



Hamlet Essay Kit #2: The Character of Claudius (Hamlet Essay Kits)

Brendan Munnely

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You have the rest of your life to appreciate Shakespeare's *Hamlet* - but only a few hours to finish that essay!

Ready and waiting for you in *The Character of Claudius* from the **Hamlet Essay Kit** series are:

- 3 x 1,500-word full sample essays
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Here are some short samples from the three 1,500-word essays about King Claudius:

1 - INTRODUCTION

Claudius is the throne and wife-stealing villain whose corrupt ambition is the “*something rotten*” (Act I-I) in the state of Denmark. His secret crime sets in motion events that bring calamity to everyone around him. Gertrude’s poignant elegy over Ophelia’s grave offers a glimpse of what has been lost in the unfolding tragedy: “*I hop’d thou shouldst have been my Hamlet’s wife*” (Act V-I). A deceitful manipulator of others, Claudius is undeniably honest with himself: “*My words fly up, my thoughts remain below*” (Act III-IV).

2 - CLAUDIUS: THE SKILFUL POLITICIAN

Claudius’ moment of triumph begins and ends with the coronation scene. He is afterwards compelled to expend almost all his mental energy grappling with the consequences of his secret murder – recruiting courtiers as spies, calling in a murderous favor from the English king, arranging the “*hugger-mugger*” (Act IV-V) burial of Polonius and manipulating Laertes into a rigged fencing duel disguised as a mere “*brother’s wager*” (Act V-II).

3 - CLAUDIUS AND GERTRUDE: LOVE AND POWER

Despite Hamlet’s accusation towards his mother of disloyalty (“*Frailty thy name is woman*” – Act I-II), Gertrude remains steadfastly at the side of her second husband. Claudius’ dark secrets mean he can never fully open his heart to her, but his comments about Gertrude – “*I could not but by her*” (Act IV-VII) – reveal another side of an otherwise cold and calculating man.

4 - CLAUDIUS AND PRINCE HAMLET: “MIGHTY OPPOSITES”

King Hamlet once stood between Claudius and the throne and queen. Now his son threatens his hold on each. A suspicious Hamlet is unswayed by Claudius’ request “*to think of us as of a father*” (Act I-II). Claudius describes Prince Hamlet as “*like the hectic in my blood*” (Act IV-III); to the prince, his uncle is the man who “*killed my king and whored my mother*” (Act V-II).

5 - CLAUDIUS AS TRAGIC HERO

Claudius is a ‘tragic hero’: an otherwise noble figure who dooms himself and everyone around him because of a fatal flaw - “*some vicious mole of nature*” (Act I-IV) - in his character. He commits one murder only to find that he must plot a second to cover up the first. When this plan fails, his next scheme leads to the death of the woman he loves. But Claudius will not give up the rewards of his crime: “*My crown, mine own*

ambition, and my queen” (Act (III-III).

6 - CONCLUSION: HOSTED ON HIS OWN PETARD

With deadly symbolism, Hamlet uses two means to kill the man who had twice schemed to murder him, and who was the cause of both his parents’ deaths. And so, just like his brother, and by the same means of his own poison, Claudius is “*Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched*” (Act I-V). King Hamlet ruled Denmark successfully for at least three decades. His usurping brother lasted only about six months.

>>> With this book you’ll very quickly be expressing your own thoughts about King Claudius, in your own individual way and personal writing style.

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