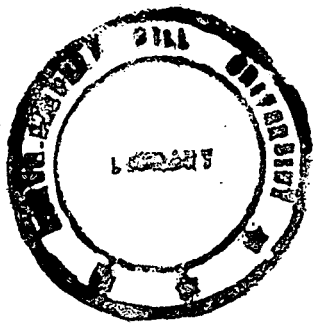
HAMLET AND SAMSON AGONISTES

A COMPARATIVE STUDY



DISSERTATION
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BY

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Certified that the dissertation entitled Hamlet and Samson Agonistes: A Comparative Study, submitted by B. W. Nongbri embodies the record of original insights carried out by her under my supervision.

She has been duly registered and the dissertation presented is worthy of being considered for the award of the M. Phil Degree.

(S. HOMCHAUDHURI)

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PREFACE

The differences between Hamlet and Samson Agonistes are only too obvious. Structurally and even otherwise, they can be said to be almost antipodal and to belong to two different worlds, as it were. Samson Agonistes is conceived and set in a medieval cast of mind, whereas Hamlet combines divergent modes of thought so characteristic of the Renaissance.

Notwithstanding all this, one can see some remarkable similarities in terms of the themes dealt with in these two works. The basic human situation focussed on in Hamlet and Samson Agonistes, when perceived amid the dissimilarities of world view and other details, brings them significantly together and provides a rich subject for critical exploration.

Both Shakespeare and Milton present a seemingly intractable human situation imprisoning their protagonists. It is a representative human situation - a scene of human predicament resulting from the triumph and rule of evil. Man's image is that of impotence and bondage. There is a protracted wrestle and the final release.

In both the works reason is the subject of debate. The Renaissance conception of reason as the prime human attribute is at the heart of much of the introspection and discussion that take place. Both authors see the fall of man in terms of the subjugation of reason by the passions. In fact, the reason-passion antithesis is central to the conception of the works under consideration.

In both the crisis glances directly, among other things, at the role of woman. Female inconstancy, female treachery is a common theme.

Both plays involve the revenge theme and delay is getting revenge is common to both. What is even more important, there is a remarkable similarity about the means of getting revenge.

Then there is the crucial role of the supernatural in both the plays. One can also see a certain similarity of treatment as far as the parent symbol is concerned.

Our study is primarily addressed to an examination of the nature of evil dramatised in the two works, to the protagonists wrestling with it, to the relationship between the existential situation and the supernatural order and to the concept of reason as it emerges from the authors' treatment of their respective dramatic situations. Our study is thus divided into the following sections:

1) An introductory critical survey
2) The Religious Temper
3) The concept of Reason
4) Hamlet encountering evil
5) Samson encountering evil
6) Conclusion - where the entire discussion is summed up.

In conclusion, we can only hope that our examination of these two great works of art will prove worthwhile in that it will have thrown some fresh light on our understanding of them.

Bukowski

CHAPTER - I

AN INTRODUCTORY CRITICAL SURVEY

Hamlet presents a world which is substantially cut off from the anchorage of medieval thought and which is like a ship whose captaincy has been usurped through foul treachery and which is inwardly rotting, though only in the eyes of the discerning. God is further away than He ever was from man's thought in the earlier age. The certainty of a living faith and the secure clarity of vision have disappeared in the uncertainty and disquiet of a scarcely perceived providence. It is a bedimmed world where the rule of reason which ensures moral and spiritual health in the life of the community and the individual has been undermined almost beyond correction and recovery.

It is a pronouncedly secular world in which the hero, the victim of appalling circumstances, was once the model of a soldier, a scholar, a courtier —a man of the world with singular worldly accomplishments. Even when in the grip of an unsettling trauma as he is now, he gives convincing evidence of what must have been, in the earlier days of normality, a keen, full-blooded participation in the varied affairs of life, remaining equally at home in the world of 'emperor and clown', of men of all stations. Hamlet is at home with the soldier, with the player, the grave-digger, with the courtier. He is, or let us say, was a

lover. He is a scholar, a thinker, a poet. He is equal to any situation, whether of his own making (witness the play within the play scene) or of some one else's. A master of rhetoric, of quibbling, of poetry, of mind-boggling thought, he is versatile answering to the versatility of interests such as only the Renaissance knew.

The play involves the tragic and the comic, the sublime and the profane, the beautiful and the macabre. It involves the crudest melodrama and human thought at its intensest and most rarefied and breath-taking. 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 amplitude 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 jilted lover or petrified son of the incestuous mother.

The play is a world which, apart from the main thorough-fare, is full of lanes and by-lanes suggesting the excitedly varied interests and the complex fulness of life the Renaissance epitomised. Its scope connects earth and heaven and hell, but is not set in one exclusive framework. Both pagan and Christian elements connect. Such is the manipulation of the situational

potential and the psychological thrust that characters are kept painfully guessing at the true import of situations. This results in the provocative mysteriousness that is the keynote of a milieu which imprisons man as though in a mist and which in the process of dramatisation brings out tellingly what Keats saw as Shakespeare's supreme gift, viz, the negative capability — the power to remain in a state or uncertainty, doubt and anxiety "without any irritable reaching after fact and reason". The dramatist's prickly awareness of many-layered and contradictory experience and his tense resolution to spread out, to probe and to variegate appeal at the popular and sophisticated levels — easily distinguish this play from the less bustling and more exclusively focussed drama of the ancients and of Milton.

Milton's Samson Agonistes, very much like his Paradise Lost, is set within the medieval framework of God-man relationship. It suggests the certainty of God and the medieval sense of man's nearness to God. The lapsed man's eclipsed sense of the immediacy of God's presence is only an ironic device used to dramatise the living reality of God being where He is not suspected to be and being ever mindful of his devotee or champion. Samson is God-intoxicated, and in that sense a mono-maniac and whatever concern he has for his nation is prompted by his sense of accountability of God. Indeed, Milton is out to justify the ways of God to man. His hero does not recognise anything of

value unless it has an explicit relevance to his mission as God's champion on earth. This explains the character of the work and the method that Milton adopts to realise his aim. Much of what Shakespeare needs is superfluous or almost blasphemous to him. He needs only a handful of characters, a scrupulously narrowed arena, and he will keep to the thoroughfare, being contemptuous of lanes and by-lanes which can only provide criminal diversion from the urgent need to arrive and vindicate. He has no use for an appeal at the popular level, for unlike in Shakespeare, people, by and large, are a contemptible quantity. The Renaissance multiplicity of human concerns gives way to the exclusive concern of man seeking his God, for this seeking is what matters to the exclusion of everything else. And whenever God and the world are mentioned in the same breath, the former takes precedence over the latter. What is in question in Hamlet is the status of man and the credibility of reason as of potency enough to sustain man's superiority over the animal world, while what is of obsessive interest in Samson Agonistes is man's accountability to his maker. The nature of vindication at the end of Milton's work sets off, as nothing else could so tellingly, Hamlet's sense of being cut off prematurely. He has lamentably not been allowed the time to render a true account of all that has gone before, so that his people remain 'unsatisfied'. For him death marks no truimph. The 'fell sergeant' has denied him the time he needed, ('Had I but time').

Still another point is that the world of Samson Agonistes is remarkably incident-free except at the end, unlike that of Hamlet which is packed with a variety of incidents. The closed world of the court is counterpointed by a whole bustle of life.

Such differences as we have noted above are likely to preclude any scope for a worthwhile comparative study involving perceptions of kinship in one respect or another. Never the less one can see some striking similarities in outline and detail between Samson Agonistes and Hamlet, and the resemblances strike one as all the more revealing on account of the overall divergencies in conception and execution.

Samson is literally in enemy territory and in prison. Hamlet is virtually in enemy territory and in prison. Claudius talks of Hamlet's 'transformation', but thanks to the appalling transformation brought about by fratricide, Hamlet finds himself an alien in his own land and talks of being in prison.

There was a divine secret imparted to Samson, who having divulged it in a weak, unguarded moment, now bewails his apostasy. To Hamlet, too, a dread secret has been entrusted, but, unlike Samson, he has kept the sanctity of it. Hamlet's present predicament is due to an act of treachery on the part of his uncle, and infidelity on the part of his mother coupled with obtuseness on the part of Ophelia. In a manner not entirely dissimilar,

Samson's bondage and his blinded state have been brought about by treachery on the part of his own people, especially Delilah.

Samson's wife acts as a tool in the hands of his enemy, so that he stands alienated and betrayed. Hamlet's mother has gone over to the usurper, being guilty of marital apostasy, while his erstwhile friends have become tools of his enemy.

Both Hamlet and Samson condemn the untrustworthy character of women as a class. Hamlet's fury and sarcasm in the nunnery and closet scenes bear a striking family resemblance to Samson's explosive denunciation of women in his encounter with Delilah. The Cynicism epitomised in the formulation 'frailty, thy name is woman' is not far removed in temper from Samson's vitriolic of denunciation of woman as a 'poisonous bosom-snake'. The fortunes of both protagonists touch the nadir of despair and both resort to self-laceration, the discrepant nature of the causes not withstanding. A feeling of inadequacy, of not being equal to the occasion demoralises both for a while. Samson is borne down by a sense of the inscrutability of God's ways, Hamlet by a sense of the sphinx-like mystery of life and death. Both reflect mournfully on the paradox that is man —how he is at once the glory and the shame of creation. Both lament the enslavement of reason by passion. And in both the plays crippling doubt eventually gives way to rejuvenating faith. While

this statement might seem too strong and categorical to be applied to the Hamlet world, the fact remains that what had seemed difficult, almost impossible of attainment comes within easy reach when the muddy stream of scepticism merges in the rising tide of belief. The thread that snapped is joined again. The 'exiled' man is restored. (This restoration is peculiarly valid for Samson, while for Hamlet it can only be construed as a sudden upswing stopping short of yielding complete fulfilment. He has a sense of being snatched away before time. The vision of man at odds with the existential situation abides. The word remains till the end 'out of joint'. The restoration we are talking of is of ephemeral effect almost like that of a mirage).

In spite of the caveat thus entered for Hamlet, it will be noticed that Hamlet and Samson both get their revenge with a measure of unexpectedness, the accomplishment of the task (however unsatisfactory for Hamlet) being rather slow to come. In either case, there are two phases — in the first phase, i.e., the phase of alienation and sterility, the protagonist is groping, questioning and whip lashing himself in enveloping darkness. In the second phase, i.e. the phase of recovery, he has reached the healing waters of faith, leaving sterility behind. For both the process is one of graduation from a state of spiritual crisis. Both Shakespeare and Milton dramatise the growth of the soul, its upward swing. Paradoxically, there could be nothing most unexpected and expected than Hamlet's resounding claim in the final scene:

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will. (V ii. 10-11)

He is settled in mind and will respond to the King's summons, even when Horatio counsels caution.

> Not dissimilar is Samson's sudden thrust of mind:
> I begin to feel
> Some rousing motions in me, which dispose
> To something extraordinary my thoughts.

Somson's 'presage' ('If there be aught of presage in the mind') echoes Hamlet's 'augury' ('Not a whit, we defy augury: there's special providence in the fall of a sparrow').

These miracles of utterances acquire their electrifying effect, their substance, indeed their authenticity from the enormity of the suffering borne and the resulting growth of the soul.

"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".[1] The conception is of a sentinel ever awake and watchful, holding to his appointed station without a thought of yielding to the foe. Both Hamlet and Samson are such sentinels and they are conceived remarkably alike. Whereas Hamlet proves

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1. The Business of Criticism, Oxford Paper Back, 1963, p.49.

true to the conception in holding his fort (the privacy of his soul and the dourness of his vision of man), defeating all attempts at despoiling him of his secrets and making inroads on his preserves, Samson proves guilty of a criminal slackening of vigilance, resulting in the enemy lapping up his 'secret', and in his impotence and present ignominy. Hence, the unremitting self-chastisement and hence in Dalila's words 'the eternal tempest never to be calmed'.

In characteristic Renaissance imagery, Milton represents his protagonist's failure to be worthy of his charge.

> How would I once look up, or heave the head
> Who like a foolish pilot, have ship-wrecked
> My vessel trusted to me from above
> Gloriously rigged, and for a word, a tear,
> Fool! have divulged the secret gift of God
> To a deceitful woman? (italics added)

Again, changing the image, yet retaining the suggestion:

> What boots it at one gate to make defence,
> And at another let in the foe,
> Effiminately vanguished? (italics added)

The soldier-image in Hamlet which must have been a conscious part of the overall dramatic conception, comes through fluently and convincingly in Fortinbras's speech at the end:

> 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 royally: and, for his passage,
> The soldier's music and the rights of war
> Speak loudly for him. (italics added, V.ii. 388 et. seq)

Even when Hamlet proves invulnerable as a soldier at his post, he fights constantly under the threat of a siege. He can see the evil masquerading as virtue while 'rank corruption minding all within/Infects unseen!'

The conception of a soldier given a solemn charge is reinforced by the following description given by Manoa of a rejuvenated Samson as he visualises the situation:

> And I persuade me God hath not permitted
> His strength of grow up with his hair
> Garrisoned round about him like a camp
> Of youthful soliery ... (Italics added)

The overwhelming feeling of the ubiquity and decisiveness of defilement is germane to the visions worked out in the two works. Both protagonists are victims of an unclean regime. Samson's feeling of being tainted and unclean is all too palpable and he has the additional feeling of having brought it upon himself through sinning. While Hamlet is innocent of any such offence as Samson accuses himself of, he is not free either from the sense of guilt. As he reflects on the situation, he unavoidably has a share of the corruption that has gone too deep into the human stock ('virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it'). 'With more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in' Hamlet too feels tainted and sick. He calls himself an 'arrant knave'.

Conceived as God's champion, Samson eventually turns out to be the cleanser that he was destined to be. What about Hamlet? One notices an atavistic tendency that Shakespeare implants in his hero. Could it be that in his awe-struck allusion to Hercules in his first soliloquy, he was, however unconsciously, glancing at the cleanser-image of that mythical hero? Could it be that Shakespeare made him recognise, however dimly, a compulsive, if intimidating, intimation from the conjuration of that puissant pagan image? In other words, could it be that Shakespeare had all but cast him in that role only to see how in his vision of the dismembered time, such a role would turn out to be? Hamlet's habitual language with reference to the corruption of the time is of one who looks upon himself as a possible cleanser, purifier. Habitually, he thinks of and harps on the general corruption, the rotting of the state rather than the single act of treacherous murder which could be more of a symptom than the cause of the ever-spreading malady. He generalises the evil and its destructive character so that the world is "an unweeded garden,/That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature/Possess it merely." The often-noticed generalising bent of Hamlet goes well with, in fact, gives point to his projected role of redeemer, however dismayed in spirit he may feel contemplating his task:

> The time is out of joint: - O cursed spite,
> That ever was I born to set it right! (I.V. 189-90)

In the last act Hamlet asks Horatio if it is "not to be damn'd/To let this canker of our nature come/In further evil." He is thinking with revulsion and horror of the further harm that might issue from Claudius and he is thinking not merely of the murder of his father, but also of the staining of his mother, of being deprived of his claim to the throne and of the treacherous design on his life. His concern is how "not to be damn'd" and how to extirpate this spreading evil.

The debasement of the situation brought about by sin is focused on in both works by a similarity of means. Both Shakespeare and Milton make use of divine imagery, of the contrast between a greater and a lesser divinity to emphasise the almost immeasurable gulf between the present and the past, between what was and what is, between the radiance that was and its monstrous eclipse. Hamlet refers to the past splendour and the present monstrosity in terms of Hyperion and Satyr:

> But two months dead! Nay not so much, not two:
> So excellent a king; that was to this
> Hyperion to a Satyr: (I. ii. 138 et. seq.)

In the closet scene, he speaks to his mother:

> Look here upon this picture and on this,
> See what a grace was seated on this brow;
> Hyperion's curls; .....
> ..... Look you now what follows:
> Here is your husband, like a mildew'd ear
> Blasting his wholesome brother. (III. iv. 53 et. seq.)

Hyperion-Satyr antithesis symbolises the Renaissance antithesis of reason and passion; the triumph of Satyr over Hyperion signifies the displacement of reason and the usurpation of its rightful place by passion standing for inordinate ambition, greed, lechery and so on. The insurrection within man overthrowing the rational soul and thus overturning the hierarchy of elements has unleased the reign of evil.

In Hamlet the earlier period is spoken of in terms such as 'fair and war-like', 'majesty' and 'dignity', 'hallowed and gracious', 'our valiant Hamlet'. Hamlet's loving and wistful reference to his dead father ('He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again') is an anguished tribute to a reign of reason never to return. The present dispensation is that of an 'incestuous and adulterate beast'.

Milton, likewise, drives home Samson's unforeseen subjection to the present abomination in terms of the eclipse of Israel's God and the ascendance of Dagon, the abhorred Philistine God. The present dispensation is a witness to Dagon reigning in 'pomp' and to 'dishonour' and 'obloquy' brought to Israel's God.

> All the contest is now
> 'Twixt God and Dagon. Dagon hath presumed,
> Me overthrown, to enter lists with God,
> His deity comparing and preferring
> Before the God of Abraham.

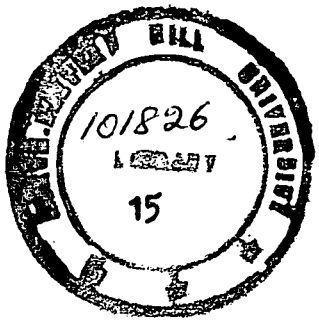
The present regime 'drunk with idolatry, drunk with wine' is an abomination not unlike the one presided over by the Satyr-king, Claudius.

The glory that characterised the rule of Israel's God is represented by Samson when he was in full possession of reason and in full consciousness of that power which was transmitted to him from above. And the rise of Dagon is accounted for by Samson letting himself be ruled by passion that made a captive of reason.

Shakespeare and Milton dwell upon conjugal infidelity and stress the deification of lust and treachery as the cause and accompaniment of the reign respectively of Satyr and Dagon. The protagonists are trapped and menaced. The feeling of being encircled and thus imperilled expresses itself in a language that is significantly similar. Hamlet talks of being 'benetted round with villainies'. And Samson wails:

> Ye see, o friends,
> How many evils have enclosed me round.

Both undergo the tortures of the damned. Both are hard upon themselves for being 'lapsed' souls, though for different reasons. Hamlet sees himself as one 'lapsed in time and passion' for having unforgivably put off 'the important acting of thy dread command', while Samson feels 'bereaved', 'exiled', even 'annulled' for having 'profaned/the mystery of God, given me under pledge/of vow'.



The points of similarity embrace even other aspects.

In spite of the obvious difference in their dramatic roles, Gertrude and Manoa would seem to have a similarity of approach towards the suffering protagonists. Gertrude, notwithstanding being the cause of Hamlet's crisis of being, continues to love him and would like to see him happy in her own placid way. In fact, it pains her to find her son so unlike his former self, almost transformed beyond recognition — a melancholy, bitter and tortured soul. She wants him to get reconciled to his father's passing as an inevitable happening in a man's life, accept the changed situation and resume his former self when he was the 'observed of all observers', as Ophelia put it. 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 realise that her marriage to Claudius so soon after her former husband's death could cause such disquiet in Hamlet's mind. For Hamlet the situation is pestilential.

Not only is Manoa ever ready to ingratiate himself with the Philistine lords to secure Samson's release, he even advises his son to prefer 'self-preservation' to being 'self-rigorous', 'choosing death death as due'.

> I already have made way
> To some Philistine lords, with whom to treat
> about thy ransom
> .....

Repent the sin; but if the punishment
Than canst avoid, self-preservation bids.

Both Gertrude and Manoa symbolise the obtuseness of moral vision. While Manoa represents the spirit of compromise with evil for the sake of worldly comfort and ease, Gertrude is all self-indulgence which, for its uninterrupted proceeding, fears any questioning posture which Hamlet seems to represent. In Gertrude one sees gross, if bland, sensuality asking for approval and acceptance.

In both the plays then the parent symbol is a means of spelling out the unbridgeable gulf between the myopia of mundane gratification and a terrifying insistence on being true to the rightful image of man.

Yet in another respect, one can see a nearly identical thrust. Hamlet's attitude to the two spies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is almost on all fours with Samson's attitude to the 'thirty spies' 'appointed to await me'. Justifying the murder of those spies, Samson says:

I used hostility, and took their spoil,
To pay my underminers, in their coin.

Anticipating what he is going to do to the two former school-fellows whom he will trust as I will adders fang'd' because of their being in league with the villainous King, Hamlet chuckles:

> Let it work;
> For 'tis sport to have the engineer
> Hoist with his own petard: and't shall go hard
> But I will delve one yard below their mines,
> And blow them at the moon. (III. iv. 205 et. seq.)

Later, justifying his action is sending them to their death in England, Hamlet puts the matter in decisive perspective, using an argument Samson himself might approve of:

> Why, man, they did make love to this employment;
> They are not near my conscience; their defeat
> Does by their own insinuation grow. (V. ii. 57 et. seq.)

It is obvious, then, that both Shakespeare and Milton must have apprehended remarkably similar situations though their artistic enactment thereof took on widely different expressions because of their distinctive world-views and the compulsions of their pronouncedly individual talents and temperaments. Indeed, we have already alluded to the basic differences.

At this point we must beg leave to glance at some other disparities. Both Hamlet and Samson are obsessed with death, yet their approaches to it are sharply different. The difference here is a difference between Shakespeare and Milton. The thought of death is natural to a tortured soul. But while Shakespeare harbours the idea from time to time, he cannot persist in doing so for long, for death is an insoluble enigma. However painful and unbearable life may be, the thought of death affords no assurance that it will be a better state of affairs when one has wound up the business of life. No such sense of mystery troubles Milton who is fortified by his dogma and his faith. Shakespeare

does not seem to know either, at any rate when he is composing his Hamlet. He is a tormented and unresting quester. He is an open-eyed questioner subject to the fears natural to a man who would probe unfettered by prescriptive dogma:

> Who should these 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. (III.1. 76 et. seq.)

Contrast this with how Milton's hero longs for death:

> This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,
> No long petition-speedy death,
> The close of all my miseries and the balm.

Hamlet sees an unknown 'dread' in death, Samson knows no such perplexity. He welcomes death within the religions framework, the framework of faith.

Shakespeare's plays suggest the philosophy of growth. His belief in growth is true not only of the central figures of his plays but also of the minor characters.

Gertrude is certainly different at the end of the closet scene. She can be supposed to have felt some stirrings of a moral awakening:

> Be thou assur'd, if words be made of breath
> And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
> What thou last said to me. (III. iv. 197 et. seq.)

Laertes who has been in league with the king, wakes up at the end of the play to the evil of his proceeding, disowns Claudius, exchanges forgiveness with Hamlet and befriends him. This fact of moral growth is in complete contrast with the staticity of Manoa and Dalila. Manoa's complacency is incorrigible while Dalilah remains self-righteous till the end.

Unlike Milton, Shakespeare takes us inside his characters. He lets us hear what the characters think or say to themselves behind the facade of their public selves.

Thus we hear Claudius confess, express remorse and ask for God's pardon, although he knows that the retention of the fruits of his crime cannot entitle him to pardon. We hear him praise Hamlet:

> ... he, being remiss
> Most generous, and free from all contriving,
> Will not peruse the foils. (IV. vii. 134 et. seq.)

Milton's cast of mind and art are such that he cannot afford us such insights into the character of, say, Harapha or Dalila. We only encounter their public selves.

Claudius's private admiration for Hamlet glances at and is in line with Iago's secret acknowledgement of Othello's goodness and candour:

'The Moor is of a free and open nature' (Othello I, III)

and Edmund's private view of Edgar:

> ... a brother noble,
> Whose nature is so far from doing harms
> That he suspects none. (King Lear I. ii)

Such utterances constitute an individual trait of Shakespeare's art. They point to and intimate his rounded view of life. And then one cannot but notice his pervasive ambivalence — the multiple perspective under which the characters and the wide world in which they move are viewed. This ambivalence is reflective of the dramatist's profound recognition of the mystery of life — life that is many-layered and many-faceted and which refuses to be seen against one set perspective. Plurality of vision is the unstated law of the Shakespearean world.

Despite the overtly religious background, Greek drama would seem to be more akin to Shakespearean drama in its focus on and intensification of the basic mystery of life. Both work out in their unique ways the needling awareness of the dimness and ambiguity of human perception and the fatal congruence of fate and character conspiring to weave man's tragic destiny.

And finally, the common, popular touch — an area where Shakespeare is sui generis. Milton has no use for the common people — 'the common rout,/that wandering loose about,/grow up and perish as the summer fly,/Heads without name, no more

remembered'. And now look at the soldiers who introduce us to the Hamlet world, the players in whose unexpected company Hamlet forgets his melancholy and the grave-diggers whose natural, lusty accent holds Hamlet and reminds us of the elemental character of life and of the inevitability of death — well, it is such characters as they who provide the unique tang and savour of the Shakespearean milieu and create its enthralling ambience.

CHAPTER - II

THE RELIGIOUS TEMPER IN HAMLET AND SAMSON AGONISTES

"There is a divinity that shapes our end,
Rough hew them how we will."
(Hamlet - V 2)

"Just are the ways of God,
And Justifiable to men;
Unless there be who think not God at all,
If any be, they walk obscure;
For of such doctrine never was the school,
But the heart of the fool."
(Samson Agonistes)

Man's realization of his imperfect condition, the hard jolts of reality causes him to despair of life. But in spite of this, his instinct of survival is the 'Hope (which) springs eternal in the human breast.'[1] This life-affirming impulse is the force which drives man on to his spiritual quest, a quest for a meaning in life, a quest which brings him to a point of acknowledging that behind the scene of human existence there must be a power, or a higher order -GOD- which controls and directs the goings-on in this terrestrial plane. Thus religion is the expression of man's reaction to the total situation in which he has to live. It is according to Helen Gardner '... More than attitudes, aspirations, emotions, speculations and intimidations... it includes them within a way of life consciously accepted in obedience to what are felt to be the imperative from without the self that are binding."[2]

1. Essay on Man: Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot Alexander Pope, ed. by Anthony Trott and Martin. Oxford, London, Macmillan, 1966. Epistle I. p. 40.
2. Religion and Literature, Helen Gardner, Faber and Faber, 3 Queen Square, London, 1971, p. 134.

In Hamlet and Samson Agonistes, this awareness and acknowledgement of God or of the power that works behind human activities is very much there although this statement needs clarification in its application to either of the two plays. The hero of the play Hamlet is in this aspect seen as a portraiture of the Renaissance Spirit — the emergence of individualism. Whereas man of the middle ages was conscious and aware of himself only as a member of the collectivity of a general category, he emerges in the Renaissance as one awake to the different potentialities with which he is endowed. His enlightenment enables him to consider the world outside and its state in an objective manner and also to turn inwardly and consider himself subjectively as a spiritual individual. Hamlet true to the Renaissance Spirit, is an amalgam of pagan modes of thought and the Christian ethos, out of which arises a broad impact, a remarkable inclusive view of humanism. It is apparently a picture of irreconcilables of scepticism, sensuality, fatalism and exalted idealism and piety of belief in the divine spark of human reason and susceptibility to superstitious fears of evil omens. In other words, Christian morals are the official standards but adultery and incest the common practices. And to our hero, Hamlet, the existence of such contradiction serves to create a complexity of character that mystifies ardent psychologists. It explains his initial scepticism as to any purpose in living, it explains the despair that grips his being when reality, the world, appears,

"... An unweeded garden
That grows to seed, things rank and
gross to nature
Possess it merely."

(Act I Sc 2. ls. 134)

And it also explains the secular bias in Hamlet when even after he has completed his mission as an avenger he is distressed with thoughts of a wounded name left behind him, a taint on his honour as a Renaissance prince in this secular word rather than being content that he has done what providence had decreed. The absence of doctrinaire religion in Shakespeare's work might suggest a complete absence of religious motive in his characters. This would, however, be a misleading impression. Hamlet's profound unhappiness and anguish can only be explained by his deeply held moral and religious beliefs having been rebuffed by the unrighteous conduct of his uncle and mother. This fact of offended moral and religious sensibilities is best appreciated by recognising, as with Professor Kitto, the divine background against which the play is structured and also how the hero open up to the realization and acknowedgement of its reality. But clearly Hamlet shows a 'syncretic' approach uniting the garb of of Christianity to man-made values with a dash of mysticism; its religion is a system of insights and concepts.

In contrast, Milton's Samson Agonistes, is, after Paradise Lost, the author's means of justifying God's ways to man based

on the covenanted relationship of man and God - 'I will be your God and you will be my people'[3] a relationship of a personal God and his creature, and the breaking up of it, through sinning, will naturally usher in adverse consequences. Milton is a Puritan by conviction and his works have a perceptibly Christian background. The protagonist of Samson Agonistes finds himself in the throes of a predicament arising out of his being physically incapacitated and of the despair resulting from alienation from God. The tragedy of Samson is wrapped in an atmosphere of the reality of God in the life of the hero, and the reverberating theme is the pain of his estrangement from his God, the pain of the struggle to regain the lost relationship. A good deal of the theme has its bearing on the question why God allowed such humiliation to his chosen one and also to his own honour.

> "Retiring from the popular noise,
> I seek this unfrequented place to find some ease
> Ease to the body some, none to the mind
> From restless thoughts..."

The Chorus also echoes the torment of a broken relationship:

> "This idol's day has been to thee no day of rest,
> Labouring thy mind
> More than the working day thy hands."

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3. The Holy Bible, Joel 2:27.

Among other things, though dh varying lengths, Hamlet and Samson Agonistes stand comparable as there is in both, an intellectual hypothesising of God as an explanation of the reality and meaningfulness of both the protagonists' lives. For Samson there is no question as to the reality of God, his holiness and his righteousness, even though he stands at variance with him because of his lapse. For Hamlet, on the other hand, there is a need to grow into spiritual realization of this reality which he gradually achieves not through rationalizing but by an act of faith through experience.

To bring out and underscore the prevalence of the divine in both Hamlet and Samson Agonistes, is to note the perceptively ethical stance that the protagonists take, as they grapple with their respective situations. For it is not enough to assert the presence and participation of a divine power in human lives if it does not affect moral conduct, as it is undeniably true that the morality of a person stands in the closest connection with his consciousness of God, although this relation differs from person to person, so that any investigation can never reach a point of certainty or establish a generalization.

Between Shakespeare's Hamlet and Milton's Samson, therefore, can be read resemblances in their awareness of the higher order of things although their moral responses differ because of the variation of their environment and the temper of the

age in which each was concieved. Both the protagonists feel morally beholden to carry out a similar mission that of revenge, Hamlet against the murderer of his father and Samson against the conquerors and oppressors of his nation Israel. Both were enjoined to their tasks by powers beyond the human sphere, Hamlet by the ghost of his father's spirit and Samson by the Spirit of God.

Hamlet finally accepts his moral responsibility to avenge his father's death after he has caught his uncle's conscience, and proved that it was no 'damned ghost' that he had seen, even as Samson has no doubt as to the fact that he is reared to be God's 'Mighty Champion' against his nation's enemies and oppressors, foretold to be so even through the nature of his birth. Thus in both the plays, we can see the working out of supernatural powers through human agencies.

How Hamlet and Samson respond to the demands of another world will be a study of resemblances amidst divergencies.

Hamlet's moral attitude and conduct can be looked at and understood if we regard him as a Renaissance Prince in whom we see the juxtaposition of pagan and Christian moralities, incompatible moral attitudes which explain the complexity of his nature, his scepticism and his faith. Hamlet is 'morally divided so perfectly that he does not seem aware of the division.'[4]

4. The Morality of Hamlet - 'Sweet Prince or Arrant Knave' (1963) by Patrick Gruttwell, Shakespeare Hamlet, A Casebook, edited by John Jump, The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1970, p.187.

And his unawareness of this division in himself can again be explained if we take into consideration the Renaissance endowment on him, a powerful individuality, which makes his religiosity altogether subjective.

Samson's ethical conduct, on the other hand, can be clearly understood if we see it against the background of his belief in God who had called him to be his Champion, not for his personal end and glory but for his nation and his God. Thus his moral responsibility and actions are for the good and honour of his nation. Whatever might be the eventual outcome of his moves and action, his strong belief is that it is God who is actually at work, ordering and directing.

Tracing the religious note in Hamlet, we have recorded that its hero does not, at the outset of the play, appear to consciously acknowledge the working out of the divine pattern in his and other's' life, but that as the play progresses he grows into the spiritual realization.

After the ghost's revelation to him the first step that he takes towards avenging his father is to camouflage his true intentions by going about in the guise of 'an antick disposition'. But this hardly convinced King Claudius, his uncle-stepfather, who displays an acute sense of danger when he starts setting two erstwhile friends of the Prince, Guildenstern

and Rosencrantz, to spy on him and further to agree with Polonius to spy on Hamlet's meeting with Ophelia. His wariness is sufficiently motivated, for he is convinced that Hamlet's 'antick disposition' is no madness but that

> "There is something in his soul
> O'er which his melancholy sits on brood."
>
> (III. 1. ls. 163)

This in turn offers him the opportunity of attempting to do away with the Prince by sending him to England under the pretence of collecting neglected tribute. 'Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go' says Claudius. It seems that the hound has turned hare. Freedom of movement and action appears to have subtly been denied Hamlet. He finds for himself, as he metaphorically puts it, that 'Denmark's a prison'. His predicament is brought about by his uncle's act of treachery and his mother's moral depravity.

A reverse in circumstantial position is seen in Samson Agonistes. He who was cut out for the role of a redeemer finds himself literally in prison and blinded through his own country men's refusal to rally round him against the Philistines, and of course, primarily, through the fact that his personal desire for 'Repose and rest', momentarily eclipsed his constancy to his God and his nation, with the result that his foreign wife proved true to her own people and false to him. The point here

to note is that Samson's apostasy stands in glaring contrast to Hamlet's steadfastness to the secret entrusted to him.

The pervasion of evil is felt in both the plays. The regimes under which the heroes find themselves victims stink with corruption and sin. Samson feels himself besmirched with its filth more so as he realizes his part in bringing it upon himself, while Hamlet, although there is no overt offence on his part, yet is not altogether free from a sense of sinning. The corruption that has gone deep into the human stock taints even the best of us. His own views expresses this:

> "I am myself indifferent honest, but yet
> I could accuse me of such things that it
> were better my mother had not borne me...
> We are arrant knaves all..."
>
> (III. 1. ls. 163)

How this degrading, debasing situation is brought about by sin is conveyed to us in both plays through the divine imagery, a play of contrast between the heavenly and the beastial elements in man; a means of suggesting the radiance of the past, while reason sat enthroned in man's consciousness, and the darkness of the present, when passion manages to overcome and overwhelm reason, thereby, bringing in a reign of darkness and all its evil manifestations. Hamlet and Samson are both perplexed by this bewildering paradox of human nature 'the glory, jest and riddle of the world' (Pope)[5] and both

5. Essay on Man: Epistle of Dr. Arbuthnot, A. Pope. Epistle II. p. 56.

lament the enslavement of reason by passion. We can sense the tension in the heroes and imagine their existence as one of tight rope walking in their efforts to do what each in his own context, thinks is morally good.

In Hamlet the Hyperion-Satyr antithesis carried through its interpretation all of the above mentioned aspects, even as God and Dagon do in Samson Agonistes. The difference between the past and the present in Hamlet can be illustrated by the 'Closet Scene' where he says to his mother:

> "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 comman,
> 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 look you now, what follows
> Here is your husband: like a mildewed ear,
> Blasting his wholesome brother, have you eyes?"
>
> (III. 4. ls. 152)

The reign of reason and light is personified in Hamlet's father whom he wistfully remembers "He was a man take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again" while the reign of passion and darkness is personified in Claudius whom Hamlet describes as 'an incestuous beast' who has made a mockery of all that is virtuous and ideal.

Samson's self-portraiture:

"Full of divine instinct
Fearless of Danger, like a petty God
I walked about, admired of all and dreaded
On hostile ground none daring my attempt."

refers to his earlier self in whom the glory of Israel's God was reflected while he was in possession of reason and the power of God. But through Samson's own undoing, the high God is now lowered in esteem and Dagon raised in his stead.

"I this pomp- has brought
To Dagon and advanc'd his praises high
Among the heathen round, to God have
brought dishonour..."

This post-lapsarian state of humanity is a Renaissance view with a deeper truth in it, for man is seen to be always undergoing times of upheaval when he loses his grip on rationality and its resources to unleash as it were the reign of the devil.

The powerful and despotic nature of sin and its evil consequences also exercises a great influence on the morals of conjugal relationships. Infidelity and the canker of lust and treachery receive underscoring attention from both Shakespeare and Milton, because it is in such situations that Hamlet and Samson find themselves trapped. This anguished feeling of being trapped as expressed by Hamlet and Samson is almost identical.

Hamlet says he is being 'benetted round with villainies' and Samson says:

> "Ye see O friends
> How many evils have enclosed me round."

The supparative condition of the atmosphere in which Hamlet and Samson find themselves is described by Hamlet as

> "...The ulcerous place...rank corruption,
> mining all within infects unseen,"

and Samson's description of his prison house:

> "... Air imprison'd also, close and damp
> Unwholesome draught,"

can be stretched to allude to the entire condition of the atmosphere he is in, reeking with lust and treachery. In Hamlet and Samson Agonistes marriage commitments and loyalty are deliberately trampled underfoot. Gertrude is married again:

> "...Ere those shoes were old
> With which she followed
> My poor father's body
> Like niobe all tears, why she, even she
> Oh God a beast, that wants discourse with
> reason, would have mourn'd longer -
> Married with my uncle..."
>
> (I. 2. ls. 147)

And in Samson Agonistes Samson's first wife of Timna:

> "...Betray me, and reveal the secret werested
> from me in her highth
> Of Nuptial love profest, carrying it strait
> To them who had corrupted her my spies,
> And rivals."

And again his second wife, Dalila:

> "Who also in the prime of love, spousal
> embraces, vitiated with God, ...
> She purposed to betray me...."

Kind Claudius in Hamlet, as we see him conducting his kingly duties, is a powerful personality but he exemplifies violence which cannot control itself because it is born of weakness. Passion for the throne drives him to crime, and sensual desire, to win his brother's widow with an audacity which causes Hamlet to cry out:

> "Oh villain, villain, smiling damned villain!"

Samson in this respect can also be seen as strength that is misused for the gratification of his desire. His own words on the choice of a second wife do not convincingly show the part of the divine in it. In fact, the lust of his eyes must have presumed divine permission for he never waited for that 'Intimate Impulse' which urged him in the first choice.

> "I thought it lawful from my former act
> And the same end."

The two protagonists are seen to be caught up in perversion and moral filth and against these forces they are called upon, one, to be a cleanser, 'a scourge and minister' and the other, God's champion. Samson does eventually turn out to be the great cleanser he was destined to be, while Hamlet's role

can be looked upon as one dealing with the whole situation of rank corruption and rottenness of the state and not merely with the single act of treacherous murder. His reflection on Claudius' crime and his (Claudius') potentiality for more crimes horrifies but, at the same time, strengthens the prince and justifies his duty as an avenger. He asks Horatio in the last act:

> "Is it not perfect conscience to quit him
> with the aim? And is't not to be damn'd
> To let this canker of our nature come
> In further evil?"
>
> (V. 2. ls. 67)

It is in a wider prospective that he sees the malady of evil infecting and destroying the beauty of living, so that he feels obliged to be a redeemer and cleanser. Maybe, when Hamlet, to his great disadvantage, compared himself to Hercules, Shakespeare wants us to see in him the cleanser image of the mythical hero.

Against heavy odds, then, the heroes of Hamlet and Samson Agonistes had vowed to fight inexorably. And their irreconcilable nature is stressed when both Shakespeare and Milton use the parent symbol to show that even parental love and concern cannot prevail against the bulwark of the heroes' determination not to gratify the urge of mundane, unauthentic existence but to live up to the call and demands from beyond. Gertrude, notwithstanding the fact that she is the cause of Hamlet's suffering, continues to love him and in her placid way wishes him

happiness, so that she pleads with him to accept the changed situation, his father's passing and his uncle as his stepfather. His melancholy and tortured look she does not relate to her own lust and coarseness, she is insensitive to the fact that within her son's soul is a belief in love of the noblest kind, a unity of souls in the divine being, such as he had seen in his father:

> "So loving to my mother
> That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
> Visit her face too roughly.
>
> (I.2. ls. 139)

But she is still his own mother and it must have cost him not a little inner struggle to bring himself to give her a tongue - lashing

> "... Let not ever,
> The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom..."
>
> (III. 2. ls. 383)

Manoa, Samson's old father too, poses for the protagonist the urge for an unauthentic existence, of merely drifting along with the circumstances, of living a life of anonimity without the need to struggle in making any deliberate choice. He even goes to the extent of ingratiating himself with the Philistine lords in order to secure Samson's release:

"I already have made way
To some Philistine Lords, with whom to treat
About thy ransom..."

and in a most humiliating manner tells the chorus: "With supplication prone and father's tears..." He even advises Samson to choose:

"Self preservation to being self rigorous
Repent thy sin but if the punishment
Thou canst avoid, self preservation bids."

Gertrude's and Manoa's part respectively in Hamlet's and Samson's life symbolises the obtuseness of moral vision, the readiness to go to any length, even to compromise with evil, for the sake of worldly comfort and ease.

In surmounting these odds, both Hamlet and Samson are to prove themselves worthy of the task that is set before them proving their religious obligation. Indeed, how vigilant and unwavering the heroes of Hamlet and Samson Agonistes need to remain is aptly noted and described by Helen Gardner in the Business of Criticism.

"The soldier on guard, who cannot leave his post until he is relieved or given permission from above, is a metaphor of the soul in this world which comes very easily to Renaissance writers."7

Samson's and Hamlet's predicament represent man's constant struggle to hold each his personal fort of truth and

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7. The Business of Criticism, Helen Gardner, Oxford Paper backs 1963, p. 49.

integrity. His strength, endurance and loyalty is being constantly put to the test. Samson, unlike Hamlet had allowed himself to be swayed and overcome, bringing him to his present ignominy. Hence, his lament and constant self-flagellation over his failure.

> "How could I once look up or heave the head
> Who, like a foolish Pilot, have shipwrecked
> my vessel trusted to me from above
> Gloriously rigged, and for a word, a tear.
> Fool! have divulged the secret gift of God
> To a deceitful woman?"

And again,

> "What boots it at one gate to make defence,
> And at another let in the foe,
> Effiminately vanquished?"

That, however, relates to the past. As for the present, he is invulnerable in the face of threats and temptations.

The soldier in Hamlet, on the other hand, proves worthy of the status he's given. His enemies were not able to wrest the secret of his heart. And symbolic of his soldier - status he makes his friends swear to secrecy on his sword.

> "And lay your hand upon my sword
> Never to speak of this that you have heard
> Swear by my sword."
>
> (I. 5. ls. 158)

Hamlet's confrontation with the constricting power of evil is carried on with such clear-mindedness that it belies the 'antick disposition' which he assumes. He understands his moral responsibility as a fulfilment and an appeasement of his sense of justice for which he could have plunged his sword into his uncle when he found him kneeling and unguarded. But Shakespeare makes him remember that to kill when the object of wrath is engaged in prayer is no revenge but an act of grace.

> "...Am I then revenged
> To take him in the purging of his soul,
> When it is fit and season'd for his passage?
> No..."
>
> (III. 3. ls. 84)

Here we can see apparently contradicting moral refinements, that merge in Hamlet, for his vengeance to be fully justified and fulfilling, he does not go for a mere triumph of force but must ensure that the offender must not only be mortally injured and morally humiliated. His whole being as a man with his sense of honour and of scorn must be victorious. Thus his speech of the appropriateness of the time of his revenge:

> "When he is drunk, or asleep or in his rage,
> Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed,
> At gaming, swearing or about some act
> That has no relish or salvation in it,
> Then trip him that his heel may kick at heaven,
> And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
> As hell whereto, it goes."
>
> (III. 3. ls. 89)

Samson's grapplings with the evil that besets him contrast with Hamlet's on the point that his response to his moral responsibility to his God and his nation has, after his lapse taken second place to his despair and self-contempt. Bogged down by a sense of inadequacy for not being equal to the occasion he also broods over the inscrutability of God's ways:

> "Why was my breeding order'd and prescribed
> As of a person separate to God,
> Design'd for great exploits; if I must dye
> Betray'd, captiv'd, and both my eyes out,
> Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze;
> To grind in Brazen fetters under task
> With this Heav'n gifted strength?"

As long as Samson is in this state of self-pity and questioning, God seems to bide his time until Samson is purged of his whys' and wherefore's of his situation and realizes the need of a total surrender, belief and giving God the priority before anything else. Then only will understanding and a sense of fulfilment come.

In the 'closet scene' Hamlet's quick blind thrust through the arras which killed Polonius, is because, as he says, 'I took thee for thy better' which shows his unremitting vigilance with regard to the ghost's 'remember me'. There are no qualms in this instance, for if it is the king, he must have done with praying, and no longer in a state of grace. That Polonius is unwittingly killed is Hamlet's regret. And this unforeseen turn of events or contingency is, we can say, the first instance

when Hamlet realizes that there are instances in this life which cannot be rationalized nor their purpose understood. It is the time when he realizes that there is nothing in this world that can be explained in terms of forces and principles solely within this world; that there is a beyond, independent of which the world does not exist. Thus:

> "For this same lord,
> I do repent: but heaven hath pleased it so, ..."
>
> (III. 4. ls. 172)

Samson, on the other hand, never for a moment doubted the hand of Providence in his affairs, but for his questioning the 'contradictions' of God's 'edits' in relation to his life. He is weighed down by the despairing thoughts that he is the sole cause for advancing Dagon's praise to the derision, dishonour, and obloquy of his God, the consequences of which are:

> "..... scandal.
> To Israel, diffidence of God, and doubt
> In feeble hearts, propense enough before
> To waver, or fall off and joyn with Idols."

And this is his 'chief affliction, shame and sorrow'

> "The anguish of my soul, that suffers not
> Mine iei to harbour sleep, or thoughts, to rest."

His attempts to draw himself out of this quagmire of despondency take a first tottering step on the road to recovery when

he realizes that he is not indispensable to God and rids himself of any sense of his own importance in God's scheme of things; when he realizes his limits and God's omnipotence.

> "..... the strife
> with me hath end, all the contest is now
> 'Twixt God and Dagon...."

Hamlet's attitude to and dealings with the two friends turned spies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are in line with his own understanding of morality and religion. His Renaissance heritage, namely, his sturdy individualism, determines his moves, for in the face of appalling corruption, of Claudius' attempts to outwit him, he retains an authority over himself, forming independent decisions to fulfil his moral responsibility and appease his sense of honour. That both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern allow themselves to be Claudius's tools is reason enough for Hamlet to regard them as mere obstacles hindering him from achieving his goal. To be fair to Hamlet, his direct accusation of their hypocrisy is warning enough for them to extricate themselves from the favour of the king. His hostility towards their attempts to manoeuvre him under the guise of 'love' is seen when he directly charges Guildenstern with attempting to play on him as he would a pipe, and again when he calls Rosencrantz a 'sponge' of the king to his very face. There is no second thought on the desert that awaits them in England, as Hamlet expresses himself to Horatio:

"Why, man, they did make love to this employment;
They are not near my conscience; their defeat
Does by their own insinuation grow
'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
Between the pass and fell incensed points
Of mighty opposites."

(V. 2. ls. 57)

We note how awakened ~~is~~ Hamlet's sensibility is now to the hand of Providence in the detailed affairs of man. This is brought in with added emphasis when Hamlet ascribes his restlessness and ~~a~~ sense of fear, while on his voyage to England, to Providential protection which offered him the chance to thwart his uncle's design and end the dirty career of the spies.

"There is a divinity that shapes our end,
Rough hew them how we will. "

(V. 2. ls. 10)

Again, his possession of his father's signet, at this critical point of his life he ascribes to 'heaven being ordinant'.

While Hamlet does come round to develop belief in Providence, Samson is seen to fluctuate from certitude to questioning God and his purpose through him, who is now alienated and sterile. Samson is still lacking in resolution, conviction and patience to wait for the shape of the purpose that will eventually emerge. The following words:

"His pardon I implore; but as for life
To what end should I seek it?"

illustrate his inability to trust that his God can still use him even in his failure. Hence, his recurrent self chastisement and self-rage for his one moment of weakness which brought about his disastrous fall:

> "O impotence of mind in body strong!
> But what is strength without a double share
> Of wisdom, vast, unwieldy, burdensom,
> Proudly secure, yet liable to fall
> By weakest suttleties, not made to rule,
> But subserve where wisdom bears command."

Again:

> "O how I suffer
> She was not the prime cause, but I myself,
> Who, vanquished with a peal of words (O weakness!)
> Gave up my fort of silence to a woman."

Hamlet's psychic change which began after he had unwittingly killed Polonius, is firmly established within him by the time we come to the duel in the final act. His narrow escape from death in England only serves to strengthen and spur him on to the show down between him and Claudius who stands for sin and its corruption. His belief in a divine purpose in the universe makes headway against the forceful current of scepticism. Its slow emergence through many set backs and apparent failures is evident more to his inner self than to outer vision, so that the future can neither disturb nor surprise him. Hamlet seems to have gained an insight into a power that respects the freedom of the individual in his soul-ful strivings.

"Not a whit, we defy augury there's a
special providence in the fall of a sparrow.
If 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. Since no man has aught
of what he leaves, what is't to leave
betimes? Let be."

(V. 2. ls. 211)

The protagonist of Samson Agonistes progresses towards a complete restoration in a sluggish manner, the process being interspersed with despair and a sense of purposelessness. What good can come out of his present plight is something which Samson cannot pretend to see. Human nescience as distinguished from divine omniscience he has early in the play recognized.

"But peace, I must not quarrel with the will
Of highest dispensation, which here-in
Happ'ly had ends above my reach to know!"

But he needs to bring himself to believe that deeds of faith, virtuous deeds, can still be his to fulfil God's choice of him as His champion. At a moment of penitential agony, Dalila, his wife ~~to~~ offers him a new lease of good life, which he spurns to her face. His suffering in this instance serves to give him an insight into God's providential design which enables him to see his present outer enslavement as a means to achieve a purpose that his former inner enslavement had denied.

Then the encounter with Harapha, which provoked Samson to challenge the warrior thrice to a single combat inspires within Samson a renewed trust in God:

> "I know no spells, use no forbidden Arts
> My trust is in the living God who gave me
> At my nativity this strength..."

and

> "... these evils I deserve and more
> Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me
> Justly, yet despair not of his final pardon
> Whose ear is ever open; and his eye
> to re-admit the supplicant...."

Samson was all along rather regardless of God's righteousness even while realizing his own part in bringing about his tragic plight. In fact, it appears as though Samson's acknowledgement of his sin verges on injured pride.

> "Appoint not heavenly disposition, Father,
> Nothing of all these evils hath befall'n me
> But justly; I myself have brought them on,
> Sole Author I, sole cause..."

Samson's state of mind see-saws between harking back to the abdication of responsiblity causing his downfall and bitter acknowledgement of the justice of God's punishment. He further yearns that the omnipotent God in whom he believes should vindicate his cause in spite of his lapse. God's holy nature makes it impossible for him to overlook sin and forget to enforce just penalties for the infraction of his laws. Samson

appears to be weighing God's perfectness against human righteousness which is only partial, incomplete and derived. His father voices such conflicts when he says:

"Alas methinks when God hath chosen once
To worthiest deeds, if he through frailty err,
He should not so overwhelm, and as a thrall
Subject him to so foul indignities,
Be it but for honours sake of former deeds."

Such paradoxical musings on God lie behind Samson's effort to reconcile his present condition and the mission for which he was born and gifted with strength. His encounter with Harapha saw his pride pricked. He becomes testy and wrathful. The Chorus cautions him with exhortations to be patient and watchful. For in stubborness and pride lie the greatest dangers which man can procure for himself.

"It is no weakness for the wisest man
To learn when he is wrong, know when to yield
So, on the margin of a flooded river
Trees bending to the torrent live unbroken
While those that strain against it are snapped off."[8]

"But patience is more oft the exercise
Of saints, the trial of their fortitude,
Making them each his own Deliverer,
And Victor over all..."

—A timely caution for Samson who seems to be swayed by his emotions and passions. But his regeneration is still in the process even during his dialogue with the Philistine Officer who has come to take him to the Temple of Dagon. At this point

8. Antigone (Tr. E.F. Watling), Penguin Classics.

Samson is still weighing his finite comprehension of God against God's justice, he is still seeking for a solution to the apparent contradiction between God's justice and His goodness. Thus still holding on to his belief that his attempts at correct observances at this stage will spare him from further humiliation, he replies to the Philistine Officer thus:

> "Thou knowest I am an Ebrew, therefore tell them,
> Our Law forbids at this Religious Rites
> My presence, for that cause I cannot come."

But before the return of the officer, and in the course of his dialogue with the chorus, Samson appears to realize all of a sudden that God's being is unitary, it is not composed of a number of parts working harmoniously but simply one. The display of God's justice and goodness in a given situation may thus seem to override and contradict his earlier acts. This insight convinced Samson of God's goodness and his infinite wisdom even through the present contingency:

> "Yet that he may dispense with me or Thee
> Present in Temples at Idolatrous Rites
> For some important cause, thou needst not doubt."

This renewed faith in God is immediately succeeded by:

> "Some rouzing motions in me which dispose
> To something extraordinary my thoughts."

It is as though God signified to his champion his approval of this long waited return of faith.

So Samson's acquiesence to go along to the Temple of Dagon takes place with such an assurance that it heartens the Chorus into believing, hoping and praying:

> "Go and the Holy One
> Of Israel be thy guide
> To what may serve his glory best, and spread his name
> Great among the Heathen round.....
> be now a shield
> Of fire;
> Be efficious in thee now at need."

God will vindicate his own Name in whatever manner he sees fit.

We have in this chapter tried to sketch Hamlet's passage to what we would call providential philosophy and Samson's recovery of faith. It needs to be pointed out, however, that in Hamlet the religious temper is painfully slow of growth and makes itself unmistakably clear only towards the end, while Samson Agonistic is definitely conceived of and rendered as a religious play in which the supernatural background and a recognition of it are in evidence in the dramatic design from start to finish.

CHAPTER - III

THE CONCEPT OF MAN IN HAMLET AND SAMSON AGONISTES

After the discussion on the religious temper in Hamlet and Samson Agonistes, it is fitting to continue with a chapter which seeks to find out concept of man as found in the two plays. The underpin upholding the importance of human nature for both Milton and Shakespeare is the fact that man is not a static being but one who acts or functions. Man's function is what matters greatly, from whence an attempt to read his nature can be made.

Miltion's basic concept of man is Biblically founded. He believes that man has been created in the image and likeness of God. Paradise Lost provides repeated evidence of this assumption. In Samson Agonistes there is no specific instance to pin-point this basic concept of Milton, but the very subject matter of the play, its theocentric nature is enough to infer this concept to be basic.

That Shakespeare too follows the Biblical concept of man as a created being is seen when man is described as 'a piece of work' in Hamlet's speech:

> "What a piece of work is man how noble in reason; how infinite in faculty; in form and moving 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."
>
> (II. 2. ls. 303).

Prof. E.M.W. Tillyard's comments on this passage is:

> "This has been taken as one of the great English version of Renaissance humanism, and assertion of the dignity of man against the asceticism of medieval misanthropy. Actually, it is in the purest medieval tradition: Shakespeare's version of the orthodox encomia of what man created in God's image was like in his prolapsarian state of what ideally be a still capable of being. It shows Shakespeare placing man in the traditional cosmic setting between the angels and the beasts."1

This cosmic setting explains the constant conflict within man, between reason and passion and the many contraries ~~nesses~~ that make up man —one of which makes him capable of utter baseness and another of almost angelic perfection.

The Biblical account of the creation of man is as follows:

> "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them."
>
> (Genesis 1:27)

But in the preceeding verse the word 'image' is qualified and limited through the phrase 'after our likeness'.[2] This indicates that the emphasis is not on a direct correspondence between man and God. In fact, we can interpret the image of God in man as man being endowed with spiritual powers of

1. Elizabethan World Picture, E.M.W. Tillyard, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1975, Introductory, p. 12.
2. The Holy Bible, Genesis 1:27.

thought, communication and self-transcendence, powers which enable man to function as God's representative on earth, differentiating him from the non-human creation. This concept of man's origin would naturally indicate that man is only man as long as he remains true to his origin, i.e. to his creator, and that he sinks into subhuman beastly existence when he turns away from God and seeks to live without God, centred in himself.

That 'man' in Milton's Samson Agonistes and Shakespeare's Hamlet, is a depiction of a fallen creature, turned away from God, goes without saying. But in both the plays, man's struggling to regain his lost status is also evident, ~~that~~ but while Samson's struggle and ultimate victory will be seen to be distinct as it pertains to his Hebraic understanding of God, Hamlet's inner conflict stresses Renaissance humanism more than his one-to-one or personal and direct relationship to God. In this existential struggle man is seen in both Hamlet and Samson Agonistes not as a collective whole but as an individual. The lone figures of Hamlet and Samson, in the tumult of doubt, uncertainty and pain can be seen and appreciated as individuals. But this individuality again is co-related to the ideas of humanity and human relationship, one aspect of which is conjugal relationship.

The basic concept in both Milton and Shakespeare that man is a created being implies that he owes his existence not to chance or to himself but to God's creative activity, who made him the crown and centre of all creatures. This also purports that man was created not for leisure but for a purpose. Samson's own account of his birth supports this truth, although he questions its validity and worth in the face of his present plight:

> "Why was my breeding prescrib'd
> As of a person separate to God
> Design'd for great exploits;..."

Hamlet also expresses the purposefulness of existence:

> "What is a man,
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? a beast; no more
> Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and god-like reason
> To fust in us unused."
>
> (IV.4. ls. 33)

Now in reading and interpreting these concepts of man in Hamlet and Samson Agonistes we begin by trying to trace ideas of the nature of man such as are in line with the Biblical thought in this regard. The customary reflection on man in the dualistic terms of Greek philosophy in which the spiritual and material natures are sharply distinguished does not stand. The Bible, on which Milton and Shakespeare base their concept of

man, has no such dualism. A holistic view of man sees man as a vital unity of the 'soul' the 'spirit' the 'heart' and the 'flesh'. These psychological terms cannot be clearly defined as they would seem to overlap considerably. The 'soul' can be translated into various ways: life, soul or person. It is used to designate a person's vitality, a force which activates the mysterious principles of life, bound in and to a body. But this differs from the Greek concept of the soul: according to which man is a mortal and a material body containing the immortal and immaterial soul. Genesis 2:7 refers to this aspect of man. It is the stuff of life of a dynamic character. In Milton's Samson Agonistes we read of how Samson considers life and light to be synonymous and that light or life is in the soul.

> "Since light is so necessary to life,
> And almost life itself if it be true
> That light is in the soul,
> She all in every part..."

Hamlet too expresses the life and soul of man as seen in man's dynamism and vitality:

> "...how noble in reason! how infinite in
> faculty!
> In form and moving 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..."
>
> (II. 2. ls. 303)

The attributive adjective used to described man's reason, faculty, his form and moving, his action, his apprehension and his place in creation, suggests the pulsation of a force – the soul, which is responsible for manifesting the qualities of nobility, infinity, well-formedness. And again, it is the soul in man, with its inherent angel-likeness, its God-consciousness its beauty and perfection, which is the stamp of man.

The 'Spirit' of man refers to the immaterial part of man's being, the organ of his personal spiritual life. Its source is God, for it is the breath He breathed in man when first created. Man's 'spirit' is also the psychical aspect of life including the whole range of man's emotional and mental life. Samson's spirit moved with anguished, anger, frustration, and remorse, is the vibrating chord whose sound is heard pulsating throughout Samson Agonistes. On the day of the feast of Dagon he was given a short respite from labour in the mills away from which he seeks – to find some case,

> "Ease to the body some, none to the mind,
> from restless thoughts deadly swarm
> Or Hornets arm'd; no sooner found alone,
> But rush upon me thronging and present
> Time past, what once I was, and what am now."

The torments of regretful thoughts toss his spirit into utter despair as he seeks to justify himself or sees the

justification of his plight. At one time he almost blame God and at another he is repentant of such rampant thoughts.

In conversation with a friend the once mighty Samson is bowed down with a spirit of shame! ... confused with shame,

"How could I once look up, or heave the head,
Who like a foolish pilot has shipwreck't
My vessels trusted to me from above...
... tell me friends
Am I not sung and proverb'd for a fool
In every street, do they not say, how well
Are come upon him his desert!..."

The self-contempt for his weakness finds expression in:

"O indignity, O blot
To honour an religion! servil mind
Rewarded well with servil punishment!
The base degree to which I now am fall'n,
These rags, this grinding, is not yet so base
As my former servitude, ignoble,
Unmanly, ignominous: infamous,
True slavery, and that blindness worse than this,
That saw not now degenerately I serv'd."

With the deprivation of sight and strength he feels even the will to live gradually ebbing away from him.

"So much I feel my genial spirits droop,
My hopes all flat, nature within me seems
In all her functions weary of herself."

In such strains Samson's spirit is like a see-saw expressing the condition of his inner being in words, bitter,

regretful, vengefully angry. His rising hope for an assurance in God's vindication alternates with a relapse into helplessness though finally he is borne by a rousing motion that restores him unforseeably to his God who, he thought, had quite foresaken him.

Let us turn to Hamlet

Hamlet's spirit is melancholic and sits brooding within him. When admonished for his continuous wearing of 'nighted colours' and what 'seems' to be his expression of unmitigated grief, he hits back sarcastically and his rejoinder reveals his innermost spirit "within (him) which passeth show." The anguish and turmoil of his spirit breaks forth immediately in his first soliloquy.

> "O! that this too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw and resolve itself into dew."

That his spirit is depressed and melancholic and open to demoniac influence, is a possibility that Hamlet is aware of. Thus his initial scepticism about his father's ghost moved him to test his uncle's guilt (II.2 ls. 590).

> "I'll have these players
> Play something like the murder of my father
> Before mine uncle; I'll observe his looks
> I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench
> I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
> Maybe the devil; and the devil hath power
> To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps

> Out of my weakness and melancholy
> As he is very potent with such spirits
> Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
> More relative than this, the play's the thing
> Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king."

Thus we note that in both plays the protagonist's spirit undergoes variation of changes, tossed up or turned down by the particular situation he finds himself in.

Another of the anthropological terms is 'heart' to which is credited the chief of all psychical functions. In the heart is said to be the seat of feelings of intellect and of the will. But in its usage we again note overlappings of meanings to differentiate or distinguish it from the 'soul' or the 'life'. The heart of man is within him as contrasted to his outward appearance. It sums up all that is of the inward man as opposed to the outward tangible man. Its other function, which we tend to localize in the head or the brain are ethical response and religious knowledge.

A verse of the text from which the tragedy of Samson is taken, Judges 16:15 refers to the heart as the basis of the will and intellect. Dalila accuses Samson of not loving her:

> "...How can you say, 'I love you, when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me wherein your great strength lies."

Listening to his heart's dictates, mistaking it as 'lawful from my former act, "And the same end". Samson again chose a

wife from among his enemies' women to whom he says, 'I yielded and unlocked her all my heart' and who later proved to be a trap and the cause of his downfall. This he laments to the sympathetic ears of the Chorus. Grieved feelings awoke inwardly to assault his heart as his friends mention the approach of his aged father, Manoa:

> "Ay me, another inward grief awak't
> With mention of that name renews the assualt."

Samson's final resolve to accede to the Philistine Lords' demand that he appear in the festival resulted after much deliberations with his friends and within his heart.

His emotions, feelings of enmity towards his captors, arising out of a difference of beliefs, prompted his initial refusal to comply. Then the unforeseen development moved his heart to realize that his God being above all gods, He must have a purpose fulfilled even through Samson's presence in a Dagon worshipping feast.

> "Yet that he may dispense with me or thee
> Present in Temples at Idolatrous Rites
> For some important cause, thou need'st not doubt."

And then he feels in his heart that which finally bends his will to meet the situation at hand

> "I begin to feel
> Some rouzing motions in me which dispose
> To something extraordinary my thoughts."

The heart's dictates are hearken'd to in the case of the protogonist of Samson Agonistes even as they are in Hamlet.

Angered and perplexed at his mother's hasty remarriage to his uncle, Prince Hamlet instinctively felt the perverseness of the union and its evil outcome. But in his heart must he hide all that he feels and with his heart he resolved to hold his tongue.

> "It is not nor it cannot come to good,
> But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue."
>
> (I.2. ls. 158)

King Claudius and Polonius, spying on Hamlet's 'chance' meeting with Ophelia learn something if not fully of the turmoil within Hamlet's heart. Love, contrary to Polonius' assertions, is ~~being~~ ruled out by King Claudius, as being the cause of Hamlet's 'malady' -

> "Love! his affections do not that way tend....
> There's something in his soul
> O'er which his melancholy sits on brood...
> This something settled matter in his heart
> Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus
> From fashion of himself."
>
> (III. 1. ls. 163)

This is king Claudius' observation.

In Hamlet's heart is hidden the why's and where for's of his 'antick disposition' and from within his heart will he resolve what steps to take for encountering his uncle.

Of Claudius's heart, too, we have a glimpse, during his attempt at prayer. It is a heart troubled by murder and desirous of pardon but reluctant to release the 'effects' for which the murder was committed. It is surely and obviously in a 'wretched state' a 'bosom black as death' and a 'heart with strings of steel'.

The plots and counterplots that go on in the play, Hamlet, further point to the heart as a 'hidden man'. Hamlet's thoughts and feelings arising out of the meditation in his heart, condemned himself as a coward, 'a dull and muddy mettled rascal' who so far has not made any progress in avenging his father's murder, but simply:

> "Unpacked (his) heart with words
> And fall a cursing, like a very drab,
> A scullion."
>
> (II. 2 ls. 581)

Again as he reflects on the ambition and courage of Fortinbras who dared danger and death to win 'an egg shell' of a land, Hamlet's heart again smote him to a renewed determination to get his revenge for his father's murder.

"O from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth."

(IV. 4. ls. 65)

Then we note king Claudius and Laertes plotting against Hamlet's life, the former to ensure the security of his life and kingdom and the latter to avenge for his father, Polonius' death and his sister, Ophelia's madness. As they plot and plan, the cunning ingenuity of the heart is seen. Using Laertes' anger for his own ends, Claudius subtly egged him on to draw conclusions with Hamlet, by alternately flatterring and questioning the constancy of his zeal and love for his father. Thus moved and instigated, Laertes adds his own unscrupulous, dishonourable tricks to bring about Hamlet's sure death.

Thus the heart sums up the inward man 'the hidden person' (1 Peter 3:4) in opposition to the 'flesh', the fourth in our study of the parts of man's psychological make up. This part clearly denotes the material nature of man's being which sets man apart from God and marks him out as a creature. With reference to the human body, Psalm 16:9 & 84:2, regards it as the seat of pain. It is weak and perishable, a contrast to God whose power is set forth in Psalm 78.39. But nowhere in the Bible is it set forth that the flesh or body is sinful or the passion of the spirit.

This aspect of the flesh can also be noted in Milton's and Shakespeare's plays. In Samson Agonistes there are instances of the flesh as a seat of pain with its need for rest after hard labour which Samson yearns for.

"... I seek
This unfrequented place to find some ease
Ease to the body some..."

Its inherent weakness is seen when Samson succumbed to his wife's caresses and cajolings to the extent of letting down his guard of vigilance protecting the secret of his strength. In his own words that he flung at Dalila, he had:

"unbosom'd all my secrets to thee
... over power'd
By thy request, who could deny thee nothing..."

Of the perishable, easily destroyed human body, Samson's physical condition in the prison at Gaza is example enough. The Philistines could have put him to death right away, but they chose to use his physical strength minus his eyes. That they chose only to blind him and thus destroy him more than death can, underscores the weakness and perishability of the body. Loss of sight intensifies Samson's depression for he realises how deprived he is - 'various objects of delight annull'd'; how humiliated he is - 'inferior to the vilest, now become of man or worm...' how exposed and helpless and dependent he has become -

"Expos'ed
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse and wrong,
Within doors or without, still as a fool,
In power of others, never in my own..."

That the flesh is also a seat of spiritual expression is seen when Samson refuses to accept the Philistine Lord's order for him to demonstrate his strength in honour of Dagon. For he considers his body which contains his returning strength, 'a consecrated gift', not to be abused or prostituted for the glory of idols. Answering the Chorus's apprehension of 'More Lordly thund'ring' he says:

"Shall I abuse this consecrated gift
Of strength, again returning with my hair
After my great transgression, so requite
Favour renew'd, and add a greater sin
By prostituting holy things to idols,
A Nazarite in place abominable
Vaunting strength in honour to this Dagon?
Besides, how vile, contemptible, ridiculous
What act more execrably unclean prophane?"

Samson also considers his body and the strength in it to be God-given:

"My trust is in the Living God who gave me
At my Nativity this strength, diffus'd
No less through all my sinews, joints and bone."

In Shakespeare's Hamlet the flesh as part of man's psychological component is also seen with an emphasis on its weakness, its instability and infirmity. In Act I Sc 2, Claudius' weakness is seen in his intemperance - making

everything that happens to him, an occasion to drink. When Hamlet agrees to his mother's request to stay in Denmark and not to leave for Wittenberg, King Claudius finds it a fit occasion for a drink. It is this intemperance, one of the characteristics of King Claudius, which arouses Hamlet's disgust, a sentiment he expresses to Horatio and Marcellus while awaiting the appearance of the Ghost:

> "This heavy headed revel east and west
> Makes us traduced and tax'd of other nations
> They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase
> Soil our addition."
>
> (I. 4. ls. 17)

The weakness of the flesh is also seen in Claudius' ambition to satisfy his desire for power by doing away with his own brother, in so unscrupulous a way - that it revolts us by its unnatural character. To make his position secure he does not hesitate to make sure that Hamlet too should be done away with through a poisoned cup of wine and Laertes' venomed rapier point.

The 'flesh' in Hamlet is also a pronounced aspect of man's life when we consider Gertrude, the Prince's mother. She can be compared to Samson's father Manoa, for both symbolise the obtuseness of moral vision. While Manoa represents the spirit of compromise with evil for the sake of worldly comfort and ease, Gertrude, is ~~also~~ self-indulgent, easy going and grossly sensual.

The four components of the human psyche have, as mentioned before, within them various psychical faculties. In our attempt to trace their manifestation in the characters of both Milton and Shakespeare's work may be noted how these faculties within the soul, the spirit, the heart and the flesh, act and interact among themselves resulting in glimpses of human nature as depicted in the characters of the play. And the conclusion one can draw about man's nature is that, it is basically emotional.

Alur Janakiram in his study of the works of some of the representative ethical and psychological writers of the Renaissance - Reason and Love in Shakespeare: A Selective Study shows that these writers have not split the human psyche into four components of soul, spirit, heart and flesh. They have, in fact, taken the human soul as consisting of all the faculties of heart, spirit and flesh. The two approaches are not at variance with each other, for both recognise that what dictates man's conduct is the outcome of the conflict of the faculties of reason or understanding and passion through the interaction of other psychical faculties of imagination and will. The Christian Humanist view (of Shakespeare's time) which places man in the middle state explains the constant tug of war within man's self to maintain a balance or a harmonious relation between passion and reason. Thus there is a constant struggle for a harmonious relation of the faculties with reason, on the

one hand and an attempt to topple reason altogether, on the other, thereby allowing passion to reign supreme. Prelapsarian man had no such conflict within him. Janakiram quotes Pierrede la Primaudaye to support this view from his French Acadaemie.

> "So that before man sinned,
> The image of God was such in
> him, that there was a perfect agreement
> of all the powers and virtues of the
> soul, between God and him, neither
> was there any resistance against him
> either in his heart or in his will,
> but a sound and perpetual concord and
> consent."3

The role of imagination in determining human conduct is said to be both negative and positive. But human nature being basically emotional, it appears that the negative aspect of this faculty is more pronounced. Milton in Paradise Lost Bk IV (pp. 801-803) reflects on the vulnerability of the imagination to the temptation of evil spirit:

> "Assaying by his devilish act to reach
> The organ of her fancy, with them forge
> Illusion as he lists, phantasm and dreams."

Francis Bacon too, recognises the role imagination plays in human life:

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3. Quoted from French Acadaemie, Pierre de la Primaudaye (Part II, 1618 ed. p. 439) by Alur Janakiram Reason and Law in Shakespeare: A Selective Study.

> "For we see that, in matters of Faith and Religion, we raise our Imagination above our reason, which is the cause why Religion sought even access to the mind by similitude, hyper, parable, vision dreams. And again, in all persuasion that are wrought by eloqouence, and other impressions of the nature, which do paint and disguise the true appearance of things, the chief recommendation unto Reason is from the Imagination."[4]

Imagination can stir up the external senses or man's flesh when reason does not rule over it, and when it stands against reason in alliance with the will or passion.

Man's will is not beholden to any faculty. Its freedom of choice is an inherent part, a divine legacy. In the prelapsarian state, when one faculty depended on another the will's choice was of the principle of good. But lapsarian man's will is more inclined towards passion and satisfying its fleshly appetites resulting in a disharmony within the soul and between man and man. So man has moral responsibility, accountable for his own deeds, good or bad.

Man's passions or 'perturbations' are the faculties of the soul which if indulged in would disturb the soul and cause many problems. Passions are created blind and are made to be responsive to and excited by what is introduced to them through the senses. It is only the perversity that has enveloped the entire human psyche after the fall; that causes

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4. The Advance of Learning, Bk II Everyman's Library,

the expression of the passions to be vehement and violent, and malignant to the soul's health. Although St. Augustine in his The City of God does not totally consider all passions as bad,[5] yet for the purpose of this study the negative aspects are to be emphasised.

These various aspects of the human psyche, point to the need of keeping rationality in human conduct by enabling reason to operate duly in all situations. Again what emerges from this limited study of the human psyche is that man is different from all other creatures holding an eminent place in creation and he is so placed because of his intellectual faculties and his moral sense which are denied to the brutish creation.

The sense of the right and wrong in the abstract is peculiar to man. He has in him an inward approbation of the one and disapprobation of the other, even when human nature is found at its worst. This explains the sense of shame a man feels in secret for any misdeeds and also the promptings for open confession. Claudius in Shakespeare's Hamlet is seen in this condition of awareness, a mental blushing in solitude because of his secret crime. How fast Claudius is held in passion's grip is greatly enhanced when his soliloquy reveals his cleared-eyed awareness of his standing before heaven:

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5. City of God, St. Augustine, translated from Greek by Marcus Dods, New York, Random House, 1950.

"O, my offence is rank, it smells, to heaven.
It halt the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder."

(III.3. ls. 36)

Claudius is reluctant to acquiese in the dictates of reason though his moral sense, would bid him do so in order to ease the inward disquiet. Reason in Claudius is drowned under the flood of his passion for the throne and the queen. The moral sense, the need to make a clean breast of everything, which is so essential to the nature of man is being squashed within Claudius' heart, because he fears the consequences that any public knowledge of his offence would bring upon him — ignominy and maybe, death. But more than anything else he fears the loss of all that he had gained:

"O! What form of prayer
Can serve my turn? Forgive me my foul murder?
That cannot be since I am
Still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition and my queen."

(III. 3 ls. 51)

Further, it can be noted ~~that~~ through this soliloquy that Claudius' reason is blinded by his own passion when he satisfied this moral sense by this private confession of his crime. This is sheer delf-deceit, an attempt to salve his conscience.

Laertes' passion for revenge for his father's death and his sister's madness could have been viewed with sympathy but for the fact that he proves to be as adept in villainy as Claudius. This is seen when both are contriving to murder Hamlet.

"I'll anoint my sword".

This one single touch takes away our sympathy for Laertes. His design is baser than the king's, Reason in him appears to take second place to action. And of conscience there is hardly any. But at the end of the play, his moral sense overcomes his evil, for he disowns Claudius and exchanges forgiveness with Hamlet. Reason and understanding that make Laertes capable of this inward compunction and action contrast him sharply with Claudius who seems nearer to being a brute for lacking the same.

In contrast to these two passion-controlled characters of Shakespeare's play, Hamlet the hero, stands out to a certain extent as an embodiment of reason, even though his delay in wreaking vengeance for his father's murder. That reason through the moral sense is superior in Hamlet can be seen when he needs to 'catch the conscience of the king' in order to ensure that it is no damned ghost that instigates him to acts of violence. In him we see the restraint which keeps him from plunging into revenge too precipitately. But, of course, the

contrariness of human nature cannot be denied in Hamlet too, for to hold him up as a paragon of all that is reasonable, is to deny man's imperfectibility and finiteness. Shakespeare's man is so full of humanness, that no other way seems right but that he should act or react according to his nature. A touch of evil or sin, the existence of which is an accepted fact, and to which man is so prone and ready to give way is discernable in Hamlet too, when we note his apparent ruthlessness in sending his school friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths. It appears that within Hamlet's psyche, reasons why's and wherefor's are on this occasion squashed to silence, when his will and his contemptuousness for his friends, formed an alliance against reason's plea for consideration of the duo's obsequieseness to the king. However, it may be suggested that in this instance Hamlet acts as one who is driven by Providence, i.e. one in whom a higher power operates with impervious rigours. The passion-driven Hamlet, is again seen in the graveyard scene when he is struck with the realization that he has lost Ophelia for good. His rantings as he grapples with Laertes show passion submerging reason.

> "Evil affects not only Hamlet, but all the other characters too. We can see here the Elizabethan idea that the link in the chain of being, in nature and the elements also links man to man in the unfolding events, so that in 'Hamlet' that the characters work each other's destruction because of the evil influences with which they are surrounded."6

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6. Form and Meaning in Drama, H.D.F. Kitto, London, Methuen, 1960, p. 262.

Reason manifested through the moral sense in Shakespeare's Hamlet appears in Milton's Samson Agonistes as man's consciousness of his God. Samson, God's champion, failed because his passions deafened him from hearing the true dictates of reason and blinded his true perception thereby taking him over the edge and into the abyss of ruin. Samson's lapse, of course, signifies man's estrangement from God. Meant to be together, man and God find themselves apart. The reason - passion antithesis in the case of Samson is more profoundly highlighted because of the extraordinary strength with which he is gifted and the words of the Chorus aptly express this truth:

> "O mirror of our fickle state,
> Since man on earth unparallel'd!
> The rarer thy example stands,
> But how much from the top of wondrous glory,
> Strongest of mortal man,
> To lowest pitch of object fortune thou art fall'n."

Through Samson's personality we see the ascendancy of unleashed and misapplied emotions in man. Emotions are dangerous if they are not channelled and directed by the guiding hand of reason. So long as Samson is aware that his strength has its source in God, there runs through his spirit certain basic loyalties to his clan, his tribe and within his limitations, to God. And this guarantees a wholesome use of his strength as that 'intimate impulse' which urged him to marry the Philistine woman of Timna, whereby he believed God

would make 'occasions' against the Philistines. And on the occassion when he was called by his captors to display his strength in honour of Dagon, he acquiesed because he began to feel:

> "Some rouzing motion in me dispose
> To something extraordinary my thoughts."

His strength, as the Chorus says, 'Might have subdued the Earth' and 'Universally crown'd with highest praises' if only 'virtue was her mate'. The telling and retelling of how powerful Samson was, would stir the hearts of the Israelites as when Milton refers to Samson's shrine:

> "Thither shall all the valiant your resort,
> And from his memory inflame their breasts
> To matchless valour, adventures high."

But the picture of strength is stained, because it is a strength which is utterly undisciplined. It is a strength which lies at the disposal of his emotions. This strength could not protect him from himself. In fact, it can be said that his strength made him blind to the slavery of his passion for Dalila. His passions raged within him, making him careless of the high gift of God. Dalila, a name now synonymous with deceit and treachery, used her feminine wiles to prod him towards the abyss. The vigilance of reason was gradually eroded by – 'a peal of words' in the form of 'flattering prayers and sighs and 'amorous reproaches'. As he himself puts it:

"At times when men seek most repose and rest,
I yielded and unlock'd her all my heart."

For his fall Samson bewailed his lack of wisdom. His immeasured strength outweighs his wisdom and so he says, 'These two proportioned ill drove me perverse'. It appears as if Samson would place the blame on God so that the Chorus admonishes him - 'Tax not divine disposal'. Samson seems to have expected God to take all the initiatives to keep this relation alive and strong. The need for wisdom to carry out God's purpose through him is belatedly felt, for while he had his strength, Samson felt self-sufficient to the extent that he was willing to please the passion of his life - Dalila, by divulging to her the secret of his strength, the weakening of reason's vigilance through indulgence, Samson describes to his father in the following words:

"Then swollen with pride into the snare I fell
Of fair fallacious looks, venereal trains
Soften'd with pleasure and life
At length to lay my head and hallow'd pledge
Of all my strength in lap
Of a deceitful concubine who shore me
Like a tame weather, all my precious fleece."

How easy it is for man to lose his consciousness of God, understood as reason's guiding hand, is so clearly illustrated here. The breach of the vow of secrecy caused Samson to be alienated from God. And it is this alienation which created a vacuum within him, a vacuum which is the ache of

his entire being. The healing of their estrangement is what Samson yearns for. The bitter regret for the dishonour he brought to God, speaks of his yearning for forgiveness and for rejuvenation. This yearning for God is an inherent part of post lapsarian man. The inadequacy man feels within himself, the need to depend on a power greater than himself urges man to seek out God. As man yearns for God he underneath it all realizes that God is willing at any time to return. But what He's waiting for is man's total response to him. It is only when Samson became truly aware of ~~the~~ his total dependence upon God that God can have use for him.

The state of total dependence on God came to Samson in a moment of realization that God being God, cannot be limited nor comprehended by puny man's mind. For suddenly he tells the Chorus:

> "Yet that he may dispense with me or thee
> Present in Temples at Idolatrous Rites
> For some important cause, thou needes not doubt."

Throughout Samson Agonistes the protagonist$ laments his weakness and his fall. But along side the strain of remorse is also his thought that to be regenerated is to try and earn it through his own effort. When he ceases to be influenced by his own likes and dislikes and preferences he realizes that God desires him to do all his will without any reservation on Samson's part.

The foregone discussion on the nature of man in both Milton and Shakespeare's work points to the fact that by reason of the complexity of his nature and the diversity of pulls and counter pulls man is always in a state of tension. But it is seen at the same time that this mental tension is necessary to make man a responsible creature he was meant to be. Reason, the prime faculty of man, is open to threats and challenges and runs the risk of being undermined and overthrown by passions. It is insecure and precarious, but capable of assertion and recovery.

CHAPTER - IV

HAMLET'S ENCOUNTER WITH EVIL

The serpent as a literary image has the weight of a whole tradition behind it. The serpent was the subtlest of God's creatures in Eden and caused incalculable damage to the human pair. It stands for guile and a frightening destructive potential. It undermines order, 'Degree' by covert means. It has fell designs and a glozing tongue. It is the archetypal subverter. It is the archetypal forger of meretricious lies.

> "And the great dragon was cast out,
> That old serpent called the devil,
> And satan which deceiveth the whole world;
> He was cast out into the earth
> And his angels were cast out with him."
>
> (Revelation 12:9)

The Ghost's references to Claudius exploit the traditional conception of the Devil in full richness of detail. Its cunning and deceit, its lasviciousness - all this is overtly suggested:

> "Ah, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
> With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,
> O wicked wits, and gifts that have the power
> So to seduce - won to his shameful lust
> She will of my most seeming virtuous queen."
>
> (I. 5. ls. 41)

The Ghost talks of Claudius' lewdness courting Gartrude in a shape of heaven. The royal bed of Denmark has become

"A couch for luxury and damned incest."

Marlowe's dramatization of the Devil possessing Faustus' soul readily comes to mind. Fuastus is depicted as savouring the sight of the Seven Deadly Sins. His lasciviousness is continually emphasised. Milton's epic realization of the vice of lechery in all its hideousness can perhaps be equally pertinently recalled here:

"Belial came last, than whom a spirit more lewd
Fell not from heaven, or more gross to love
vice for itself
... who filled
With lust and violence the house of God?
In courts and palaces he also reigns,
And in luxurious cities..."

(Paradise Lost Bk. I)

"On the other side up rose belial,
In act more graceful and humane,
A fairer person lost not heaven;
For dignity composed, and high exploit,
But all was false and hollow through his tongue
Dropped Manna, and could the worse appear
The better reason, to perplex and dash maturest
councels.
For his thoughts were low -
To vice industrious, but to nobler deeds
Timorous and slothful, yet he pleased the ear,
And with persuasive accent thus began."

(Paradise Lost Bk. II)

In the person of Claudius is realized the hoary tradition of evil seeking to possess the soul of mankind here

represented by Hamlet. The plausibility of evil has been the greatest snare of man. Claudius' plausibility is indeed decisive for the unwary and grimly disturbing for the discerning mind. By reason of the 'witchcraft of wit?' the evil has already made a conquest of the world — a conquest which it is now seeking to consolidate and expand. Hamlet is the only refractory element which has to be subdued and brought to subjection. The alien recalcitrance of Hamlet has to be qonquered. And to this effect it employs all the plenary resources of its wit.

Hamlet scents the approach and closing in of evil and the forces in its pay. The king's opening speech is a masterpiece of rhetorical virtuousity designed with the utmost deliberation to conceal his real self and project the image of a judicious, public spirited ruler who has had to battle with his conscience to mute the anguish and cry of bereavement in the interest of state affairs which must be given precedence over private grief.

Polonius, to prove his indispensibility to the king, whose mind misgives an account of Hamlet's 'transformation' takes it upon himself gratuitously to play the eaves-dropper whether the prince is closetted with Ophelia or Gertrude. He has already proffered his services to elicit the cause of Hamlet's distemper.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been commissioned to ply Hamlet with a view to fishing out his secret. The evil is triumphant, for it has won acceptance by an unsuspecting world; in fact, it has been emboldened by the genuflection it has received. Nevertheless, it is not complacent, it is wary. Its agents are up and about. Hamlet is encircled, hemmed in.

What does he do seeing himself imperilled? What he does constitute peremptory, yet artful gesture of his beleagured self. If Claudius can muster his rhetoric and further ensure that Hamlet is watched and spied upon, should Hamlet just cave in? Or should he not attempt to hoist Claudius with his own petard? Rooted in and nourished at once by the popular and classical traditions, a Renaissance prince has his own formidable expertise to draw upon and bring into play, Hamlet chooses the idiom and the role of the antic jester weilding the twin weapons of irony ('Dry Mock') and sarcasm ('The Bitter Taunt'). It is the role of one who smacks your conscience, exposes your pretentions and, as it were, flays you alive. As a supposed lunatic, Hamlet, actually performs the function of an enraged, yet witty critic of society — functions that have been traditionally assigned to and performed, at different levels and to varying purposes, by the rustic fool in folk games or the vice or clown of the popular stage. Hamlet, in

this role, marshals such a rich and varied fare that he proves more than a match for his adversary. His manifest training in rhetoric and reasoning (so characteristic of the Renaissance) now stands him in excellent stead and comes as grist to his mill. He focuses unsparingly on the abuses and deceptions of the court. His satiric fury does not spare the king while it falls squarely on Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, on Osric, on his mother and on Ophelia. The subtle and mordant with that he manipulates simply disconcerts and bewilders. To their bewilderment and dismay, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discover what a hard nut Hamlet can be and is. So far from being able to lead him by the nose and unravel his secret, they are driven to the wall and made to give themselves away ('My Lord we are sent for'). Polonius has to pay for his misplaced self-confidence and curiosity with his very life. The king takes alarm. Instead of his being able to find Hamlet's secret, Hamlet snapped up his. Hamlet has proved to the hilt that he can spy more successfully on those people who had been spying on him. Keeping his own secret fast secure, he pries into the king's conscience and make a capital discovery.

Through gibing and mockery and ridicule, through punning and quibbling, and what is more, through the actions accompanying his simulated madness Hamlet is strenuously at work illuminating in the process the ugliness and iniquity of a civilization which is nearly beyond redemption. He sees and makes us see the collapse of his ideal the irretrievable decadence of a

once radiant culture. Hamlet sketches for us the world in which he is more an alien than a native. For, this is no longer the world he was born into and in which he was brought up. The culture to which he was born has been displaced and dislodged; it can now only be summoned from memory and invoked for the purpose of defining today's world which differs from the remembered milieu as might differ from today, as Tophet from Heaven. The world in which he is spiritually oppressed and in pain is the world in which men and women have abdicated reason - the prime human faculty (in fact, the faculty which ensures man's kinship with the divine) and who have sunk into the realm of perversion and bestiality.

Hamlet is a puzzle to Claudius who is no puzzle to Hamlet. Hamlet disturbs Claudius continually, robbing him of his peace and composure. He does not know why Hamlet behaves the way he does and can only attribute it all to his 'madness'. He suspects the 'madness' to be a sort of smokescreen but just cannot get behind it. Hamlet tears unto Claudius who can only guess at his tormentor's motives, but his guessing does not go far enough. His suspicions are aroused and he is continually on his guard. He is sorely distracted. Hamlet is like a malignant growth on his body.

"Like the hectic in my blood he rages."

Yet he cannot touch Hamlet, for he enjoys the immunities of a lunatic, of a licenced jester-cum fool. Beside, he is the darling of the people though they may not quite understand him. One who had pursued Hamlet in devious ways finds himself pursued. Claudius now meditates Hamlet's physical removal from the scene. But even this last fell scheme of his goes awry.

We shall now look at the text for our purpose is to see the characteristic mode of Hamlet's action — a mode of action which strike terror into the hearts of all those who are ranged against him. His calculated postures and the incredible verbal legerdemain subtly geared to intensify the effect of those postures are deadly hits causing confusion in the ranks of the enemy.

Let us see how Hamlet accosts Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the first time they meet in the play.

Hem: My excellent good friends. How dost thou, Guildenstern?
Ah, Rosencrantz. Good lads, how do ye both?

Ros: As the indifferent children of the earth.

Guil: Happy in that we are not over happy.
On fortune's cap we are not the very button.

Ham: Nor the soles of her shoe?

Ros: Neither my Lord.

Ham: Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?

Guil: Faith her privates we.

Ham: In the secret parts of fortune? O most true; she is a strumpet. What's the news?

(II. 2. ls. 223)

This is an excellent specimen of Elizabethan punning — specially the kind of punning which we associate with Elizabethan fools. It derives from the long tradition of verbal acrobatics, of getting the most out of words in a witty combat — a keen attitude of mind and a zestful habit that had received a peculiar impetus from the sustained and widespread training in logic and rhetoric as part of Renaissance culture. It speaks of the zest (that had gradually cut across the barrier of classes) for the racy tang and the salty savour of debate where no holds are barred. Demonstrating a kind of verbal pugilism Hamlet tells his erstwhile friends where they now truly belong — the slimy world of moral promiscuity, thus putting them in their place. The traditional medieval image of fortune as an inconstant woman - now smiling, now frowning and promiscuously bestowing favours - is made the most of in an argument that calls attention to the very heart of the play.

How does Hamlet argue with his friends-turned-sleuths? There are surprises almost every step for them as

the Prince goes about ruthlessly establishing his view of things and tearing to shreds the logic of his opponents.

Ham: ... Let me question more in particular: What have you my good friends, deserved at the hands of fortune, that she sends you to prison hither?

Guil: Prison, my Lord?

Ham: Denmark is a prison.

Ros: Then is the world one.

Ham: A goodly one; in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons, Denmark being one O' the worst.

Ros: Why, then, your ambition makes it one; 'tis too narrow for your mind.

Ham: O God. I could be bounded in a nut-shell and count myself a King of infinite space were it not that I have had bad dreams.

Guil: Which dreams, indeed, are ambitions; for the very substance of the very ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

Ham: A dream itself is but a shadow.

Ros: Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow.

Ham: Then are our beggars' bodies and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars' shadows. For, by my fay, I cannot reason.

(II. 2. ls. 237)

Well, indeed, he has reasoned devastatingly, leaving his opponents' quivers empty. By a dexterous turn of logic he has pointed the absurdity and hollowness of their wit. He shows how spurious their logic is. Indeed, they are the agents of a spurious authority.

In the meantime Hamlet has made his points. If 'the world's grown honest' as Rosencrantz puts it then the Prince has no doubt that the doomsday is near. And Denmark is a prison. The world has grown frightfully dishonest, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern being evidence enough, and he is in pain being a prisoner in that world. He lets them know that he is alive to being "most dreadfully attended". His claustrophobia does not need further pointing out.

However, he has clean got the better of the spies. He now brings the force of his personality to bear upon them in such an irresistable manner that they see no way but to confess their mission.

"Guil: - My Lord we were sent for."

With savage sarcasm and withering scorn Hamlet tells his pursuers what they are worth, what he thinks of them, and how, no matter how keen the thrust of their endeavour, he can keep his counsel.

Ham: Why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil?

Guil: O, my Lord, if my duty be too bold my love is too unmannerly.

Ham: I do not understand that. Will you play upon this pipe?

Guil: My Lord, I cannot.

Ham: I pray you.

Guil: Believe me I cannot.

Ham: I do beseech you.

Guil: I know no touch of it my Lord.

Ham: 'Tis as easy as lying: govern these ventages with your finger thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops.

Guil: But these I cannot command to any utterance of harmony: I have not the skill.

Ham: Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me. You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from the lowest note to the top of my compass: and there is much music, excellent voice in this little organ; yet cannot you make it speak. S'blood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me you cannot play upon me.

(III. 2. ls.337)

Hamlet can be fretted but not played upon. We shall see how Hamlet can both fret Claudius and play upon him. In the meantime he has foiled the latter's attempt to emasculate him as it were through the spies.

How does he go about with Polonius, the professed know-all? He has just now suggested a stratagem whereby he can convince their majesties that his discoveries about Hamlet is true. As they converse, Hamlet appears. Here, feels Polonius, is an opportunity for him to prove his worth. He beseeches them to leave him alone. He will face the young man and ply him with such cunning and decisiveness as to leave his discovery confirmed. Then, presumably, he will run back to his master and report his triumph. How long can this young man hold his secret from the sage and crafty counsellor? He has already told the king that should he be proved wrong:

> "Let me be no assistant for a state
> But keep a farm and carters."

Thus with a bursting sense of self importance he launches his attack, as it were. Mark his words: "I'll board him presently: O, give me leave."

Shakespeare the inimitable ironist is at work. As ever, he is going to show pomposity duly deflated, but not without providing a delectable treat for his audience.

Pol: Do you know me my Lord?

Ham: Excellent, excellent well, you're a fish monger.

Pol: No I my Lord.

Ham: Then I should you were so honest a man.

Pol: Honest my Lord!

Ham: Aye, Sir, to be honest, as this world goes, is to be picked out of ten thousand

Pol: That's very true, my Lord.

Ham: For if the sun breeds maggots in a dead dog, being a god-kissing carrion, - Have you a daughter?

Pol: I have, my Lord.

Ham: Let her not walk i 'the sun: conception is a blessing; but not as your daughter my conceive friend, look ot 't.

(II. 2. ls. 172)

Hamlet proves too subtle and way ward for Polonius who, however, feels he can read some meaning in a phrase or two and puts the rest down to the dissolution of Hamlet's mind. In addi tion to baffling Polonius, Hamlet has the satisfaction of having given vent to his lately - engendered cynicism, his mistrust of integrity and sex in the plutrid atmosphere in which he is so painfully entangled.

Polonius hears Hamlet further on and struck by a sudden sally, which he happens to make sense of, utters the following aside:

> "How pregnant sometimes his replies are, a happiness that after madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of."

Polonius's startled reaction has a certain family resemblance to the delighted exclamation of Jacques on hearing Touchstone:

"Is not this a rare fellow, my lord? He's as good as anything, and yet a fool" (A You Like It) (V. iv). Finding himself out of his depth, Polonius attempts a retreat: "Most honourable Lord, I will most humbly take my leave." Indeed he has been most properly humbled. But he cannot go before he has been duly rated.

> "You cannot, Sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal..."

When Polonius finally takes leave of him, Hamlet takes it as a good riddance.

"These tedious old fools."

One recalls Touchstone's unflattering opinion of Corin:

> "Will thou rest damned? God help thee, shallow man, God make incision in thee! thou art raw."
>
> (A.Y.L.I. III.ii)

The encounter in which Hamlet shows up the hypocrisy of Polonius should detain us for a while. Hardly has he breathed after giving a bit of his mind to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern when appears Polonius to repeat the summons from Gertrude. Hamlet is tensed from the sense of being shadowed. He now sees the man who by being a busy body, has already proved himself too much for him. He decides to show him up:

Ham: Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?

Pol: By the man and 'tis like a camel indeed.

Ham: Methinks it is like a weasel.

Pol: It is backed like a weasel.

Ham: Or like a whale?

Pol: Very like a whale.

(III. 2. ls. 167)

The slimy obsequiousness of the man could not have been brought out better. The obviously deliberate misdirection of Hamlet runs somewhat parallel to the attempted misdirection of Feste who as Sir Topas is talking to Malvolio:

Feste: Say'st thou that house is dark?

Mal: As hell, Sir Topas.

Feste: Why it hath bay-windows, transparent as barricadoes, and the clerestories towards the south-north are as lustrous as ebony; and yet complainest thou of obstruction?

Mal: I am not mad Sir Topas; I say to you this house is dark.

(Twelveth Night) IV. ii)

It is the same trick — in one case it brings compliance in the other resistance. Polonius's readiness to go all the way and Malvolio's dogged refusal are both in character. Although Hamlet says that "they fool me to the top of my bent," it is, in actual fact, he who is playing the fool to them; he has read them, turned them inside-out, not they him. Hamlet's encounter with the king in Act IV scene iii shows him at his deadly and devastating best, His involved punning on eating, worm and fish carried on and brought to a pulversing end with ferocious pugnacity at once baffles and outrages Claudius who, when Hamlet's fury has abated, tells him of the decision already taken to send him, to England 'for thine special safety'. Let us see how Hamlet fires his salves. 'Where's Polonius?' asks Claudius. 'He is at supper', quipps Hamlet, not where he eats but where he is eaten. With breathtaking audacity, he makes a mockery of the dead man who had been the questioners' counsellor lackey.

> "... A certain convocation of politic worms are at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots: Your fat King and lean beggar is but variable service - two dishes but to one table: that's the end."
>
> (IV. 3. ls. 21)

With a wierd irrepressible glee Hamlet has already pushed him down to the unenviable level of the beggar and enacted in words the macabre and ego - shattering Dance of Death, This picture of the great leveller that made no distinctions - such as so grossly practiged in the corrupted world of medieval and Renaissance civility in which thrived all the Seven Deadly Sins and in which God's scheme of justice and equity was set at naught had a special meaning and appeal (in terms of ultimate compensation) for play-goers.

Of the same macabre variety are the following utterance of Hamlet in the Churchyard scene:

> "Now get you to my ladies chamber, and tell her,
> let her paint one inch thick, to this favour she
> must come, make her laugh at that.
> Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of
> Alexander till he find it stopping a bung-hole?"
>
> (V.I. ls. 187)

The play within the play is a huge, deadly practical joke pulled off to Claudius's discomfiture. This is Hamlet's capital achievement in his assumed role. The play is about to begin when he breaks off his conversation with Horatio; "They are coming to the play. I must be idle." Both will be watching for the King's reactions during the play at the end of which they will compare notes. Hamlet must now take leave of his normal behaviour to assume the role of a lunatic. And immediately he goes for his satiric digs at both the King and his counsellor.

King: How fares our cousin, Hamlet?

Ham: Excellent, 'faith! of the Chameleon's dish:
I eat the air promised crammed: You cannot feed
capons so.

(III. 2. ls. 90)

Hamlet thus obliquely reminds the kind of his assurance that he is upper-most in his thoughts as being the most immediate to the throne.

But the promise seems as thin and insubstantial as the air on which the Chameleons feed. It is both timerity and misdirection which he can and does resort to under the immunities he enjoys.

At Polonius who with his stupid conceit, referred to his having played Julius Caesar once at his University adding; 'I was killed i' the Capitol; 'Brutus killed me' Hamlet's contemptuous fling is:

'It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf'. The pun on 'Capitol' and 'Brutus' reminiscent of such punning by fools and clowns does not go unnoticed.

With studied deliberation Hamlet keeps harping on his generally believed weakness for Ophelia occasioning Polonius's rather expected self-congratulatory interjection to the King.

With equal deliberation he breaks into a spell of obscenity with Ophelia creating the impression that this is all an expression of a frustrated lover gone mad. With noticeable aplomb and vitality he persists in having digs at the people around him. And now he takes on his mother.

Oph: You are merry, my Lord.

Ham: Who, I?

Oph: Aye, my Lord.

Ham: O, your only jig-maker. What should a man do but be merry? For look you, how cheerfully my mother look, and my father died within two hours.

Oph: Nay, 'tis twice two months my Lord.

Ham: So long? ... then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year.

(III. 2. ls. 117)

At the point when the player-queen protests undying fidelity to the player-king:

> "Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife
> If once a widow, ever I be wife!"

Hamlet, to feel the pulse, asks Gertrude how she finds the play:

Ger: The lady protests too much me thinks.

Ham: O, but she'll keep her word.

Both Gertrude's uneasy conscience and Hamlet's ironic quip are worth noting.

Suddenly, getting dubious, Claudius asks Hamlet, if there was no offence in the 'argument' whereupon the latter replies that there is none: "No, no they do but jest, poison in jest, no offence i the world." Then elaborating the content of the play, Hamlet assures him:

> "... Your majesty and we have free souls it
> touches us not: let the galled jade wins,
> our writers are unwrung."
>
> (III. 2. ls. 236)

His barbed speech recalls Jacques's submission to the exiled Duke that his railing at the vices of the world would not touch one who is free from them.

> "... if he be free,
> why, then my taxing like a wild-goose flies
> Unclaim'd of any man."
>
> (A.Y.C.I. II. vii)

This is one of the arresting moments of the play Hamlet has the royal criminal akwardly caught in the meshes of his wit. He is quiveringly expectant with the anticipation of discovery. And, then, indeed, the King gives himself away. We hear the triumphant Hamlet,

> "O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's words
> for a thousand pound."

Much of the closet scene is a testimony ~~of~~ to Hamlet's power of employing wit and invective to masterly effect. One cannot fail to notice the exulting cry, with which, so to speak, he jumps into the fray. He was summoned to be given a set down. Polonius who is soon to pay for his 'pranks' with his very life, has just now advised Gertrude 'to be round with him (Hamlet'). But who is going to be round with whom? With a kind of wild animation Hamlet enters and no sooner does he enter her chamber and faces Gertrude than he looks aggression itself, setting his mordant cutting wit, against hers and subjecting her to pitiless exposure. The projected roles get instantly reversed. Gertrude finds herself affronted, scandalised, terrified. Hamlet is in full cry. Let us hear the dialogue:

(III. 4. ls. 8)

Ham: Now mother what's the matter?
Queen: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended
Ham: Mother, you have my father much offended
Queen: Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.
Ham: Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.
Queen: Why, how now, Hamlet?
Ham: What's the matter now?
Queen: Have you forgot me?
Ham: No by the rood, not so.
You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife.
And - would it were not so - you are my mother.

When the queen makes minatory noise, Hamlet answers with absolute peremptoriness:

> "Come, come, and sit you down, you shall not budge:
> You go not till I set you up a glass
> Where you may see the inmost part of you."

The Queen panics and raises an alarm, Polonius gets slain, When she calls her son's attention to the rash and bloody deed, he jibs savagely with a sneer:

> "A bloody deed! - almost as bad good mother,
> As kill a King and marry with his brother."

Gertrude cannot be sure that her son is quite in his senses and that he is not seized with a bout of insanity. In fact, her panicked cry.

> "What will thou do, thou will not murder me?
> Help, help ho."

is an expression of fear that Hamlet in his 'estacy' might turn so violent as to take her life. In the face of Hamlet's resolve to act the inquisitor: 'And let me wring your heart for so I shall...' ~~and~~ the queen cries out:

> "What have I done that thou dor'st wag thy tongue
> In noise so rude against me."

And again when Hamlet hysterically charges her with an act that 'blurs the grace and blush of modesty' her outraged being cries out:

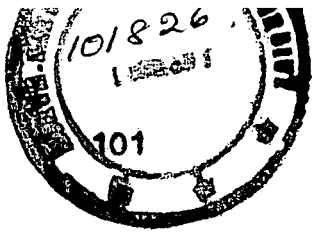
"Ah me, what act
That roars so loud and thunders in the index?"

The most dramatic thing that Hamlet as a frenzied inquisitor does is to present contrasted pictures of his father and uncle and thereby to illumine the very heart of the tragedy. These pictures juxtapose the glory that has passed away from the earth and the depravity and disease that has taken its place. In facing up to the time that is out of joint, that is, the dark deeds of a degenerate humanity he looks upon himself as 'Heaven's scourge and minister'. It is in this role which he has arrogated to himself that he speaks to his mother as a desecrator, a sacrileger ~~she~~ who has made a mockery of all that is touched with the divine 'modesty','virtue', 'innocent love', 'marriage vows'. She has reduced religion to a mere rhapsody of words.

"... heaven's face doth glow;
Yes, this solidity and compound mass,
With trustful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought sick at the act'

It is in this context that he focuses on the contrast between the dead king and the usurper. The former is spoken of in terms of the images of grace and beauty power and majesty, images that betoken ~~of~~ the high gods. He was:

"A combination and a form, indeed
Where every God did seem to set his seal,
So give the world assurance of a man."



Here was a king who was beloved of the gods whom he constantly suggested in his action and bearing. And the present King? He is:

"Like a mildew'd ear
Blasting his own brother."

He is a disease a poisonous growth on life, disfiguring it. The dead King was 'a fair mountain' suggesting beauty and elevation and majesty. The present one is a moor, low and unwholesome with its overhanging miasma. He is a devil:

"What devil was't
that thus hath cozen'd you at hood-man blind."

He is a 'murderer' and a 'villain',a 'slave',a 'vice of kings' a 'cutpurse of the Empire' (The last phrase strongly suggesting Satan - the potential cutpurse of the celestial Empire) A foul contagion has blotted out an era of health and radiance. The resplendent Renaissance ideal of yesterday has plummetted to abysmal depths.

In his first solioquy in Act I Sc. II, Hamlet had spoken of

"So excellent a King: that was, to Him,
Hyperion to a Satyr."

From the blazing sun-god bestriding the heavens to the diminutive, ugly-looking and lecherous god represented partly as a

goat that is,the metaphoric equivalent of man's fall from light to darkness, from beauty to ugliness.

It is not without significance that Hamlet is spelling out in greater details and in more imaginative terms the study in contrast that had been initiated by the Ghost thus:

> "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...
> But virtue as it never will be mov'd
> Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven:
>
> So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd
> Will sate itself in a celestial bed
> And prey on garbage."

The decline from 'virtue' to lewdness and from 'a celestial bed' to 'garbage' is symtomatic of the travesty and collapse of values, of the deceit and depravity of the present 'frailty they name is woman'. But reason is frail too. Shakespeare dramatises this frailty of reason positing a full and tearing consciousness of it in Hamlet's psyche. Hence, he grieves and storms, hence, his 'eternal tempest never to calm.'

The Renaissance had apotheosized reason, the divine faculty of man aspiring heaven high and keeping passion in subjection. It had always been alive to the tension bred by the opposition within man of reason and the appetites of passion

At the same time, however, it had come to hope that reason with its heaven - scanning ambition, the guarantee of man's greatness, would be an insurance against the almost inevitable propensity, consequent from the original sin, towards depravity and degeneration. That this hope or belief was illusory was proved by the crisis of the times. The precarious grips of reason over passion is the theme of lament and protest. More truly, the fact of reason abdicating its authority and prostituting itself so far as to lose its identity in order to serve the ends of passion is the burden of Hamlet's denunciation. Thus in his horror struck eyes 'reason panders will' and Gertrude lives.

> "In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed
> Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
> Over the nasty sty."

Man is a unique creation in a largely foreign world of mere organic vitality. His pre-eminence and glory is because of his being non-animal and non-mechanical. Hamlet has in mind 'the scheme of the ideal internal psychic hierarchy in which man's will is liberated from mechanism and released for its glorious work of choice and command.[1] This non-animal and non-mechanical but inalienably human function of choice and command is dwelt upon by Hamlet as something that even madness could not eclipse and as his most dearly held belief, now shaken by Gertrude's conduct:

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1. The Rhetoric of World of Augustan Humanism, P. Tussell, 1967, p. 13.

"Sense, sure, you have,
Else could you not have motion, but sure sense
It apoplex'd; for madness would not err;
Nore sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd
But it reserv'd some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference."

The 'blood' and 'judgement' satiric thrust that had just preceded the above passage, derives from the same mode of thought and is thus seen to fall in place.

"Ha! have you eyes?
You cannot call it love; for at your age
The hey-day in the blood is tame, its humble
And waits upon the judgement, and what judgement
Would step from this to this?

If Macbeth's deed reverberates through heaven and hell and Lear's madness embraces an inner and outer storm, Gertrude's act which has struck at the very root of Hamlet's faith affects the universe no less potently and is no less an outrage.

"... heaven's face doth glow, yes, this solidity
and compound man, with tristful visage, as against
the doom. Is thought-sick at the act."

This is so because in the great ~~change~~ chain of being, man occupies a pivotal position and his individual actions find their implications and echo in macrocosmic nature. It is a characteristic Renaissance way of looking at an understanding the inter-related scheme of things.

> "Levels of existence, including human and cosmic, were habitually correlated and correspondences and resemblances were perceived every where. Man as a microcosmic model was thus a mediator between himself and the universe."

Indeed, in what we encounter in the closet scene Hamlet is very much a mediator between himself and the universe; he is the outraged spokesman of Renaissance humanism.

Towards the end of the scene Hamlet mentions to his mother-like one mentioning something of moment he was about to forget that he is going to be sent off to England, the dark motive behind which has not altogether eluded his misgiving mind. The important thing for our present purpose is that the manner in which Hamlet talks about the disguised threat to his life and his confidence in his ability not only to frustrate the designs of his opponent but to destroy him at his own game suggests an extraordinary precipience and an equally extraordinary; yet easy superiority of bearing even in the state of contemplating the mortal peril:

> "Let it work;
> For 'tis the sport to have the engineer
> Hoist with his own petard: and 't shall go hard,
> But I will delve one yard below their mines,
> And blow them at the moon."

He is not unnerved, he is zestful. And he seems to be chuckling even in anticipation, over out-manouvering his enemy. And we know that this is no empty boast, but that he does at the proper, moment carry out his grim resolve to outwit his enemy as he himself relates the episode to Horatio in Act V Sc.II.

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2. Shakespeare and the Thought of his Age, in a New Companion to Shakespeare Studies ed. K. Muir and S. Schoenbaun, Paperback 1974, p. 181.

The quality of mind defined by D.H. Lawrence in a letter to Lady Cynthia is the quality that Shakespeare gave Hamlet as the one irreducible mark of his being.

> "One should stick by one's soul; and by nothing else. In one's soul one knows the truth from the untruth, and life from death. And if one betrays one's soul knowledge one is the worst of traitors I am out of all patience with the submitting to the things that be however foul they are, just because they happen to be."[3]

Hamlet's decisive refusal to come to terms with evil and betray his soul knowledge demonstrates how he sticks by his soul and will not be a traitor to himself. Even when caught in the toil of speculation (witness his soliloquies) which would never be resolved to calm his unquiet self, his concern for the inviolability of his soul is overridingly stressed. In Hamlet's stark refusal to "commit the vast wickedness of acquiescence."[4]

Shakespeare defines not only the physiognomy of his protagonist's soul but also that of the evil he faces. And in the process he illuminates, in unique dramatic terms, the ever-recurring predicament of man on this earth and the imperative need for a clear eyed choice to give battle to the forces of darkness and death.

Thus, in spite of the impression (too often dwelt upon exclusively) of nervelessness and vacillation created by the

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3. Selected Letters, D.H. Lawrence, ed. Richard Aldington, Penguin Books, 1968. p. 115.
4. Ibid, p. 88.

soliloquies which are full of self reproach, Shakespeare's projection of Hamlet seems centred in an unerring recognition of a pollution and a threat and in an artful but masterly way resort to a series of actions calculated to arrest the pollution and meet the threat with adequacy.

Of the admittedly various impressions the play yields of the central character, one is indoubtedly, as we have tried to show, that of a person who, in the face of an enormous evil bent on conquest or destruction, opposes his roused and bristling self to its devious and deadly proceedings. It was left for Milton to dramatise a similar crisis of being and a similar refusal to come to terms in Samson Agonistes in more Christian terms.

CHAPTER - V

SAMSON'S ENCOUNTER WITH EVIL

The basic theme of *Samson Agonistes* can be said to be the fallen, forsaken and punished man's laboured search for his God from the Slough of Despond to the Celestial City through Doubting Castle. Samson passes and repasses through the whole complex gamut of feelings and attitudes between 'a sense of Heaven's desertion' and a lingering hope for 'His final pardon.' Indeed, most of the action of *Samson Agonistes* would seem to be held in a state of soul-tearing tension between these two poles of abysmal despair and tremulous hope. The experience this tension mirrors is characteristic of early Christianity and Puritanism. It not only recalls but throws into sharp relief the Augustinian concepts of *privatio Dei* (the turning away from God, the highest Good, to the perishable world), *contemptus mundi* (contempt of the world) and *amor Dei* (love of God). At the same time it would seem, at least in some measure, to anticipate for all temperamental, situational and theological differences, Hopkin's tortured sensibilities:

> "...and why must
> Disappointment all I endeavour end?
> .....
> O thou lord of life, send my roots rain."

And here is Samson's anguished cry:

> "Why was my breeding ordered and prescribed
> As of a person separate to God,
> Designed for great exploits, if I must die
> Betrayed, captived, and both my eyes put out..."

Milton's Puritan vision of ultimate human worth and the fulfilment of human destiny is understandably awesome, while the human worth glimpsed and credited is put, again understandably, to its grimmest test.

In the Greek conception of things God is something alien, mysterious, unaccountable, and therefore dreaded. The Hebrew God is dreaded too, but with a difference. The sense of being chosen for merit and then forsaken for transgression in the overall context of a personal God-man relationship and of a responsible Providence, is not quite germane to Greek thought as it is to either Hebrew or Christian theology. The divine hostility to Prometheus or Oedipus - one with a sense of being in the right till the end and the other rather trapped into sinning - is entirely a different matter from God's anger on account of Samson's breach of divine trust. Of his own admission Samson consciously accepted the trust and equally consciously violated it. He has:

> "profaned
> The mystery of God, given me under pledge
> Of vow."

The sense of being alienated from God and of being tainted is a natural consequence of a Puritan's faith, for he is a stickler for purity, his purity consisting in a strict obedience to God's decrees which commend themselves to man's understanding and acceptance. To such a decree he has proved false. His being plagued today is consciously his own doing. Thus in his opening speech:

"What if all foretold
Had been fulfilled but through mine own default?
Whom have I to complain of but myself,
Who this high gift of strength committed to me,
In what part lodged, how easily bereft me,
Under the seal of silence could not keep,
But weakly to a woman must reveal it,
O'ercome with importunity and tears?"

And now to Manoa:

"Appoint not heavenly disposition, father,
Nothing of all these evils hath befallen me
But justly; I myself have brought them on;
Sole author I, sole cause."

I have been false to my God; I have been false to myself; I have chosen the world in preference to God — this would seem to be the burden of his agonised cry. Thus viewed, from Samson Agonistes would seem to issue forth a long-drawn wail — the wail of alienation — and an irrepressible spirit of urgency for setting at naught this alienation and for being restored to God's grace. The impression is inescapable that this world and all that goes with it is evil, is abominable and that what matters to the exclusion of all else in God's grace and favour to fall upon you.

"... to displease
God for the fear of man, and man prefer,
Set God behind."

is the most unforgivable sin. The road to salvation lies through contempt of the world and love of God. And this is what Augustine meant by 'Contemptus mundi' and 'amor Dei'. For Samson

there is a two-fold call — a call from those around him and a call from beyond. Milton shows Samson dealing with these exclusive calls and wrestling with himself. And in the process he shows his vision — his vision of human worth to which we have referred previously.

Milton turns the spotlight on and dramatises with an intensity rarely matched in English drama the supreme human predicament in which the protagonist comes to grips with, interprets, and finally fulfils the terms for divine acceptance. Here is an extraordinarily dramatic portrayal of an dilemma finally resolved in a sudden burst of illumination which can be and is stunning for both reader and spectator.

Samson's predicament is first hinted at by his own words:

> "Retiring from the popular noise, I seek
> This unfrequented place to find some ease -
> Ease to the body some, none to the mind
> From restless thoughts..."

The chorus later focusses on this predicament:

> "This idol's day hath been to thee no day of rest,
> Labouring thy mind
> More than the working day thy hands."

Samson's soul is stretched to the uttermost and the final moment has arrived. He must choose between the two — the terrestrial call and the divine; the terrestrial call is represented

in the figures of Manoa, Dalila and Harapha, each in his or her way offering a false sense of security. There is, on the other hand, the divine call for going the whole hog in the face of all suffering. In the midst of suffering and faced with a seemingly endless slavery to the Philistines, Samson does at times waver in his faith, but the one thing he has firmly turned his face against is to succumb to the temptations, to seek reconciliation with his enemies. As Dalila, who employed all her wiles to bring about a change in his mind, puts it picturesquely:

> "I see thou art implacable, more deaf
> To prayers than winds and seas. Yet winds to seas
> Are reconciled at length, and sea to shore:
> Thy anger, unappeasable, still rages,
> Eternal tempest never to be calmed."

Rising superior to all specious pleas for reconciliation with the soul-negating forces, to all manner of blandishments and bullyings — in other words, repudiating all earthly temptations which, to the discerning mind, point the way to the soul's ruination, the protagonist, aided by his prescience, firmly responds to the call of Providence, to the imperious summons to the supreme feat of self-sacrifice leading to self-recovery and self-fulfilment. It can be seen that just before he takes the final leap, knowledge has grown so puisant and imperious as inevitably to result in his cutting himself loose from the downhill pull of finitude and flying out, so to speak, to merge in the bosom of the Infinite.

Indeed, the vision embodied is born of a travail — an agonised trial having for its essential components a certain complex of abominations which are the means of at once harrowing and purging the hero's soul.

Samson's present existential condition, his father's proposed 'solicitations' to the Philistine lords, his remembrance and the subsequent appearance of Dalila, that 'deceitful concubine' the hollow vaunting of Harapha, that 'baffled coward' - are all singularly abominable, while what is even more so is the enormity of his own folly, or 'sin' as Samson views it. But it so comes about that Samson has perforce to endure these abominations if only to get over them even as a pilgrim has to get over such hurdles as may be put on his way to test the fibres of his moral and spiritual being.

The anguish bred by the enormity of his own folly is infinitely augmented by having to bear and absorb the shock resulting from the pitiless onslaughts made by Dalila and Harapha, and not very slightly by Manoa himself.

The moral ugliness represented in Dalila and Harapha appears loathsome and revolting in the extreme and is made the more execrable when contrasted with the unrelenting refusal of Samson to do business with any form or shape of evil. This refusal has everything religious, rather puritanic about it and it is enacted with the plenary force of his entire being.

This refusal is a peremptory gesture of his revived self operating in an aura of Beauty and Truth as he glimpses them. One recalls the famous observation of Keats:

> "The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their close relationship with Beauty and Truth."
>
> (Letter, Dec. 21, 1817)

Thus viewed, the intensity of Samson Agonistes makes the abminations, to which we have referred, evaporate from their close relationship with Samson's fresh-lit, severe vision of what is true and beautiful; and the unpleasantness of Samson's encounters with Dalila, Harapha, the Philistine officer and Manoa is sunk in the 'momentous depth of speculation' excited by them.

Samson can make himself acceptable to his God by self-conquest and this self-conquest is achievable through identifying and then completely repudiating and excluding from his being those all too instinctive urges which are both peculiarly of this world and of a kind that precludes all spiritual growth.

The Manoa, Dalila and Harapha episodes can thus be regarded as Milton's dramatic objectifications of those instinctive urges which serve to keep man in bondage to this world. These may, in a sense, be considered as 'objective correlatives' to use Eliot's phrase. And not only Manoa, Dalila and Harapha;

even the chorus can be treated as an 'objective correlative.' Manoa represents the solicitous paternal endeavours of which one in the position of the hapless Samson would be only too tempted to take advantage. Dalila, under the initial garb of panitence, offers the prospect, however questionable, of a fresh lease of conjugal life —a prospect which would not be very easy to resist. Harapha nepresents a bully's invitation to submit, and again such an invitation cannot but tempt one as sorely handicapped as Samson is at the moment. The chorus, which, as a friendly force, can be looked upon as an extension of Samson with reference to his past, present and future, performs a number of functions. It at once eulogises Samson's heroic past, lapses into despairing interrogation of God's will and rises, in the midst of occasional bafflements, into a confident prophecy of Samson's redemption.

An urge to take an easy refuge with a Manoa or even a Dalila, however treacherous, especially when they offer to take him back, has an unquestionable credibility in view of the crippling circumstances of Samson. So also is an urge to capitulate, however heroic the past. The rather ambivalent posture of the chorus is basically that of Samson himself.

From the dramatic point of view, these urges and propensities whose shadows at least are likely to be there in the mind and heart of the long-harassed protagonist, need to be

identified and brought to the fore. The protagonist needs to be made publicly to meet these situations and repudiate the temptations involved. Therefore, these dramatic situations may as well be looked upon as powerfully suggestive extensions or, better, externalisations of certain latent facets of Samson's own consciousness. The profane tendencies are brought out in the open only to be cast aside. This is the dramatic means adopted of demonstrating how Samson refuses once and for all to be taken in by and do business with evil, in other words, of demonstrating Samson's triumph over and rejection of evil.

CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion has, we hope, brought out the essential problems that Shakespeare and Milton are engaged with in Hamlet and Samson Agonistes and which they transmute into remarkable works of art.

The war between reason and passion, the confrontation with evil, both within and without, in its subtle and diverse manifestations, the debate on the status and credibility of man, his relationship with an invisible circumambient order which is the ultimate sanction of morality and religion — all this informs, animates, vitalises and shapes these two plays. While Hamlet is decidedly of the Renaissance, Milton's work, in spite of its medieval cast of mind and temper, does embody something of the Renaissance spirit too, especially in its accent on the individual, on individualism, on the internal conflict and on the free and extended debate on the potency of reason and free will. It partakes of the Renaissance temper also in point of the aesthetic response to the sensuous beauty of the world, whether located in the human world or in the physical world, although Samson's attitude by and large is rather negative. However, the very fact that Samson laments his exclusion from the surrounding beauty and glory of the world, the sun, the moon and the sundry other beauteous aspects of the material world is proof positive that nature and the

flesh is not all wicked, even though his attitude by and large is that of world negation. And the overpoweringly sensuous description of Dalila's approach can be suspected to be an irresistible expression of Milton's Renaissance susceptibility to sights and sounds and smells.

Man's predicament arising out of the fallibility of reason and the inroads of evil is the common theme of both the works. In both the works there is the long drawn out wail in the dark night of the soul when man finds himself abandoned and forlorn with no answering response to his piteous calls for sustenance and succour. In both works the way of vindication and fulfilment is found after a long, agonised and tortured search.

In both the works the supernatural plays a dominant role, though the difference in temper and outlook is all too manifest.

With Samson God is a living reality even when he is in the throes of abysmal doubt and despair. He takes the god-man relationship for granted, as something beyond question. While the reality of God and of his being chosen to perform a mission is above question, what really baffles and torments Samson is why God is treating him in this painful manner, as though he had never been chosen and he had never rendered any service to him.

For Hamlet, to begin with and for quite a length of time, God is not as much real, although his meditations on man and on reason make it abundantly clear that his entire moral being owes its strength and authenticity to a belief, however, inchoately stated and formulated, in an unseen, yet decisive and authoritative order which has intended man to be rational, to hold his passions in the thrall of reason, to wage war against evil and thus to remain above the level of a beast. But both Claudius and Gertrude have descended below that level. In the closet scene, Hamlet, stung to the quick at the affront to man's divine pedigree, tells his mother that in consequence of her atrocious conduct, 'heaven's face doth glow' and the universe is 'thought sick at the act'. In other words, to Hamlet's ingrained ways of thought, an invisible, higher order of things sustains and gives meaning to the terrestrial order to which we apparently belong and man gains in merit and stature in so far as he partakes of that higher order.

Besides, of course, both the heroes find themselves postured in a special sort of relationship with another world—Samson in relation to his God and Hamlet to the ghost.

In both the plays, as we have seen, woman plays a crucial part in bringing about the reign of the Devil. Much space is devoted to the castigation and denunciation of evil that is woman or is in woman. Female apostasy and female epicureanism

are the burden of lament. It must not however be missed that Gertrude remains a loving mother, while Dalila's protestations are shown to be dubious. Gertrude is not rejected the way in which Dalila is.

And if Samson's mission is fulfilled in an entirely miraculous manner, Hamlet achieves his mission in a frame of mind which is little short of being extraordinary. Indeed, Hamlet's carrying out of his task is the result of a virtual transformation of a secular prince into a religious convert. A prince who would always argue and seek to reach laboured conclusions and in the process find himself at sea is miraculously metamorphosed into a believer. One who was obsessively caught in what Keats would call 'consequitive reasoning' clean breaks with it and we hear him speak the language of a man who has seen into the heart of things and at length found his true moorings. The doubts and questions, the fruitless resort to logic-chopping are a thing of the past. All the inner wrestle is over and he is now carried forward by a newly experienced movement of the soul.

Though not physically imprisoned, Hamlet was imprisoned by the meshes of his inconsequent speculations. But now he has turned over a new leaf and action comes easily and unbidden. Likewise, the physically imprisoned Samson is roused by a hitherto unknown movement of his soul and is led to freedom and final accomplishment of his divinely enjoined task.

However, as we have noticed earlier, when Samson takes the final step, he turns his back completely upon the world for which he has no thought or use, all his thoughts being now focussed on his God, on God vindicating his elect. Hamlet presents a different picture. The moment of carrying out his pledge is the moment of anguish, for the prince is conscious of leaving a 'wounded' name behind. The ending of the play marks the re-affirmation of the secular spirit with its emphasis on honour and reputation, that is, on worldly concerns. This, indeed, constitutes a fundamental difference between the pre-eminently secular play that Hamlet is and Samson Agonistes, a religious work of art.

There are many other points of difference too, as we have noticed in the introductory chapter and even later. One of the most important and obvious differences lies in the respective canvas of the plays, Hamlet so extended in scope and Samson Agonistes so narrowly focussed like Greek tragedy. In contrast with the ambivalence of attitudes and perceptions, the multiplicity of characters and situations and the disconcerting variety of actions in Hamlet, we have the remarkable concentration of attention on just a handful of characters and on almost a static situation in Samson with the exception of the final catastrophe which, in the pattern of Greek tragedy, is appropriately reported.

These differences, however, are seen to be no hurdle when one sees and enters the basic theme of the two plays — the eternal struggle between good and evil, between the insidious character and ways of evil and the steadfastness of the hero. There is also the penetrating insight into the guilt-ridden psyche, into the vulnerability of reason and the precariousness of the human situation.

Both protagonists find themselves at bay. Both are besieged by a deadly, soul — negating foe. Both are faced with a choice — to come to terms with evil by being false to the inner self or to refuse to submit and call the evil by its proper name and fight it till the end. Both protagonists hold fast to the truth of the soul in the face of temptations. And both arrive in their own ways.

In a way both the plays can be read as artistic representations of the soul's perilous journey through this world. The forms of imagination are admittedly different, but the basic truth apprehended is the same. While Milton enacts the soul's drama within a given, set framework, Shakespeare, the questing artist, characteristically, depicts the same drama within an excitedly fluid framework of felt change and growth. And both frameworks are true to the pressure of the times.

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