The Hamlet Soliloquies

I.

THERE are marked similarities in the first, second and fourth soliloquies of Hamlet[1]. Although the third appears to be differen sufficiently like the others to be reckoned with them in estimati impression the prince is likely to have made upon the audiences of the 17th century. Of course such an impression would vary considerabl person to person and from class to class, but it is possible to think of a g 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[2].

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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 ou play.

to the four soliloquies is a dilemma in which the speaker finds own particular position makes him aware of a general situation in have no place except in one kind of humiliating position or an- world of Denmark offers him nothing but several sorts of degrad- ible to a prince, and his personal sensitiveness to his own imagined at war with his experience of the grossest examples of mankind's sitiveness. Hamlet is prince and yet he sees he is more degraded nce 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 me acceptance of the necessity for such compromise. Hamlet self 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 ries. The difference between them is that Hamlet expresses him- his most satirical generalisings, more concretely, and, of course, cter in a revenge play.

nfiguration of the Hamlet soliloquy repeats typcially a device in e his own words, " in one line two crafts directly meet." Escape and the weapon the wit tempers is destined for the hero's own mmolation. 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 ing 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."

t 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. hinking, not declaiming. He speaks as in a dream. But the ghtmare, the full significance of which we do not realise until the nes.[3]" Whether this is declamation or not would depend on rds are spoken. Elizabethan acting styles favoured declamation, clearest evidence of this and interesting comment too in the well- ge in Act 3. In whatever way the lines were rendered by the llowed the dramatic pointing of the Second Quarto, it is note- Dover Wilson grants that if this is dream it is nightmare too.

nuscript of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Vol. II. J. Dover Wilson. (1934) p. 200.

For all its meditative air it speaks the language of passion. The opening
with their threefold stress on "melt, thaw and resolue itself into a d
suggest not cool gratification but perfervid anxiety. As Dover Wilson
the lines not the attractions of dissolution are contemplated, but a pictu
sin-spotted nature from which the speakers imagination revolts. In
case whether one reads "sullied" or "solid," it is plain that the directi
Hamlet's thought is from one unwelcome and nauseating possibility to wh
in effect another. Since the stress is on the wished for state of dissolu
one, can read "solid," which would provide associations of intractable h
ness and oppression—the state in which one wearies of "solid firmness
from which the only escape is to the opposite—"Dew." This would ca
unwholesome damps, chills, "the night's danke dew" of Friar Lawrence
"rotten damps" which ravish the morning air, and the vaporous foggy
of *The Rape of Lucrece*[4]. 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[5].

The Everlasting's canon is not invoked with a tone of awe but with
of irritation, as if the Everlasting wished to reserve for mortals who
evade it if they could, an eternity of solid firmness. In the two lines
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[6].
violence of "Fie on't? Oh fie, fie" as the rankness and grossness of the
are remembered, shows that as strong as his consciousness of his own
is his feeling of a world-evil which must of force continue because it is
nature of things. Solid flesh, dew, garden—tended or unweeded—a
powerless to satisfy. The image of the garden with the usual associ
of that image in Shakespeare is vital to the thought of this soliloquy.
den" moreover would tend to recur in Hamlet's thoughts later; it wa
garden that his father was found dead, most important of all "garden"
lend itself to remembrance of that other garden, the state of paradis
Richard II Act 3 Scene 4 which Miss Spurgeon calls "the curious garden
a kind of allegory, unlike anything else in Shakespeare, deliberately in

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

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

6. With regard to this Hamlet is very much the man of his time—note later
tocratic "hyre and Sallery."

t of any likeness to nature," the easy transition from gardens to the
den state is made by the Queen who interrupts the Gardener with

"Thou, old Adam's likenesse, set to dresse this garden,
How dares thy harsh rude tongue sound this unpleasing Newes
What Eue? what Serpent, hath suggested thee,
To make a second fall of cursed man?"

ns, paradise with all its wealth of memories of religious legend and
ory, would contain a seed of the ominous too. The great tragedy of
was played there, all our woe was man's inheritance there; to both
d Donne, for instance, gardens offered intimations of man's morta-
nne is witty and his tone is not serious; "garden" flicked his mind
membrance of the first garden and the abode of the serpent without
would have been no true Paradise. In the Hamlet soliloquy the world
ded garden from which the prince starts in anger, would, even if it
prelapsarian garden, have been just as unacceptable[8]. The unweeded
ggests first lack of care and disarray, and then disorder, the limits of
uld be extended from the comparatively unimportant horticultural
ons to an apocalyptic vision of universal chaos. The speaker (poet)
mercy of the strong emotion pent up in the image. "Unweeded garden"
ows to seede" have deeper and more serious tones which are sounded
us and Cressida where Achilles' pride, the cause and effect of the
ing" of degree in the Grecian camp is described by Ulysses who has
pictured the universal ruin that must follow, as

"the seeded Pride
That hath to this maturity blowne up
In ranke Achilles."

eded" in this context produces by natural sequence "ranke."
he Troilus image Miss Spurgeon notes that Shakespeare "is impressed
vitality and strength of seeds, especially of weeds, and their power,
cked of over-growing and killing all else, and he is continually con-
f a similar strength and power in the weeds and faults in human
r." In *Hamlet* the image has the effect of rubbing the prince's nose
t we know must be, and is as common As any the most vulgar thing

he word "rank" with its senses of offensive to the smell, over-luxuriant in growth,
ed in nature, occurs often in the play. Highly significant are "thou mixture
Midnight Weeds collected" with which the player king is poisoned; "O my
ranke"; "ranke corruption mining all within"; and
"do not spred the Compost or the Weedes
To make them ranke (r)"
four instances "ranke" is accompanied by associations of the corruption of
plant life, symbolically those of unregenerate humanity.

his is of course not explicitly stated but it seems to have been a natural turn of
poets of this time and later. See W. Empson on Marvell's Garden—Some
Pastoral (1935) pp. 131 & 132.

to sence "—the divine and the bestial of which man is compounded9.
dilemma in which Hamlet is caught, the torture to which he submits him
understandable to an audience brought up on many centuries of Chr
commonplaces—the war between the senses and the soul, between go
reason and bestial oblivion, between the pleasures of life and the corru
of death, between intellect and blood, between the antithetical sens
" nature "—that which was emblematic of the highest reach of human
and that which " merely " included man's kinship with the beasts. In
lines there is a slight ambiguity which illustrates the continual bifurcati
Hamlet's thought—things " rank and grosse 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 ess
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, fo
simplicity of the emotion he feels stresses the evil in his situation. Most
nature is evil—the bottomless pit with the revolting stench, Man mig
" quintessence of dust " or a piece of divine work in an lower cat
than the angels and God. In this soliloquy the prince's agitatio
the result of the shock in trying to comprehend both, and the diffi
of permitting the baser affinities which " flesh " suggests from f
his mind. His protest against being immersed only releases the fi
" things rank and grosse in nature," and " increase of appetite " finally
merge him. The prince's emotions turn towards the contemplation of h
depravity. The direction of his thoughts is towards what in Lear's ima
tion 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 o
Rabbins, Hamlet describes his mother's love for his father as depravity.
original intention—to contrast the excellence of the love between his fathe
mother (natural love in one sense of the term) with the incestuous passi
that same mother for his uncle—is defeated by the violence of his emot
He is often defeated and so often in the same way that it seems as if he p
upon himself the task of fighting a hopeless conflict. The pri
imagination sickens at the tainting of his mother's love, and the wave o
indignation mounts so high that it breaks scornfully upon it as if he ha
the time intended to destroy it as a lustful deformity. His mother's lov
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 "Satyr

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9. The prophetic verse in Genesis 3. 5. On the " impudency of this conjo
of the good like in man with the bestial see Montaigne's Apologie for Raimond Se

> " As if encrease of appetite had growne
> By what it fed on . . . "

ord " appetite " was sinister—it is the " universal wolfe " of *Troilus*
ida—besides appetite which increases as it feeds is both gluttony
tfull lechery," an amalgam of qualities repellent and yet attractive
. As Spenser expresses it " O who does know the bent of women's
" The image is criticism of an unnatural state—Enobarbus wishing
n the effect of the riggish Cleopatra on men uses the same suggestion :

> " Other women cloy
> The appetite they feede but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies . . . "[10]

ee Hamlet then swung into the opposite of what he intends—his
ffection for his father fouled bya mind which can apprehend nothing
ld but the alternatives of evil and depravity. Everything is changed
osite, and he is so prone to express tones of disgust that even his
nce of good is an occasion for intemperate nausea. He can do noth-
le upon himself " millions of Akers " of self-torture. His mother in
quy is degraded lower than " a beast that wants discourse of Reason,"
eart must break because he must hold his tongue.

udience of that time would not have sought for reasons for such con-
such speech, because the thought expressed would have seemed
trange nor remarkable. Such turns would have been familiar to
ccustomed to the girdings of satirists both medieval and Elizabethan.
as not expressing a frame of mind so unusual that explanations would
to be provided in individual character aberrations. In fact such
f character as Elizabethans would be likely to accept would recognise
as typical aberrancy. If the type to which Hamlet the prince belonged
ered the audience of that time, the existence of the " firking satirist "
e topicalities of medieval misanthropy, even without the new vogue
malcontent," would not have allowed them to worry themselves for
at Hamlet's mind should have been in a tussle between the god-like
nd the bestial, both of themselves impossible because both were
[11], was no new thing. What must have been new was its expression
mages and bold colloquialisms in a revenge play. Rhythm and phrase
how naturally Shakespeare records the commonplaces of the satirists
grasped them, and how easily his feeling of man's mortality and the
is physical nature are set down. Whether this was his own dilemma

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Pericles V.1. 113.

> " . . . another Juno
> Who starves the ears she feeds, and makes them hungry,
> The more she gives them speech "

raise.

te that in the prince's words even the elder Hamlet's love for his wife is
something " unnatural " and hyperbolical—he " might not beteene the windes
it her face too roughly."

as well as the prince's we have no way of finding out, all we can point to i
frequency of this forcing upon oneself, with a pleasure which seems wilfu
the discovery of the world's perversion and of man's irremediable brutish
The hideousness of this discovery is never spared, nothing redeems the t
Even the tears Gertrude sheds for her husband are not merely " unrighteo
they are seen as incitements to lust. " Salt " and " flushing[12] " hiss with
corrosive suggestion that grief for the first husband was an accessory to love
the second, that the tears were sanctified bawds, that they—to use ano
image—sent the Queen posting to " Incestuous sheets." " Speede "
" post " have strong familiar and concrete associations, they make the int
between the death of the king and the second marriage a frantic dash f
one night's repose at an inn to the next night's orgy in an adulterate be

II.

As in the first soliloquy neither the state prior to his reproaches of h
self in the second soliloquy, nor that which follows is tolerable. If alternat
are available they are unacceptable. The typical Hamlet dilemma is like
Morton's fork of the school history books which permits the unfortunat
escape from extravagant disbursing of his resources. Here the emotions
mulcted. All the prince can do is to shift in attempted ease from one p
of the fork to the other, all the freedom allowed him is the choice betw
the humiliations of being " Rogue," " Pesant slave," " muddy-met
Rascall," or "a player" " in a dreame of Passion," a member of a frater
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 poi
that dutiful tears, the sacred pledges of a wife's affection for her husband, were in this
evidences of the queen's " blood." The tears were emblems of her damned " luxu
The dutiful weeping mother is begrimed and the imagination transforms her into a wh
There is good instance both of the lustful sense of the word salt, and the recurrence of
thought that lust can pervert even the symbol of woman's chastity in *Timon* IV. 3. 44

> " The seas a Theefe, whose liquid Surge, resolves
> The Moone into salt teares . . . "

Resolves, salt, the instances Timon gives of the thievery of the world, the wa
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 c
crated Snow that lyes on Dians lap." Yet there is no doubt that both Timon and Ha
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.
word had however certain connections with " flesh " ; from its use on the hunting
and in sport it developed the meaning of gratifying lust, as in *Alls Well that Ends*
" and this night he fleshes his will in the spoyle of her honour." " Flushing " the
could contribute to " salt " tears significances which lie adjacent to lustful gratificati

moves to its appointed course the prince[13] who impales himself upon
orn that the player is a better man than himself, quivers upon the
int of his realisation that to unpack his heart of words player-wise
no better than a whore. The configuration of the first soliloquy
noted here.[14] There the speaker was faced with an unbearable
, in which neither dew nor solidity nor garden offered relief. Here
quy opens with an outburst of intolerant passion against a world
llows the " monstruosity "of an affected grief—the player's—to out-
d outdo the real suffering of a prince. Rage against himself is strong
cely directed with the three several blows of " Rogue and Pesant
which weight the opening line. But in a moment not his own plight,
t of a world in which order is confounded and the monstrous becomes
, grips the prince's imagination. He himself is rogue,[15] and even worse
gue in the catalogue. In such a situation a player in a fiction, in a
of passion can work a defeat upon the soul and make it subservient to
fulness, and " all for nothing." The monstruosity of the world is
by its subversion of the soul, now led in triumph at the wheels of
rfeited passion. " Fiction," " dreame of passion," " to his whole con-
to his conceit " are cries which compel the attention of the heavens to
normality of the world. The question mark at the end of the sentence
ark of interrogation but a piece of exclamatory pointing, an underlin-
the speaker's invective. If this is monstrous, far more hideous would
lt be if a " player " had been moved by real passion. The metaphor
stage colours Hamlet's thinking, if the world had been his stage chaos
nfusion would follow—a general doom of floods, thunderbolts and
ss:

> " drowne the Stage with teares,
> And cleave the generall eare with horrid speech,
> Make mad the guilty and apale the free,
> Confound the ignorant and amaze indeed
> The very faculties of Eyes and Eares."

e describes it as confounding and *amazing* the very faculties of eyes and
n other words of diverting from their normal function and disorganising
he human senses. As the player in the one case could impose himself
the spiritual order and subdue his soul and his whole function to his

The references to the rank of the speaker are insistent. It is a prince who humi-
imself to not-to-be-thought-of levels—peasant, slave, player. It is significant
world offers Hamlet—as he sees it—no place but these. As the soliloquy goes on
d " and " whore " are added to the list of possibilities. The rottenness of the
Denmark lies here. This is the only " advancement " held out to the prince.

An important difference in the conclusion might be noted—the first ends with
lve to do or say nothing, the second commits Hamlet to a course of action.

Dover Wilson notes the associations with the status of the player in Elizabethan
. See his notes to 2.2.534 and 553 in his edition of *Hamlet*. (1934).

conceit, in this case the world would undergo the nature of a revolution the operation of the senses would be confuted.

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

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

Hamlet can after a storm of words accuse himself of saying noth That some irony intended here is possible, but whether much stress is to placed on the word " say " would depend on the actor's interpretation of part. Neither the sense of the lines nor their intention concentrates atten on a character so ill balanced that he is unaware at this moment that h neither taciturn nor tongue-tied. An ironical contrast between the wo and the real situation of the speaker is licit, but to insist upon it would be give as distorted an interpretation as that given by some editors to the l at the close of the fourth soliloquy—4·4·66. To point out that the resolu 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 Ham is not a deficiency in loquacity but his sterility—" nothing " comes from h he is truly unpregnant of his cause. This sterility is all the more reprehens as it is a king against whom outrage has been committed. Against him Hamlet invokes the general rule that the murder of princes entrusts to meanest of their subjects, the duty of requital. The consequences of " heynous, black, Obscene a deed " are sketched by Carlisle in *Richard II.* speaks as a subject to whom rebellion against a king is one with humanit foul crime against God

> " Disorder, Horror, Feare, and Mutinie
> Shall here inhabite, and this land be call'd
> The field of Golgotha and dead men's Sculls."

In *Hamlet* the same general rule is stated by the murderer of a king with a dramatic irony pleasing to an audience speaks confidently of " Divinity doth hedge a King."

That he should be found wanting in such an eventuality, that his facul should be inoperant is felt by the prince as debasement to a status even lo than that of a player. He puts upon himself further indignities. He coward—although moral opprobrium is intended and not social stigma, i clear from what has gone before that coward is a another stage in the prin declension. He is now worse than peasant slave and villain—they migh least have belched out oppression, he stomachs it. The image from the di

ss provides a transition to concrete feelings and valuations.[16] he feels is lighted up by the word "Oppression;" both the political f forced submission to the rule of a slave (it is " this slaves offal ") a stomach qualm are brought to mind. The political humiliation is felt as the other, it is after all the king's "property" as well as his hich has been attacked. It may be accidental that the king is menore the father, yet there is a great deal in the play which makes ove for his father of less consequence than his hatred of his uncle and g of his mother's lechery. Certainly the aggressiveness against d uncle go hand in hand, they produce the inarticulate paroxysm t two lines. The two together drag the prince's rage at insenseate

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

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

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," s is made to bear what he cannot enjoy, it is his function to carry patiently.[17] 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 "

particular reproach he puts upon himself is noteworthy—the prince t despised of all animals, his sense of the confusion of the established tamped upon the audience in this way. The symbolic lion—note I in Marlowe's play on the griefs of princes contrasted with those of en—has become mere ass.

by another twist which is new self-abasement, the prince who began sting the player's rodomontade with his own lack of words and nothiscovers himself indulging in the bravura of a whore. In the first the heart had to press down words lest it should break, now its free-eech fastens upon it the badge of "whore." Here again is the Hamlet

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e Dover Wilson's note on this passage with its reminiscence of the lines from ere may be this further association of thought too—Envy feeds on outcast a kite, so Hamlet wittingly gorges upon oppression.

he following are the best known references in Shakespeare to this quality of *ulius Caesar* 4.1.21 ; *Measure for Measure* 3.1.25. In *Coriolanus* 2.1.269 the y of the humility of endurance is given to the camel. For the other senses of best known instance would probably the comicality of Dogberry's indignant d *Timon of Athens* 4.3.334.

dilemma repeated—either way there is no relief, not to speak is heart-b to speak is to earn the distinction of being common prostitute, either ma female.[18]

As a piece of self-examination the soliloquy ends here, in disgust himself so acute that he reacts against it with " Foh." There is cause en in this recognition of himself as marketable flesh for the imagination to in squeamish disgust. The prince's repeated attacks upon himself are particular instances of a general evil which has conspired to subvert the blished 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 hi that he is rogue, peasant slave, worse than player, coward, slave and w At the very end a memory of the first image of the soliloquy returns " pro ed to my Revenge "—with the bitter reflection that the prince plays no c role now than that of "generall Filth."

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(To be Continued)

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