"FRAILTY, THY NAME IS WOMAN"
A STUDY OF THE DARK LADY OF THE SONNETS, GERTRUDE, OPHELIA, CRESSIDA AND CLEOPATRA

By

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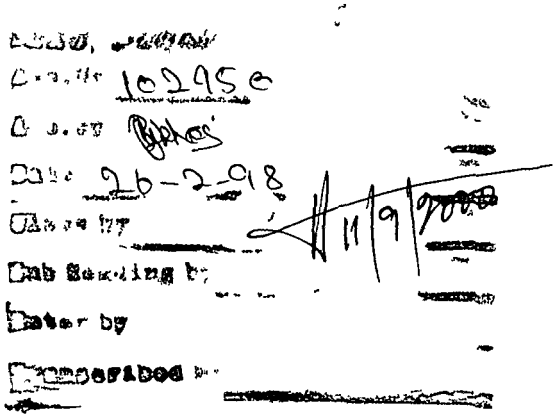

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Certified that the dissertation entitled "FRAILTY, THY NAME IS WOMAN" : A STUDY OF THE DARK LADY OF THE SONNETS, GERTRUDE, OPHELIA, CRESSIDA AND CLEOPATRA submitted by Ms. Toony Gill embodies the record of original insights explored by her under my supervision.

She has been duly registered and the dissertation presented is worthy of being considered for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

September 24, 1993

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I N D E X

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P R E F A C E

This Dissertation attempts to analyse Shakespeare's understanding of women and of the power that women can have on the universe to which they belong. Love can bring joy. It can also bring pain. It can create. It can destroy. Shakespeare's world-picture is complete. This Dissertation attempts to dissect the power of the instruments of the darker aspects of love.

INTRODUCTION

"I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
Who cry'd - 'La belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!"[1]

An atmosphere of disturbance envelops the world of Keats' Knight-at-Arms, who is 'alone' and 'palely loitering'.[2] His concept of the integrity of love has been shattered by 'La belle Dame sans Merci. The expression of nightmare is an expression of a phase of an extreme of suffering. What we are confronted with is an example - one of many - of the working of the process of annihilation of an order comprising Truth, Goodness and Beauty. Keats says about Shakespeare :

> "The poetry of Romeo and Juliet, of Hamlet, of Macbeth is the poetry of Shakespeare's soul - full of love and divine romance. It knows no stop in its delight, but 'goeth where it listeth' - remaining, however, in all men's hearts a perpetual and golden dream. The poetry of Lear, Othello, Cymbeline, etc., is the poetry of human passions and affections, made almost ethereal by the power of the poet."[3]

To these vibrant representations of love, Shakespeare, nevertheless, presents the archetypal La belle Dame sans Merci in the images of the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, of Gertrude and of Ophelia, of Cressida and of Cleopatra. These women are departures from the general rule. They

stand for "Frailty". Frailty as a denial of beauty, of truth, of goodness Shakespeare's is always the voice for a deeper truth whether it be a translation of a joy resulting from the union of love and truth or an expression of an apocalypse. In some of the latter cases, we encounter a mourning which takes on a force, a universality. The process of mourning begins with the acceptance of Keats' statement that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty".[4] We trace the movements of incoherence, of departure from this statement and the development of mourning assures us of the destruction that will follow, a destruction that is sometimes followed by resurrection. The orders of truth and beauty are dedicated to a cult whose disciples believe in love and purity. These orders are disturbed by the spirit of falsehood which imparts a sense of decay in relationships.

A study of this spirit aims to trace the vicissitudes of one line of thought: on Shakespeare's theorizing on the destruction of love and the subsequent death of beauty. The Renaissance definitions of 'love' and 'beauty' find their sources in the legitimate development of Plato's thought which records the two great speeches of Socrates in the Symposium and the Phaedrus. The first dialogues between Diotima and Socrates are reflective of the concept of love as a search for beauty :

"And now, Socrates, there bursts upon him that wondrous vision which is the very soul of the beauty he has toiled so long for. It is an everlasting loveliness which neither comes nor goes, which neither flowers nor fades; for such beauty is the same on every hand, the same then as now, here as there, this way or that way, the same to every worshipper as it is to every other."

"Nor will his vision of the beautiful take the form of a face, or of hands, or of anything that is of the flesh; it will be neither words, nor knowledge, nor a something that exists in something else such as a living creature, or the earth, or the heavens, or anything that is, but subsisting of itself and by itself in an eternal oneness; while every lovely thing partakes of it in such sort that however much the parts may wax and wane, it will be neither more nor less, but still the same inviolable whole."

"... And this is the way, the only way, he must approach, or be led towards, the sanctuary of Love : starting from individual beauties, the quest of the universal beauty must find him ever mounting the heavenly ladder, stepping from rung to rung, that is, from one to two, and from two to every lovely body, from bodily beauty to the beauty of institutions; from institutions to learning, and from learning in general to the special lore that pertains to nothing but the beautiful itself : until at last he comes to know what beauty is."

"'And if, my dear Socrates,' Diotima went on, 'Man's life is worth the living, it is when he has attained to the vision of the very sould of beauty.'

'And remember,' she said, 'that it is when he looks upon beauty's visible presentment, and only then, that a man will be quickened with the true, and not the seeming, virtue - for it is virtue's self that quickens him, not virtue's semblance.

> And when he has brought forth and reared this perfect virtue, he shall be called the friend of God : and if ever it is given to man to put on immortality, it shall be given to him.'
>
> "This, Phaedrus - this, gentlemen - was the doctrine of Diotima. I was convinced : and in that conviction I try to bring others to the same creed, and to convince them that, if we are to make this gift our own, love will help our mortal nature more than all the world. And this is why I say that every man of us should worship the god of Love; and this is why I cultivate and worship all the elements of Love myself, and bid others to do the same; and all my life I shall pay the power and the might of Love such homage as I can. So you may call this my eulogy of Love, Phaedrus, if you choose; if not, call it what you like."[5]

Love is a moving power in the Platonic sense of the word, becomes the vehicle of revelation in the Phaedrus. The soul remembers its intrinsic, whole divinity in its love for celestial beauty that radiates its way through earthly forms :

> "But if beauty, I repeat again that we saw her there shining in company with the celestial forms; and coming to earth we find her here too, shining in clearness through the clearest aperture of sense. For sight is the most piercing of our bodily senses; though not by that is wisdom seen ... But this is the privilege of beauty, that being the loveliest she is also the most palpable to sight.
>
> Now he who is not imitated or who has become corrupted, does not easily rise out of this world to the sight of the true beauty in the other; he looks only at her eartly namesake, and instead of being awed at the sight of her, he is given ever to pleasure, and like a brutish beast he rushes on to enjoy and beget ...

> But he whose initiation is recent, and who has been the spectator of many glories in the other world, is amazed when he sees anyone having a godlike face or form, which is the expression of divine beauty; and at first a shudder runs through him, and again the old awe steals over him; and then looking upon the face of his beloved as of a god he reverences him, and if he were not afraid of being thought a downright madman, he would sacrifice to his beloved as to the image of a god."[6]

True love involves a celestial bond between soul and soul, a flight into those regions where division between lovers is not known, a bond as existing in Shakespeare's "The Phoenix and the Turtle".

> So they loved as love is twain
> Had the essence but in one;
> Two distincts, division none:
> Number there in love was slain.[7]

The renunciation of this bond follows a sacrifice of the soul, of the spiritual reality of the self for the material, external, superficial self. Divinity, harmony and order are destroyed as apostasy strikes notes of discordance in the manifestations of the inconstant, false and hence frail woman. "Frailty" is a betrayal of faith with the divine order. It is hence a betrayal of self, of love and of heaven. It is a prison, the prisoner being held captive by the "worser spirit"[8] that lives in the archetypal 'La belle Dame sans Merci and voices in the prisoner the realization :

> "O cunning Love, with tears then keep'st me blind,
> Lest eyes well-seeing thy foul faults should find".

The Dark Lady of the Sonnets is in many ways similar to Cleopatra. The Dark Lady displays the faithlessness that causes a sense of futility, of emptiness, of world-weariness, perhaps, of horror. Ophelia, Cressida and Gertrude are starkly individualized representations of 'frailty'. There are many differences (as there are similarities) between each of these characters. The essential similarity lies in the fact that each one's conduct deserves Hamlet's judgement on La belle Dame sans Merci :

> "Frailty thy name is woman."[10]

Their universe has no room for the moral vision of integrity in love that finds utterance in Renaissance "poetic statements of order."[11] Spencer's "Hymn of Love" describes Creation :

> "Air hated earth and water hated fire,
> Till Love relented their rebellious ire."[12]

True love in the world of men and women corresponds to "the eternal light of the fixed stars and of the sun in particular, and lust and its miseries to deprivation of light caused by the earth's own self-interposition."[13] This Renaissance metaphor clearly strengthens belief in the vision mentioned.

Shakespeare's world abounds in women who emerge as not merely manifestations of pure living love, but also as messengers of a pure living world order revolving on

harmony and on reason ... Juliet, who dies for love ...

> "... A cup, closed in my true love's hand?
> Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end.
> O churl! drunk all, and let no friendly drop
> To help me often? I will kiss thy lips.
> Haply some prison yet doth hang on them
> To make me die with a restorative..."[14]

> "Yea, noise? Then I'll be brief. O happy dagger!
> ... This is thy sheath; there rust, and let me die."[15]

Rosalind, who possesses the depth, the fullness and most importantly, the courage to love and who reigns as a memorable member of the galaxy of Shakespearean women - the great forces of order and of civilization :

> "I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel and to cry like a woman; but I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat. Therefore, courage ..."[16]

Viola who stands out in her nobility, in her willingness to give her whole being to love; in her readiness to accompany the objects of her love, in their movements away from self-deception and ignorance, to self-knowledge wisdom and hence virtue :

> "A blank, my lord. She never told her love,
> But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud
> Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought;
> And, with a green and yellow melancholy,
> She sat like Patience on a monument,
> Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
> We men may say more, swear more; but indeed
> Our shows are more than will; for still we prove
> Much in our vows but little in our love."[17]

~~These heroines are examples of the many women who lay bare and illuminate the only principle in consequence~~

These heroines are examples of the many women who lay bare and illuminate the only principle in consequence really important in life - that of loyalty to virtue. They are the instruments to the very vision of the soul of beauty that Plato speaks of in his Dialogues. They are beauty's visible presentment, they are the moving powers. As a counter-image the Dark Lady of the Sonnets is "cruel". The sonnetteer is prisoner who believes :

> "Only my plague thus far I count my gain,
> That she that makes me sin awards me pain."[18]

In her we anticipate Gertrude, Ophelia, and Cressida because she deviates from these norms of beauty and of Order and a machinery of conflict and of destruction revolves around the very essence of her being.

The sonnetteer's awareness of her destructive force does not save him. Hamlets total disillusionment with his mother Gertrude does not enable him to move in a positive direction. Troilus sinks to pathos and does not rise to tragedy when he discovers that Cressida is unfaithful. So powerful is the negative force in Hamlet, Anthony and Cleopatra and Troilus and Cressida, that will is numbed or "benumbed" in "sin". Despite the existence of knowledge, despite the fact that these lovers are in traffic with reality, there is no escape; they do not break the fetters. Apostasy creates the Hyperion-Satyr situation, in the sense

that it prepares the atmosphere conducive to the movement of the temporary overthrow of beauty, truth and reason by the discordant, the ugly, falsehood, betrayal and lack of reason. However, Shakespeare's world-view is infinite. Truth is brought back to the throne. A knowledge of pain is essential for a knowledge of joy.

In presenting the image of the archetypal femme-fatale, Shakespeare gives us a comprehensive view of world-reality.

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[11] E.M.W. Tillyard, "Order", The Elizabethan World Picture (Penguin Books, in Association with Chatto & Windus, 1943), p. 21.

[12] Ibid., Edmund Spenser, "Hymn of Love", quoted.

[13] Ibid., "The Correspondences", p. 113.

[14] William Shakespeare, "Romeo and Juliet", William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, General editor Alfred Harbage, Allen Lane (The Penguin Press, London, ed. 1969), Act V, Sc. (iii), lines 160-166, p. 891.

[15] Ibid.

[16] William Shakespeare, "As You Like It", William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, General editor Alfred Harbage, Allen Lane (The Penguin Press, London, ed. 1969), Act II, Sc. (iii), lines 4-8), p. 253.

[17] Ibid., "Twelfth Night", Act II, Sc.(iv), lines 109-117, pp. 318-319.

[18] Ibid., "Sonnet 141", lines 13-14, p. 1477.

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CHAPTER-I

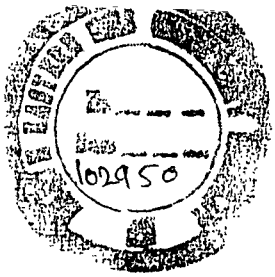
HAMLET : An Exit from Dreams of Passion

> "Let four captains
> Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,
> For he was likely, had he been put on,
> To have prov'd most royal; and for his passage,
> The soldier's music and the rite of war
> Speak loudly for him."
>
> (Hamlet, Act V, Sc.(ii), 400-405)

Hamlet's soul deserves the "Rite of War". Had it been "put on", had it been put to test, he would have proved "most royal". His death signifies an inevitability of the departure of a noble spirit from the reign of corruption. Shakespeare's world is infused with a profound sense of the inexplicable mystery and wonder of life - of "the fatal congruence of fate and character conspiring to weave man's tragic destiny."[1]

"Denmark's a prison".

(Act II, Sc.(ii), 242).



This utterance has both explicit overtones and implicit undertones. Hamlet is in a prison because he is encircled by a sense of doom provided by the machinations of happenings whose instruments are men and women who represent treachery and unfaithfulness.

Rosencrantz's reply to Hamlet's expression of a sense of imprisonment seeks to place the world of Denmark in the larger sphere of the entire world. He says : "Then, is the world one". (Line 243). And Hamlet's response is :

> "A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o'th' worst."

The spies are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (whose presences are ironical at this point considering that they have been summoned by Gertrude and Claudius to identify and diagnose and dissect the causes of "Hamlet's transformation" and who prove to be the principal agents who organize the play within the play - a macabre exposition of an immediate past in a deliberately planned setting and subsequently the proof of Claudius' guilt "wherein" Hamlet catches "the conscience of the King". [Act II, Sc.(ii), 600]).

An atmosphere infected by the activities of Claudius, Gertrude and some of their satellites and by the inactivity of Ophelia's will, kills Hamlet's soldier-image in the sense that it oppresses it. Hamlet's refusal to compromise, stems from the very nature of his soul.

Helen Gardner says, "The soldier on guard who cannot leave his post until he is relieved or given permission from above is a metaphor for the soul in this world which comes very easily to Renaissance writers." Hamlet's soul refuses to be shaken from its post. The progression from the earlier stage of anguish caused by a process of distancing himself from the false practices of the court and involving a deep sense of utter futility and meaninglessness, of decay and of a temporary cessation of action, as it were; to that of a later stage of "the phase of recovery", where "he has reached the healing waters of faith, leaving sterility behind",[3] and adopting a principle of resolution, one which urges Hamlet to act honestly, to do what he thinks right.

The earlier phase is marked by a withdrawal from the Court. Hamlet is aware of the possibility of the generation of miracles that man is capable of. But he is also aware of the baser instincts of man and woman which impel them towards movements marked by treachery and betrayal. Claudius has killed Hamlet's father and married his brother's wife, Gertrude. He is beyond redemption. Gertrude is not aware of Claudius' act of fratercide. She is perhaps not aware of the monsterosity of her surrender to him. However, she is guilty of "frailty". It is this "frailty" that nullifies the meaning of Hamlet's life in

his own perspective. It is this "frailty" that creates the anguish in Hamlet's soul, the anguish that questions the very nature of man's existence in the world. The atmosphere that permeates the dungeon, that is Denmark, is marked by the darkness that blankets the unregenerate and Hamlet wonders at the waste of it all.

> "I have of late, but wherefore, I know not, lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilient congregation of vapours ..."
>
> (Act II, Sc.(iii), 292-299).

The ghost of his noble father tells Hamlet of the horror of his murder :

> "The serpent that did sting they father's life
> Now wears his crown ..."
>
> (Act I, Sc.(v), 39-40).

He expresses his agony, the result of the nightmare caused by Gertrude's frailty :

> "... that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
> With witchraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts -
> O wicked wit, and gifts that have the power
> So to seduce! - won to his shameful lust
> The will of my most seeming - virtuous queen.
> O Hamlet, what a falling off was there,
> From me, whose love was of that dignity
> That it went hand in hand even with the vow
> I made to her in marriage, and to decline

> Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
> To those of mine.
> But virtue, as it never will be mov'd,
> Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
> So lust, though to a radient angel link'd,
> Will rate itself in a celestial bed
> And prey on garbage ..."
>
> (Act I, Sc.(v), 42-57).

He invokes the spirit of "nature" in Hamlet to prevent the "royal bed of Denmark" from being a "couch for luxury and damned incest." Gertrude's apostasy is classified as a crime that stems from unawareness, oblivion, forgetfulness of a beautiful past; it cannot be punished by mortals. Retribution and the power to deal with it, belong to the realms of heaven. The ghost tells Hamlet :

> "Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive
> Against thy mother ought. Leave her to heaven, and to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
> To prick and sting her ..."
>
> (Act I, Sc.(iv), 85-88).

Hamlet can feel the pulse of pain in these lines. He finds himself unable to eliminate the bitter sense of horror caused by Gertrude's betrayal :

> "I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> All sams of books, all forms, all pressures past
> That youth and observation copied there,
> and thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> Unmix'd with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!
> O most permicious woman!
> O villain, villain, smiling damned villain!
> My tables. Meet it is I set it down
> That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain
> At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark..."
>
> (Act I, Sc.(v), 99-109).

To remain true to the commandment mentioned, Hamlet wears an armour of madness. He assume an "antic disposition" which is 'Hamlet's immediate response to the charge the ghost has laid upon him...'. This as Harold Jenkins says 'receives prompt demonstration in Ophelia's account of the visit to her closet..."[4].

> "My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
> Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd,
> No hat upon his head, his stockings foul'd,
> Ungarter'd and down-gyved to his ankle,
> Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
> And with a look so piteous in purpurt
> As if he had been loosed out of hell
> To speak of horrors, he comes before me."
>
> (Act II, Sc.(i), 77-83).

Polonius concludes that 'this is the very ecstasy of love,' and regrets the advice and instructions that he had imparted to Ophelia that had resulted in Ophelia's rejection of Hamlets letters and access. Ophelia says :

> "... as you did command,
> I did repel his letters and denied
> His access to me ...".
>
> (Act II, Sc.(i), 108-110).

Ophelia's apostasy consists of an apostasy of will. It seems that her individuality as a person sleeps in a tomb of a death-in-life predicament. Her brother Laertes and her father Polonius dictate all terms of life to her. She is a puppet in the hands of all around her and a symbol of abnegation - a representation of denial - of music vows. Her senselessness is a form of passivity, of spiritual

inertness, a numbness. Her attitude provides her with an anesthesia with which she can blot out the plain of reality and the risk involved in truly loving Hamlet. This attitude starkly reveals itself in her earlier exchange with Polonius.

Ophelia tells her father that Hamlet "hath given countenance to his speech, my Lord, with almost all the holy vows of heaven". (Act I, Sc.(iii), 113-114). Polonius' answer is

> "Ay, springes to catch woodcocks. I do know,
> When the bood burns, how prodigal the soul
> Lends the tongue vows. These blazes, daughter,
> Giving more light than heat, extinct in both
> Even in their promise as it is a-making,
> You must not take for fire. From this time
> Be something scanter of your maiden presence,
> Set your entreatments at a higher rate
> Than a command to parley. For Lord Hamlet,
> Believe so much in him that he is young,
> And with a larger tether may be walk
> Than may be given you. In few, Ophelia,
> Do not believe his vows; for they are brokers
> Not of that dye which their investments show,
> But mere implorators of unholy suits,
> Brathing like sanctified and pius bands
> The better to beguile. This is for all
> I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth
> Have you so slander any moment leisure
> As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.
> Look to 't, I charge you. Come your ways."
>
> (Act, I, Sc.(iii), 115-135).

Ophelia's answer to this obtuse approach, adopted by her father, seals the benumbing effect of an emotional comatose that she finds so safe and so convenient to sink into : "I shall obey, my lord." (Act I, Sc.(iii), 136). Ophelia and Gertrude are worlds apart from one another. But they share one characterisitc and this characteristic is displayed in their attempt to kill the past by living in a state of Lethe-like sleep. Gertrude succumbs so easily and so quickly to Claudius and is callous and insentient enough to tell her son :

> "Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off,
> And let thine eye look like a friend on
> Denmark
> Do not forever with thy vailed lids
> Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
> Thou know'st 'tis common : all that lives
> must die,
> Passing through nature to eternity".
> (Act I, Sc.(ii), 68-73).

The ensuing dialogue between Hamlet and Gertrude on "seeming" states 'Denmark' and its present condition, and Hamlet's alienation from it.

Hamlet's sense of isolation is expressed in the following lines :

> "Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not
> 'seems'.
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forc'd breath.
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
> Together with all forms, moods, shapes of
> grief,

> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem
> For they are actions that a man might play;
> But I have that within which passes show,
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe.
>
> (Act I, Sc.(ii), 76-86).

Gertrude's failure to understand the meaning, the implications and the value of suffering is somewhat akin to Ophelia's paralysis of will. The similarity lies in a deliberate, conscious surrender of will to event. Such a surrender must necessarily be accompanied by asuicide of emotions. Dead emotions are entombed in coffins of frailty. Ophelia's sin against love, however, is very different from Gertrude's

Getrude succumbs to a desire for self-satisfaction and satiety. Ophelia surrenders to her fears of failure, of betrayal. Gertrude distrusts questions regarding her incapacity for remembrance and for love. Ophelia distrusts herself and a lack of self-trust naturally results in a frightening lack of trust in anyone else, least of all, in a lover. Gertrude represents the spirit of sheer, unadulterated intemperance. Ophelia represents the spirit of docility to an environment infected by emotional and moral and spiritual lassitude. Self-indulgence and a suicide of will, represent a desire for forgetfullness, for 'safe' withdrawal from a challenging, questioning and hence enlivening love.

Hamlet's predicament in the early phases of his spiritual development is one that is surrounded by a corrupt atmosphere. He knows the wonder of love, creation and peace, the wonders that were and he is aware also of the negative powers. His understanding of ambiguities is deepened by his touch with the realities that involve Getrude and Ophelia, realities that are disturbing and he wonders in his soliloquys at the glory of creation and the pity of waste.

As in his soliloquy in Act II, Sc.(ii) (lines 535-550):

> "Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his wown conceit
> That from her working all his visage wann'd,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect.
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing!
> For Hecuba!
> What's Hecuba to him, or he to her,
> That he should weep for her? What would he do
> Had he the motive and the cut for passion
> That I have? He would drawn the stage with tears,
> And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
> Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
> Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
> The very faculties of eyes and ears ..."

Hamlet makes explicit what is implicit. Dreams of passion are easier, for simpler, less complex when they become the study of Players - when they become the tools of talent -

merely to be re-enacted on an artificial stage with the setting of art as its backdrop. They are the cause of the insurrection within Hamlet overthrowing serenity and replacing it with war. A compromise with the present would spell blasphemy. The war within Hamlet is a search for vision of a world of truth beyond the universe of Denmark where 'frailty' seems to be the supporting base. The dramatized opposition in the soliloquy in Act I, Sc.(ii) is between 'the uses of the world' and loyalty, between suicide and silence before a corrupt world. Suicide involves a refusal to compromise but also holds the element of negativity, in the sense that it spells out withdrawl from a state of possible positive action to 'set' time 'right'. Silence, if negative, could mean a passive, cowardly surrender to corruption. It could, if positive, mean wisdom. In Hamlet's case, 'frailty' displayed by his mother and by Ophelia, in their acts of treachery and of suicide of will power, respectively, urge him to his adoption of an antic disposition. In his soliloquy, we trace a movement from intense thought to intense pain :

> O that this too sullied flesh would melt,
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
> Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God! God!
> How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> Fie on't, oh fie, 'tis an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in
> nature possess it merely. That it should
> come to this!
> But two months dead - nay, not so much, not
> two -

So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
That he might not between the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on; and yet with a month -
Let me not think on't - Frailty, thy name is woman -
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears - why, she -
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourn'd longer - married with my ungle,
My father's brother - but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules. 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 deterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not, nor it cannot come to good.
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tonge..

(Act I, Sc.(ii), 129-159).

This soliloquy contains the poetry of despair. Hamlet's mourning is replete with the force of a sense of hopelessness and futility - caused by 'frailty'. A longing to melt into the elements is pushed aside in respect for the belief that self-slaughter is a crime. However, the longing does remain and its existence is voiced in an utter, intense expression of disillusionment with the entire world. The impact of unfaithfulness can be catastrophic. It can consume an intense character completely. It can eclipse the beauty of the world and of

the very fact of being alive. The world can become, in the eyes of a disillusioned beholder, a vast waste. The sixth commandment may forbid 'self-slaughter' but to the upright, a compromise with "things rank and gross in nature" is a solution worse than death. Hamlet's dilemma is caused by Gertrude's unfaithfulness, her speedy approach to Polonius' "incestuous sheets". Frailty implies waste. Unweeded gardens like undisciplined souls, unleashed desires in untrained hearts inherent in women, lie waste. Increase in 'appetite', as in the case of Cressida, can be disastrous. Gertrude's apostasy is a betrayal of the symbol of truely sorrowing woman rendered unconsolable by the death of her loved one (as in the case of Niobe, the Greek mythical figure of the type of sorrowing womanhood, who wept without cessation or consolation for the deaths of her children, slain by Apollo and Diana, until sadness and grief turned her into a stone; from her stone figure, tears continued to fall). Gertrude is the symbol of departure from the true embodiment of love and remembrance. Hamlet compares her with beasts without "discourse of reason" and realizes that she would fall short of even their 'moral' standards. They would have mourned longer. Gertrude, within a month, marries Polonius with a haste, with a numbless that leaves no room for memory, for love. Her marriage, moreover, in the eyes of the Renaissance world, is incestuous because 'incest' formerly included the marriage of a woman with her

husband's brother. Her frailty has a temporarily crippling impact on Hamlet. For a while, he feels extremely helpless and inadequate. He, who is meant to be a true soldier, in every sense of the word, he who would have proved to be the most royal, would have perhaps, as suggested by Saxo, "outdone the labours of Hercules", if "fortune had been as kind to him as nature."[5] "Fortune" would imply the roles of Gertrude and Ophelia, to a great extent, in this context. The grief expressed by Gertrude's red eyes was not a lasting one. True grief has value. Gertrude's has none. It is Hamlet's destiny to have for his mother, an unfaithful woman who co-operates with her dead husband's brother to taint the once-pure atmosphere of Denmark with traces of decay. Funerals and marriages sometimes follow each other with very little delay and the absence of hesitation and delay proves the absence of fidelity to moemory. The ironic exchange between Hamlet and Horatio is a revealing illumination of the situation :

Herato : My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.
Hamlet : I prithee do not mock me, fellow student. I think it was to see my mother's wedding.
Horatio : Indeed, my, lord, it follow'd hard upon.

Hamlet : Thrift, thrift, Horatio. The funeral bak'd neats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables
(Act I, Sc.(ii), lines 176-183).

Mourning is naturally followed by Hiatus : a period of silence in which celebration is stilled into a kind of death. In Denmark, however, the pattern was a departure from the rule. The funeral left-overs were perceived to be literally cold and served thus for the wedding. Gertrude could not mourn the death of her husband long or intensely enough to abide by the table of memory. The absence of a period of mourning is manifested in her "frailty", in a subsequent hasty marriage. It displays the truth that

The time is out of joint (Act 1, Sc.(v), line 196).

Hamlet's disillusionment, caused by Gertrude's frailty, juxtaposed with Ophelia's weakness of will, results in tragedy. Ophelia says :

> He took me by the wrist and held me hard
> Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
> And with his other hand thus o'er his brow
> He falls to such perusal of my face
> As a would draw it. Long stay'd he so.
> At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
> And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
> He rais'd a sigh no piteous and profound
> As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
> And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
> And with his head over his shoulder turn'd
> He seem'd to find his way without his eyes,
> For out o'doors he went without their helps,
> And to the last bended their light on me.
>
> (Act II, Sc.(iii), lines 88-100).

To this account of a strange scrutiny on account of a manifestation of sheer despair? Or is it a description of Hamlet's attempt to dissect a form of frailty? Or is it merely one of the "desperate undertakings" of the will led

by an unruly passion, as Polonius seems to suggest? The very ecstasy of love should reflect itself in other ways. Hamlet is searching, in his antic disposition, for an answer beyond frailty, and sees in his despairing state, only the frailties that his mother has committed. A thousand differing circumstances contribute to tragedies of love, few of them willed or determined by the will - they result out of the demands of human natures and of the environments and the interest of them are usually the fruits of frailty. Gertrude's apostasy results in Hamlet's journey - from the first phase of despair to the last of resolution - in pain. Her apostasy points forward to Ophelia's, in Hamlet's mind, as he is led in his inner and outer pilgrimage of suffering. Pain can sometimes lead to one of the most rewarding forms of introspection. Sometimes, however, it can kill. Hamlet's recourse to action can be traced in the phases that follow. Hamlet's letter to Ophelia reads thus : 'To the celestial and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia', in her excellent white bosom, these ...

> Doubt thou the stars are fire,
> Doubt that the sun doth move,
> Doubt truth to be a liar,
> But never doubt I love ...
> O deal Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art to reckon my groans. But that I love thee best, O most best believe it, Adieu.
>
> Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him, Hamlet."
> (Act II, Sc.(ii), 115-125).

'Beautified' would imply artificiality, Hamlet perhaps comments quietly on the falseness of feminine beauty which consists of art - aimed to attract. The four-lined verse refers to "the orthodox belief of the Ptolemaic astronomy that the sun moved round the earth. Since each of the poem's first two lines assumes the certainty of what had now begun to be doubted, there is an irony of which Shakespeare (though not, I take it, Hamlet) must have been aware."[6] Hamlet's doubts are expressed in this letter. He lacks the "art" to measure his groans. This letter indicates to some extent, the conscious control that Hamlet attempt to reveal over a sensibility excited beyond the pitch of the aveage, of the normal. The war within is caused by frailty as expressed in Gertrude's marriage and Ophelia's passivity. Polonius tells the 'King' and 'Queen' :

> And then I prescripts gave her,
> That she should lock herself rrom his resort,
> Admit no messengers, receive no token;
> Which done, she took the fruits of my advice,
> And he, repelled - a short tale to make -
> Fell into a sadness then into a fast,
> Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness.
> Thence to a lightness, and by this declension,
> Into the madness wherein now he raves
> And all we mourn for.
>
> (Act II, Sc.(ii), 142-151).

Ophelia's rejection of Hamlet's love tokens, at a time when Hamlet's mother's heartless marriage had shattered Hamlet's trust in her; is an act that deserves a poet's

denunciation. The method in Hamlet's madness shows that he is pursuing a vocation as exacting as that of the Church - he is in relentless pursuit of relentless truth, he seems to possess a talent for tasting any extreme - as in his dialogues with Ophelia, that are anticipated in his "mad talk" with Polonius. He calls Polonius a fishmonger. "It was believed that daughters of fishmongers were unusually prone to breed; and the thought of the daughter here comes straight upon a nauseous example."[7]

> "For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion - Have you a daughter?
> I have, my lord.
> Let her not walk i' th' sun. Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive - friend look to 't.
>
> (Act II, Sc.(ii), 181-186).

Ophelia is compared with a carrion good for kissing. "Carrion has its primary sense of a good carcase, but also its secondary sense of live flesh, and especially flesh contemptuously regarded as available for sexual pleasure. This leads us directly enough to Polonius' daughter, and what, by analogy, may happen to her."[8]

In the lines to follow, Hamlet aware of Ophelia's passivity waras Polonius to keep her away from the sun - "literally, for obvious reasons in view of what the sun does to the other carrion; figuratively, keep her away from public places, and perhaps, with the sun as a royal emblem,

specifically from the prince. After Polonius' plan to "loose" her, the audience may appreciate the irony of this."[9] Hamlet's reaction to his mother's corruption prepares him to bear Ophelia's frailties. His disillusion with women represents a judgement on their capacity for art and their propensity towards paint and falsehoods:

> I have heard of your paintings well enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble, and you lisp, you nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't, it hath made me mad. I have we will have no no marriage. Those that are married already - all but one - shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(i), 144-151).

The dialogue between Ophelia and Hamlet that occurs immediately prior to this declamation is coloured with Hamlet's disillusionment with Ophelia's frailty. Hamlet's answer to the question concerning his welfare :

I humbly thank you, well (Act III, Sc.(i), 92)

expresses his feeling that Ophelia is a stranger. The world 'well' has been the source of much critical contemplation. Does it imply boredom, depression, impatience, irony? Does it imply the ennui that arises from a sense of total waste? Is it, ironically, an interpretation of a mood caused by a vision of the human apocalypse, and generated by a machinery of conflict and destruction evolved by 'frailty'? Plato's world of beauty and order has no room for the working of such machinations,

but Denmark does.

Ophelia's attempt to 'redeliver' Hamlet's 'remembrances' are met with the latter's denial that he ever gave them to her.

> No, not I
> I never gave you aught
> (Act III, Sc.(i), 95-96).

Ophelia's persistence that he did, is ironical in that it is worded so glowingly that it nullifies the senseless frailty that she, however, seems determined to commit. She says :

> My honour'd lord, you know right well you did,
> And with them words of so sweet breath compos'd.
> As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost,Take these again ...

Hamlet's denial of having given Ophelia gifts implies that the transformation in her has rendered her a changed person. Her frailty consists in her total and sheer inability to stand by Hamlet at the time when it is out of joint and when he needs an affirmation of love and of value. Hamlet then says in the course of their conversation :

> "... if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty ....
> (Act III, Sc.(i), 107-108).

and

> ... for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd

> than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(i), 111-115).

J. Dusinberre says :

> Hamlet's father's goodness had no power to translate Gertrude's beauty into its own likeness. Hamlet sees Ophelia as the representative of a sex who deserve the poet's venom.

He did love her once, but her denial of his access to her anticipates the re-enactment of further acts and moves of frailty.

The negative forces that centre around betrayal are powerful enough to overthrow all beauty; and the atmosphere succumbs to ugly futility. Love, marriage and procreation subsequently seem methodical steps leading towards disaster. A nunnery seems to be the only answer. Hamlet says :

> Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?
>
> (Act III, Sc.(i), 121-129).

Original sin cannot be wiped away. It would be better for man not to be born. Hamlet says :

> We are arrant knaves all, believe none of us.
> Go they ways to a nunnery.
> Where's your father?
>
> (Act III, Sc.(i), 129-131).

A nunnery seems, according to him, the apt place for Ophelia, "where she will preserve her chastity and be safe from love, marriage and the breeding of sinners. "Nunnery" was sometimes used sarcastically for a house of unchaste women, and awareness of this may add a bitter undercurrent as the dialogue proceeds..." Ophelia's passivity betokens even to the inexpert eye some dead inert will. She is ineffective, passive, in the sense that while true love is assuring - Ophelia has no powers, no dispensing agents of joy or of hope, of reassurance to wipe away the marks of spiritual ravage that Gertrude's frailty has left on Hamlet. Hamlet says :

> If thou dost marry, I'll give this plague for they dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get the to a nunnery, farewell. Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go - and quickly too. Farewell.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(i), 136-142).

Ophelia's sense of helplessness is expressed in a weak, ineffective invocation to the heavenly powers to restore Hamlet. She believes him to be insane. She makes no real effort to understand.

Hamlet's ensuing declamations are a satire on women, satire at this point is not a poet's paradox, but a

revelation of trurth. Hamlet has a firm and incessant desire to render to every one in Denmark that which is his or her due. Poetic justice becomes retributive in his hands and as he traces his mother's guilt, he is struck by the pity of it all. It is a sense of waste that developes, designs tragedy. Gertrude's apostasy, Ophelia's rejection of Hamlet's courtship are the crucial links in the inexerable chair of events that culminate in tragedy. Ophelia says :

> O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye,
> tongue, sword,
> Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
> Th'observ'd of all observers, quite, quite
> down!
> And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
> That suck'd the honey of his music vows,
> Now see that noble and most sovereign reason
> Like sweet bells jangled out of tune and
> harsh,
> That unmatch'd form and feature of blown
> youth
> Blasted with ecstasy. O woe is me
> T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(i), 152-163).

The music of sacred vows turns harsh. Ophelia's obtuseness is a veil that covers her eyes from seeing her responsibility. She seems to be distracted with a terrible preoccupation with her own self and her own misery. Her paralysis is of a mental and emotional type. Her attitude places her in a world far removed from the one in which Rosalind, Portia, Juliet and so many strong symbols of

living love, brave all dangers, meet all contingencies, overcome all obstacles for those they love.

Hamlet's world revolves around questions relating to the dichotomy existing between human will and destiny. Displacement of will by fortune in Denmark gain impetus by the frailty displayed by Gertrude and Ophelia.

The sense of waste that follows such a displacement results in a strong sense of mortality.

Man is endowed with glorious characteristics, but he is dust :

> What piece of work is man, how noble in reasons, how infinite in faculties, in form and moveing how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals - and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me - nor woman neither ...
>
> (Act II, Sc.(ii), 295-309).

We tread on main roads and on by-lanes, on desert sands with the tantalizing knowledge of remembrance of fresh, fertile areas more promising. Dreams are manipulated into nightmare. Love is forgotten. Fine is needed to revitalize visions. Hamlet has no help. The love that is rightly his, is replaced by frailty. However, Hamlet does not succumb to the trauma that involves this displacement. As Prof. Homchaudhury says :

> The hero contemplates the paradox that is man and is himself a paradox. He is at once

> impulsive, wilful, ratiocinative and profound. In spite of the fixation that haunts him and bedevils his proceeding, such is the variety and amptitude of his mind that he finds himself responding with obvious zest to every happening around him. His psychic agony does not diminish his vitality in any significant manner. He is no statue-like fitted lover or petrified son of an incestuous mother.[10]

This is apparent in the exchanges between Ophelia and Hamlet in Act III, Sc.ii, immediately prior to the enactment of the play within the play. Hamlet says :

> O God, your only jig-maker. What should a man do but be merry? For look you how cheerfully my mother looks and my father died within's two hours.
>
> (Lines 123-125).

Hamlet's brilliance cannot be answered by Ophelia, whose weak mind is rooted in the immediate present and is beset with obtuse ordinances. Her answer is : Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord. (126). she misses the irony in Hamlet's response :

> So long? Nay then, let the devil wear black, for I'll have a suit of sables. O heavens, die two months ago and not forgotten yet! Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year. But by'r lady a must build churches then, or else shall a suffer not thinking on, with the hobby-horse, whose epitaph is 'For O, for O, the hobby horse if forget'.
>
> (Act III, Sci.(ii), 127-133).

This, in Shakespeare's undermeaning, is an expression of a descent from love to forgetfulness, from celestial love to satiety ... descents that Gertrude has displayed and that

Ophelia is so silent on. Love awakens the divine in man. Betrayal of love is a conscious rejection of divinity.

In the play-within-the play that follows, the story of Gertrude's frailty is visibly portrayed. During the course of the inactment of the show, Hamlet's and Ophelia's dialogues with each other are implicative of the death of faithfullness and the birth of the irony of existence....

Hamlet : Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?

Ophelia : Tis brief, my lord.

Hamlet : As woman's love.

(Act III, Sc.(ii), 147-149).

Ophelia has no answer. The lack of response expresses a lack of the denial of such a pronouncement on woman's love. Both the embodiments of frailty, Gertrude and Ophelia, are audience to a show that reflects as a mirror the former's activities and the latter's insensitivities.

The Player Queen says :

The instances that second marriage move are
base respects of thrift, but not of love.
A second time I kill my husband dead,
When record husband kisses me in bed.

(Act III, Sc.(ii), 177-180).

Again, there is mention of "thrift". Gertrude was not an active accomplice in her husband's murder, but her marriage with the murderer makes her a passive accomplice, accomplice enough, anyway, is their act of disrespect towards love.

The Player King says :

> So think thou wilt no second husband wed,
> But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(ii), 209-210).

This histrionic obliteration of any illusions regarding the lasting of love is a comment on the Player Queen and on the real queen. Hamlet's expertise with word and with creation of situation leads to the eliciting of response from Getrude and Claudius to the establishment of truth. In the final analysis there is no ambiguity. The truth is crystal clear and stark and raw in this crystal clarity. Hamlet

Hamlet asks Gertrude if she likes the play and Gertrude's answer is revealing :

> The lady doth protest too much methinks
>
> (Act III, Sc.(ii), 225).

Hamlet's response is pregnant with meaning :

> O, but shell keep her word.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(ii), 226).

Keeping words such as these is proof of loyalty in love and of remembrance :

> Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light,
> Sport and repose lock from me day and night,
> To desperation turn by trust and hope,
> An anchor's cheer in prison be my scope,
> Each opposite, that blanks the face of joy.
> Meet what I would have well and it destroy,
> Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife,
> If, once a widow, ever I be a wife.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(ii), 211-215).

Claudius is on the alert. He wonders if there is no offence in the creation of the play and Hamlet's comments.

Gertrude's is not a 'free' soul. Subsequently, her guilt is touched. Ophelia's comment on Hamlet's interpretation is ironically correct. She says :

> You are as good as a chorus, my lord.
> (Act III, Sc.(ii), 240).

Hamlet's skill at summing up a situation and interpreting it is words, enables him to translate drama and the reality of drama. He tells her :

> I could interpret between you and your love
> if I could see the puppets dallying.
> (Act III, Sc.(ii), 241-242).

To all the opposing tensions there was only one answer - exposition - until such times as the inexerable pressures of the past and the present could be suspended by some finite perfect action that every hero is believed to be capable of performing. Ophelia's inertia is met with a mastery summing up of the situation. The mention of the word 'puppets' is implicative in that it draws a question. Thoughts drifting in Hamlet's mind become logically mixed with evocations of past memory. Passivity in love results in a grotesque and limited expression of it. Is Ophelia not a puppet, a willing one who would rather rehearse her lines than speak them? Would she not rather repeat lines given to her by somebody else?

As Hamlet tears aside the veils that cover the truth and speaks for puppets in the dnagerous tones of truth the

drama of frailty is presented to the audience within the play and the audience without. Each scene depicts a turbulent, disturbing reality.. Hamlet comes up agains some insuperable obstacle of the kind which only the determination of a Hannibal could have shifted - whichever side he looks, there is a barrier. His battle against all these, precludes violent revenge against his mother. In his memory, Hamlet carries a living pain - map that had been drawn in a recent past which told him that "frailty" would certainly make certain moves. Nor is Hamlet wrong in the anticipation of these moves. The dreadful tug of memory is there - the signposts are familiar. Reality is so far in excess of expectation that we, the audience, are deprived of all desire to abandon Hamlet in his effort to set time right, despite the lingering sense of futility, that Gertrude's and Ophelia's frailty has, left as a kind of legacy. Hamlet's efforts bequeath in the memory of his name something of the pain and austerity of solitary life, devoted to the discovery and revelation of truth which was to become a symbol for holiness ...

One could not abandon Hamlet at this juncture without inflicting on him serious impairment. However, Ophelia does not seem to be aware of this. In the evening dialogue between them, Ophelia finds no answers to meet Hamlet's wit.

Hamlet's acquaintance with the reality concerning the frailty of certain women is a constant, sufficiently strong motive to bring the conflict to a point of crisis.

He tells Ophelia :

> So you mis-take your husbands -
> Begin, murderer. Leave thy damnable faces
> and begin. Come, the croaking raven doth
> bellow for revenge
>
> (Act III, Sc.(ii), 246-248).

Hamlet jests at the lightness with which women take their marriage vows. Gertrude's forgetfulness of her earlier marriage vows, puts her in sharp contrast to the idealistic symbol of woman who stands for fidelity.

The entire operation of the play within the play is conducted in an atmosphere of deceptive peacefulness. The state of absence of any conception of guilt is soon ended. As soon as Lucianus pours the poison into the ears of the sleeper saying :

> Thoughts black, hands apt, drugsfit, and time
> agreeing,
> Confederate season, else no creature seing,
> Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds
> collected,
> With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice
> infected,
> Thy natural magic and dire property
> On wholesome life usurps immediately
>
> (Act III, Sc.(ii), 249-254).

the King arises in guilt and the Queen shows her concern -

> How fares my lord?
>
> (Act III, Sc.(ii), 261).

Her gesture betokens concern for the 'peacock', not for the murdered 'Jove'. Later, she sends Guildenstern to Hamlet with the message that she wishes to talk to him. Rosencrantz's words sum up her views on the play that alarms Claudius :

> ... thus she says : your-behaviour hath struck her into amazement and admiration.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(ii), 317-318).

After his brief exchange with Polonius, there is a soliloquy that expresses Hamlet's resolution :

> 'Tis now the very witching time of night,
> When churchyards yawn and hell itself breaks out
> Contagion to this world. Now could I drink lot blood,
> And do such bitter business as the day
> Would quake to look on. Soft, now to my mother
> O heart, lose not thy nature. Let not ever
> The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom;
> Let me be cruel, not unnatural.
> I will speak daggars to her, but use none.
> My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites:
> How is my words somever she be shent,
> To give them seals nevery my soul consent.'
>
> (Act III, Sc.(iii), 379-390).

Gertrude is not to be put to death the way Agrippina was. Agrippina's apostasy was one that included murder of her husband, Claudius. To avenge his father's death, Nero killed Agrippina. Hamlet does not wish to be unnatural and follows his father's Ghost's instructions which preclude the commitment of physical assault on Gertrude.

The ensuing dialogue between Gertrude and Hamlet in Act three, Scene four is a rich and meaningful one. It

indicates the importance of a manifestation of a force in Gertrude that is crucial, decisive to Hamlet's fate. Polonius' role as a spy is ended in a swift, decisive and fatal action. Gertrude's recourse to keeping Polonius behind the arras results in the violence that follows. Her spirit of falsehood seems to be the cause of almost every disaster that occurs in the world of Hamlet's Denmark.

Gertrude's moral laxity and obtuseness characterize her in the ealier phase of the dialogue :

Hamlet : Now, mother, what's the matter?
Queen : Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.
Hamlet : Mother, you have my father much offended.
Queen : Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.
Hamlet : Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.
Queen : Why, how now, Hamlet?
Hamlet : What's the matter now?
Queen : Have you forgot me?
Hamlet : No, by the road, not so
You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife,
And, would it were not so, you are my mother.
Queen : Nay, then I'll set those to you that can speak.
Hamlet : Come, come, and sit you down, you shall not budge.
You go not till I set you up as a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you.
Queen : What wilt thou do? Thow wilt not murder me?
Help, ho!

(Act III, Sc.(iv), 7-21).

Hamlet, agonized by the thought, by the realization that his mother's concern lies not for her dead husband but for her husband's murderer, answers her with, formerly, quiet ironic brilliance. But then as their conversation reaches a point of climax, he expresses a desire that she, in all her frailty were not his mother - an expression that provokes Gertrude to call out for help.

In Shakespeare's vision of life and death, so complete as it is with truth and so replete as it is with a sense of moral design, the role of the frail woman is imperatively crucial, in that it builds up the moments of drama to the essential pitch that underlies the crisis that follows clash of wills. If there were no will, there would be no crisis. If there were no goal, there would be no desire for Hamlet to resolve a time that is out of joint. Resolution results fatally in the case of Hamlet's actions that are impelled by Gertrude's frailty. At this point, as Polonius is slain, we witness one of the crises in Hamlet - one of the braking points at which the strength of the opposing forces is so strained that : there must be a cracking of the strain.

The exercise of the protagonist's will is sufficiently vigorous at this stage. It sustains and develops the conflict to a point of issue. A conflict which fails to reach a crisis is a conflict of weak wills. Gertrude's

role is of extreme importance. It is an impetus to Hamlet's movements away from court compromise to extremely final and absolute resolution of conflict.

He realises that his murder of Polonius is a bad deed. He tells Gertrude :

> A bloody deed. Almost as bad, good mother,
> As kill a king and marry with his brother.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(iv), 28-29).

The Queen, Gertrude was not guilty of complicity in the murder. Her reaction to this statement proves her innocence. In Hamlet's present state of mind, however, there is hardly a distinction between the basic elements of killing and marrying - these he regards as "one composite crime". As Prof. Homchaudhury says :

> To be fair to Gertrude, she is unaware of the fact that Claudius has treacherously got her former husband out of his way. On the other hand, epicureanism and lust have rendered her insensitive enough not to realize that her marriage to Claudius so soon after her former husband's death could cause such disquiet in Hamlet's mind.

Hamlet continues, dismissing temporarily, Polonius' death:

> Leave wringing of your hand. Peace, sit you down,
> And let me wring your heart; for so I shall
> If it be made of penetrable stuff,
> If damned custom have not braz'd it so,
> That it be proof and bulwark against sense.
>
> (34-38).

Shakespeare's hero displays a determination to transcend damned custom and to attempt to go beyond the

sheath of the armour of senselessness. There is at work a sharp, intense and overpowering sense of urgency here. Hamlet embodies Shakespeare's concept of a hero whose demand is that he reveal truth even to the insensate. The Queen, Gertrude is embodiment of the insensate. Her frailty results in Hamlet's persistence in dwelling upon the attainment of a goal. We witness the drama of the will striving towards a goal. There is no break, no hiatus whatsoever in the rhythm of urgency.

Gertrude's moral lassitude is displayed in her question :

> What have I done, that thou dar'st wag thy tongue
> In noise so rude against me?
> (Act III, Sc.(iv), 39-40).

Hamlet's answer pronounces such judgement as would shake an empty theatre full of the noisy contentions of the dead, insensate living many into shocked realization of truth.

> Such an act
> That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
> Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
> From the fair forehead of an innocent love
> And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
> As false as dicers' oathe - O, such a deed
> As from the body of contraction plucks
> The very soul, and sweet religion makes
> A rhapsody of words. Heaven's face does glow
> O'er this solidity and compound mass
> With tristful visage, as against the doom,
> Is thought-sick at the act.
> (Act III, Sc.(iv), 40-50).

Gertrude's betrayal has amounted to putting canker in the heart of the rose of love, nullifying the meaning of religion, scoring the vows of marriage. Even the heavens are affected. Mental disorder, spiritual dislocation cause such a canker to grow.

One recalls Blake, in this connection, whose rose suffers ...

> O Rose, thou art sick!
> The invisible worm
> That flies in the night,
> In the howling storm,
>
> Has found out thy bed
> Of crimson joy :
> And his dark secret love
> Does thy life destroy.[13]

Experience speaks of cankers and of worms of different kinds - that destroy the innocence of roses of love. The act of wilfully planting the seed of disease in a bed of beautiful roses is a horrifying treacherous act. Gertrude is culpable of such an act.

In his romances, Shakespeare's heroines perform acts that betoken an honesty, a faith thy keep with love. They are the embodiments of true love, in the Platonic sense and in their giving of their bodies, minds and souls, to their objects of love. In Oscar Wilde's collection of poems, we find a rendering of the attributes possessed by the ideal woman. She is archetypal of Shakespearean heroines. In the last stanza of 'The New Helen' in Rosa

Mystica, we are told of this flower of love and its power :

> Lily of love, pure and inviolate!
> Towers of ivory! red rose of fire!
> Thou has come down our darkneess to illumes :
>
> For we, close-caught in the wide nets of Fate,
> Wearied with waiting for the World's Desire,
> Aimlessly wandered in the house of gloom,
> Aimlessly sought some slumberous anodyne
> For wasted lives, for lingering wretchedness,
> Fill we beheld thy re-arisen shrine,
> And the white glory of thy loveliness.[14]

Shakespeare's heroines contain the powers to disperse gloom, futility, waste, wrechetdness. They emanate the divine spirit of love in their human attributes. Gertrude exudes gloom, futility, waste, wretchedness.

Hamlet implores her to renounce her role in the incestuous marriage in the remaining part of the conversation. Gertrude's obtuseness reveals itself in her question :

> Ay me, what act
> That roars so loud and thunders in the index?
> (Act III, Sc.(iv), 52-53).

Hamlet's answer is of important dramatic significance. It is of significance that lies in the reactions of one character to the acts of another. Gertrude's laxity in understanding truly and fully, the enormity of her act of frailty is the cause of Hamlet's conflict - a conflict that includes the struggle of wills, the interplay and opposition which makes crises inevitable.

Look here upon this picture, and on this,
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
See what a grace was seated on this brow,
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
An eye like Mars to threaten and command,
A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill,
A combination and a form indeed
Where every god did seem to set his seal
To give the world assurance of a man.
This was your husband, like a mildew'd ear
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feel
And batter on this moor? Ha, have you eyes?
You cannot call it love; for at your age
The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgement, and what judgement
Would step from this to this? Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion; but sure that sense
Is apoplex'd, for madness would not err
Nopr sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thralled
But it reserv'd some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference. What devil was't
That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sons all,
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope. O shame, where is thy blush?
Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
And melt in her own fire; proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn
And reason pardons will.

(Act III, Sc.(iv), 53-87).

An air of carefully controlled anger and grief surrounds the atmosphere as Hamlet judges, questions and dissects the nature of, and the possible causes for,

Gertrude's frailty. A comparison between the two pictures of the two brothers results in the awareness that Hamlet's father was archetypal of Shakespeare's ideal man, characterized by all qualities, physical, mental and spiritual that would combine to render in him the embodiement of perfection. He was a soldier, he was god-like in appearance and in deed. He was blasted, murdered by the satyr - the man who won his queen with no struggle because she was frail. Hamlet implies that Gertrude's frailty consists of inner blindness, of a failure to see the heart of reality. The love that she had received from Hamlet's father was valuable - as valuable as life - glorified by Plato in his Dialogues.

> "Phaedrus began by affirming that
> Love is a mighty god, and wonderful among
> gods and men, but especially wonderful in his
> birth ...".
>
> "Love will make men dare to die
> for their beloved - love alone; and women as
> well as men. Of this, Alcestis, the daughter
> of Pelias is a monument to all Hellas; for
> she was willing to lay down her life on
> behalf of her husband, when no one else
> would, although he had a father and mother;
> but the tenderness of her love so far
> exceeded theirs, that she made them seem to
> be strangers in blood to their own son, and
> in name only related to him; and so noble did
> this action of hers appear to the gods, as
> well as to men, that among the many who have
> done virtuously she is one of the very few to
> whom, in admiration of her noble action, they
> have granted the privilege of returning alive
> to the earth; such exceeding honour is paid
> by the gods to the devotion and virtue of
> love."[15]

Men and women are natural instruments of love. Sometimes their strings crack and the stories of their lives are out of tune. Gertrude easily succumbs to the meaner sort of existence, tempted by her husband's murderer, into a pact that denies the bond of love that she had earlier made with Hamlet's father. Her age proves to be no barrier to her fall. Her reason and her sense are slave to low passion. She is lured by some evil spirit into a benumbed state which denies her the ability to feel, see, know, experience realities. Her will is asleep, dominated by the powers of lust that seem to rule Denmark. The function of reason now appears to be meaningless. It is subverted when it is a service to these powers. It is now only an instinct for low self-gratification. It provides no ecstasy. It gives birth to no new fresh insights. It is far removed from the world of God and godliness that Plato's Dialogues speak of.

Gertrude is struck by remorse. Hamlet's speech enables her to look at herself, deep within she says, with fear :

> O Hamlet, speak no more.
> Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul,
> And there I see such black and grained spots
> As will not leave their tinct.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(iv), 88-91).

Stains left by acts of frailty are characterized by a horrifying permanence. Scars and marks left by experiences are unnaturally ugly when they are the results of the dictates of self-gratifying will. They are indelible.

Hamlet suggests that Gertrude has succumbed to the lowest forms that lust can take :

> Nay, but to live
> In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
> Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
> Over the nasty sty!
>
> (Act III, Sc.(iv), 92-95).

The imagery in these lines suggest an atmosphere that is bleared and filthy, smeared with the dirt and stale smell of corruption. The ascension into regions of light and beauty, the uplifting flight of the soul into areas of knowledge, goodness and truth - which true love is accompanied with are unknown to Gertrude and to Claudius.

Gertrude cannot bear the truth. The daggers in Hamlet's words pierce to the heart of the truth of her frailty. Hamlet's purpose is fulfilled. His tirade against Claudius is continued in the following lines. His father's ghost appears to sharper Hamlet's decision to avenge his death.

> The ghost says :
> Do not forget. This visitation
> Is but to what thy almost blunted purpose.
> But look, amazement on thy mother sits.
> O step between her and her fighting soul.
> Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.
> Speak to her, Hamlet.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(iv), 110-115).

The ghost's request to Hamlet that he serve as a protection to Gertrude from her own inner battle reinforces the awareness that Gertrude is frail and weak. She cannot see

the ghost. Hamlet's words that follow are loaded with anguish :

> Look you how pale he glares.
> His form and cause conjoin'd, preaching to stones,
> Would make them capable. - Do not look upon me,
> Lest with this piteous action you convert
> My stern effects. That what I have to do
> Will want true colour - tears perchance for blood.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(iv), 125-130).

Gertrude's frailty is a source of torture to Hamlet, a torture that is infinite and manifests itself in a dialogue or in a soliloquy that is also infinite. These dialogues or soliloquies are not isolated entities - they are narrations - they are an axis of innumerable narration. They are not, as is supposed by some characters within the play, records of Hamlet's madness. On the other hand, they are documents of reason and of sanity.

> My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time,
> And makes as healthful music. It is not madness
> That I have utter'd. Bring met to the test,
> And I the matter will re-word, which madness.
> Would gambol from. Mother, for love of grace,
> Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,
> That not your trespass but my madness speaks.
> It will but skins and film the ulcerous place,
> Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
> Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven,
> Repent what's past, avoid what is to come;
> And do not spread the compost on the weeds
> To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue,
> For in the fatness of these pursy times
> Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
> Yea, curl and woo for leave to do him good.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(iv), 141-156).

Sheakespeare's basic subjects in these lines are philosophy and ethics : it is natural and inevitable that Hamlet's condemnation of his mother's past capital error of frailty should take on a tone of new urgency - underlying his pleas to her that she confesses her frailty and renounces her present state of compromise with a gross world and her self-satiety. His refutation of her momentary exclamation that he is mad, speaking as a result of delusion :

'This is the very coinage of your brain' (139)

is the establishment of a further truth that he has risen from a sense of dejection and futility to a conviction that he must rescue his mother from herself.

The mixture of disgust, malaise and sadness that Gertrude's actions had left on Hamlet is converted into resolution. Gertrude says :

O Hamlet, thou has cleft my heart in twain.
(Act II, Sc.(iv), 158).

Even at this juncture, when Gertrude looks deep into her soul and sees the scars of frailty, she speaks of a divided heart - divided between repentance and a sense of ironically enough, 'loyalty' that she feels for her present husband.

Hamlet's following speech is a condemnation of custom - of habit that involves the performance and repetitions of acts that lose any value - negative or positive, negative

in this case - for the person who is performing them - because repetition itself is a corrosion of meaning. He tells Gertrude to disregard the worse part of her divided heart :

> O throw away the worser part of it
> And live the purer with the other half.
> Good night. But go not to my uncle's bed.
> Assume a virtue if you have it not.
> That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat
> of habits evil, is angel yet in this,
> That to the use of actions fair and good
> He likewise gives a frock or livery
> That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight,
> And that shall lend a kind of easiness
> To the next abstinence, the next more easy;
> For use almost can change the stamp of nature,
> And either [lodge] the devil or throw him out
> With wondrous potency. Once more, good night,
> And when you are desirous to be blest,
> I'll blessing beg of you. For this same lord
> I do repent; but heaven hath pleas'd it so,
> To punish me with this and this with me,
> That I must be their scourge and minister.
> I will bestow him, and will answer well
> The death I gave him. So, again, good night.
> I must be cruel only to be kind.
> This had begin, and worse remains behind.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(iv), 159-181).

Hamlet's words are magical in the sense that they evoke a silence of finality over and above the traffic of words that follow. The infinite use of phrases that signify battle between resolution and thought in Hamlet's mind which is so often a battlefield is exonerated by the establishment of a certainty that violence to follow will serve as positive eradication of all the earlier siblings of chaos and destruction of values.

It is ironical that Gertrude should require Hamlet's dialogues to shake her into shock over her own frailty. Hamlet's words sometimes required further elucidation. He adds at the end of the speech quoted above that he has one word more and Gertrude asks him what she should do. Hamlet, hopeful of having shaken Gertrude from her indolence and bestiality, seeks to sustain his achievements. Gertrude's actions deflected, in the recent past, a force of nature from its course - the force of love. Hamlet tells her :

> Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:
> Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed,
> Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,
> And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,
> Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers,
> Make you to ravel all this matter out
> That I essentially am not in madness,
> But mad in craft. 'Twere good you let him know,
> For who that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise,
> Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,
> Such dear concernings hide? Who would do so?
> No, is despite of sense and secrecy,
> Unpeg the basket on the house's top,
> Let the birds fly, and like the famous ape,
> To try conclusions, in the basket creep,
> And break your own neck down.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(iv), 183-198).

Hamlet's blatant censure of the diseased involvement between Gertrude and Claudius is extremely powerful. Shakespeare's concept of the ideal woman is of one who is fair, sober and wise. Gertrude's frailty places her in a

class very far removed from that of the ideal woman. Her frailty results in despair in those dear to her. However, Hamlet's appeals to her that she make amends for her acts of ineptitude are touching in their intensity, and do not pass away, unheard. She promises to remain silent and to refuse to disclose to Claudius what Hamlet has said to her.

In the act that follows, she tells Claudius that Hamlet is

> Mad as the sea and wind when both contend
> Which is the mightier. In his lawless fit,
> Behind the arras hearing something stir,
> Whips out his rapier, cries, 'a rat, a rat'.
> and in this brainish apprehension kills
> The unseen good old man.
>
> (Act IV, Sc.(i), 7-12).

Act four, subsequently, is replete with the hatching of plots involving Hamlet's journey to England. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the two "sponges" are Claudius' instruments who play their roles believing Hamlet to be mad.

The soliloquy in Act four, scene four, words Hamlet's depreciation of passive, inert forbearance and emphasizes on his appreciation for noble action. In the course of the soliloquy, he says :

> Rightly to be great
> Is not to stir without great argument,
> But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
> When honour's at the stake. How stand I
> this,
> That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,

> Excitements of my reason and my blood,
> And let all sleep, while to my shame I see
> The imminent death of twenty thousand men
> That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,
> Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
> Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
> Which is not tomb enough and continent
> To hide the slain? O, from this time forth
> My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth.
>
> (53-66).

Gertrude is stained by her relationship with Claudius. Hamlet's honour is at stake. If he is a passive witness to Gertrude's pollution, he is worthless. In Shakespeare's vision, the hero is impelled sometimes beyond his reasoning self, to grasp at values that have become alien in a corrupt world, because at least they embody some continuance, some tradition; while other characters, who were meant to be lovely emblems of love and virtue, perform deeds of frailty that kill, shatter and trample the beauty of life. Hamlet is in the throes of the process of shaking free from and destroying the ugliness of a once beautiful world, engulfed by Gertrude's servility to Claudius, faintness of heart displayed of Ophelia. Hamlet, as it were, is here treading the frail plank over the abyss, rotten-ripe for destruction, turning a slanting, doomed eye on death that waits around the corner.

During all this frightening evanescence and dissolution, Hamlet keeps his link with the glorious past and looks at the disrupted present and awaits an

intimidating future. The chain is both frail and tough, a preservation of values, of love, of loyalty.

Act four, scene five conveys a sadness, a sense of futility arising from Ophelia's 'madness'.

The Gentleman says :

> Her speech is nothing,
> Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
> The hearers to collection. (7-9)

The Queen sends for her :

> Let her come in
> [aside] To my sick soul, a sin's true nature is,
> Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.
> So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
> It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.
> (Act IV, Sc.(v), 16-20).

Gertrude's sickness of soul, a result of her frailty, of her complicity with the diseased soul of Claudius, is instrumental in her seeing every 'toy', every trifle, as a beginning to disaster. Hamlet's denunciatory reproaches to her, have struck home. Betrayal is the quickest road to ruin. "The wretchedness which the guilty infliect on themselves in their apprehension of disaster is no less than would be that of disaster itself."

Ophelia's songs, have been linked, by most commentators, with her sorrow for her father. The songs have for their themes, death and burial. The songs, however, imply more than just her grief for her father. They also ring with the sadness connected with the death of

love and with its deliberate burial. The end of life is signified by Polonius' death and the death of love, by the 'end' of the love between herself and Hamlet.

The first song is sung to Gertrude, the second verse of the first song tells of the green turf, the stone - the shroud. Of extreme significance are the lines :

> Larded with sweet flowers
> Which bewept to the grave did not go
> With true-love showers.
> (Act IV, Sc.(v), 38-40).

Are these lines reflective in some strange way, of Hamlet's father's death? Do they betray a slight, subtle remembrance of a death that passed unmourned by Gertrude? If so, Ophelia's song, rings with a note of choric commentary. Was Hamlet's father's death accompanied by the showers of true love? Gertrude's self-indulgence soon after the burial of her murdered husband, was no sign of grief.

In Ophelia's straying mind, her father's death gets mixed up with Hamlet's fathers and with the death of some abstract, intangible reality that of love. For Ophelia, this intangible reality can perhaps be materialized in the concrete form of Hamlet. Is she, in her singing, anticipating another death - that of Hamlet's?

In a mysterious way, sense emerges from nonsense, clarity from confusion, sanity from insanity.

Ophelia, in her frailty allows herself to become a tool in her father's hand. The disasters that follow are terrible.

Blake's search for freedom and sunshine gives him the following insight :

> A little Flower grew in a lone Vale.
> Its form was lovely but its colours pale.
> One standing in the Porches of the Sun,
> When his Meridian glories were begun,
> Leap'd from the steps of fire and on the grass
> Alighted where this little flower was.
> With hands divine he mov'd the gentle Sod
> And took the flower up in its native Clod;
> And planting it upon a Mountain's brow -
> "'Tis your own fault if you don't flourish now".[16]

Ophelia lives, first in her father's and brother's shadows, lovely but frail, insensitive to Hamlet because she prefers to shield herself from pain. The Sun gives life. Love of life is given and received in pain. Ophelia remains a prisoner to the valleys of life - the divine hand that could have transported her to realities higher, could have been Hamlet's love. However, she shuns the hand and buries the love. The appropriate form of mourning accompanies the burial, in her song.

The second song about seduction is song to Claudius, again we have a reminder of Gertrude's frailty. The third is a funeral elegy sung to the son of the man just buried. Death, in her songs, is not the positive transforming

agent, as it is in Ariel's song in The Tempest. Ariel says:

> Full fathom five thy father lies;
> Of his bones are coral made;
> These are peals that were his eyes:
> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change.
> Into something rich and strange.
> Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell.[17]
>
> (Act I, Sc.(ii), 399-405).

Ophelia's songs are full of gloom, of the sense of waste that thickens the atmosphere, of the sense of sterility and futility that regins only when apostasy of love has been committed.

Later says :

> Nature is fine in love, and where 'tis fine
> It sends some precious instance of itself
> After the thing it loves.
>
> (Act IV, Sc.(v), 161-163).

The sensitivity of human nature when it is in love sends a precious part of itself as a token to follow the object of its love. Ophelia's songs reveal to some that her reason has died with Polonius. Does it also lie buried somewhere with her buried love for Hamlet? Shakespeare's vision is that of a world rendered into ruins by its inhabitants who mourn what they have lost by their own actions.

The petals that Ophelia distributes to Laertes, signify rememberance, thoughts. Memory and reason were forgotten when Gertrude married Claudius and entered into a sterile relationship and when Ophelia returned Hamlet's

letters and became a puppet in Polonius' hands. It is significant that fennel and columbines (symbolizing marital infidelity) are handed by Ophelia to Gertrude. Floral tributes, ironically enough, become messages of disasters to follow, in the sense that they implant a sense of the crimes that each one has committed, against love. Petals and songs could have signified happiness and beauty, but apostasy kills all such possibilities. Ophelia gives Claudius rue or herb of grace (symbolic of repentance). She says :

> There's fennel for you, and columbines.
> There's rue for you. And here's some for me.
> We may call it herb of grace a Sundays. You must wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died. They say a made a good end.
>
> (Act IV, Sc.(v), 178-183).

Rue is worn by both Gertrude and Ophelia. Repentance is the flower that they must reap. Rue, work with a difference, not as a sign of grace, is a symbol of repentance. A daisy is a sign of unhappy love. Violets symbolize faithfulness.

They have, of course, died.

Act four resolves all questions. Claudius plots with Laertes to murder Hamlet, after hearing from Hamlet that he will return soon.

Ophelia dies.

Ophelia dies in a stream reflecting a willow tree, with garlands made from it. Her death signifies the desolation and sorrow associated with willow trees. The garlands, woven with other flowers, lie as a wrecks of life and love.

Ophelia dies singing her own dirge. Denmark's ruin is completed in Act five.

In Shakespeare's vision, clowns are wise when they take on the role of the Chorus and give both the characters within the play, and the audience, a commentary on the situation, or the atmosphere resulting from it or on the characters themselves. Very often, these choric commentators become effective vehicles that transport Shakespeare's philosophical insights.

As the Grave-Digger digs, the clown sings. It is significant that the Grave-Digger says that a Grave-Digger builds strongest objects. 'The houses he makes lasts till doomsday'. (Act IV, Sc.(i), 59). Hamlet and Horatio overhear these songs and comments on death, on burials of all kinds. Hamlet wonders about the skulls that are tossed about in the process of grave-digging. Hamlet wonders about the vanity of life. Denmark has become a graveyard where are buried life, love, hope. For those who live intensely, such burials are maddening.

Instead of a marriage, we have a funeral. The Queen says :

> Sweets to the sweet. Farewell
> I hop'd thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife:
> I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
> And not have strew'd thy grave.
>
> (Act V, Sc.(i), 236-239).

Hamlet learns much in this scene. The Grave-Digger has already told him of a young king, Hamlet who has lost his reason, Hamlet realizes that so much more had died. His anguish over Ophelia's grave reveals the intensity and depth of his love for her. Once again, we are struck by a sense of inexorable doom that results from waste. When love is killed by apostasy, tragedy follows, a tragedy that is not pessimistic because without hope, the question of tragic destiny never arises.

Hamlet tells Laertes :

> Dost come here to whine,
> To outface me with leaping in her grave?
> Be buried quick with her and so will I.
> And if thou prate of mountains, let them throw
> Millions of acres on us ...
>
> (Act V, Sc.(i), 272-276).

He truly loved, but all possibilities suffered annihilation by apostasy. As Claudius says, 'Time qualifies human love'. In the scenes that follow, we are given glimpses into attitudes held by the principal characters towards each others, as in the conversation between Osric, Hamlet and Horatio. It is a tragedy that Hamlet who respects Laertes must fight him.

A lord informs Hamlet that the Queen desires him "to sue some gentle entertainment to Laertes" before they "fall to play" (Act V, Sc.(ii), 202) and Hamlet says :

> It is but jealousy, but it is such a kind of gaingiving as would perhaps trouble a woman
> (Act V, Sc.(ii), 211-212).

Misgivings could have been avoided and deaths and tragedies averted. Apostasies could not have been made. But they were. Destinies that follow are inevitable.

Hamlet's strength lies in his answer to Horatio that they stall the duel : There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. It it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. (Act V, Sc.(ii) 215-218).

Hamlet's journey into pain began with gripping questions and now ends in quiet answers on the nature of destiny in the world. He travels in time, in space and in his mind from the time he asks himself :

> To be, or not to be, that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
> And by opposing end them. To die - to sleep,
> No more, and by a sleep to say we end
> The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
> That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation
> Devoutly to be wishe'd. To die, to sleep;
> To sleep, perchance to dream - ay, there's the rub:

> For in that sleep of death what dreams may
> come,
> When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
> Must give us pause - there's the respect
> That makes calamity of so long life.
> For who would bear the whips and scores of
> time,
> Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's
> contumely,
> The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,
> The insolence of office, and the spurns
> That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,
> When he himself might his quietus make
> With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear
> To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
> But that the dread of something after death,
> The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
> No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
> And makes us rather bear those ills we have
> Than fly to others that we know not of?
> Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(i), 56-83).

Denmark is a prison. Within its walls are found all the sorrows and troubles that Hamlet enumerates in this soliloquy. Gertrude's apostasy and the noisy deafness around, the emptiness of words spoken are just part of the torture. Hamlet's voyage in and out of the prison, result in an awakening not dissimilar to the truth stated in Matthew, Chapter ten, Verses twenty-eight and twenty-nine:

> Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted.[18]

Hamlet's wisdom prepares him for the death that he will soon die. The readiness is all that counts now. Biblical echoes enter, re-enter and are revived at this stage. The

reinstatment of order in Hamlet's mind prepares him to deal with the disorder that accompanies waste and senselessness in an external world where the monster Claudius plots to kill Hamlet, where a shallow queen, once guilty of apostasy, now repentant, drinks the prison meant for her son, dies. Hamlet and Laertes, turn once again towards each other. The struggle between the two ends as the King dies. It is a significant end. The King's marriage with Gertrude began all the sea of troubles, including Polonius' death, resulting in Laertes' desire for revenge on Hamlet. One corrupting factor led on to another. The King's death, after Gertrude's, heralds the completion of cure.

Hamlet drinks the poison. A sense of sadness fills the air.

> I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, adieu
> (Act V, Sc.(ii), 338).

It is significant that Fortinbras should hear Hamlet's dying voice. Hamlet's Denmark is silent in death. However, as Horatio bids his sweet prince, good night, one can almost hear the song of that accompanies flight of angels.

> Reason and faith enter with the sound of drums.
> Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.
> (Act V, Sc.(ii), 376).

There is room for life and beauty, for continuity. However, it is a heavy-heart that leaves Hamlet in his

sleep of death - a sleep that he longed for, so often as he struggled against frailty.

Hamlet's death is a blow to the religion of love. There is no mitigation of sorrow. However, there is a sense of peace in death.

Shakespeare's vision of 'frailty' as an extremely destructive force, includes an awareness of the inaccessibility of peace in life and in love in the presence of the agents of this force.

As in Blake's Garden of Love, death reigns Denmark.

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this chapel ere shut,
And 'Thou shalt not' writ over the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore;

And I saw it was filled with graves
And tombstones where flowers should be;
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with brairs my joys and desires.

Hamlet's destiny includes his being a witness to flowers turning into tombstones. The agents of destruction in his world are different from those who tread on Blake's grounds. The agents of destruction in Denmark are the living embodiments of frailty whose forms of nemesis are also the tombstones.

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CHAPTER-II

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA : The Death of the Warrior

O, bid me leap, rather than marry Paris,
From off the battlements of any tower,
Or walk in thievish ways, or bid me lurk
Where serpents are; chain me with roaring
bears,
Or hide me nightly in a charnel house,
O'er covered quite with dead men's rattling
bones,
With reeky shanks and yellow chapters
skulls;
Or bid me go into a new-made grave
And hide me with a dead man in his shroud -
Things that, to hear them told, have made
me tremble -
And I will do it without fear or doubt,
To live an unstained wife to my sweet love!

(Romeo and Juliet, Act IV, Sc.(i), 77-88).

Juliet's readiness to face death, danger, horrow and terror, and her refusal to be shaken from her love for Romeo, are conveyed in intense, honest and deep expressions of love. The most final expression of love is an answer to

the most challenging question that could be asked - that is the question of death. We leave Romeo and Juliet in the silence of their tomb, but it is not a cold, blank silence. It is a warm, speaking silence, a silence full of love, an answering, hopeful silence. Juliet's death is proof of true love. Her expressions of loe are never mere moves in a game as Cressida's are. Cressida's attitude towards love does violence to our instincts. It is destructive. It is a calculated move towards chaos and annihilation. As Charles R. Lyons in his essay "Troilus and Cressida : The Finiteness of Love", says :

> In the context of the play there are two deeds which seem to serve as metaphors for experience : the sexual act between Troilus and Cressida, and the heroic acts of war. The primary tension in this work is between disintegrating objects of desire - Cressida the desired woman and Achilles the warrior.
>
> The relationship of Troilus and Cressida seems itself to function as a metaphor for the disintegration of experience - sexual use is the consumption of life. In the spending of desire in sexual union, the deed consumes itself. In the temporal process of sexual experience, the sexual object changes identity as the personal emotion resolves from desire to surfeit. The very consumption which appetite demands destroys the appetite and so disintegrates the source of value. The self-consuming sexual energy of the world of Troilus and Cressida is the transition from power into will and will into appetite which Ulysses describes in his famous description of the fallen world.[2]

"fallen world" is an evocative phrase. It quite aptly describes the world of Troilus and Cressida. The cause of

of the Trojan war, itself, prepares the atmosphere in which appetite, lust and betrayal reign.

The Prologue introduces us to Troy :

> In Troy there lies the scene. From isles of Greece
> The Princes orgulous, their high blood chafed,
> Have to the port of Athens sent their ships,
> Fraught with the ministers and instruments
> Of cruel war; sixty and nine, that wore
>
> Their crownets regal, from th 'Athenian bay
> Put forth toward Phrygia, and their vow is made
> To ransack Troy, within whose strong immures
> The ravished Helen, Menelaus' queen,
> With wanton Paris sleeps - and that's the quarrel.[3]

Helen's betrayal of Menelaus prepares us for Cressida's betrayal of Troilus. Marriage seems to be rather meaningless in Troilus and Cressida as Lyons would say :

> Throughout the Shakepearean canon, there seems to be an equation of marriage and grace. This equation, which is of course related to the conventions of medieval love poetry, infuses the text of the romantic comedies, exists in the arbitrary conclusion of Measure for Measure, in the image of eternal marriage in Antony and Cleopatra, and in the structure and imagery of The Winter's Tale most strongly. However, in Troilus and Cressida, marriage and the equivalent sense of grace is absent. In the world which the poet imitates in this play, there is no triumph of love, for there is no sense of its constancy. Love in Troilus and Cressida has no extended reality.[4]

The result is disintegration of the world of Troy. As in

Homer's depiction, in Shakespeare's picture, there reigns the age of chaos, there is war everywhere, war and violence: truly the Bronze Age, where armour, swords, and spears clash over issues of 'Love' and honour and Cassandra's "prophetic tears" are ignored. (Troilus and Cressida, Act II, Sc.2, 103).

In Troilus and Cressida, we trace the chaotic flux of time. The sense of honour - the theme of war - cannot be separated from the conception of destructive sexuality. As Lyons, in his essay "Troilus and Cressida : The Finiteness of Love" says :

> ... the whole performance of the Trojan War is an attempt to extend, in Time, the union of Paris and Helen, a union which is already distasted.[4]

The relationship between Paris and Helen prepares us for the relationship between Diomedes and Cressida - one which does violence to our instincts and to the world of Troy.

Troilus claims to have lost his heart. His declaration of love is replete with hyperbole. The exchange between Pandarus and Troilus in Act I, Scene I, is indicative of their attitude towards love and relationships. Food imagery dominates. Appetite is all-consuming. Superficial beauty inspires 'love' and Troilus declares that this love is an ulcer. Food imagery alternates with disease imagery. We are overcome by an irresistable sense of decay. Troilus

views the image of Cressida as the source of pain. Metaphors dealing with knives and wounds indicate the destructive nature of love.

> As true as thou tells't me, when I say I
> love her
> But saying thus, instead of oil and balm,
> Thou layst in every gash that love hath
> given me
> The knife that made it.
>
> (Troilus and Cressida, Act I, Sc.(i), 60-63).

Lyons says :

> The revealing form of the feeling which is description of Cressida takes is the extreme of tactile sensation.[5]

Troilus, unlike other 'heroes', in Shakespeare's romantic comedies seems to be indulging appetite. His evaluation of Cressida is full of hyperbolic exaggeration and erotic glorification ...

> Tell me, Apollo, for thy Daphne's love,
> What Cressida is, what Pandar, and what we.
> Her bed is India, there she lies, a pearl.
> Between our Ilium and where she resides,
> Let it be called the wild and wandering
> flood,
> Ourself the merchant, and this sailing
> Pandar
> Our doubted hope, our convoy, and our bark.
>
> (Act I, Sc.(ii), 101-107).

Troilus, from the very beginning, holds a desire for satisfaction. He experiences a finite sense of human experience in his relationship with Cressida, to whom pleasure is preferable to happiness - this is clear. The world order that Ulysses' discourses on in the first council scene seems to die as appetite replaces all other

aspects of human existence. Human relationships are seen in the light of sources of mere physical satisfaction.

The metaphor of baking, so skilfully used by Shakespeare, seems to indicate that the growth of love is a process that is deliberately handled by persons who wait to see an outcome that will satiate them physically. The spiritual concept of love is a far cry.

The heart seems to remain excluded. The spirit plays no role. There is no question of metaphysical love, there is no question of immortality.

"Love" is rooted only in the physical senses. In creating food metaphors to serve as instruments for conveying his vision of love as a destructive force, Shakespeare anticipates a Cressida who renounces a bond of love and beauty and surrenders a spiritual reality of the self for the material, external, superficial self.

Disease imagery portrays the idea that something is intrinsically wrong with Cressida's attitude towards love. Marks of spiritual ravages on the world around her are symbolically conveyed by images of wounds and physical ailments.

Harmony and order are destroyed as apostasy strikes notes of discordance in the manifestation of Cressida as the embodiment of frailty, as one responsible for scars as she renounces all human propensities towards high ideals and

values. In Troilus' rhetoric of his discussion of Helen, we see an anticipation of this.

> We turn not back the silks upon the merchant
> When we have soiled them; nor the remainder viands
> We do not throw in unrespective sieve
> Because we are now full.
>
> (Act II, Sc.(ii), 68-71).

Time, however, is an agent of transmutation and Troilus is too short-sighted and myopic to visualize this. Food is consumed. Silks are spoiled. However, Troilus continues to live in illusions, failing to see that Helen has been damaged by Time. "Love" in this world of Troy, is not the love expreienced by Romeo and Juliet, but a satiation of appetite. Sensuous experience gives value to the object of love. Use decays. Helen is the reason for a destructive battle. Nestor's message, however, is not taken seriously.

> Deliver Helen, and all damage else,
> As honour, loss of Time, travail, expense,
> Wounds, friends, and what else dear is consumed
> In hot digestion of this cormorant war.
>
> (Act II, Sc.(ii), 3-6).

The world of Troy smells of mortality. Northrop Frye's comment that <u>Troilus and Cressida</u> represents a fallen world, as a mythos of irony, seems very just. Frye says :

> In irony, as distinct from tragedy, the wheel of time completely encloses the action, and there is no sense of an original contact with a relatively timeless world. In the Bible, the tragic fall of

> Adam is followed by its historical repetition, the fall of Israel into Egyptian bondage, which is so to speak, its ironic confirmation. As long as the Geoffrey version of British history was accepted, the fall of Troy was the corresponding event in the history of Britain and, as the fall of Troy began with an idolatrous misapplication of an apple, there were even symbolic parallels. Shakespeare's most ironic play Troilus and Cressida, presents in Ulysses the voice of worldly wisdom, expounding with great eloquence the two primary categories of the perspective of tragic irony in the fallen world, time and the hierarchic chain of being.[6]

In Troilus and Cressida, we concentrate with precision upon man's fallen nature. We are overcome by an overwhelming and suffocating sense of mortality - mortality that is defined in the demonstration of a self-destructive lust. In the relationship between Troilus and Cressida, we see a demonstration of the diffusion of Troilus' understanding of reality as a projection of human experience. Cressida is incapable of constancy, of serious passion. Her apprehension of relationships is crude, superficial, unformed - bestial. The exchange between herself and Pandarus is proof of this. Pandarus says:

> You are such another woman, a man knows not at what ward you lie.
>
> (Act I, Sc.(ii), 259-260).

Her answer is :

> Upon my back, to defend my belly; upon my wit, to defend my wiles; upon my secrecy, to defend mine honesty; my mask to defend my beauty; and you, to defend all these:

and at all these words I lie, at a thousand watches.

Her estimate of man is summed up in food imagery - appetite reigns. It is all-pervasive: Her corruption is a striking contrast to Miranda's innocence and strength of love in The Tempest :

Ferdinand : Wherefore weep you?
Miranda : At mine unworthiness, that dare not offer
What I desire to give; and much less take
What I shall die to want. But this is trifling;
And all the more it seeks tohid itself,
The bigger bulk it shows. Hence, bushful cunning!
And prompt me plain and holy unscience!
I am your wife if you will marry me;
If not, I'll die your maid : to be your fellow
You may deny me; but I'll be your servant,
Whether you will or no.[7]

(The Tempest, Act III, Sc.(i), 77-86).

Here, the canon of marriage is sealed and kept. In Troilus and Cressida, it cannot be taken seriously. Cressida's inconstancy, and the total disintegration of Troilus is anticipated in the speech in Act III, in which is expressed his awareness of the insubtantility of his relationship with Cressida :

I stalk about her door
Like a strange soul upon the stygian banks
Staying for waftage. Oh, be thou my charon,
And give me swift transportance to those fields
Where I may wallow in they lily beds
Proposed for the deserve! ...
I am giddy, expectation whirls me round.

> The imaginary relish is so sweet
> That it enchants my sense. What will it be
> When that the watery palates taste indeed
> Love's thrice repured nectar. Death, I fear me,
> Swounding destruction, or some joy too fine,
> Too the capacity of my ruder powers.
> I fear it much, and I do fear besides
> That I shall loose distinction in my joys,
> As doth a battle when they charge on keeps
> The enemy flying. (9-30).

His emphasis on death implies his desperation. Deeds consume themselves. Troilus' desperation is acute, deliberate bawdiness laces the conversation of Pandarus, Helen, Paris and Cressida. Self-consciousness, cloying mannerisms suggest surfeit. Pandarus' song (Act III, Sc.(i), 125-136) is full of ambiguity and sneers at the concept of love. Paris' response to it is full of emphasis on eating, hot blood and begetting. Cressida is also aware that love does not exist beyond consumption and the immediacy of deed :

> Things won are done, joy's soul lies in the doing,
> that she beloved knows naught that knows not this
> Men prize the thing ungained more than it is
> That she was never yet that ever knew
> Love got so sweet as when desire did one.
> Therefore this maxim out of love I teach:
> Achievement is command; ungained beseech.
> Then though my heart's content firm love did bear,
> Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear.
>
> (Act I, Sc.(ii), 313-321).

Troilus seeks for the infinite in any finite relationship.

This is the monstruosity in love, lady, that the will is infinite and the execution confined, that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit. (Act III, Sc.(iv), 88-90).

Reality is dissolved in ambiguity. In Act three, Troilus and Cressida vow the infinity of their love. There is irony in the fact that they mention their mythical identities :

> If I be false, or swerve a hair from truth,
> When Time is old and hat forgot itself,
> When waterdrops have worn the stones of Troy,
> And blind oblivion swallowed cities up,
> And mighty states characterless are grated
> To dusty nothing, yet let memory,
> From false to false, among false maids in love
> Upbraid my falsehood! When they've said 'as false as air, as water, wind or sandy earth, as fox to lamb, or wolf to heifer's calf,
> Pard to the hind, or step dame to her son,
> 'Yea' let them say, to stick the heart fo falsehood,
> 'As false as Cressida.'
>
> (Act III, Sc.(ii), 192-203).

Chaucer's Cressida is as complex as Shakespeare's - she values the deed of love for its pleasure which is immediate - she is aware of change and disintegration in an explicit way. Troilus' world is destroyed because his awareness, on the other hand, is merely implicit. Troilus, when betrayed cried out - "This is and this is not Cressida."

Cressida says :

> I know no touch of consanguinity,
> No kin, no love, no blood, no soul, so nearme
> As the sweet Troilus. O you gods divine!
> Make Cressid's name the very crown of falsehood
> If ever she leaves Troilus! Time, force, and death
> Do to this body what extremes you can,
> But the strong base and building of my love
> Is as the very center of the earth
> Drawing all things to it.
>
> (Act IV, Sc.(ii), 103-111).

However, when she is 'changed for antenor' and sent to where the father is, she sees no possibility of the extension of her 'love' for Troilus. Chaotic disorder rules her. The center dissolves and she surrenders to Diomedes.

> Troilus, farewell! One eye yet looks on thee,
> But with my heart, the other eye doth see.
> Ah, poor our sex! this fault in us I find,
> The error of our eye directs our mind;
> what error leads must err - O, then conclude
> Minds survayed by eyes are full of turpitude.
>
> (Act, V, Sc.(ii), 110-115).

'Mad idolatory' is transformed to denunciation in Troilus and then denial :

> If beauty have a soul, this is not she;
> If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonics,
> If sanctimony be the god's delight,
> If there be rule in unity itself,
> This is not she.
>
> (Act V, Sc.(ii), 137-142).

A witness to his own betrayal-scene, Troilus is destroyed. Cressida is consumed. Human love in their world, follows the destructive pattern of 'desire, consumption, and surfeit.'[8]

Troilus, in his realization that Cressida has betrayed him, acknowledges that frailty in love is manifested in

> Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart;
> Th' effect doth operate another way.
> Go, wind to wind! there turn and change together
> My love with words and error still she feeds,
> But edifies another with her deeds.
>
> (Act V, Sc.(iii), 108-112).

In Shakespeare's romances, Viola purges Illyia of deceit and purifies it of folly. In Troy, Cressida does the opposite as she surrenders Troilus' sleeve. Revenge on Diomedes seems pointless.

The worlds of war and love are closely juxtaposed in Troilus and Cressida. Agamemnon and Troilus are both deceived into believing that constancy in their world, is possible. Dislocated sense of reality results in disaster. Appetite reigns. Cressida is symbolic of sexual appetite just as Achilles is of the appetite for killing.

There is no creation in such a world. The warrior dies.

Blake's Divine Image is recalled here :

A Divine Image.
Cruelty has a Human Heart,
And Jealousy a Human Face;
Terror the Human Form Divine,
And Secrecy the Human Dress.

The Human Dress is forged Iron,
The Human Form a fiery Forge,
The Human Face a Furnance seal'd,
The Human Heart its hungry Gorge.[9]

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CHAPTER-III

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA : Recapturing the Dream

Antony and Cleopatra explores a complete response to the disaccord existing between the creative and distructive powers of human love. There are no veils, no attempts to disguise or mask the greatest, intensest joy and ecstasy; or the greatest, intensest despair and agony that love is capable of bringing.

Ambiguity lies in the double presentation of the two aspects of love - sexual union and celestial union. In Stirling's comment we find an implicit ethical judgement on love as satisfaction of appetite. Stirling says :

> in Antony and Cleopatra the quality of tragedy, as an attribute of the protagonists, is an actual issue within the tragedy itself. It is a theme which appears in the exposition and is resumed with great particularity toward the close

> of the play. When the protagonists self consciously assume a flawed stature, the role is ironically denied them; when they are simply themselves they ... achieve a subdued dignity. This dignity, however, is qualified by a satire which constantly keeps the tragedy within the bounds of moral realism.[1]

Equally relevant and valid is Watson Knight's comment :

> So Cleopatra and Antomy find not death but life. This is the high metaphysicof love which melts life and death into a final oneness; which reality is indeed no pulseless abstruction, but rather blends its single design and petalled excellence from all life and death, all imperial splendour and sensuous delight, all strange and ethereal forms, all elements and heavenly stars; all that is natural, human and divine; all brilliance and all glory.[2]

Cleopatra embodies in herself the two Aphrodities that Plato speaks of in the The Symposium :

> The Love who is the offspring of the common Aphrodite is essentially common, and has no discrimination, being such as the meaner sort of men feel, and is apt to be of women as well as of youths, and is of the body rather than of the soul ... but the offspring of the heavenly aphrodite is that love which is of youths, and the goddess being older, there is nothing of mantoness in her.[3]

Cleopatra combines the aspects of both Aphrodities and Shakespeare achieves a distinct totality in his statement of the human experience of love.

Philo's comment, at the opening of the play that Antony is a 'strumpet's fool' is followed by Antony's vow of love without boundaries. Cleopatra is genuine in her 'art'

because she is an actress by nature and the 'wrangling queen'. Antony's love for her induces him to claim that his place is with her :

> Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
> Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space,
> Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
> Feeds beast as man; the nobleness of life
> Is to do thus:
>
> (Act I, Sc.(i), 33-37).

We trace the vicissitudes of thought emerging from the shifting nature of their relationship. When Antony decides to leave Egypt and announces his decision to Enobarbus, Enobarbus says :

> Cleopatra catching but the least noise of this, dies instantly. I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment. I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath a celerity in dying.
> (Act I, Sc.(ii), 136-142).

It is true that she keeps Antony in fetters with her art - in this she resembles the Dark Lady of the Sonnets who holds the sonnetteer prisoner by her art. Coleridge says :

> The art displayed in the character of Cleopatra is profound; in this, especially, that the sense of criminality in her passion is lessened by our insight into its depth and energy, at the very moment that we cannot out perceive that the passion itself springs out of the habitual craving of licentous nature, and that it is supported and reinforced by voluntary stimulus and sought for association, instead of blossoming out of spontaenous emotion.[4]

Cleopatra needs art because she is not married to Antony.

She needs to sustain the infinite variety which custom cannot stale - to hold Antony - because she truly loves him. Her verbal exchanges with Antony are full of challenge - art that accentuates the truth of her being. She is conscious of her tendency to play-act and adopt roles to fit each occasion :

> See where he is, who's with him, what he does:
> I did not send you. If you find him sad,
> Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
> That I am sudden sick. Quick and return.
>
> (Act I, Sc.(iii), 3-6).

Cleopatra realizes that to constantly please Antony would be to lose him. "She differs from Cressida in that her natural emotions - grief, rage, tenderness - are heightened by art but not induced by art."[5] She is not limited by common rules. She has her own moral code. In being an artist she remains true to the essence of her being. How different is she from Perdita, to whom 'art' is repugnant as it stains purity.

> I'll not put
> The dibble in earth to set one slip of them;
> No more than, were I painted, I would wish
> This youth should say 'twere' well, and only therefore
> Desire to bread by me.[6]

Cleopatra's art expresses her love. After Antony tells her the news of Fulvia's death, she says :

> Upon your sword
> Sit laurel victory, and smooth success
> Be strew'd before your feet.
>
> (Act, I, Sc.(iii), 99-101).

The metaphorical implications in the play of sexual associations; are alternated with extremely poetic statements on celestial bonds existing in love.

Cleopatra expresses her wish to sleep during Antony's absence. Her extravagance is expressed in a gesture conveying both pain and beauty simultaneously. On hearing of Antony's words to Alexas, she says :

> Be'st thou sad, or merry,
> The violence of either thee becomes,
> So does it no man else.
>
> (Act I, Sc.(v), 59-61).

We encounter real love here, no mere appetite as we do in Cressida. To view her as Pompey does - a combination of witchcraft and lust, would be to deny the other dimensions of a rich colourful character. In Enobarbus' description of her barge, we sense the poetry of colour, movement, life:

> The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne
> Burn'd on the water : the poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
> The winds were love-sick with them; the stars were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes, kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster
> As amorous of their strokes.
>
> (Act II, Sc.(ii), 191-197).

Cleopatra celebrates her love with such rituals of splendour and of beauty that reflect her soul, that it is impossible for Antony to remain cold. He pays with his

heart. There is no satiety :

> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety : other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry,
> Where most she satisfies.
>
> (Act II, Sc.(ii), 234-237).

We witness Cleopatra shifting from one mood to another mood in scene five of act two, she is merry, melancholy in quick succession as she abandons one game for another. When the messenger tells her that Antony is married to Octavia, she strikes him in her uncontrollable grief; and later asks for details concerning Octavia's external appearance. It is evident that her bond with Antony cannot be dissolved. Antony knows that he "will to Egypt", depite his new marriage because -

> I' the east my pleasure lies.
>
> (Act II, Sc.(ii), 38).

Cleopatra's passion for Antony is pure and undiluted, at this point. Her request to Chamian -

> Pity me, Charmian,
> But do not speak to me.
>
> (Act II, Sc.(v), 119-120)

suggests that for a while, words cannot express her grief or console her.

Enobarbus is aware that Antony cannot succumb to Amnesia :

> He will to his Egyptian dish again
>
> (Act II, Sc.(vi), 123)

He is prophetic in his statements.

In Act three, scene three, we witness Cleopatra in her interview with the messenger, from whom she derives information on Octavia.

Cleopatra's refusal to be excluded from the war is reflective of her intensity - an intensity that transforms itself as battle rages.

Scarus is aware that they have lost. He says :

> You ribundred nag of Egypt, -
> Whom leprosy o'ertake! - i' the midst of fight,
> When vantage like a pair of twins appeard
> Both as the same, or rather ours the elder,-
> The breeze upon her, like a cow in June,
> Hoists sails, and flies.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(x), 10-15).

Antony 'flies' after her. We sense waste and loss here. He is the "noble ruin of her magic" (Act III, Sc.(x), 19). 'Honour' dies as Antony follows Cleopatra. His speech following his defeat at Caesar's hands, is full of a noble dignity. When he meets Cleopatra he wonders where she has led him.

> Egypt, thou knew'st too well,
> My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings,
> And thou shouldst tow me after. O'er my spirit
> They full supremacy thou knews't, and that
> Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
> Command me.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(x), 57-61).

Cleopatra's influence over Antony cannot be overemphasized. Enobarbus' statement that Antony's will is master of his

reason involves the question of the power of love. When Thidias approaches Cleopatra, she betrays Antony -

> He is a god, and knows
> What is most right. Mine honour was not yielded,
> But conquer'd merely.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(xiii), 60-62).

Her betrayal of Antony, at this juncture, reeks of selfishness and corruption. As she speaks, of laying her crown at Caesar's feet, she is guilty of an act of frailty. Antony says :

> I found you as a morsel, cold upon
> Dead Caesar's treacher; nay, you were a fragment
> Of Gnaeus Pompey's, besides what hotter hours,
> Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have
> Luxuriously pick'd out. For I am sure
> Though you can guess what temperence should be,
> You know not what it is.
>
> (Act III, Sc.(xiii), 116-122).

There is a temporary reconciliation after this and a celebration that soon gives way to disaster.

Cleopatra helps Antony to wear his armour in preparation for war. When he returns from the first battle, victorious, her prize is gold armour. Enobarbus' retreat to Caesar's camp is viewed, as alternating scenes of battle and Cleopatra's court, are presented to us.

When Antony realizes that Cleopatra has betrayed him, his grief speaks the dialect of distress -

All is lost :
This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me:
My feet hath yielded to the foe, and yonder
They cast their caps up, and carouse together
Like friends long lost. Triple-turn'd
where, 'tis thou
Hast sold me to this novice, and my heart
Makes only wars on thee.
(Act IV, Sc.(xii), 9-15).

He rejects Cleopatra. Antony's world is lost. Frailty results in destruction.

Cleopatra sends word that she has slain herself. Antony's response is worded in a desire to die. "The star is fall'n" as Antony is taken to Cleopatra's monument, where her love for him speaks a poetic language :

O sun,
Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in,
darkling stand
the varying shore o' the world.
(Act IV, Sc.(xv), 8-10).

Cleopatra's expression of love for Antony in act five, scene two, is contained in the language of the poet :

His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear'd arm
Crested the world : his voice was
propertied
As all the tuned spheres, and that to
friends :
But when he meant to quail, and shake the
orb,
He was as rattling thunder ...
(82-86).

She confesses her 'frailties' to Caesar, sins her possessions away and chooses to die.

We witness the apotheosis of Cleopatra -

> Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have
> Immortal longings in me. Now no more
> The juice of Egypt's grace shall moist his lip.
> Yare, yare, good Iras; quick, methinks I hear
> Antony call. I see him rouse himself
> To praise my noble act.
>
> (Act V, Sc.(ii), 279-284).

As the asp stings her, we witness a Cleopatra in the moment of triumph. Shakespeare's picture of love is complete.

> She shall be buried by her Antony
> No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
> A pair so famous.
>
> (Act V, Sc.(ii), 356-358).

Antony and Cleopatra is the maturest and almost final word on Shakespeare's vision of love. It contains the awareness that love is riddled with complexity. As Prof. Homchaudhury in his essay, "A Vision of Sensuous Peril : Keats' Fatal Women', says :

> Antony, passing through a see-saw experience of love and hate, of enslavement and disillusionment, finally sees his fulfillment in Cleopatra's aras."[7]

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CONCLUSION : The Dark Lady of the Sonnets

Rooted in awareness of pain and flux, Shakespeare's sonnets (137-152) reveal the poet's desire to transcend the painful actual and seek repose in beauty and the ideal.

The bringers of pain are the negative powers embodied in the Dark Lady, Cressida, Ophelia and Gertrude. Sonnet 137 speaks of the blinding force of love, a force that clouds judgement and induces the Sonnetteer to err. A plague seems to have settled on the poet - the plague of falseness. Sonnet 138 speaks of an act of mutual deception in which both the Sonnetteer and the Dark Lady hold the truth from each other in order to continue a relationship which is futile. External beauty of the lady seems to be the cross that the Sonnetteer bears in Sonnet 139. Wounds are inflicted. Tactile sensations are evoked. One is reminded of Troilus' infatuation for Cressid. Yet, the Sonnetteer prefers to pull a veil of deception over himself rather than to see her "glance" her "eye aside". The Dark Lady needs no art to slay the poet - her being itself is powerful enough to subdue him. Her beauty is his enemy and so, ironically, she turns her weapons towards another target. The Sonnetteer prefers to be slain rather than to suffer this pain.

Sonnet 140 holds a plea to the Dark Lady that she restrain her 'disdain' which might otherwise invoke sorrow to speak the language of self-pity. The poet wishes that he could teach her the 'wit' of saying she loves, though one does not love. Illness and love equate, here. The Sonnetteer compares his state with that of a dying man who would rather be deceived into thinking that he is healthy than be inflicted with the truth that death awaits him. Desperation could drive the poet to madness. sonnet 141 is written by a slave of the Dark Lady's heart. His heart loves what his eyes reject. One is reminded of Antony's unsuccessful attempts to break the fetters. Sonnet 142 equates love with sin. Darker powers taken on greater force. Lips seal false vows and other women are divested of their dues of the marriage bed. Sonnet 143 pleads with the Dark Lady to look back on who loves her. 'Frailty' implies a rejection of love - as in Sonnet 144, "the worser spirit a woman colored ill" tries to lure the Sonnetteer to hell.

Sonnet 145 expresses the power a woman can have over a man, whose hell is transmuted to heaven as she adds the words 'not you' to 'I hate'.

Sonnet 146 concludes with these lines :

> So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
> And Death once dead, there's no more dying then.

The poet asks his soul why it pines away, fooled by 'rebel powers' that disturb it. Sonnet 147 suggests that love is a fever and that the patient longs for the cause of the disease. The possible physician, Reason haas abandoned the poet because he is not heard. The only cure is Death. Love, in this manifestation is death-bringing and real and pervasive. Sonnet 148 equates blindness with the effect of love. Painful tears blind that poet to the Dark Lady's faults. Truth has no chance with a man whose eyes are 'vexed' and tear-laden. Sonnet 149 expresses the poet's grief at the fact that his love is not acknowledged or appreciated. His entire world revolves around the Dark Cruel Lady for whom he is willing to surrender all. In Sonnet 150, Shakespeare dwells on the increasing intensity and depth of a passion, founded on unworthiness. The most worthless actions inspire love in the Sonnetteer.

> ... thou betraying me, I do betray
> My nobler part to my gross body's treason

In sonnet 151, the dark lady holds the sonnet/eer a slave to her will and in Sonnet 152, the poet claims that he has violated his marriage vows and is a captive to deception. No contracts can be kept. Pain haunts the atmosphere created by these sonnets. The Dark Lady of the Sonnets has constructed a prison in which she holds the Sonnet/eer captive, who believes

> Only my plague thus far I count my gain
> That she that makes me sin awards me pain (141).

The Sonnetteer's awareness does not serve as protection from her destructive powers. In expressing his totality of vision of life, Shakespeare presents both the creative powers of true love and the destructive powers of 'frailty'.

> Love could be rose-like.
> For nothing this wide universe I call
> Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all.
>
> (Sonnet 109).

It could be a source of destruction. Shakespeare, the truth-teller sees both manifestations. The truth-teller must see pain steadily and see it whole. 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'. Keats' Urn, with its knowledge of joy and pain, expresses itself in truth and beauty. Shakespeare expresses a similar knowledge. His vision of truth embraces conflicts that exist but conflicts that are reconciled. His drama expresses an exquisite awareness of the existence of joy and melancholy, of pleasure and pain, and art and life. It expresses a feeling that these are inseparable although not identical and it expresses acceptance of the inseparability of the elements of human experience.

In romances such as A Midsummer Night's Dream, we witness holy celebrations of love.

Oberon sings :

Now, untill the break of day,
Through this house each fairy stray
To the best bride-bed will we,
Which by us shall blessed be;
And the issue there create
Ever shall be fortunate.
So shall all the couples three
Ever true in loving be.
(Act V, Sc.(i), 390-397).

The atmosphere created by the destructive archetypal Dark Lady, the femme fatale, the Gertrudes, Cressidas, however, is suffocating and oppressive. Blake in 'The Clod and the Pebble' discusses both aspects :

"Love seeketh not itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care
But for another gives its ease
And builds a heaven in hell's
despair."[1]

So sung a little clod of clay,
Trodden with the cattle's feet,
But a pebble of the brook
Warbled out these metres meet :

"Love seeket only self to please
To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease
And builds a hell in heaven's
despite".

Shakespeare expresses a similar knowledge. He acquires a vision where sorrow falls in place. The image of 'La Belle Dame sans Merci, the femme fatale is instrumental in that she brings pain, an inescapable reality. Her role cannot be dismissed just as tragedy cannot be dismissed. Shakespeare transcends pain.

Shakespeare's presentation of the world is the product of an imaginative genius that transcends the boundaries of

mortality. He is capable of infinite modification, and as Borges would say, Hugo compares him with the ocean, the possible forms of which are infinite.[2]

Milton's tribute to Shakespeare is one that can be given to a dramatist in whom the universe and the universal are present, to one who is in Coleridge's words, a "natura naturata".[3]

ON SHAKESPEARE 1630

What needs my Shakespear for his honour'd Bones,
The labour of an age in piled stones,
Or that his hallow'd reliques should be hid
Under a Star-ypointing Pyramid?
Dear son of memory, great heir of Fame,
What needs't thou such weak witnes of they name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Has built thy self a live-long Monument.
For whilst to th' shame of slow-endeavouring art,
thy easie numbers flow, and that each heart,
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalu'd Book,
Those Delphick lines with deep impression took,
Then thou our fancy of it self bereaving,
Dost make us Marble with too much conceaving;
And so Sepulcher'd in such pomp dost lie,
That Kings for such a Tomb would wish to die.[4]

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