Hamlet Essay, Research Paper

Hamlet In the first three acts of the play Hamlet, King Claudius go through a subtle, but defined change in character. Claudius role in the play begins as the newly corrinated king of Denmark. The former king, King Hamlet, was poisoned by his brother, Claudius, while he was asleep. Claudius, however, made it known to everyone that the king died of a snakebite in the garden, and thus no one knew of the murder that had just taken place making his murder the perfect crime. The only problem that Claudius must deal with now is his conscience. After Claudius commits the deed of killing King Hamlet, he almost immediately marries Hamlet’s wife, Queen Gertrude. Claudius also gains a new son, his former nephew Hamlet, the son of King Hamlet. Young Hamlet is very displeased with his mother’s hasty marriage of Claudius and is angered by this incest. Hamlet has a deep attraction for his mother which goes beyond the traditional, mother-son relationship. At this point in the play, Hamlet does not know that Claudius has murdered his father, but he dislikes him anyway. Claudius is not a bad king, which is demonstrated by his handling of the situation between Young Fortinbras and Denmark, but he is not extremely popular with the people and has brought back the obnoxious custom of firing the cannons whenever the king takes a drink. Claudius’ conscience, here is non-existent. After the ghost of the dead King Hamlet tells Hamlet to avenge his murder, Hamlet has a reason to truly hate Claudius. From this point on in the play, there is definitely friction between the two. When Claudius offers Hamlet the throne after he dies, Hamlet acts apathetic as if the rule of Denmark was, but a mere trifle. Hamlet enters a deep depression which the king and others, see as madness. First they think that Hamlet is lovesick over Polonius’ daughter, Ophelia, but after the king spies on Hamlet and Ophelia in conversation, he comes to the conclusion that Hamlet is mad, a threat to his rule, and must be sent to England to be executed. This is a sign of the king’s uneasiness over the mettle of Hamlet’s anger which is directed towards him. The last thing that Claudius wants is for Hamlet to be unhappy with him, in fear that Hamlet will overthrow him, discover the murder, or possibly kill him. The king becomes increasingly nervous as time passes, making him a bit paranoid over Hamlet. By the beginning of Act III, Hamlet is almost ready to kill Claudius, but he still needs more proof that Claudius killed his father, and he also wants to put off the murder because he is a bit of a coward. Claudius is beginning to lose his composure. Hamlet decides to set a trap for him in the form of a play. The subject of the play is the murder of a king by his brother who, in turn, marries the king’s wife. The plot of the play is strikingly similar to the circumstances of King Hamlet’s murder, which strikes a disharmonious chord in the conscience of Claudius. In the middle of the play during the murder scene, Claudius gets up and begs for the play to stop so that he can get some air. Hamlet is very angered by this because it confirms that Claudius did kill his father. Later that night, Claudius prays to god to forgive him for his sins, but he is not ready to give up his new crown and his new wife. Guilt has begun to cloud over Claudius’ thoughts, and it will indeed drive him to the brink of insanity and beyond. Hamlet spies Claudius, praying with his back turned and on his knees, but he passes up the opportunity to kill the monarch with the excuse of not wanting to accidentally send Claudius to Heaven. The development of Claudius’ guilt is a gradual transformation. This metamorphosis will come to a head later in the play. The guilt though, has already begun to affect the actions of Claudius in his everyday life, by transforming a normal night out to the theater into a devastating insight into his own life. Hamlet, although he does not know it, is a key instrument in bringing about Claudius’ guilt, and Gertrude is still a bit nervous about her marriage with Claudius. Claudius life, because of the murder, will never be the same because he cannot bear to live with his conscience. This flaw will be his downfall.

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