to bring out the Ghost's sense of outrage and frustration with his murder. The Ghost says, "I find thee apt; / And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed / That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf, Wouldst thou not stir in this" (1.5.38-41). Shakespeare's allusion to the Greek myth of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, allows him to express the Ghost's attitude that his murder is a cause for outrage for all but the dullest of minds. For the Ghost, the murder is an egregious and scandalous act that Hamlet would be wise to avenge. The Ghost continues, "'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard, / A serpent stung me" (1.5.42-43). Alluding to the biblical serpent in the Garden of Eden, Shakespeare elucidates the magnitude of Claudius' crime by comparing it to the fall of man. The Ghost believes that Claudius embodies corruption and sin. Furthermore, Shakespeare's metaphor – describing the murder as a serpent's sting – enhances his characterization of Claudius as deceitful and unjust.

Shakespeare's powerful use of diction emphasizes the Ghost's feelings of resentment and helplessness regarding the murder. By referring to Claudius as "that incestuous, that adulterate beast" (1.5.49), Shakespeare shows the extent of the Ghost's unresolved resentment toward his situation. The Ghost feels that Claudius has not only wronged him but has sullied the state of Denmark itself. Shakespeare portrays Claudius' act as inhuman and bestial, remarking, "Murder most foul, as in the best it is, / But this most foul, strange, and unnatural" (1.5.33-34).

Shakespeare uses these strong descriptors in order to show the Ghost's belief that the murder is unusually cruel, unjust, and evil.

Throughout Hamlet's encounter, Shakespeare highlights the Ghost's sense of egregious injustice, comparing the murder to the assassination of Caesar and the biblical fall of man. By making ample use of several literary devices, Shakespeare is able to illuminate the Ghost's deep resolve for vengeance. Shakespeare ultimately leaves the reader with an understanding of the Ghost's profound sense of despair, unresolved sense of resentment, and desire to be remembered.