

# Composition 2

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Composition 2 Hamlet and the Universal Reasons Behind Murder There is a reason for every death, a dark motive for every assassination or brutal killing of another human being. It has been proven throughout human history that murder can be used as a means to a desired end. Characters in the Shakespeare drama, Hamlet, certainly use murder to their advantage in order to accomplish their goals. To gain political power and influence, murder is utilized by some major characters of the play. Vengeance in the form of murder is also prominent within the script; murder in this sense acts as a tool for justice and redemption. Intense sexual desires may have been key contributions to the motivation for murder within Hamlet. Finally, some characters desire to murder themselves; suicide may seem to be the only logical option to escape a world filled with many horrors such as murder itself. Politics are not always morally positive and without corruption. The political "atmosphere" of Hamlet is no different. The epitome of political corruption within the play can be attributed to King Claudius, the brother of the deceased King Hamlet. The murder of Hamlet by his bloody hands is the event that ignites the drama that unfolds afterwards and is a perfect example of using murder as a means to a desired goal; this time, the goal was the Danish crown as well as King Hamlet's young wife, Gertrude. King Claudius' crime is not an uncommon occurrence. As stated by John Safer in an essay titled "Hamlet Inconsistent", "princes, we have learned from countless examples throughout history and drama, plot, scheme, maneuver, risk, and sometimes lose their lives in their attempts to become kings." (Safer) Even Hamlet can be accused of having thoughts of murder in order to gain political power as King of Denmark; it was supposed to be his throne

after his father's death until Claudius snatched it from him through skillful deception. Prince Hamlet's two long-time friends, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, both intended to use murder to gain political influence with King Claudius. Like Claudius has done with his dear older brother, they were even willing to murder someone close in their lives, Prince Hamlet. In order to gain Claudius's favor, Guildenstern even stated " Most holy and religious fear it is, to keep those many, many bodies safe that live and feed upon your majesty. " (Act 3, Scene 3, Lines 7-10 Crowther) This statement is regarding Hamlet's seemingly insane state; Guildenstern (and Rosencrantz) had essentially turned their back on Hamlet and decided to go down a corrupted path. Their greed allowed the murder of their former best friend to be a virtually simple and necessary task. Guildenstern even further confirms this; " But we both obey and here give up ourselves, in the full bent, to lay our service freely at your feet to be commanded. " (Act 2, Scene 2, Lines 29-32 Crowther) Vengeance plays a key role in the drama; three sons within the text have their own story of revenge within the plot. (Shmoop Editorial Team) The most important revenge story within the script follows Prince Hamlet's desire to kill his uncle, Claudius, for the cold assassination of his father, King Hamlet, with a deadly poison in the King's slumber. His vengeance does not come swiftly although, as Hamlet's tragic flaw is his indecision and hesitation to commit to any one action. Hamlet's indecisiveness allows the drama of the play to unfold and spiral to even further tragedy and catastrophe. Hamlet sought vengeance because his goal was partly to end the corruption and madness within the confines of the Royal Court of Denmark. Hamlet in essence, " recognizes the decay of the

Danish society". As stated, this task of restoring society would be accomplished when the representation of this decay, Claudius, dies. ("Hamlet By William Shakespeare Character Analysis: Hamlet.") By killing Claudius, Prince Hamlet would avenge Hamlet Senior's death and restore order within the Kingdom of Denmark. Not only does it restore order within the Kingdom, it also restores spiritual order. The Ghost of Hamlet Sr. pleads for his son, Prince Hamlet, to kill the king and redeem his soul that is confined to the fires of Purgatory. This is the only way, according to the Ghost, that Hamlet's father will be able to repent for the sins of his past life and enter Heaven in peace. Hamlet's primary goal for the majority of the play is finally understood with this information; the death of Claudius would redeem the legacy of his betrayed father, a sort of personal vendetta for Prince Hamlet. With this redemption, Hamlet's mind will be assured that his father's ghost will now be able to die easily and without problems while his arch-nemesis, Claudius, will fall and go to eternal Hell for his harsh sins. Essentially, it is both divine justice in the case of Claudius and the late King Hamlet, and personal redemption for Prince Hamlet. Fortinbras, the Prince of Norway, shares a similar background as Hamlet. They are both princes who have lost their fathers and their deserved thrones to their uncles. Instead of being killed by his own brother, King Fortinbras was slain by King Hamlet. In order to avenge his father's death, Fortinbras initially sets up an immediate invasion of Danish territory. His swift and forceful action is unlike Hamlet's hesitation and indecision and so Fortinbras acts as a foil to Hamlet. (Schmoop Editorial Team) Horatio states to Marcellus in Act One, " Now, sir, young Fortinbras, Of unimprov'd mettle hot and full, Hath in the skirts of

Norway here and there Shaked up a list of lawless resolute, For food and diet, to some enterprise That hath a stomach in 't, which is no other-As it doth well appear unto our state-But to recover of us, by strong hand". (Act 1, Scene 1, Lines 94-103 Crowther) From this it is understood that Fortinbras is willing to basically murder anyone in his path of conquest for the redemption of the late King Fortinbras. Unlike cold, brutal and very personal murder, all of the killing would be theoretically in the battlefield; although, murder is murder and the motive is the same, justice in the avenging of a loved one's death. Perhaps Fortinbras even wished to personally murder Prince Hamlet at some point in order to further redeem his father's death; it would make sense given Fortinbras's fiery attitude. (" The Role of Fortinbras in Shakespeare's Hamlet") At the same time, this murderous conquest would also grant Fortinbras with the political power he believes he deserves; a successful invasion would grant him all the lands of the Kingdom of Denmark. Fortinbras actually does receive political power in the end of the play, but without personally murdering anyone. Fortinbras arrives at a ghastly scene of the Danish Royal court to find out that the royal Danes murdered each other, essentially allowing him to take the throne. Fortinbras himself in Act Five states in the final scene, " Let us haste to hear it, And call the noblest to the audience. For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune. I have some rights of memory in this kingdom, Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me." (Act 5, Scene 2, Lines 387-391 Crowther) Fortinbras desired to murder for these Danish lands, but did not have to, the task of murder was already completed for him while he was just able to reap the rewards. (" The Role of Fortinbras in Shakespeare's Hamlet") Like Fortinbras,

Laertes, the son of Royal Advisor Polonius, is very hot-headed and swift in his actions. When he finds out that Hamlet murdered Polonius in Queen Gertrude's chambers, his fit of rage almost causes the striking down of King Claudius. Ultimate justice for his beloved father is the sole focus within Laertes's mind at this point in the script and he intends to murder anyone responsible for it. Laertes's desire for murder in this case clouded his mind, which is why he almost slays Claudius and is soon deceived by Claudius to join forces with him in taking down Hamlet. Laertes's clouded judgment could have even caused him to kill anyone that Claudius blamed for Polonius's death. Indeed, vengeance and desire for murder is very strong within Laertes; " How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with: To hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil! Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit! I dare damnation. To this point I stand, That both the worlds I give to negligence, Let come what comes; only I'll be revenged Most thoroughly for my father. " (Act 4, Scene 5, Lines 104-110 Crowther) Laertes does finally avenge his father by killing Hamlet, but he realizes that killing Hamlet was a mistake; Claudius was the true culprit, the cause of death for several important members of the Danish royalty, including his sister Ophelia and father, Polonius. After Hamlet kills Claudius, Laertes proclaims to Hamlet, " He is justly served. It is a poison tempered by himself. Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet. Mine and my father's death come not upon thee, Nor thine on me. " (Act 5, Scene 2, Lines 322-326 Crowther) True justice and redemption for his loved ones came with Hamlet's murder of Claudius. Like Fortinbras, justice was not delivered by personal means; it was served through murder by another's bloody hands. Prince Hamlet's possible

incestuous jealousy of Claudius's intimate relationship with Queen Gertrude (Prince Hamlet's mother) can even be a cause of Hamlet's murderous desires towards his uncle. In this case, jealousy stems from Hamlet's sexual desire for his own mother. An analysis of Hamlet's psyche would agree with psychologist Sigmund Freud's Oedipus Complex theory that states men have an inhibited incestuous desire for their mothers to the point where they may wish to kill their own fathers to fulfill that desire. (Cherry) This is shown through Hamlet's intense hatred for Claudius and his observation of Claudius's constant sexual intimacy with Gertrude ("Hamlet By William Shakespeare Character Analysis Hamlet.") Hamlet's consistent obsession with his mother's sex life contributes to the Oedipus Theory. He identified with his father, King Hamlet, even to the extent where he idolized him and compared him to Roman Gods. (Abeijon) This identification allows the Oedipus Complex to resolve itself; a son who idolizes and identifies with their father would not want to murder them. (Cherry) Hamlet states in Act Two, "My father's brother, but no more like my father Than I to Hercules." (Act 1, Scene 2, Lines 151-153 Crowther), implying that Claudius is much less of a man than his father in his eyes. When Claudius replaced his actual father as the father figure, Hamlet completely lost this identification and felt no praise towards Claudius, just hatred. Even though he lost the identification, he did not lose the sexual desire for Gertrude. Hamlet's rival became Claudius in this case, and Hamlet did not want to lose his beloved mother to him. (Abeijon) Murder of Claudius was decided by Hamlet to be the proper means to obtain Gertrude all for himself. Like Hamlet, Claudius uses murder as a tool to obtain Queen Gertrude all for himself. Unlike Hamlet, Claudius

actually accomplishes his goal before his death. Claudius murdered King Hamlet partly to fulfill his sexual desires with Gertrude, which would have been nearly impossible without Hamlet disposed of. Suicide can be considered murdering oneself with the end goal of removing yourself from existence. The reasons for this desire may vary with the subject. Hamlet's state of mind throughout the play is that of despair. The famous line spoken by Hamlet, "To be, or not to be? That is the question" (Act 3, Scene 1, Line 57 Crowther), challenges the very purpose of life. His thoughts of suicide are apparent and consistent; "Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt, Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew" (Act 1, Scene 2, Lines 129-130 Crowther). The death of his father, the installment of Claudius as king instead of him and the relationship between Gertrude and Claudius all contribute to Hamlet's desperation. Initially, Hamlet's primary goal was not to murder King Claudius but to murder himself; Hamlet did not know for sure that Claudius assassinated his father until the end of Act One when the Ghost confirmed his suspicion. Only then did Hamlet's goal change from removing himself from the "cruel" world into seeking vengeance against Claudius and power, both politically and sexually. With this alteration of ends came the alteration of means. Instead of targeting himself to murder, Hamlet murders Claudius in the final scene of the play. Ophelia, the daughter of Polonius, after hearing of her father's death is left in a devastated, near-suicidal state. Her accidental fall and drowning from Gertrude's account of the incident may not all be "accidental". Gertrude states, "But long it could not be Till that her garments, heavy with their drink, Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay To muddy death." (Act 4, Scene 7, Lines 176-179 Crowther)



Ophelia's death seems to be a form of "passive" suicide. Rather than committing direct suicide, Ophelia "simply neglects to save herself from sinking" after falling into the brook. (Shmoop Editorial Team) After realizing the perfect opportunity in removing herself from a world she may find unforgiving due to her circumstances, Ophelia commits to this end goal and allows herself to drown. This is her form of murder and ultimate closure. Murder is a key plot device utilized by Shakespeare within Hamlet, it invokes intense and primal human emotions. As it is throughout the drama, murder is pervasive throughout human history. Man has always tried to kill man, whether it is for power, vengeance, justice or sex. Man has even murdered himself numerous times in order to escape the world man has created. Murder will always be treated as a serious crime within society, and for good reason, but at the same time, it will always inevitably have a presence in human civilization. Sometimes, the best we can do to end the occurrence of murder is understand the reasons and motivations behind each and every killing.

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