The Hamlet Soliloquies

I.

THERE are marked similarities in the first, second and fourth soliloquies of Hamlet. Although the third appears to be different sufficiently like the others to be reckoned with them in estimating impression the prince is likely to have made upon the audiences of the 17th century. Of course such an impression would vary considerably person to person and from class to class, but it is possible to think of a general impression left upon the audience of that time by the speaker of what be the most important sources of insight into character in a play.

1. References—line numbering only—are to the Oxford Edition (Ed. W. J. of the complete works of Shakespeare.

2. The importance of the soliloquies is my justification for taking them out of play.
THE HAMLET SOLiloQUIES

To the four soliloquies is a dilemma in which the speaker finds his own particular position makes him aware of a general situation in which he has no place except in one kind of humiliating position or another. The world of Denmark offers him nothing but several sorts of degradation to a prince, and his personal sensitiveness to his own imagined war with his experience of the grossest examples of mankind's sensibilities. Hamlet is prince and yet he sees he is more degraded than could be; further he will have man both as he is and as he is round the cycle of the impossible Hamlet situation turns. There Hamlet both the inability to compromise with humanity and at the same acceptance of the necessity for such compromise. Hamlet himself in the commonest of all tangles of human thought. If he had the vocabulary of metaphysical discrimination, he might have ed as exercised by the same problems as Shakespeare's younger aires. The difference between them is that Hamlet expresses him his most satirical generalisings, more concretely, and, of course, ater in a revenge play.

The configuration of the Hamlet soliloquy repeats typically a device in his own words, "in one line two crafts directly meet." Escape and the weapon the wit tempers is destined for the hero's own mummolation. There is to be noted the recurrence of an imagined fering the speaker various alternatives all of them bad. Each which helps to clarify the character's reaction to this situation initial pattern of good perverted and bad which remains bad. The of the speaker is in proportion to the sharpness of the opposing en which he is being torn. In the play scene the king is caught in a thing this. He contributes to his own undoing by his consent, by see the play to its end. As he suffers, whether he goes or stays, the prince. For those who could see this, it would be irony almost or others it would be a neat piece of revenge play "business."

The soliloquy is described by a recent editor as a "piece of medita-trippingly on the tongue, with two striking pauses. And these these two semi-colons, give us the clue to the speaker's mood. binking, not declaiming. He speaks as in a dream. But the hightmare, the full significance of which we do not realise until the 3's. Whether this is declamation or not would depend on ds are spoken. Elizabethan acting styles favoured declamation, earest evidence of this and interesting comment too in the well-
ge in Act 3. In whatever way the lines were rendered by the allowed the dramatic pointing of the Second Quarto, it is note-
UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

For all its meditative air it speaks the language of passion. The opening lines with their threefold stress on "melt, thaw and resolve itself into a moat," suggest not cool gratification but perfervid anxiety. As Dover Wilson and Lloyd Thomas notes, the lines not the attractions of dissolution are contemplated, but a picture of sin-spotted nature from which the speakers imagination revolts. In no case whether one reads "sullied" or "solid," it is plain that the direction Hamlet's thought is from one unwelcome and nauseating possibility to another. Since the stress is on the wished for state of dissolution, one can read "solid," which would provide associations of intractable hardness and oppression—the state in which one wearies of "solid firmness" from which the only escape is to the opposite—"Dew." This would confirm unwholesome damps, chills, "the night's danke dew" of Friar Lawrence, "rotten damps" which ravish the morning air, and the vapidous foggy spirit of The Rape of Lucrece. Hamlet finds himself at debate with himself, in general—he is thinking of the common lot of humanity—is heavy and the only alternative is unwholesomeness.

The Everlasting's canonic is not invoked with a tone of awe but with that of irritation, as if the Everlasting wished to reserve for mortals who could evade it if they could, an eternity of solid firmness. In the two lines which follow metaphors from food and usury are mixed to keep this effect. Even if the "vses" of the world had been profitable, it is worth noting life would still be contaminated with the dirty business of usury.

Donne's use of the verb "clewed..." which is illus trated in the text. But inkcl'd a

4. It is true that "dew" called up emblematically the attractive sensuousness of the living jewel in the breast of the morning flower—see Andrew Marvell: Ben Jonson and Lloyd Thomas. (1940) p. 68 n2. Dew could just as well symbolise unhealthiness and refreshing power, gentle fall, or bright jewel trembling in the morning sun. The speaker quotes Donne's use of the verb "dewed..." which is illustrative—"But infected and with these frivolous, nay pernicious apparitions and revelations..." Sermons cv. 144.

5. Stoll—Shakespeare and Other Masters (1940)—notes throughout his life, Hamlet the prince's tendency to reach "beyond the death of his father and the murder of his mother, and embrace life itself."

6. With regard to this Hamlet is very much the man of his time—note later to democratic "hyre and Sallery."
to sense”—the divine and the bestial of which man is compounded. The dilemma in which Hamlet is caught, the torture to which he submits himself, is understandable to an audience brought up on many centuries of Christian commonplaces—the war between the senses and the soul, between good reason and bestial oblivion, between the pleasures of life and the corruption of death, between intellect and blood, between the antithetical senses “nature”—that which was emblematic of the highest reach of human thinking and that which merely included man’s kinship with the beasts. In like lines there is a slight ambiguity which illustrates the continual bifurcation of Hamlet’s thought—things “rank and gross” in “Nature” might be all things which are evil because of their connection with “nature,” or only things which are in human nature evil. Nature could either be corruption or the common human legacy. Whether the prince thinks “rankness is the general attribute of “nature,” or whether he believes that some things in “nature” are so affected, seems to be of little moment, for the simplicity of the emotion he feels stresses the evil in his situation. Most of nature is evil—the bottomless pit with the revolting stench. Man might be “quintessence of dust ” or a piece of divine work in an lower category than the angels and God. In this soliloquy the prince’s agitation is the result of the shock in trying to comprehend both, and the difficulty of permitting the baser affinities which “flesh” suggests from his mind. His protest against being immersed only releases the further “things rank and gross in nature,” and “increase of appetite” finally merge him. The prince’s emotions turn towards the contemplation of human depravity. The direction of his thoughts is towards what in Lear’s imagination women inherit from the fiends:

“... But to the girdle do the gods inherit, beneath is all the Fiends.
There’s hell, there’s darkness, there is the sulphurous pit.”

Carried away by this passion, by the picture of woman as the Eve of Rabbins, Hamlet describes his mother’s love for his father as depravity. An original intention—to contrast the excellence of the love between his father and mother (natural love in one sense of the term) with the incestuous passion that same mother for his uncle—is defeated by the violence of his emotion. He is often defeated and so often in the same way that it seems as if he places upon himself the task of fighting a hopeless conflict. The prince’s imagination sickens at the tainting of his mother’s love, and the wave of indignation mounts so high that it breaks scornfully upon it as if he has the time intended to destroy it as a lustful deformity. His mother’s love for his father is framed in an image which is explicit condemnation, yet his intent was to contrast it favourably with the lust she lavishes on a “Satan.”

9. The prophetic verse in Genesis 3. 5. On the “impudence of this conjugal of the good like in man with the bestial see Montaigne’s Apologie for Raimond Sei
as well as the prince’s we have no way of finding out, all we can point to is the frequency of this forcing upon oneself, with a pleasure which seems within the discovery of the world’s perversion and of man’s irremediable brutishness. The hideousness of this discovery is never spared, nothing redeems the tears. Even the tears Gertrude sheds for her husband are not merely “unrighteous,” they are seen as incitements to lust. “Salt” and “flushing” hiss with corrosive suggestion that grief for the first husband was an accessory to love of the second, that the tears were sanctified bawds, that they—to use an image—sent the Queen posting to “Incestuous sheets.” Speede and “pope” have strong familiar and concrete associations, they make the intimation between the death of the king and the second marriage a frantic dash, one night’s repose at an inn to the next night’s orgy in an adulterate bed.

II.

As in the first soliloquy neither the state prior to his reproaches of himself in the second soliloquy, nor that which follows is tolerable. If alternatives are available they are unacceptable. The typical Hamlet dilemma is like Morton’s fork of the school history books which permits the unfortunate escape from extravagant disbursing of his resources. Here the emotionally mulcted. All the prince can do is to shift in attempted case from one point of the fork to the other, all the freedom allowed him is the choice between the humiliations of being “Rogue,” “Pesant slave,” “muddy-mouthed Rascal,” or “a player” “in a dreame of Passion,” a member of a fraternity so prone to misrepresent humanity that a man might have thought that of nature’s journeymen had made men and not made them well. As

12. “Salt” of tears would not only refer to their salinity—the O.E.D. gives interpretation; undoubtedly the senses of lustful too would operate. Hamlet’s point that dutiful tears, the sacred pledges of a wife’s affection for her husband, were in his evidences of the queen’s “blood.” The tears were emblems of her damned “laxness.” The dutiful weeping mother is b-gned and the imagination transforms her into a witch.

There is good instance both of the lustful sense of the word salt, and the recurrence of that lust can pervert even the symbol of woman’s chastity in Timon IV. 394:

“The seas a Thebe, whose liquid Surge, resolves
The Moone into salt teares...”

Resolves, salt, the instances Timon gives of the thievish of the world, the world which everything in it is “oblique” demonstrate the similarity of the Timon and Hamlet attitudes. Timon is much more explicit, it is gold which “thaws” the created Snow that lies on Dians lap.” Yet there is no doubt that both Timon and Hamlet are in the same situation.

As for “flushing,” the senses of washing out are later than Shakespeare. Elizabethan English the word would be used of the rush of blood to the face, etc., but word had however certain connections with “flesh”; from its use on the hunting field and in sport it developed the meaning of gratifying lust, as in All’s Well that Ends Well. “This night he fleshes his will in the spoyle of her honour.” “Flushing” “the tears” could contribute to “salt” tears significances which lie adjacent to lustful gratification.
conceit, in this case the world would undergo the nature of a revolution in the operation of the senses would be confuted.

Both eventualities sweep the prince to such self-reproach that he blames himself for lacking just that quality he finds morbidly excessive in the player:

"Yet I
A dull and muddy-mettled Rascal, peake
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing."

Hamlet can after a storm of words accuse himself of saying nothing. That some irony intended here is possible, but whether much stress is to be placed on the word "say" would depend on the actor’s interpretation of part. Neither the sense of the lines nor their intention concentrates attention on a character so ill balanced that he is unaware at this moment that he is neither taciturn nor tongue-tied. An ironical contrast between the word and the real situation of the speaker is licit, but to insist on it would be to give as distorted an interpretation as that given by some editors to the fit at the close of the fourth soliloquy—4.4.66. To point out that the resolution to act fritters itself away in the bravado of "My thoughts be bloody, or nothing worth," is as forced as to stress "say" here. What offends Hamlet is not a deficiency in loquacity but his sterility—"nothing" comes from him as he is truly unpregnant of his cause. This sterility is all the more reprehensible as it is a king against whom outrage has been committed. Against himself Hamlet invokes the general rule that the murder of princes entrusts to their meanest of their subjects, the duty of requital. The consequences of "heynous, black, Obscene a deed" are sketched by Carlisle in " Divinity doth hedge a King."

"Bloody: a Bawdy villaine,
Remorselesse, Treacherous, Letcherous, kindles villaine"

"Bloody" is uncle, "bawdy" both uncle and mother, "remorselesse" uncle, "letcherous kindles" both uncle and mother, the twice "villaine" joins them together. The fit can go no further.

In the prince recollects himself it is to realise that he is the most all animals. There is a fresh and strong emotional tone in "Asse," as is made to bear what he cannot enjoy, it is his function to carry patiently. It is not lack of intelligence with which Hamlet himself, but with what in the next soliloquy is rendered as "who would Fardles bear
To grunt and sweat under a weary life"

The particular reproach he puts upon himself is noteworthy—the prince despised of all animals, his sense of the confusion of the established stamped upon the audience in this way. The symbolic lion—note II in Marlowe’s play on the griefs of princes contrasted with those of men—has become mere ass.

by another twist which is new self-abasement, the prince who began despising the player’s rodomontade with his own lack of words and nothing discovers himself indulging in the bravura of a whore. In the first heart had to press down words lest it should break, now its free speech fastens upon it the badge of "whore." Here again is the Hamlet
dilemma repeated—either way there is no relief, not to speak is heart-breaking, to speak is to earn the distinction of being common prostitute, either male or female.\(^{18}\)

As a piece of self-examination the soliloquy ends here, in disgust at himself so acute that he reacts against it with "Foh." There is cause enough in this recognition of himself as marketable flesh for the imagination to react in squeamish disgust. The prince's repeated attacks upon himself are particular instances of a general evil which has conspired to subvert the established order. The second soliloquy is instance of how the rottenness of mark is smelt out by the prince. In this setting he must rage against himself that he is rogue, peasant slave, worse than player, coward, slave and whoremonger. At the very end a memory of the first image of the soliloquy returns "proceed to my Revenge"—with the bitter reflection that the prince plays no role now than that of "generall Filth."

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(To be Continued)

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18. Stoll—Shakespeare and Other Masters—rightly points that the sex of the parts matters little in his observations on Dover Wilson's support of Q2 "stallyon," substituting—whatever their sex—and "scullions," if one accepts the F reading, would be credited with a natural aptitude for foul language. In the social order in any case would be the antipodes of "prince."