

## **Claudius Character Analysis**

Hamlet's major antagonist is a shrewd, lustful, conniving king who contrasts sharply with the other male characters in the play. Whereas most of the other important men in *Hamlet* are preoccupied with ideas of justice, revenge, and moral balance, Claudius is bent upon maintaining his own power. The old King Hamlet was apparently a stern warrior, but Claudius is a corrupt politician whose main weapon is his ability to manipulate others through his skillful use of language. Claudius's speech is compared to poison being poured in the ear—the method he used to murder Hamlet's father. Claudius's love for Gertrude may be sincere, but it also seems likely that he married her as a strategic move, to help him win the throne away from Hamlet after the death of the king. As the play progresses, Claudius's mounting fear of Hamlet's insanity leads him to ever greater self-preoccupation; when Gertrude tells him that Hamlet has killed Polonius, Claudius does not remark that Gertrude might have been in danger, but only that he would have been in danger had he been in the room. He tells Laertes the same thing as he attempts to soothe the young man's anger after his father's death. Claudius is ultimately too crafty for his own good. In Act V, scene ii, rather than allowing Laertes only two methods of killing Hamlet, the sharpened sword and the poison on the blade, Claudius insists on a third, the poisoned goblet. When Gertrude inadvertently drinks the poison and dies, Hamlet is at last able to bring himself to kill Claudius, and the king is felled by his own cowardly machination.