

Evidence that Claudius is guilty of killing King Hamlet

In Shakespeare's play Hamlet, King Claudius ascends to the throne after the death of his brother, Hamlet. He then marries Hamlet's wife Gertrude. From the beginning of his reign, Claudius approaches things in a shady manner. As the play presses on, it becomes evident that Claudius killed King Hamlet to take over the throne. In Act I, the ghost of Hamlet's father, the king, comes to Hamlet and says "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder." This indicates that he was murdered, and did not die in a natural way. He goes on to tell Hamlet how Claudius killed him, saying "Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole with juice of cursed hebona in a vial, and in the porches of my ears did pour." The ghost actually implicates Claudius with this sentence, making it obvious that he committed murder. The ghost continues, saying "Thus was I, sleeping by a brother's hand." Claudius is the brother in this statement, which shows his guilt in the murder of the king. In Act II, Hamlet proclaims "I, the son of a dear father murdered." By using the word murdered, Hamlet shows that he knows his father was killed, and he believes that Claudius is the murderer. Hamlet then comes up with an idea to trick Claudius into admitting his guilt. Hamlet knows that "guilty creatures sitting at a play have by the very cunning of the scene been struck so to the soul that presently they have proclaimed their malfactions." Hamlet wants a play to be put on about a man killing his brother to become king, so Claudius will react to it. Hamlet hopes that Claudius' reaction to the play will reveal his involvement in the king's murder. Hamlet goes on to say "I'll have these players play something like the murder of my father before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks." He hopes Claudius will give himself away through a violent reaction to the play. Hamlet knows that Claudius killed King Hamlet, and says "The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king." The only motivation Hamlet has to put the play on is to show the people that Claudius is guilty of killing the king. In Act III, a conversation between Polonius and Claudius subtly reveals Claudius' guilt. Polonius says "with devotion's visage and pious action we do sugar o'er the devil himself." Claudius responds with "O, 'tis too true. How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!—O heavy burden!" He even knows that he is responsible for the king's death, and admits it in this conversation. When Hamlet finally puts on his play, the queen in the play delivers some lines directed at Gertrude and Claudius. The player queen says "In second husband let me be accurst! None wed the second but who killed the first." This line is meant specifically for Claudius, since he killed the king and married the queen. Claudius is uneasy, but conceals his true thoughts. The player queen goes on to say "A second time I kill my husband dead when second husband kisses me in bed." This quote addresses the fact that Claudius married the queen after killing her husband. As the play continues, Hamlet watches as Claudius leaps up and says "Give me some light. Away!" This reaction is one of a guilty man, and only strengthens the evidence that Claudius killed the king. Once alone, Claudius truly realizes his guilt in the death of his brother, calling his deed "rank, it smells to heaven." The word rank is associated with bad, or rotten, just as the deed of murder is rotten. He continues by saying his actions have "the primal eldest curse upon't, a brother's murder." The 'primal eldest curse' is the curse of Cain, the first murderer, who killed his brother. The comparison of Claudius to Cain further shows how Claudius killed his brother to take the

throne. He calls his "cursed hand" "thicker than itself with brother's blood." The fact that Claudius has his brother's blood on his hands strongly connects him to the king's murder. He tries to pray, but cannot, since he "still [possesses] those effects for which [he] did the murder." The effects are obviously being king and marrying Gertrude. Claudius is attempting to free his soul from this deed, thus implying that he was part of his brother's murder, and therefore guilty. The evidence given proves that Claudius is guilty of killing his brother in order to become king and satisfy his hunger for power.