

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## “Frailty, Thy Name is Woman!”

*From Hamlet*

By William Shakespeare  
1603

*William Shakespeare is a British poet and playwright who is widely regarded as the greatest writer and playwright in the English language. Hamlet is one of Shakespeare’s most famous tragedies. The play dramatizes the revenge Prince Hamlet is instructed to enact on his uncle Claudius, who murdered Hamlet’s father and married his mother. As you read, take notes on how Hamlet uses figurative language to express his feelings.*

### Hamlet:

- [1] O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt  
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!  
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
His canon<sup>1</sup> 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
- [5] How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie<sup>2</sup> on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,  
That grows to seed; things rank<sup>3</sup> and gross in  
nature  
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
- [10] But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two:  
So excellent a king; that was, to this,  
Hyperion<sup>4</sup> to a satyr;<sup>5</sup> so loving to my mother  
That he might not beteem<sup>6</sup> the winds of heaven  
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
- [15] Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,  
As if increase of appetite had grown  
By what it fed on: and yet, within a month —  
Let me not think on't — Frailty, thy name is  
woman! —  
A little month, or ere<sup>7</sup> those shoes were old
- [20] With which she follow'd my poor father's body,  
Like Niobe,<sup>8</sup> all tears: — why she, even she —  
O, God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,



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1. A canon is a set of rules, judgments, and morals. Here they refer to ones set by God, referred to as “the Everlasting.”
2. An exclamation of distaste
3. very unpleasant; overgrown vegetation
4. A powerful, godly Titan from Greek mythology and the father of the sun, moon, and stars.
5. A satyr was another figure from Greek mythology, half man and half goat.
6. to grant permission to
7. before

Would havemourn'd longer — married with my uncle,  
My father's brother, but no more like my father  
[25] Than I to Hercules:<sup>9</sup> within a month:  
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,  
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post  
With such dexterity to incestuous<sup>10</sup> sheets!  
[30] It is not nor it cannot come to good:  
But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue.

*"Frailty, Thy Name is Woman!" from Hamlet by William Shakespeare (1603) is in the public domain.*

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8. In Greek mythology, Niobe was a queen who made the mistake of rudely boasting to Leto, who only had twins, that she had seven sons and seven daughters. Unfortunately for her, Leto's twins were the gods Apollo and Artemis, who killed all of Niobe's children as a punishment for insulting their mother. Niobe was so devastated that she wept ceaselessly. The gods took pity on her and turned her into a stone, but the stone still spouted water like her tears.
  9. A mighty hero from Greek mythology
  10. Although Gertrude is not related by blood to Claudius, it is still considered incestuous because he is her brother-in-law.

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best expresses Hamlet’s perspective in this soliloquy?
  - A. Life is cruel and death is the only relief, as shown by the death of his father.
  - B. In mythology, heroes’ paths are determined by fate or destiny.
  - C. His mother’s betrayal is evidence that women are weaker than men.
  - D. The power of human nature always overcomes the rules of society.
  
2. PART B: Which phrase from the soliloquy provide the best support for the answer to Part A?
  - A. “O, that this too too solid flesh would melt / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!” (Lines 1-2)
  - B. “How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,/Seem to me all the uses of this world!” (Lines 5-6)
  - C. “... tis an unweeded garden, / That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely.” (Lines 7-9)
  - D. “O, God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,/Would have mourn’d longer--married with my uncle,” (Lines 22-23)
  
3. PART A: Which statement best describes how Hamlet’s ideas progress in his soliloquy?
  - A. Hamlet yells at his mother for her choices, explores with his rage toward his father’s death, and ends his soliloquy by accusing his mother of sin.
  - B. Hamlet expresses despair over life, remembers his mother and father’s relationship, and then expresses his frustration with the current state of his family.
  - C. Hamlet describes his father’s death in detail and dwells on the quick marriage of his mother and her new husband, although he does not blame her.
  - D. Hamlet compares himself to a hero in Greek mythology who finds himself facing an impossible task, which he later reveals to be the grief he feels for his father.
  
4. Explain the impact that the use of figurative language has on the soliloquy’s tone. Cite evidence from the text in your response.

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## Discussion Questions

***Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.***

1. In your opinion, were Hamlet's mother's actions a betrayal? Why or why not?
2. In the context of this soliloquy, what can we learn from tragedy? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. In the context of this soliloquy, how do people face death? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.