
The Hamlet Soliloquies (continued)

III.

THE main difference between the third soliloquy and the others is that in them the occasion for the soliloquy is an actively realised personal situation from which the imagination reaches out into a general order which offers only a choice of evils. Here on the other hand is generalised reflection, for the most part abstracted from the immediate personal. Whether Hamlet is posing here the question of suicide or that of his future course of action, the argument is maintained on a level of broad and general discussion. Nowhere does Hamlet consider himself explicitly here, his reflections apply to himself as one of mankind, an inheritor of the thousand natural shocks of the flesh. The effect of lowered tension left by this soliloquy when compared with the others, its uncertainty of theme (editorial discussions on its reference, whether to suicide or to hostility to the king, are relevant here) would support the interpretation that Hamlet here is not prompted to utterance primarily by the bitterness of his own personal situation, but that the soliloquy is a piece of elocutionary excellence which effectively and characteristically bridges the gap between the withdrawal of the conspirators and the prince's meeting with

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Ophelia.¹ The stage tradition according to which Hamlet enters at this juncture reading, (although the act of reading itself was intended to be construed as evidence of the prince's guilt, the fatal proneness to reflection instead of action) has at least this to be said for it—it makes the soliloquy natural extension of the reading.

If the soliloquy differs from the others in this way, yet its reflections are those of a prince to whom the world has already presented itself as a complex of contradictions. Its only order is the rule of disorder, all it can offer is the certainty of evil,—it is an unweeded garden and monstrous in that a man's soul is forced to his own conceit by passion. The same foundation is built upon here. To be or not to be, to suffer or to take up arms, to live or to die, they are all attended by their several calamities, the natural shocks of the flesh, nightmare. Man as a consequence is cowardly and sickly pale. It is a jaundiced world in which nothing affords relief from the ills of the flesh. Whatever the prince is considering, it seems to be clear that neither life nor death, neither action nor inaction are of as great consequence as his certainty that they are all equally calamitous. This gives unity to the whole discourse, and what begins seemingly as *disputatio* becomes part of the whole Hamlet situation.

From asking whether one should live or not live (Dr. Johnson forced himself into interpreting it as whether one lived after death or not in his anxiety to give Hamlet a dilemma more congenial to the contemporaries of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia than to the Danish prince), Hamlet drifts on to ask what would be *nobler*, what would be more fitting to a prince. The stress falls on "Nobler in the minde." It is the ever present preoccupation of the prince, and what was in the previous line posed as a moral problem becomes now a question of decorum, the attitude of the magnificent man perhaps. But neither the noble attitude of sufferance nor the heroics of defiance are possible, for fortune is "outrageous" and the sleep of death is a nightmare. Confidence there might be in the prince's statement of the alternatives,—the firmness of "end them" after the climax of the figure of opposing the "sea" (whether it is normal mixed metaphor or remembrance of barbaric extravaganza) sug-

1. The shift in position of this soliloquy from Act II in Q1 to Act III in Q2 and F might be regarded as further evidence in support of the view that it is to be read as a piece of detached eloquence. Stoll in his monograph on Hamlet argues that a soliloquy was needed to "provide Hamlet with something to do while these arrangements (the eaves-dropping) are making and until his eyes shall light on the girl. It is a convenient means of making his unsuspection plausible." He goes on to say "it stands attached, therefore, to the nunnery scene, rather than the nunnery scene to it." His plea is that a piece of "mental abstraction" was necessary, and he defends it from the charge of irrelevance by asking what else could Hamlet speak about on this occasion and not give himself away to the eavesdroppers. He justifies the philosophical discourse and reverie in this way. See Stoll: *Hamlet: An Historical and Comparative Study* 1919, pp. 30 ff.

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gests confidence—but it surely evaporates as he goes on. The difference between “by opposing end them,” and “to say we end” is to be noted. The mood changes, general reflection is broken into by the typical Hamlet afterthought of the assurance of evil. That death offers not restful sleep after life’s fitful fever, but the broken sleep of nightmare is surely clear both by the plain statement and by the undertones of the repeated “to dye, to sleepe, . . . to dye, to sleepe, to sleepe.” That death brings the unknown terror of dreams is stated here explicitly. Dreams whether good or bad were invested with a portentous significance which made sleep not passivity nor relaxation, but an activity brimful of consequence for the sleeper or dreamer. However great its physical solace, sleep through its dreams was of special import to man, for dreams interpreted the future and were the retribution of the past. That death should be described as sleep, trite as the metaphor is, would add to its sinister significance. Sleep paradoxically enough—in Shakespeare and elsewhere—withholds itself from those most in need of its balm, it had some of the conventional attributes of femininity, its favours were granted arbitrarily. In addition, producing as it does here both its own underlying sexual associations and those of death, it would hold in suspension both nostalgic regression, and, most strongly, the arousal of painful anticipations. The normal expectation is of rest surely, but as it is taken up the mind is aware of sickening possibilities. “No more” works in two ways, it is both Q.E.D. and it is question mark. It slides into ironical query, doubt is actively present. Doubt later interjects “to say” and is conscious to the full of the “thousand Natural shockes.” It is difficult on this account to read the “consummation deuoutly to be wish’d” as the smooth climax in words of a spirit ardently wishful of death. The seeming roundness of the phrase upon the ear does not last long, there are acidulated tones, mean mouthing in “deuoutly to be wish’d”; and “consummation” itself is self-important, there may be parody in it. The phrase spirts bitterness because the satisfaction is no satisfaction at all, the gratification of relaxed tension is illusion, and the word “deuoutly” gives the sexual connotations of consummation a sceptical inflection. It is difficult to accept Knights’ reading of the soliloquy because Death is not presented here as “relaxing of tension and the abandonment of struggle.”² Two things stand in the way, first of all the image of sleep, which to Hamlet as readily means bad dreams as it did to Job. One parallel to the death sleep comparison would be familiar in the Biblical reference to the cessation of the troubling of the wicked and the rest of the weary, not quite so well known would be Job’s fears of nightmare: “When I say my bed shall comfort me, My couch shall ease my complaint; Then thou scarest me with dreams And terrifiest me through visions.”³ Secondly the sexual connotations of death would keep

2. L. C. Knights. *Prince Hamlet*. *Scrutiny* September, 1940. Vol IX, No. 1.

3. Job with his usual forthrightness goes on to state his preference for strangling and death than life on these terms. Hamlet on any terms is always faced by two alternatives both bad. See Job 7. 13 and 14.

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at bay the enervated lax associations which have been read into this soliloquy. Certainly these connotations would put the reflecting engine into gear, the word "die" does not suggest a switching off. Cleanth Brooks notes that "in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to "die" means to experience the consummation of the act of love."⁴

"Consummation" in this passage should then be taken not as metaphorical *extension* of the sexual significance, the condition in which desires, aims, tendencies are satisfied, crowning or fitting end, goal as the O.E.D. reads it, but as a common enough pun on the sexual meaning itself. Lear in his madness makes the same pun with perhaps a relish of its obscene implications which must have been shocking to the beholders. The Folio has it "I will die brauely, Like a Smugge Bridegroom. What? I will be Iouiall." (In which there is another pun, on the lascivious proclivities of the Olympian Jove. I will sport as he did, says the old King. The contrast between this bravado and his own pitiful state, as well as its deliberate coarseness, must have been both pathetic and grim). Then there is the 'love' song in *Troilus and Cressida* in which the sense of the word "die" resembles that in Dryden's *Marriage a la Mode*,—the song "Whilst Alexis lay prest" which Empson quotes as illustration of the "extraordinary use of the word die":

These Louers cry, oh ho they dye ;
Yet that which seemes the wound to kill,
Doth turne oh ho, to ha ha he :
So dying loue liues still . . .

Death thought of as the climax of the physical satisfaction of the act of love (it is not necessary to consider whether Hamlet is not neurotically disqualified from attaining this satisfaction) is surely desirable, but it should be noted that in this image there is practical apprehension of a physical state, it is not a negation of the physical or Keats' "easeful death" he is after. But even as soon as it is mentioned "consummation" cannot be believed in. Consummations devoutly to be wished are "permissions of the will" which even religion would bless, even your Puritan would approve of them, so that Hamlet's reflection seems to be 'I am frankly sceptical about the possibility of this, this is the kind of thing that never happens in real life, it is devoutly to be wished and/because it is never granted, it is the kind of thing that one is recommended to hope for, these are the sour grapes which set the teeth on edge.' If the "devoutly" were sourly and spitefully uttered there would be the suggestion that there are consummations and consummations; consummations of which your honest man would not approve are mere lust, "before a joy proposed behind a dream" (in the words of Sonnet CXXIX). Of the

4. Cleanth Brooks. *The Language of Paradox (The Language of Poetry* Ed. Allen Tate) 1942. See also W. Empson. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 1940. p. 278 and *Some Versions of Pastoral*. 1935. p. 47.

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after effects of these one is unhappily only too certain.' Consummation seems to hold out at best a dubious satisfaction. Death in the bravery of the Elizabethan phrase could be thought of as a bride to be encountered, but one could from these fair creatures catch disease. "Consumptions sowe in hollow bones of man" says Timon to the two whores. (Between the two words consummation and consumption there is a similarity of sound and significance which needs no dwelling on). Consummation is both the desired end and the cessation of desire, in it are enclosed two senses of the word "end." There is yet a further possibility in a consummation *devoutly* to be wished; it might lend significance to the Hamlet situation that he should see himself a Christ betrayed and forsaken on the cross giving out an expiring cry. (Fanciful as this might be, the closeness of the Christian myth to Elizabethan tragedy has to be kept in mind). However one takes it, the consummation of death promises nothing but the certainty of bad dreams and the loathed sour to which the sweets we wish for turn.

The image in which Hamlet's thoughts are expressed is of a man preparing himself for bed. Death is sleep and bed (how easily consummation fits in here); both mean bad dreams. The clearness of the sleep-death image is more sharply defined by Dover Wilson's suggestion that "coil" in

When we haue shuffle'd off this mortal coile.

should be interpreted as troublesome entanglements of which the soul divests itself at death. "The image in Shakespeare's mind was, I think, that of the soul standing erect and freeing itself from the lifeless body which has fallen to the ground like a divested garment."⁵ It is possible that Hamlet in addition thinks of man freed of his clothes and climbing into his naked bed at the close of the day, the bed out of which he fears to be plucked by the outcries of nightmare. Such a simple concrete analogy would be typical of the play, equally typical would be the quick shift of the image from the game of bowls (there's the rub) to that of the bed.

The sense of the argument is never in doubt, the known evil is preferable to the unknown, of the two man would put up with the less. What is clear is that life and death are both calamities. The brilliant generalisation of life's ills might be adduced as further proof of Hamlet's sensitiveness to living, his keen propensities for life which make even a rhetorical exercise characteristic of Shakespeare. Equally characteristic are the vigour and nervousness with which the "Whips and Scornes of time," all the marks of the "the weariest, and most loathed wordly life" are scored. The satirical liveliness of one's signing oneself off with a paltry woman's hairpin is very much to the point. The image is natural to a young man scornful of legal phraseology and woman's wiles. Self slaughter, if one were so inclined, has to be seen as something

5. *Hamlet*. Ed. J. Dover Wilson, 1934, p. xxxiv, n. 2.

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stripped of its unnecessary heroics. A woman's pin (not poniard but frizzing pin or embroidery pin) is sufficient to give a man his *congé*. The "bare Bodkin" reduces the Senecan protest to something contemptible. It is both easy—"When he himself"—and commonplace. 'All you need for the business is a woman's ornament, it would be a shameful triviality to be involved in these things.' But at the same time life does not spare you shames either, it is burdensome, it reduces you to the status of a pack animal. 'You can take your choice of grunting and sweating or sticking yourself with an article of woman's gear.'

Death as Hamlet continues to picture it, whether a reminiscence of the Senecan phrase dictates the trope or whether Shakespeare was remembering those adventurers who set out on enterprises into the unknown, is only a little better. Here certainly the marmoreal phrase gives it some dignity, but one wonders whether *Terra incognita* would not to minds educated on 17th cosmographers and voyagers recall a world bristling with unimaginable terrors. Would the suavity of the Senecan turn of phrase have freed death as undiscovered country from the lively fears of Elizabethan travellers, or would these fears add to the tag a quality which would no longer animate it? Whatever their effect Hamlet is unambiguous about the unknown ills of death, the least reflection on them—"thus Conscience"—is sufficient to make us bear the ills we have. It is worth pointing out that it is only with regard to these fears that "conscience" (that which makes a man, as clearly as he is marked by the pales and forts of reason: not the inner check nor the moral faculty, but as Bradley and Dover Wilson interpret it—consciousness) transforms all men, prince Hamlet as well as commoner, into cowards. "And thus"—it is repeated and here the voice gives the word "thus" the stress needed to clear what follows from the imputation that thought always infects. 'In this way again the mind faced with the fears of death, and only with regard to those fears becomes sickly and jaundiced.' Similarly the voice takes up the word "this" in the line—

With this regard their Currants turne away.

to make it clear that no rule about the paralysis of action by thought is being propounded, but only an observation on the powerful deterrent of the fear of death. It is the thought of death and not thought generally which blights.

The sight of Ophelia interrupts the trend of his thought. It has been managed for the most part as discourse, but the mind has been alert to canvass the variant possibilities of the philosophers' commonplaces, the prince has been sceptical, ironical, scornful, he has played with the paradoxical senses of his words, but he has never been galled into indignation at what turns out to be again the typical dilemma of alternatives which afford no relief. It is because his tones are in the main reasoned and sceptical that he can refuse the con-

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ventional solace of death. If, as Brandes suggests, Shakespeare had remembered Florio's version of Socrates' speech to his judges: "Death may peradventure be a thing indifferent, happily a thing desirable . . . if it be a consummation of one's being, it is also an amendment and entrance into a long and quiet night. Wee finde nothing so sweete in life as a quiet rest and gentle sleepe, and without dreams,"⁶ he is not so well fortified by the consolations of philosophy, or he may have known life too well to permit himself belief in "quiet rest and gentle sleepe and without dreams." The thought is not distinguished for its depth or force, but it is certainly alive and watchful. The prince allows himself no delusions, he is not a little scornful of the sages. What follows with Ophelia is in the same key as the greater part of the soliloquy. He turns to her with the sarcastic

Nymph in thy Orizons
Be all my sinnes remembered.

There is coolness here—"even if you do me the good service of praying for forgiveness for my sins, yet you reckon them up, nothing will escape you, you are prone to that sort of thing." There is an implication of the prince's affront at her self-righteousness⁷—the prayer book ("Reade on this booke") and the attitude ("Devotions Visage" and "pious Action"). The movement

6. Montaigne's *Essays* transl. Florio Bk. III, Ch. XII, p. 308. (Everyman Ed.).

7. Dover Wilson notes "a touch of affectation" in 'nymph' and 'orisons' (both pretentious words) and of sarcasm in 'all my sins'. Granville Barker however protests that "Hamlet, for one thing, is not apt to be sarcastic about his own sins, and he is, at this moment, in his least sarcastic mood." *Prefaces to Shakespeare. Third Series, 1937.* p. 304, n. Juliet's use of the word (*Romeo and Juliet*, IV.3.3) to which Granville Barker refers is intended to impress the nurse with the seriousness of her preparations, the more important these are made out to be the earlier would she be able to get rid of the nurse. As for Imogen's (*Cymbeline*, 1.3.30) also drawn into the argument, it is in keeping with the hyperbolic accumulation with which she describes how she would have taken leave of Posthumus:

or haue charg'd him
At the fixt houre of Morne, at Noone, at Midnight,
T'encounter me with Orisons, for then
I am in Heauen for him:

In *Henry V*, II-2-51, the king's words—

Alas, your too much loue and care of me,
Are heauy Orisons 'gainst this poor wretch

are used deliberately in his astute cat-and-mouse play with the conspirators. The entreaties of the traitors that a mere railer against him should be punished are described by the king as "orisons." The word is especially chosen and is heavily charged with irony. The contrast between its general significance—the hieratic ritual of prayers to God's throne for mercy—and the feigned "prayers" of the traitors is played upon by the king.

In all these cases the word "orisons" is picked, it is the unusual word and has the intended effect of underlining the artificiality of the activity so described.

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from scornful reflection on the evils of life and death to bitterness at the ceremoniousness of the "orizons" is natural. The eavesdropping scene now gets under way.

IV.

Whether the FR omission of the fourth soliloquy was due to theatrical modification or not (the dropping of fifty-eight lines to save Burbadge's breath has been suggested), in its position and content it is indispensable to the action of the play and the presentation of the character of the prince. It makes the reported action of Hamlet's adventures on board ship the natural consequence of his "bloody" resolution, the mirroring of his situation in Fortinbras is necessary to the play—that Fortinbras ends the play makes the parallel between himself and Hamlet very much to the point—and dramatically it arrests the audience and fixes its attention on a picture of the prince between mad fit and the long delayed appearance at the graveyard. While substantially repeating the Hamlet dilemma it gives it a new twist, by showing in the end that there is no triumphant escape from it. That the prince believes he is escaping is clear from the concluding couplet of the scene, yet what grim irony such lines are in the mouth of the Renaissance thinker who pictured man as marked out by Godlike reason.

If Shakespeare, according to the opinion of some editors, had intended by this soliloquy to present a procrastinating character, only one part of it would have been relevant. To others, the stress would not be on the thoughts but on their "bloody" nature, and such thoughts should have been sufficient to exonerate him and show him saved. But it is not as important to refute either view as to question the grounds of both—is Hamlet's difficulty one of mere inability to act, and does this soliloquy show that "the neglect and the delay are now over and done with"? The delay, the inability to act have their roots elsewhere, the substance of the soliloquy will show how these are entwined with others, and thrust themselves deep into a world order of which the prince is the unfortunate flower.

The soliloquy carefully prepared for with a cleared stage is an eruption of the forcible sense of the prince's own guilt. Every single happening in this life, every chance that befalls him plays the informer against the prince—"How all occasions," the "all" is a tortured cry. He is spied upon and reported by one part of his mind to the other. The clue provided by the opening image of "inform" ("sour informer and bate breeding spy" of the poems) is of a speaker oppressed by guilt, and of a mind divided against itself. The mind being quartered, each thought produced by it is similarly quartered too—whether mathematically apportioned into its parts, heraldically displayed, or barbarously executed like the traitor. To it two alternatives present themselves, both characteristically unacceptable, yet the prince is precipitated into a line of action against which the whole sense of his thought and character

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revolts. His guilt infects his reason,—no man is so firm and constant as to be immune.

Man to Hamlet can either be beast (the stall-fed ox of Quincy Adams) or slothful servant who purchases with his time the mould of inaction (the talent of the parable fusts, unused, and divine vengeance mounts against him). Either man is the beast of the field—kings in their pride had been with the beasts of the field. Nebuchadnezzar “did eat grass as oxen”; or his spirit would make him surfeit swelled and puffed with divine ambition. The possibilities are either beast, coward, the godlike part mouldy with disuse, or exhorted by an example “gross as earth” (and there is unconscious irony in gross here, both what is palpable to the sense and what is rank and gross—the first soliloquy is minatory) to the sin of ambition. His guilt makes the prince fasten on himself again the reproaches of beast and coward. What if important to him is not so much the reasons for being remiss in his duty of revenge, but the remissness itself. Surely the sense of the passionate utterance is not investigation of reasons for the delay, but the oppressiveness of guilt. Even if the equation had been solved, he would still have been informed against all by occasions and remorse would have persisted.

Hamlet is of his time in seeing in man the arena of the battle between sensual (bestial) passion and Godlike reason. Sidney saw the conflict as one between erected wit and infected will. The prince propounds the age’s great commonplace but applies it wrong, examples gross as earth had prompted him out of turn. The hurried rush of words, the bitterness of “inform,” the depressed question on the theme which haunts him—man’s place in the world—the piling on himself of opprobrious names, the unlovely images conjured up, all show that he is passion’s slave and in no fit state to work out the consequences of his rule. Blood and judgement are in him so commingled that he is a pipe for fortune. So the reverse of the medal, as he toys with it, is the spirit with divine ambition puffed. The prince in whom he sees himself mirrored is, as Hamlet puts it, the most unlikely of all men to reach the stature demanded of him—note the antithesis between “mass and charge” and “delicate and tender,”—yet he becomes the perfect man of action. What Hamlet is unhappily unaware of is that every word used in the description of Fortinbras and his situation betrays his intention, the result is a falsification of the statement proposed—as in the very first soliloquy Hamlet’s attempt to extol the love between his parents had defeated itself. The extent of the betrayal could be gauged by comparing Hamlet’s previous statement about Fortinbras with the example now made of it. At the end of his conversation with the Captain Hamlet had delivered himself on the expedition in a characteristic image of disease :

This is the imposthume of much wealth and peace,
That inward breaks, and shows no cause without
Why the man dies.

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Now it is his intention to recommend this same prince as example to which the occasion exhorted him. There are in the value judgements expressed in the lines clear antithetical senses—the plain laudatory intention of prince Hamlet and the equally clear movement towards the damaging equivocal significances. In the debater's common enough gambit every word he says could be described as an argument for the other side. That this should have been missed by the audience is scarcely likely. Fortinbras himself as already been etched by Horatio :

Of unimproued Mettle, hot and full
Hath in the skirts of Norway, heere and there,
Shark'd up a list of Landlesse Resolutes
For Foode and Diet, to some Enterprize
That hath a Stomacke in it . . .

The expedition itself has already been framed by Hamlet, how then should these lines be read? What effect would they have but that of leaving upon the audience the impression of the typical Hamlet dilemma once again. Here in the most explicit piece of self examination in the play, the soliloquy in which he commits himself to a "character," he can offer himself the alternatives of beast and divine ambition.

The wave of his praise sets in motion its own backwash—for instance the "delicate and tender prince" is presented with attributes whose very fineness destroys itself. The range of "delicate" would extend from the excellence of soft, temperate, carefully nurtured, to the deficiencies of what is not made up, immature, green, or even expensive luxury. As for "divine ambition" it is both Godlike and sacrilegious, it is the mark of the gods, and it is the deadly sin of man's aspiring mind which tempts him to exalt himself to the majesty of God. Ambition might be made a virtue by big wars, it might be the special virtue of the soldier, but even so it is a calculating virtue and :

rather makes choise of losse
Than gaine which darkens . . . (*Antony and Cleopatra*, III-1-22)

It is also near allied to pride, by it the angels fell. The antithetical senses give "divine" a "fearful" significance, even if they had been lost in the enthusiasm of the prince's recommendation of his "example," the word "ambition" would have flashed a danger signal. Ambition was too closely coupled with envious emulation to be attractive; pride and envy were compounded in it and they were deadly sins. To be puffed by divine ambition would suggest the seething stomach of colic or the fate of being the winds' sport—either you are "blown up" with the sense of your own greatness, (it may be an Aesopian parallel too) or by a kinder construction you become the plaything of the blast. You are in any case beside yourself and unable to control yourself. In "puff" there is an element of danger, the threat of excess in it is fatal to hopefulla acceptance of divine ambition. As

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for making mouths at the invisible event, one either cocks a snook at fortune, like your schoolboy one puts out one's tongue at it, or (since the image is so close to Hamlet's "God has given you one face and you make yourself another") ambition puffed man delights to prink himself in the glass of unknown fortune. This perverse luxury of making mouths in a glass like a fair woman would be the quality of Pride :

... In her hand she held a mirrhour bright
Wherein her face she often vewed fayne
And in her selfe-lou'd semblance tooke delight.

Whatever it be, the action of making mouths is temerarious.

The practical demonstration urged against himself—witness this army—for all its passionate emotion must have provided proof different from that intended by the prince. The bi-fold authority of the lines, either the blatancy of war propaganda or rhetorical questioning of it (in either case the fighting at Ostend for a "barren plot of sand" might have been in the dramatist's mind) is illustration again of the prince's case.

The rule he goes on to formulate is, as is to be expected, counter to the natural and moral law, hedged though it is with all the virtues of Right and the precedents of Honour. It offers nothing but a straw as the foundation of true greatness. There must be irony for the audience in the change of feeling with which "straw" is coloured. A few minutes previously it had been the worthless stubble of which the prince was contemptuous—

Two thousand souls and Twenty thousand ducats
Will not debate the question of this straw . . .

now the more straw it is the better, it provides the scale by which honour is to be weighed. What Hamlet recommends (whether "not" belongs to copula or predicate or to both in "Is not to stir . . .," is surely of small consequence—Furness' ponderous jest in the Variorum Edition is an interesting piece of skittishness) is a kind of choleric rashness blessed by Honour. Honour had the power to transform—Sir John Falstaff's catechism is very much to the point here—and a sceptical query would intrude to turn the universal rule into caustic question. The demonstration goes all awry.

As he puts the case against himself, the difference between the two—Hamlet sees them as similar—is apparent. What have they in common even if he sees his own experiences as "excitements of my reason and my blood"? However much these are to be suspected as the misdirections of passion, the murder of his father and the adultery of his mother are a "reality", whereas Fortinbras is moved by "a fantasy and trick of fame." This as "a linguistic form common in Shakespeare's verse and typical of his method . . . rare before Shakespeare, and even in Shakespeare before *Hamlet*" needs attention.⁸

8. W. Empson. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. 114 ff.

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The highest common factor of the first two nouns would be more than the insubstantialities with which man is usually deluded. Fantasy and trick would include all the imagination's sleights, deceitful shapes, vain and contemptible shifts as well as some of the fantastic tricks played by man before high heaven. Join this to Fame and it turns Fortinbras and his army into the counterpart of the player in the second soliloquy, the man who in a "Fixion" and a "drame of Passion" forced his soul to his whole conceit. For Fame can be the roll of Honour, report, gossip, rumour—the House of Fame was too well known in allegorical poetry to be left out here. Besides a fantasy of fame produces something more than the square of "insubstantial," while a trick of fame might be Fame's characteristic feature. So that in effect the course of action Hamlet seeks to recommend stands condemned as a piece of vain and useless imagining. He is however true to his passion in the compulsion he puts upon himself that here is example for him. He is so carried away that he can believe, for the moment, that the Twenty thousand go to their graves as to their beds and have neither fears nor qualms. The contrast with the third soliloquy is to be noted; there the grave as bed spoke of nightmare, here it is forcibly transformed into the natural rhythm of man's life. "Go to their graves like beds" is triumphant progress.

The final image is of a hecatomb. The fantasy and trick of fame have got the better of the prince, and what is fantastic in the expedition delights him. The absurdity of it strikes him as a notable jest and there is a bitter pun on "continent." That this should be belauded is the climax, the prince has moved from his reflection that here is an imposthume to the unconscious assertion that upon these sacrifices the gods themselves throw incense.

The two alternatives worked out, the prince resolves on a career of action. Unweeded garden, player's "Fixion," the sleep of death, the fantasy and trick of fame, they are all of a piece. Now he chooses resolutely, moved by the spectacle of the professional soldier who was in the Elizabethan valuation the man of blood, who meditates on nothing but blood. He becomes in the last line of the soliloquy the soldier, and that is "negation of all he has been and believed in until now."⁹ The man who has lacked advancement, the 'royal unemployed' in Vaktanghov's phrase, becomes mercenary soldier. He is caught in the contradictions of his world.

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9. H. Granville Barker. *op. cit.* p. 132.