

Claudius Praying – Practice Paper 1 Essay

On the surface, it seems as if a different perspective is revealed of Claudius in his soliloquy. In contrast to the cold, heartless impression Hamlet has created of him thus far, Claudius appears vulnerable and uncertain, evidently worried about the repercussions of the murder of Old Hamlet. His remorse, however, seems only to go skin-deep. Although he experiences internal anguish and desires repentance for his sins, his soliloquy reveals his continued hypocritical nature as his search for forgiveness is unnatural and a struggle, raising questions concerning the sincerity of his words and desires.

Comment [KH1]: Good indication that this candidate is capable of going beyond the obvious appearance of the scene

Claudius internal turmoil is apparent in this scene. He yearns for forgiveness for the murder of Old Hamlet but is doubtful that he should receive it. He understands the magnitude of his crime, comparing it to the primal eldest curse+ (2) which is Cain's murder of Abel, the first murder known to mankind. Shakespeare uses this allusion to amplify the severity of the murder, as it creates the impression that the murder is an act comparable to the first and most unthinkable of all murders. Claudius is thus reluctant to pray as he feels unworthy of receiving forgiveness. He is in double business bound+ (6), tied to both the guilt+ (5) of the murder and latent+ (5) of repenting, which pulls him in separate directions. Finally Shakespeare most powerfully highlights his indecision and internal turmoil through the image of Claudius stand[ing] in pause+ (7), neglect[ing]+ (8) both positions and making no progress.

Comment [KH2]: Good clear outlining of the main ideas that will be discussed

Comment [KH3]: Good, clear, logical development of ideas.

Comment [KH4]: Lovely smooth inclusion of quotations

In his desire to find forgiveness, Claudius attempts to convince himself of heaven's capability to cleanse his sins. He claims there should be enough rain in the sweet heavens to wash [his conscience] white as snow+ (11-12), and questions the role of mercy+ (12) and prayer+ (14), almost as if he is challenging God's ability to forgive him. Claudius use of this aggressive tone may be interpreted as a subtle show of disrespect that is an attempt to capture God's attention, highlighting his desperation to be heard. Shakespeare further accentuates Claudius's internal anguish with his constant questioning of himself. He asks a string of questions, emphasizing his uncertainty. The questions What then? What rests?+ (30) and What can it not? Yet what can it [...]?+ (31-32) are short and abrupt in nature, creating the impression that Claudius's distress is so intense that he is unable to articulate his thoughts clearly.

Comment [KH5]: Good modification of quotations to fit the sentence structure

Comment [KH6]: Good connectives that create a clear sense of logical connectedness between the different points of the essay.

Comment [KH7]: Good attempt to begin commenting on a wider variety of literary features

Although Claudius appears genuine in his desire for his sins to be cleansed, it is nonetheless clear to the audience that he remains a hypocrite as he does not want to give up his crown, [his] own ambition, and [the] queen+ (21), which he gained as a result of the murder of Old Hamlet. He is still possessor of those effects for which [he] did the murder+ (19-20), the pleasures that motivated him to commit the sin. Shakespeare underlines his hypocrisy through juxtaposition of these confessions with his desire for forgiveness, leading the audience to question his genuineness.

Comment [KH8]: Good complex connective that smoothes out the transition from the first idea in the essay to the second.

Claudius's sincerity is further brought into question with the unnatural nature of his prayer. He commands his stubborn knees+ (36) to kneel, and his heart with strings of steel+ (36) to soften. The harsh tone of the command conveys the extent of self-control Claudius required in order to convince himself to carry out this act. Shakespeare further emphasizes this with the metaphor comparing his heart to strings of steel+, suggesting it is not malleable and difficult to change.

Comment [KH9]: Good opening sentence that clearly develops the above idea further

Comment [KH10]: Another good attempt to start considering a wider variety of features

Comment [KH11]: Some good language at points

As Claudius struggles with his moral sense, the differences in the manner of judgement between earth and heaven are revealed. This is particularly clear as Claudius's desire for forgiveness evidently not due to remorse, but the fear of consequences in the afterlife. In the corrupted courses of the world+ (23), Claudius's gilded hand[s]+ (24) can buy out the law+ (26). His status and wealth are essentially able to hide his sins. However, this is not so above+ (26), and there is no shuffling+ (27) or hiding in heaven. Shakespeare uses the mouth+ (29), indicating speech, and forehead+ (29), indicating thoughts, to explicate the notion that Claudius in his entirety, including both his internal and external faults, will be revealed in heaven to give in evidence+ (30) of his sinful nature.

Comment [KH12]: Good attempt to move on to a final idea that in some ways draws together or is the culmination of the previous ideas . creating a good overall sense of structure

Although Claudius reveals a more vulnerable side to himself with his admittance of his sins and his desperation for forgiveness, his soliloquy reveals that his motives remain selfish. He is reluctant to repent entirely, unwilling to give up the rewards of his sinful murder. His attempt to pray is forced and unnatural, and he acknowledges his hypocrisy will be revealed in heaven. Shakespeare gives the impression that his cry for help is thus futile, creating irony in his hope that all may be well+(38).

Comment [KH13]: Good use of the quotation as a powerful way to end