

**Theme:** Shakespeare's Villains **Text:** Extract from *Hamlet* (Act III Scene 3)

<p>5 O, my offence is rank it smells to heaven; It hath the primal eldest curse upon't, A brother's murder. Pray can I not, Though inclination be as sharp as will: My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent; And, like a man to double business bound, I stand in pause where I shall first begin, And both neglect. What if this cursed hand Were thicker than itself with brother's blood, 10 Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy But to confront the visage of offence? And what's in prayer but this two-fold force, To be forestalled ere we come to fall, 15 Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up; My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder' That cannot be; since I am still possess'd Of those effects for which I did the murder, 20 My crown, mine own ambition and my queen. May one be pardon'd and retain the offence? In the corrupted currents of this world Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice, And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself 25 Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above; There is no shuffling, there the action lies In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd, Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults, To give in evidence. What then? what rests? 30 Try what repentance can: what can it not? Yet what can it when one can not repent? O wretched state! O bosom black as death! O limed soul, that, struggling to be free, Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make assay! 35 Bow, stubborn knees; and, heart with strings of steel, Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe! All may be well.</p>	<p>rank – offensive hath – (old use) has; primal – original, first of its kind (cf. Cain's fratricide of Abel) inclination – readiness; sharp – intense</p> <p>whereto ... but – what is the aim of mercy if not to deal with those who have committed a crime (visage – face of offence); two-fold - double forestalled – hindered; ere – before pardon'd being down – being forgiven one's sin</p> <p>serve my turn – be right for Claudius still possessed of ....effects – Claudius still has what he gained by his crime</p> <p>retain the offence – keep the gain of the crime</p> <p>gilded hand – the rich can corrupt judges by paying bribes; oft – often; 'tis – it is; wicked prize – what was gained by the crime; above – in heaven; shuffling – no excuses are accepted before the heavenly judge man must tell the truth in facing his evil deeds</p> <p>rests – remains to be done repentance – feeling of regret about one's sins</p> <p>wretched – miserable; bosom – heart, soul limed – besmeared (with lime/dung) art more engaged – are more caught in a net of evil deeds; make assay – try to help; stubborn – unwilling to obey; sinews – (cognate) they connect muscles and bones</p>
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**Assignments:**

- 1) For what reason does Shakespeare use soliloquy in this scene? (Extract relevant information on Claudius' villainy in your answer.)
- 2) Work closely on the role of religion in this extract that is usually set in the chapel of the royal castle.
- 3) Compare Claudius – as we get to know him in this scene - to one other Shakespearean villain of your choice. Who fares better – who fares worse in your judgement? Give reasons in your answer.