

William Shakespeare

Hamlet (1600-01)

TEXT 3



BEFORE READING

'Frailty, thy name is woman' is a sentence uttered by Hamlet in his first soliloquy when he expresses his disappointment at his mother's hasty marriage with Claudius. Keep it in mind while reading the following extract and say if it can be applied to Gertrude.



Hamlet



MP3 49

After the ghost has asked Hamlet to remember and to revenge him, according to the medieval code, the young prince is more and more torn between the necessity to comply with his father's request and his inability to act, as appears in many of his soliloquies. He pretends to be mad and arranges the performance of a play resembling his father's murder to observe Claudius' reactions, which clearly betray his guilt. After the performance he visits his mother.

HAMLET. Look here, upon this picture, and on this,
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
See, what a grace was seated on this brow;
Hyperion's¹ curls; the front of Jove² himself;
5 An eye like Mars³, to threaten and command;
A station like the herald Mercury⁴
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;
A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
10 To give the world assurance of a man:
This was your husband. Look you now, what follows:
Here is your husband; like a mildew'd ear,
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
15 And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?
You cannot call it love; for at your age
The hey-day in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgment: and what judgment
Would step from this to this? [...]

AMLETO. Guardate questo ritratto, e quest'altro. Sono le immagini fedeli dei due fratelli. Guardate quanta luce di grazia su questo volto! I riccioli d'Iperione, la fronte di Giove; l'occhio d'un Marte alla minaccia e al comando; il portamento di Mercurio l'araldo, appena posa il piede sui colli ai margini del cielo; un complesso e una forma in cui, veramente, sembra che ogni dio abbia impresso il suo suggello per garantire al mondo l'autenticità di un uomo totale. Questo 'era' il vostro marito. Ma guardate ora quest'altro, il sopravvenuto. Questo 'è' il vostro marito, la spiga guasta che insidia la salute del fratello sano. Avete occhi, voi?
E allora, come avete potuto abbandonare questo pascolo d'alta montagna per ingrassare in questa palude? Ah! Avete occhi? E potete dire che è amore? All'età vostra già si è placato il furore di Iulio; e il sangue, fatto mansueto e savio, ubbidisce al giudizio. Ma quale giudizio vi porta a questo trapasso? [...]

1. **Hyperion:** Iperione; nella mitologia greca è un titano, padre di Elio (il sole).

2. **Jove:** Giove, il mitologico re degli dei.

3. **Mars:** Marte, il dio della guerra.

4. **Mercury:** Mercurio, il messaggero alato degli dei.

20 O shame! where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax,
And melt in her own fire: proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,
25 Since frost itself as actively doth burn
And reason panders will.

QUEEN GERTRUDE. O Hamlet, speak no more:
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;
And there I see such black and grained spots
30 As will not leave their tinct.

HAMLET. Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty, -

35 **QUEEN GERTRUDE.** O, speak to me no more;
These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears;
No more, sweet Hamlet!

HAMLET. A murderer and a villain;
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
40 Of your precedent lord; a vice of kings;
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole,
And put it in his pocket!

QUEEN GERTRUDE. No more!

45 **HAMLET.** A king of shreds and patches, -

O vergogna, dov'è il tuo rossore? Ribelle inferno, se tu puoi accendere un tal braciere nelle midolla d'una matrona, sia cera alla fiamma viva della giovinezza la virtù e si fonda al suo stesso fuoco; e si proclami che non c'è vergogna, quando viene all'assalto, d'impeto, il desiderio; ché se alla foia serve da mezzana la ragione, vedremo il ghiaccio in fiamme.

REGINA. Oh basta, Amleto! Tu costringi i miei occhi a guardare nel fondo dell'anima mia. E vedo laggiù macchie nere e così aderenti che vi lasceranno un segno indelebile.

AMLETO. E, intanto, vivere arrosolata in un letto di corruzione tra tanfate di sudaticcio e fetori di lardo rancido; e con parolette sdolcinate fare all'amore sopra a un mucchio di letame.

REGINA. Oh basta! Basta! Le tue parole m'entrano per le orecchie come pugnali. Oh basta, Amleto caro.

AMLETO. Un assassino, un vigliacco, un cialtrone che non vale la ventesima parte d'un millimetro del vostro re di prima; una parodia di re, un tagliaborse del potere e del regno che da un cassetto scassinato ha tratto di furto il ricco diadema della regalità, e se l'è cacciato in tasca.

REGINA. Basta! Basta!

AMLETO. Un re di stracci e toppe.

Traduzione di C. V. Lodovici



OVER TO YOU

1 Answer the following questions.

1. Where is Hamlet?
2. What is his intention in talking to his mother?
3. What two objects does Hamlet compare? What differences does he point out in his comparison?

2 When reproaching his mother, what does Hamlet criticise her for? (Choose.)

- her complicity in the murder of his father
 her marriage to an inferior husband
 her marriage to her former husband's brother
 other (specify) ...

3 What is his mother's reaction?

4 Identify the images used to juxtapose the two brothers, King Hamlet and Claudius. Fill in the following chart.

King Hamlet	Claudius
.....
.....

5 'What feelings are conveyed through this imagery?

6 Hamlet's imagery is associated with beauty, nature and sex. Find expressions related to these areas.

Beauty
Nature
Sex

7 What feelings does the Queen show in her words? Tick as appropriate.

- disbelief
- remorse
- shame
- anger
- sorrow

8 As far as language and style are concerned¹ answer true or false.

1. There are references to mythology.
2. The style is colloquial.
3. There are references to corruption/decay.
4. The text is in prose.
5. There is juxtaposition of opposites.

T	F
T	F
T	F
T	F
T	F

9 Why does Hamlet treat his mother with such violence? Discuss the following points.

1. He has an Oedipus complex²: he is jealous of Claudius.
 2. He thinks she is an accomplice in murder, as well as an adulterer.
 3. He wants to make her understand her sin, and become his ally.
 4. He is really mad as his mother's behavior has driven him crazy.
 5. He is a misogynist³ (as he shows in his relationship with Ophelia).
- Other: ...

1. Consider in Shakespeare's time, audiences expected actors, especially in histories and tragedies, to speak in verse. The poetic style of verse was felt to be particularly suitable for kings, tragic themes and moments of high emotional intensity, while prose was used especially in comedies and by people of low origin (like the gravediggers in *Hamlet's* Act V), or when a character loses his control and so he shifts from verse to prose. More than ninety per cent in *Hamlet* is in blank verse. It is written in iambic pentameter. A ten-syllable line has five stresses: five stressed (/) syllables alternate with five unstressed (X) syllables, with the pattern of unstressed/stressed, as in the example of line 1: Look here, upon this picture, and on this X / X / X / X / X /

2. This is a Freudian interpretation of the character of Hamlet, obsessed by his mother's sexuality.

3. **A man who hates women:** in this case Hamlet rejects Ophelia's love and blames his mother's behavior he considers adulterous.