

Hamlet

Act I, Scene 5

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Hamlet — Prince of Denmark

Ghost — the spirit of Hamlet's dead father

MINOR CHARACTERS

Horatio — loyal friend to Hamlet

EXTRA — Marcellus

Played by
same actor

For Hamlet, this scene is one of confrontation and of confirmation: it is the first time in the play that Hamlet actually approaches and questions the Ghost of his deceased father (although earlier in the play he does see it); furthermore, his suspicions about his murderous uncle are confirmed.

To begin, the Ghost tells Hamlet that he is doomed to walk on earth during the nights and suffer the purgatorial fires for sins he committed during his lifetime; we therefore realize that the Ghost is aware of mortal imperfections and has a strict moral conscience. However, the Ghost asks Hamlet to seek revenge for his murder and to prove his love for his father. He tells Hamlet that he was murdered by Claudius, "that incestuous, that adulterate beast," who, while King Hamlet slept, poured poison into his ear, sending him to his death.

The two major elements to Hamlet's tragedy are now joined: the murder of a king and father, and the incestuous marriage of his uncle to his mother. In a state of great excitement, Hamlet declares revenge. He swears an oath of secrecy with his two friends, Horatio and Marcellus, and admonishes them that if he chooses to pretend to be mentally deranged, they are not to give the slightest indication that they know the reason for his behavior. (It must be noted that the Ghost specifically requests Hamlet to not punish his mother; he is to leave her punishment to heaven and to her own conscience.)

Lines 9-10 on page 109 fully encompass the enormous task Hamlet has before him:

"The time is out of joint; — O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right."

1 But bear me stiffly up. — Remember thee!
 2 Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
 3 In this distracted globe. Remember thee!
 4 Yea, from the table of my memory
 5 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
 6 All saws¹ of books, all forms, all pressures past,
 7 That youth and observation copied there;
 8 And thy commandment all alone shall live
 9 Within the book and volume of my brain,
 10 Unmixt with baser matter: yes, by heaven! —
 11 O most pernicious woman!
 12 O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
 13 My tables, — meet it is I set it down,
 14 That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;
 15 At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark: *(Writing)*
 16 So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word;
 17 It is, "Adieu, adieu! remember me!"
 18 I have sworn't.
 19 *Start* HORATIO: *(Within)* My lord, my lord, —
 20 MARCELLUS: *(Within)* Lord Hamlet, —
 21 HORATIO: *(Within)* Heaven secure him!
 22 HAMLET: So be it!
 23 HORATIO: *(Within)* Illo, ho, ho, my lord!
 24 HAMLET: Hillo, ho, ho, boy! come, bird, come. *(Enter*
 25 *HORATIO and MARCELLUS)*
 26 MARCELLUS: How is't, my noble lord?
 27 HORATIO: What news, my lord?
 28 HAMLET: O, wonderful!
 29 HORATIO: Good my lord, tell it.
 30 HAMLET: No; you will reveal it.
 31 HORATIO: Not I, my lord, by heaven.
 32 MARCELLUS: Nor I, my lord.
 33 HAMLET: How say you, then; would heart of man once think
 34
 35 ¹saws: stories.

1 it? —
 2 But you'll be secret?
 3 HORATIO and MARCELLUS: Ay by heaven, my lord.
 4 HAMLET: There's ne'er a villain dwelling in all Denmark
 5 But he's an arrant knave.
 6 HORATIO: There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the
 7 grave
 8 To tell us this.
 9 HAMLET: Why, right; you are i'th'right;
 10 And so, without more circumstance at all,
 11 I hold it fit that we shake hands and part:
 12 You, as your business and desire shall point you, —
 13 For every man hath business and desire,
 14 Such as it is; — and for mine own poor part,
 15 Look you, I'll go pray.
 16 HORATIO: These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.
 17 HAMLET: I'm sorry they offend you, heartily;
 18 Yes, faith, heartily.
 19 HORATIO: There's no offence, my lord.
 20 HAMLET: Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio,
 21 And much offence too. Touching this vision here, —
 22 It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you:
 23 For your desire to know what is between us,
 24 O'ermaster't as you may. And now, good friends,
 25 As you are friends, scholars, and soldiers,
 26 Give me one poor request.
 27 HORATIO: What is't, my lord? we will.
 28 HAMLET: Never make known what you have seen tonight.
 29 HORATIO and MARCELLUS: My lord, we will not.
 30 HAMLET: Nay, but swear't.
 31 HORATIO: In faith,
 32 My lord, not I.
 33 MARCELLUS: Nor I, my lord, in faith.
 34 HAMLET: Upon my sword.
 35 MARCELLUS: We have sworn, my lord, already.

1 HAMLET: Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.
 2 GHOST: Swear! (*GHOST cries under the stage.*)
 3 HAMLET: Ha, ha, boy! say'st thou so? Art thou there,
 4 truepenny?
 5 Come on; you hear this fellow in the cellarage;
 6 Consent to swear.
 7 HORATIO: Propose the oath, my lord.
 8 HAMLET: Never to speak of this that you have seen.
 9 Swear by my sword.
 10 GHOST: (*Beneath*) Swear.
 11 HAMLET: *Hic et ubique?* Then we'll shift our ground.
 12 Come hither, gentlemen,
 13 And lay your hands again upon my sword:
 14 Swear by my sword
 15 Never to speak of this that you have heard.
 16 GHOST: (*Beneath*) Swear by his sword.
 17 HAMLET: Well said, old mole! Canst work i'th' earth so fast?
 18 A worthy pioner! Once more remove, good friends.
 19 HORATIO: O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!
 20 HAMLET: And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.
 21 There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
 22 Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.
 23 But come;
 24 Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
 25 How strange or odd some'er I hear myself, —
 26 As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
 27 To put an antic disposition on —
 28 That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,
 29 With arms encumber'd thus, or this headshake,
 30 Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase
 31 As "Well, well we know," or "We could, an if we would,"
 32 Or "If we list to speak," or "There be, an if they might,"
 33 Or such ambiguous giving out, to note
 34 That you know aught of me, — this do swear,
 35 So grace and mercy at your most need help you.

1 GHOST: (*Beneath*) Swear.
 2 HAMLET: Rest, rest, perturbed spirit! (*They swear.*) So,
 3 gentlemen,
 4 With all my love I do commend me to you;
 5 And what so poor a man as Hamlet is
 6 May do, t' express his love and friending to you,
 7 God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together;
 8 And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.
 9 The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,
 10 That ever I was born to set it right!
 11 Nay, come, let's go together. (*All exit.*)
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