

Hamlet: syntax and tone

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The twelve lines between the Queen and Hamlet demonstrate a unique use of syntax and a specific tone. Beginning with the Queen's first words in line 9 and ending with Hamlet's in line 12, Hamlet's responses mimic his mother's in word choice and order, while offering opposite, but certainly insulting, meanings. For example, the Queen states " Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended" only to be countered with Hamlet's witty attack, " Mother, you have my father much offended".

The parallelism and repetition in these lines (and the two after) add emphasis to Hamlet's harshness. Also important to note is the formal and informal language contrast. While the Queen's use of " thou", " hast", and " thy" are more traditional and imply authority and properness, Hamlet's use of the simpler and less formal versions of these same words subtly undermines the power behind his mother's statement.

The tone in this dialogue is one of rising emotional conflict between the Queen and Hamlet, and is best seen through the projected attitude of the Queen. Her beginning statements to Hamlet about offending Claudius reflect a tone of calm disappointment, but her frustration rises, marked by her pleading " come, come". The exclamation she makes in line 13 displays her shock at Hamlet's rudeness while the exclamation in line 21 reveals her sudden climax of fear. Undoubtedly, Hamlet also adds to the tone as his responses become increasingly deliberate.

Making use of a skillful syntax to reveal conflict, Hamlet attacks his mother with witty statements, belittles her with rhetorical questions (" what's the matter now? "), wishes he were not her son with exclamation (line 15), and finishes with a command to sit that he may " set us a glass where you may

see the inmost part of you. ” In summary, the syntax utilizes parallelism, repetition, sarcastic and rhetorical questions, exclamations, and commands in order to highlight the tone of rising emotion and tension.