Claudius In Hamlet Essay, Research Paper

Claudius

A Man Masked in Betrayal and Murder

What could be worse than killing your brother? Marrying his wife right after! Claudius is the shadiest character in Act I of Hamlet. Claudius had poured the juice of a hebenon (henbane; a very poisonous plant) into his brother?s, Hamlet Sr.?s ear. Hamlet Sr. died quickly but was ?doomed for a certain term to walk the night.? Claudius then hurriedly married Gertrude and became king. Hamlet knows none of this however, yet already holds certain contempt for his step-father/uncle.

In scene 2, Claudius gives a very sly speech, side-stepping the fact that he is in the middle of a very incestuous relationship. He says, ?With an auspicious and a dropping eye, / With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage, / In equal scale weighing delight and dole, -/Taken to wife?? Claudius tries to beat around the bush and not really explain anything about his marriage to Gertrude. No one questions him because he is King, but the people are not happy about this situation anyway. Claudius?s slick nature somewhat surfaces when he is speaking to Hamlet also. He is obviously uncomfortable with the fact that Hamlet is still mourning the death of his father and almost seems to bully him to stop: ??to preserver/ In obstinate condolement is a course/ Of impious stubbornness; ?tis unmanly grief;/ It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,/ A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,/ An understanding simple and unschooled?? Claudius, of course, seems to say this with a face full of smiles as if politely correcting Hamlet, but it seems obvious that he is downright afraid of what Hamlet could do if he discovered the truth. This is expressed even more when Claudius says, ??we beseech you, bend you to remain/ Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye, / Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.? Keeping his enemies close seems to be his plan. Not only will Claudius be able to keep his eye on Hamlet, but he can be sure that Hamlet won?t be able to rise up against him if he stays. Claudius has much to lose if anyone finds out his terrible secret?that he killed the King, his brother. This simple fact is the reason why Claudius is not what he appears to be in Act I.