

This speech is written in Shakespearean style from the perspective of Gertrude in *Hamlet*. For those unfamiliar with *Hamlet*, Gertrude is the Queen of Denmark whose current husband (Claudius- the villain of the play) is the brother of her previous husband (King Hamlet). Her son with the deceased King Hamlet, also confusingly called Hamlet, is the protagonist. Many critics of *Hamlet* deplore Gertrude as a hyper-sexual, fatuous woman who represents the immorality of the Elsinore court. Through this speech, I seek to undermine this misogynistic criticism- instead depicting her as a victim of male imperial ambitions.

ACT 3 SCENE 4

*Enter Gertrude and attendant sitting at a vanity table in her closet
(Taking out her braid)*

Gertrude: Away. I'll do't, alone.

Attendant exit.

Gertrude: Fie for these grey hairs.
That once he decked these limpish braids with rose!
His hands as tender soft as morning dew
And honeyed breath which spilt a nectar sweet
So good and gentle. Claudius, where art thou?
Now in your eyes my bygone tyrant glints.
My love, the spectre of our springtime joy
Haunts still my heart so lucid and so close
Yet alien to the now as Heav'n to Hell.
Its deathbed stench in absence of thee swells
And festers -- rank-- a shroud upon our bed.
Tis nearly drowned. Wherefore do men seek out
These venom'd oceans of most wretched power?
And what black sins must plague my bosom that,
Accurs'd with my father's regal blood,
These brothers on their kingly quest usurp
My very body in love's pretence? I,
A craft to chart them through streams of my blood,
Those waters night-murky and hell-blasted.
See! how she creaks and cracks under his weight,
A fraying deck who winces at his tread,
Her stern a-rocking, tumbling, buff'ed by
The deluge of his rapacious desires,
my bow he flogs into a wat'ry grave.
Oh cold and cruel the sovereign summons fall!
Unwilling Lady Hamlet, Queen Claudius:
His ship, his crown, his sacrificial lamb,
His siren Lady of the Lake who bore
The very blade on which he falls:
Butchers his life, my heart, our earthly peace.
All too that's divine drown'd and submerged
'Neath ebbs and flows of this prisonlike state.
These waves too wrench my wretched child away;
Who rots now bitter cold and daily nighted.

(Ruefully touches a framed photo of Hamlet as a child which is stood on her vanity table before placing it back, face-down)

Once more, I find myself alone-
A bobbing apple idling for the maw,
His fargone imperial jointress lost
In the vast ocean of her father's blood:
My braid of roses now a crown of thorns.

Hamlet *(offstage, angry)*: Mother, mother!

Gertrude: Hark! he comes
(to her image in the mirror)

Hold firm your tongue lest he should hold your heart.
Silence tis all I have left that man hath not snatched.

[then the 'real' Act 3 Scene 4 commences]