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SHAKESPEARE AND STOPPARD: CHESS AND DIABOLO

1. Introduction

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 my 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. 'Sblood, 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 (Hamlet, III, ii, 322-328).

Hamlet must be given the first word in this, because he underlines the intricacy of the creation with whom one is concerned here, i.e. man. Trying to outline, interpret and contrast the representative literary works of two vastly differing ages may well be considered the task of a lifetime. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* may be considered as representative of the drama of the Elizabethan age, while Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and Dogg's *Hamlet* are representative of contemporary drama.

The picture which is presented here has been influenced by a multitude of impressions, opinions and concepts, but the main goal of the present study is the blending of all the colours and nuances into a harmonious and comprehensible unit. As a starting-point the worlds of William Shakespeare and Tom Stoppard have to be outlined and contrasted briefly.

Shakespeare belonged to the age of the Renaissance. In England Elizabeth I reigned and the Elizabethan era turned out to be a time of prosperity. During the Elizabethan era English literature reached its unsurpassed zenith. It was a time of movement and involvement. The rigidity of the Middle Ages had to make way for curiosity and open-mindedness. Knowledge became "cheap". The enjoyment of great literature works was no longer the prerogative of the learned upper classes; the Bible was no longer understood and explained by the higher clergy only. Man became an explorer, setting out on a voyage into the unknown realms of the intellect.

It was the age of Humanism. Man ceased to be a rather dispensable

component in the gearing of society. He became a manipulator with the responsibility to develop all his faculties and skills in order to fulfil his inherent potential. The accent shifted from society to the individual. The inner man whose existence had formerly been ignored became the major pre-occupation. Man was setting out to find himself.

The medieval society centred around the Roman Catholic Church. With the emphasis on the importance of the individual the Roman Catholic Church with its system of intermediation between God and man lost ground to the Protestant approach of individual justification. The result of the Reformation can't be reduced to a mere move towards Protestantism. The new attitudes and open-mindedness also resulted in a gradual movement away from the unquestioning acceptance of the Christian faith. The hitherto accepted structure of society which had focused on the Church began to erode. Man asked questions and he didn't necessarily seek his answers with God. God's existence was acknowledged and His power was feared by the Elizabethans, but in their concept of society man was the indispensable link between the spiritual and the material worlds.

The Elizabethans believed that there was a definite vertically-structured order in the universe, viz. a Chain of Being. Everything occupied its proper place in this chain. Any disturbance in one part upset the rigid order and resulted in confusion and total disorder. Ultimately, the creator of confusion would be punished and the order would be restored. This concept of order was not restricted to the cosmos. Order was literally an intrinsic part of man's existence. Man's ideal temperament consisted of a balanced mixture of the four "humours", i.e. choleric, blood, phlegm and melancholy. When the balance was disturbed man's inherent potential for evil, his vulnerability, became perceptible.

Even physically man was considered an ordered being. The three major organs were the liver, the heart and the brain. The liver was believed to serve man's lowest drives, his heart was the dwelling of his passions, and the brain was the seat of his capacity to learn (Maskew Miller, 1977, xviii-xxiii).

The Elizabethan Age was a period of cross-overs. Man was emerging from the smothering cocoon of the Middle Ages and he was delighted and enchanted by the discovery of a multi-coloured world and his own multi-coloured wings. He was, however, also apprehensive and perplexed by the radiance and the scope of the winking world. This co-existence of apprehension and ardent zest for life was the root of man's obsession with order. In his vertically-structured Chain of Being Elizabethan man found his required stability, an anchor in an altering world.

On the one hand Shakespeare's world was a realm of discovery, illumination and new horizons, reigned by the individual. On the other hand discovery and illumination brought with them responsibility and a new awareness of man's potential for evil. Life was a game of chess. Intellectual control was the keystone. Man was the intellectual manipulator, capable of control, self-realization and, ultimately, dramatic, chivalrous victory.

Stoppard's age is a well-known one. Intellectually man has surpassed his own limits. This century has seen the diminishing of the physical and spiritual keystones of human existence. Time and space have become obscure concepts because of the invention of space-ships and supersonic planes. Man's journey into the realms of his own intellect which started with the Renaissance has proved to be a journey without a destination. The supposed destinations were just a "conspiracy of cartographers" (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, p. 81). Somewhere on the way man has lost. Two world wars have transformed humanism into nihilism. Death has become a grey crossover, lacking all significance and meaning. The heroic, redemptive death of Hamlet has become a parody in a century in which the nuclear bomb reduces the human being to an insect that can be killed swiftly and clinically by the use of the nuclear insecticide.

The vertical organization of the universe is annihilated. Man lives horizontally. He is entrapped in a mechanical rite of existence. A metaphysical relationship has become something vague, unreal and illusory. Society has become schizoid; man uses his intellect to invent new medicines and involved ways of prolonging life, but the same intellect is used to design sophisticated weapons with which to destroy life. Paradoxes and confusion are the stuff that life is made of.

In the twentieth century life has become a game of diabolio, a haphazard affair consisting of opposing poles which are in close contact with each other while man is desperately struggling to maintain his precarious balance on the narrow horizontal level. He is no longer a manipulator; the game is no longer an intricate one, on the contrary, it is an oversimplified chance-play in which neither victory nor defeat is possible.

The Elizabethan Age is the framework in which *Hamlet* fits and the modern age is the absence of a framework in which *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Dogg's Hamlet* fit.

2. *Tragedy and comedy: an internecine interspersion*

Tragedy has its roots in mythological tradition. Most probably, tragedy

evolved from the ancient myths dealing with the death of gods or deified heroes. Tragedy was not originally concerned with the human predicament. The fifth century BC can be regarded as the crucible of the fundamental concept of tragedy. By the close of the fifth century BC the subject-matter of tragedy was outlined as being the interaction between the individual's personal responsibility (human fallibility) and the conspiracy of an unsympathetic force (gods, fellow-humans, or an unidentified fate) in causing the downfall of a fundamentally heroic and praiseworthy human being. Man's potential for evil (within the framework of the concept of tragedy) can be reduced to his capacity for misjudgement (*hamartia*) and his deification of his own capability (*hubris*). The *hubris* (arrogance and inflated self-esteem) is usually an attempt to usurp the role of the divine manipulator.

Two thousand years after the emergence of tragedy an original approach to tragedy was introduced in England. William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was one of the main exponents of the new approach that shifted the emphasis from the role of the divine manipulator in the downfall of the tragic hero to the culpability of the tragic hero himself. He becomes the architect of his own destruction. This can be related to the humanist approach of individual, intellectual responsibility that was reigning at the time. Man becomes so carried away by his intellectual powers and his role as human manipulator that he forgets that he can only retain control while subjecting himself to the divine manipulator and his proper place within the ordered system of the universe.

Hamlet is a perfect example of the tragic hero. He is a man of noble birth with a strong character who is ultimately destroyed because of his *hamartia* and his *hubris*: *Hamartia* in delaying to revenge the murder of his father and *hubris* in trying to take control of the situation himself by devising his own means of confirmation as far as the ghost's story is concerned. He realises his error when it is too late. His realization of his own culpability and his new insight redeem him. Physically, Hamlet is destroyed but morally he is redeemed. His moral redemption outweighs his physical destruction. He acknowledges the control of the divine manipulator and death loses its threatening aspect. Death becomes the culminant of redemption:

... There is 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 (V, ii, 190-192).

The concept of tragedy, as it emerges in *Hamlet*, has a strong ironic implication. This ironic implication is that the fully-developed man, the sensitive, curious, heroic character becomes the most vulnerable target of

evil. His exploration, his quest for insight, may lead to the detection and exploding of the dangerous zones hidden in himself, while the man who lacks the curiosity, heroism, courage and sensitivity to undertake the journey towards insight and self-knowledge may continue to exist peacefully. Good qualities and the potential for evil are co-existent in the tragic hero as in any other human being. The tragic hero is not without principles; on the contrary, he may be a man of exceptionally strong principles, but his inherent potential for evil causes him to overreach his own authority and to go beyond his powers and place a human manipulator in coping with the problems with which he is faced. This moral ambivalence adds dimension to the ironic implication of tragedy because the fact remains that the man of imagination may fall into the pit of evil in his own soul while the dull character may never even know his own intricate composition.

Ultimately the effect of tragedy is exhilarating. Man doesn't feel depressed because of a fresh awareness of his own potential for evil after having watched a performance of *Hamlet*. The opposite is true, for man feels cleansed. This may seem like a paradox but in truth the effect of tragedy contains nothing paradoxical. The intrinsic moral and spiritual value of death is the key to the effect of tragedy. Man is physically destroyed by evil but spiritually and morally he is the victor. He conquered the potential for evil. Hamlet comes to insight. He realizes that he has delayed his task too long, and has taken the responsibility upon himself, whereas he should have been content to be the pawn of the divine manipulator. During the play he has been pondering on questions concerning the significance of life and death instead of realizing that "the readiness is all" (V, ii, 192). Hamlet's death is an elevating experience. (The spiritual and the moral elevation is concretized by the physical elevation on stage.) Man is elevated beyond the insignificance that results from his own reflections concerning life and death and through his death he gains eternal significance.

AC Horan states that "*Hamlet* is a play concerned with the 'eternal' problems of human existence" (Maskew Miller, 1977, XLV). I believe that this statement can and should be elaborated. *Hamlet* is concerned with the "eternal" problems of the human condition evolving from the juxtaposition of the temporal and the eternal in human existence. Ultimately, the ascendancy of the eternal contains the solution.

Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Dog's Hamlet* don't fit within the fundamental frameworks of tragedy and comedy. In these plays an internecine interspersion of tragedy and comedy is found. The redemptive aspects of tragedy and the positive, corrective qualities of comedy are withdrawn. The remainders are interspersed into a fatalistic concoction.

A condensed concept of comedy is given by EV Roberts: "Comedy treats people as they are, laughing at them or sympathizing with them but showing them to be successful nevertheless" (p. 4).

The only element of this definition of comedy is found in these two plays is the sympathy which is inspired by the purposeless floating of the characters. One can't bring oneself to laugh because their "humorous" remarks are charged with an underlying implication of the insignificance of both laughter and tears.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and *Dogg's Hamlet* are truncated tragedies. The top of the tragedy is cut off. The eternal solution is non-existent. In *Dogg's Hamlet* the wall which is built continues to disintegrate because the correct combination of the letters on the wall cannot be found. Like Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern also ponder on questions concerning life and death, but their struggle remains horizontal, leading to no destination, whereas Hamlet finds the answers in a restored vertical relationship. Guildenstern ponders:

Death is not anything... death is not... It's the absence of presence, nothing more... the endless time of never coming back... a gap you can't see, and when the wind blows through it, it makes no sound... (1967, p. 95).

Hamlet acquiesces:

And that should learn us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will (V,ii,9-11).

Tragedy and comedy have been murdered and maimed. Their remains are interspersed. Comedy is coming up or tragedy is going down in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* and *Dogg's Hamlet*. This interspersion results in a tragi-comic vision of life which serves its purpose in creating an intense consciousness of the human predicament when man is restricted to a horizontal level of existence.

3. Themes

Hamlet on the one hand and the Stoppard plays on the other hand literally and figuratively belong to two worlds. Yet, the same fundamental themes occur in these plays. Around these themes the plays evolve. In the case of *Hamlet* the various themes add up to a perfectly synthesized unit — a reverberating symphony. In the case of the two plays by Stoppard the synthesizing of the same themes results in confused tunelessness.

3.1 *Loss of identity*

The theme concerning the loss of identity is of major importance in all three plays concerned. In *Hamlet* loss of identity is three-dimensional. This three-dimensional loss of identity can be elaborated:

3.1.1 The world surrounding Hamlet has undergone a sudden devastating change. Claudius, the usurper, has upset the order of God. The familiar world fades away and perplexity arises. The ghost embodies the disordered state. Hamlet is shocked by the disorder and he is unwilling to accept the responsibility to restore order:

The time is out of joint. O curséd spite
That ever I was born to set it right (I,v,188-189).

3.1.2 Hamlet doesn't know where he fits into this changed world. He struggles to accept the altered state of society and his own identity is threatened. The order within himself is upset; he develops an excess of melancholy:

For it cannot be
But I am pigeon-livered, and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should ha' fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain,
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
O, vengeance.
Why, what an ass am I... (II,ii,513-525).

3.1.3 Life and death seem to Hamlet to be losing significance. Their identity seems to be slipping away. Hamlet ponders on these issues obsessively:

To be, or not to be, that is the question,
Whether, 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them? To die, to sleep,
No more, and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks
That felsh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep,
To sleep, perchance to dream. ay there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life (III,i,56-69).

In *Hamlet* loss of identity is an all-encompassing issue, but it is also a temporary one. Loss of identity doesn't culminate in lack of identity. The sense of loss of identity is only a phase, a grey tide in which Hamlet is temporarily swept astray. The recovery of identity in Hamlet is enhanced by the fact that identity becomes elevated.

The "divinity that shapes our ends" (V,ii,10) relieves us of the burden of seeking our own identity and our own meaning. The theme of loss of identity in *Hamlet* ends in a majestic, victorious, resounding chord because man finds identity, meaning and purpose in subjecting himself to divinity.

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* the loss of identity enchains man's total existence. Rosencrantz is always embarrassed and Guildenstern is always worried. They lack any sense of security. They are faceless, even to themselves. Their names don't establish their identities; they become confused, even with each other, because they can be sure about nothing. The physical world (time and space) is also a nonentity. Guildenstern rambles on pathetically:

If it is [morning] and the sun is over there (his right as he faces the audience) for instance, that (front) would be northerly. On the other hand, if it is not morning and the sun is over there (his left)... that... (lamely) would still be northerly (picking up). To put it another way, if we came from down there (front) and it is morning, the sun would be up there (his left), and if it is actually over there (his right) and it's still morning, we must have come from up there (behind him), and if that is southerly (his left) and the sun is really over there (front), then it's afternoon. However, if none of these is the case... (1979, p. 42).

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are pathetic in their quest for identity. They have an intrinsic, intuitive awareness that identity may be found in obeying some summons. They feel that something beyond themselves ought to be able to provide them with identity.

Guil: ...An awakening, a man standing on his saddle to bang on the shutters, our names shouted in a certain dawn, a message, a summons... A new record for heads and tails. We have not been... picked out... simply to be abandoned... set loose to find our own way... We are entitled to some direction... I would have thought (1967, p. 14).

The ironic implication of this undirected awareness is that their obedience in answering Claudius' summons has put them on the road to fatalistic death. They live horizontally. Loss of identity culminates in lack of identity, because of their horizontal search for significance.

As far as the question of identity is concerned, *Dogg's Hamlet* can only be described as absolute anarchy on all levels. Man and his works are as faceless and devoid of meaning as a "tray of buttonholes" (1979, p. 28).

The theme of loss of identity doesn't have an end in Stoppard's two plays. The situation remains fluid and insubstantial. The tunelessness of the theme is as reverberating as the majestic tones of the same theme in *Hamlet*. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's disappearance stands in sharp contrast to Hamlet's heroic death. The difference in the final impact is caused by the presence and ultimate control of divinity in Hamlet's search for identity while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern keep pondering on a horizontal level.

3.2 *Appearance and reality*

The theme of the discrepancy between appearance and reality is prevalent in *Hamlet* and in the two modern plays. The interplay between appearance and reality becomes a major source of conflict and disorder in *Hamlet*. It is true that comedy stems from the discrepancy between appearance and reality. Hamlet himself abstract the crux of comedy. Laughter may arise from the discrepancy between appearance and reality but beneath the surface uneasiness ferments. The wise man is upset by the egregious folly of the human being:

... For any thing so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end both at the first, and now, was and is, to hold as't were the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure... Now this overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve... (III,ii,15-21).

In the case of *Hamlet* the inconsistency concerning appearance and reality is also the whetstone of tragedy (Hamlet delays to take revenge because he believes that Claudius is praying). In comedy, the character accepts the fact that appearance and reality are not synonymous, but he reconciles appearance and reality by allowing compromise. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet the idealist and scholar who believes man to be a paragon, the crown of the universe, is faced with the corruption of the Elsinorean world. His ideal vision of society and the true nature of society are vastly different from each other. His inability to accept the existence of the corrupt society causes him to subject himself to intense self-analysis. This introspection results in the discovery of the discrepancy between appearance and reality as far as he himself is concerned.

Hamlet appears to be the ideal fully-rounded man, the true paragon, according to the Renaissance concept of man.

In reality, however, Hamlet is insecure, immature and unable to accept the responsibility of the task laid upon him because he overlooks the guidance and control of the divine manipulator and the burden is too heavy for him to carry. His intense inner conflict results in a more mature vision of life, death and of his own being. He accepts the fact that reality deviates from his ideal and he also accepts his tragic destiny. In Hamlet's case acceptance of the true situation does not lead to compromise. He acts unflinchingly to annihilate the discrepancy between his ideal vision and reality. This endeavour results in a better world. The appearance, i.e. the ideal situation, becomes reality. This transformation is the true source of catharsis, the purging effect of tragedy. The onlooker becomes aware that the ideal is feasible when the perfect order is maintained.

Polonius is the embodiment of the discrepancy between appearance and reality. His words are meaningless. He states that "brevity is the soul of wit" (II,ii,90), yet it is his own lack of brevity that causes Gertrude to demand "more matter with less art" (II,ii,95). Polonius' death is therefore an early indication that pretence and false appearances are going to be stripped away. The futility and insignificance of his death serve to indicate the emptiness of the life he has led. Polonius has led a "behind-the-scenes" life, and this costs him his life. In Hamlet appearance, the look of righteousness, must be stripped away to leave the way open for the dawn of a purified reality.

The presence of the players has special significance as far as the interplay between appearance and reality is concerned. The players serve to unmask reality. The confusion which is brought about by the inconsistency between appearance and reality is brought to a climax by the players. The play which is supposed to represent reality reflects the unacknowledged, festering reality instead of the smooth appearance that has usurped the place of reality. The players unmask reality and in so doing they reduce the tension that has built up between appearance and reality.

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Doggs's Hamlet* appearance and reality are equally insubstantial. Both these concepts belong to the fluid zone of non-entities. Appearance and reality stand in sharp contrast to one another yet they are also fused. This paradoxical condition is part of the total confusion and the crisis that centre around man's search for identity. Man has got lost in a whirling ocean-current, and he is floating aimlessly and purposelessly.

In *Hamlet* the players unmask reality and put goodness in the ascendancy. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* the player reflects upon reality and appearance:

For all anyone knows, nothing is. Everything has to be taken on trust; truth is only that which is taken to be true. It's the currency of living. There may be nothing behind it, but it doesn't make any difference so long as it is honoured. One acts on assumptions (1967, p. 49).

Once again, the result of such reflections can't be corrective. These reflections are horizontal and don't touch upon the root of the discrepancy between appearance and reality. Appearance and reality are intermingled and become indistinguishable in *Dogg's Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Confusion reigns as the only possible concomitant of the background against which the plays were written.

3.3 *Passion and reason*

The interplay between passion and reason is a crucial theme in all three plays. In *Hamlet* the theme dealing with passion and reason is developed around Hamlet and Laertes. Hamlet is a scholar, a man of reason. His intellect has the controlling position in his life. In this respect he is the paragon, faithful to the Renaissance ideal. The domination of reason over passion causes him to delay in revenging his father's death. His passion grows cold while he devises his scheme to confirm the ghost's story. The apparent paradox as far as the domination of reason over passion is concerned, is that Hamlet is quite aware of the fact that his reason oppresses passionate action and yet he goes on allowing reason control of the situation:

... This is most brave

That I, the son of dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A scullion! Fie upon't fah!
About, my brain! (II,ii,525-531).

In truth, Hamlet's delay to act is caused by his inner insecurity. Reason has pushed passion into the background. This domination of man's reason ties in with his role as human controller. Passion, belief, faith and confidence in the power of the divine manipulator don't have a place when man's own reason is in control. Hamlet has to mature before he can take revenge. The equilibrium between passion and reason must be restored.

Laertes is Hamlet's negative. In his case, passion is on the throne. The

predominance of passion is revealed to be even more harmful than the dominance of reason. Laertes doesn't delay or reflect or seek confirmation concerning the true circumstances of his father's death. Passion's control results in rashness and gullibility that culminate in a foolhardy attitude. Even damnation becomes acceptable to Laertes:

I dare damnation. To this point I stand
That both the worlds I give to negligence,
Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged
Most thoroughly for my father (IV,v,126-132).

Both Hamlet and Laertes are the victims of a disturbed balance between passion and reason. This loss of balance results in the gaining of control over them by Claudius, the evil manipulator.

When Hamlet and Laertes are weighed, Hamlet proves to be the heavier of the two. He has gained insight and maturity. His "suffering-in-the-mind" results in a complete character, a man in whom passion and reason are perfectly balanced. Hamlet's analytical attitude eventually equips him to fulfil his duty while Laertes' passion leads to premature death. Hamlet becomes an instrument in the hands of divine manipulator. He seeks forgiveness from Laertes in a touching speech that reveals a balanced attitude:

Give me your pardon, sir. I have done you wrong,
But pardon't, as you are a gentleman.
This presence knows, and you must needs have heard,
How I am punished with a sore distraction.
Sir, in this audience,
Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts,
That I have shot my arrow o'er the house,
And hurt my brother (V,ii,195-213).

Laertes comes across as a person of good character but his reply to Hamlet's demand for forgiveness reveals that he lacks the insight that Hamlet possesses. His passionate action leads to hypocrisy whereas Hamlet's reasoned analysis leads to insight:

I am satisfied in nature,
Whose motive in this case should stir me most
To my revenge. But in my terms of honour
I stand aloof, and will no reconciliation,
Till by some elder masters of known honour
I have a voice and precedent of peace,
To keep my name ungor'd. But till that time,

I do receive your offered love like love,
And will not wrong it (V,ii,213-221).

Hamlet and Laertes are redeemed by death. Hamlet's redemption, however, is the brighter because it is enhanced by complete insight. Laertes reveals that he has also come to insight, but his death lacks the significance of Hamlet's because passion has oppressed reason too long. Laertes has never proceeded beyond the point of being Claudius' passionate pawn until his dying moments.

In *Hamlet* passion and reason are two opposing poles. Domination of the one over the other leads man astray. Passion and reason must be in perfect balance. Only when this balance is found and maintained does man lose his utter vulnerability as far as the manipulation of evil is concerned.

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* reason is all that has remained. Reason is no longer the lucid control and logic reasoning that one finds in *Hamlet*. Reason is the rambling of a perturbed and magnified mind. Reason encapsulates the whole of life. Anything that can't be explained by reasoned arguments is threatening and confusing. This attempt to give absolute sovereignty to reason has disastrous consequences. Man becomes the captive of his reason. Reason can't provide all the solutions and therefore a smothering prison of insecurity is erected. The only anchors that man has, are those that his reason can provide him with and they prove to be pathetically feeble and insufficient:

Guild: A weaker man might be moved to re-examine his faith, if in nothing else at least the law of probability. (He slips a coin over his shoulder as he goes to look upstage).

Ros: Heads.

Guil., examining the confines of the stage, flips over two more coins as he does so, one by one of course. Ros. announces each of them as "heads".)

Guild: (musing): The law of probability, it has been oddly asserted, is something to do with the proposition that if six monkeys (he has surprised himself)... if six monkeys were....

Ros: Game?

Guild: Were they?

Ros: Are you?

Guild: (understanding): Game. (Flips a coin). The law of averages, if I have got it right, means that if six monkeys were thrown up in the air for long enough, they would land of their tails about as often as they would land on their -

Ros: Heads (he picks up the coin).

Guil: Which even at first glance does not strike one as a particularly rewarding speculation, in either sense, even without the monkeys. I mean you wouldn't bet on it. I mean I would, but you wouldn't.... (1967,p.8).

Man rejects all emotive response. This belongs to the domain of passion whose existence has become illusory. Yet, the ironic truth is that man is intrinsically aware of the crux of his own crisis:

Guil: Is that what you imagine? Is that it? No fear...

Ros: Fear?

Guil: (in fury, flings a coin on the ground): Fear! The crack that might flood your brain with light! (1967, p. 10).

Man has the inherent need for emotional response but he can't bring himself to accept anything that his reason can't grasp. Everything has to be reduced to the level of comprehension by his own reason. Nothing may be subtle or mysterious. This deduction has a nauseating effect. The reasoned reality becomes monstrous absurdity:

Guil: A man breaking his journey between one place and another at a third place of no name, character, population or significance, sees a unicorn cross his path and disappear. That in itself is startling, but there are precedents for mystical encounters of various kinds, or to be less extreme, a choice of persuasions to put it down to fancy; until —“My God,” says a second man, “I must be dreaming, I thought I saw a unicorn.” At which point, a dimension is added that makes the experience as alarming as it will ever be. A third witness, you understand, and a fourth thinner still, and the more reasonable it becomes, until it is as thin as reality, the name we give to common experience... “Look, look!” recites the crowd. “A horse with an arrow in its forehead! It must have been mistaken for a deer” (1967, p. 15).

Lost in this maimed reality, Guildenstern's wistful reflection gains immense impact:

Guil (at the last moment before they enter, wistfully): I'm sorry it wasn't a unicorn. It would have been nice to have unicorns (p. 15).

The same nauseating absurdity is found in *Dogg's Hamlet*. The absence of passion results in maimed reason. Hamlet's speeches are intermingled and

Ros: Heads (he picks up the coin).

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Guil: (in fury, flings a coin on the ground): Fear! The crack that might flood your brain with light! (1967, p. 10).

Man has the inherent need for emotional response but he can't bring himself to accept anything that his reason can't grasp. Everything has to be reduced to the level of comprehension by his own reason. Nothing may be subtle or mysterious. This deduction has a nauseating effect. The reasoned reality becomes monstrous absurdity:

Guil: A man breaking his journey between one place and another at a third place of no name, character, population or significance, sees a unicorn cross his path and disappear. That in itself is startling, but there are precedents for mystical encounters of various kinds, or to be less extreme, a choice of persuasions to put it down to fancy; until —“My God,” says a second man, “I must be dreaming, I thought I saw a unicorn.” At which point, a dimension is added that makes the experience as alarming as it will ever be. A third witness, you understand, and a fourth thinner still, and the more reasonable it becomes, until it is as thin as reality, the name we give to common experience... “Look, look!” recites the crowd. “A horse with an arrow in its forehead! It must have been mistaken for a deer” (1967, p. 15).

Lost in this maimed reality, Guildenstern's wistful reflection gains immense impact:

Guil (at the last moment before they enter, wistfully): I'm sorry it wasn't a unicorn. It would have been nice to have unicorns (p. 15).

The same nauseating absurdity is found in *Dogg's Hamlet*. The absence of passion results in maimed reason. Hamlet's speeches are intermingled and

adapted to produce a perfect example of the absurd reasoning which results when balance has departed and subtlety has faded away:

Hamlet: There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will. But thou would'st now think how ill all's here about my heart. But 'tis no matter. We defy augury. There is 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 (1979, p. 8).

The contrast between *Hamlet* and the two modern plays is radical. In *Hamlet* the conflict arises because of the disturbance of the balance but restoration of the balance and redemption remain possible. Balance can be and is eventually restored. Passion and reason are put in the correct relationship to each other. In the modern plays balance has disintegrated; passion has become an illusion. No restoration of the balance can be possible because reality was cut in two parts, passion and reason. Passion was buried. Reason has remained but it has lost its sense because it is not counter-balanced by passion.

4. The temporal and the eternal

The relationship between the temporal and the eternal and specifically the interaction between them and the opacity surrounding these two entities are as topical in *Hamlet* as they are in the modern plays. In *Hamlet* the temporal and the eternal have their places within the vertically-structured Chain of Being. The temporal is the antechamber of eternity. Hamlet, after coming to insight, captures the essence of the matter:

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 (V,ii,191-192).

However, this illumination is the result of intense inner conflict concerning the relationship between the temporal and the eternal. Hamlet hasn't been concerned with the *readiness*: his concern has been the true character of life and death. He has tried to carry his load all by himself. He has taken the responsibility to recognize the truth concerning crucial questions upon himself. By taking control of himself, Hamlet has isolated himself from the divine guidance and he has been drawn in by the tumultuous current of confusion that stems from man's horizontal efforts to dissolve insoluble questions. When Hamlet realizes that "the readiness is all", "to be or not to be" is no longer a relevant question. Hamlet passes safely through the grey zone in which life and death, the temporal and the eternal, appear to be falling into an insubstantial, intermediary state:

What should such fellows as I do, crawling between heaven and earth?
(III,i,123-124).

In *Hamlet* the temporal and the eternal as eventually in a lucid relationship with each other. The time and the character of death are not really important. Eternity is the ultimate significance.

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* and *Dogg's Hamlet* eternity is the ultimate absence of significance. The temporal and the eternal are no longer vertically structured. They are a continuous horizontal line that fades into nothingness. Eternity is not a destination, it is a disappearance, the culminant of the absence of substance and meaning. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are continually puzzled by death:

Guil (tired, drained, but still an edge of impatience, over the mime): No... no... not for us, not like that. Dying is not romantic, and death is not a game which will soon be over... Death is not anything... death is not... It's the absence of presence, nothing more... the endless time of never coming back... a gap you can't see, and when the wind blows through it, it makes no sound... (1967, p. 95).

Man becomes a meaningless morsel of oblivion.

The difference in the significance of eternity results in differing values attached to death. In *Hamlet* death is very real. Yet, Hamlet's death is not cruel and harsh. Death is redemptive because Hamlet is eventually prepared for it. He has made the desired preparations while waiting in the antechamber.

In the two modern plays death is as meaningless as life. It is unreal and yet, it is very harsh. Death becomes farcical, mere acting, because man no longer regards death as a gateway to another, elevated entity, viz. eternity. Death is regarded only as the gradual movement into a continuous non-entity:

Guil (broken): We've travelled too far, and our momentum has taken over; we move idly towards eternity, without possibility of reprieve or hope of explanation (1967, p. 91).

The core of the crisis in the human condition is to be found in the distortion of the relationship between the temporal and the eternal. In *Hamlet* order is restored only after the temporal and the eternal have fallen into their proper places. In the two modern plays the temporal and the eternal are fused and the result is disastrous.

4. Conclusion

Hamlet's initial reprimand shouldn't be forgotten when a conclusion, concerning man and his devaluation of life from chess to diabolio, is drawn.

To attempt giving final answers must of necessity result in gross over-simplification. Therefore, my concluding look at the crucial issues around which the essential meaning of the play centres is anything but a final answer.

The first issue that merits attention concerns *commitment*. Hamlet, the great tragic hero, is in the end a fully-committed character. To commit himself fully and accept the task laid on him by his tragic destiny is Hamlet's great struggle. He has to sacrifice his own attempts to control his destiny and accept the steering of Providence. Hamlet subjects himself to Providence and becomes the pawn of the divine manipulator, sacrificing himself in the execution of his task. Hamlet gains the crown of total commitment, viz. spiritual fulfilment.

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Polonius, the epitome of hypocrisy, is the exponent of careful, self-interested commitment. Hamlet commits himself fully in carrying out the commission of the divine manipulator, God. This kind of commitment is self-sacrificing and leads to spiritual victory even if the body perishes. Polonius's commitment leads him into a cul-de-sac. It centres around himself and ends with his death. There is no crown, no victory. The only outcome is a futile, meaningless death behind an arras.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern flinch from commitment. They don't want to accept any responsibility. They are passively waiting to be commanded. They lack resolution and merely accept the command of an evil manipulator. They don't commit themselves fully to their task. They, like Hamlet, sacrifice their lives in the end. Their sacrifice, however, is not a result of total commitment. Their death is the culmination of non-

committal. Guil describes death as “the absence of presence” (1967, p. 95). They prefer this ultimate nothingness to carrying on their lives. Death is, to them, the easy way out. Death is an escape from the total commitment which life asks in order to be worth living and which man, in his perplexity, is unable to give.

In *Dogg's Hamlet* commitment is an illusory issue. Life is a series of fragments, leading nowhere, meaning nothing. Commitment simply doesn't exist.

Inseparable from commitment is the concept of isolation. Total commitment results in increasing loneliness. Hamlet, while growing in his commitment to his task, is progressively isolated from the world around him. He loses his trust in the treacherous world surrounding him; he is thrust into a crisis concerning his own identity and he lives “into himself”, searching and analysing himself. Hamlet's isolation is not destructive. On the contrary, his isolation is redemptive. While Hamlet is isolated from the world, he realises that the control of God is most important.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are also terribly lonely. Their isolation, however, is complete and destructive. They are isolated from God. They have no vertical relationship. Without a vertical relationship, their horizontal relationships are meaningless. They are isolated in a world in which nothing conveys any significance. Their isolation is unqualified. They are even isolated from themselves because man can't possibly know himself if he doesn't know his Maker.

In *Dogg's Hamlet* isolation has finally conquered. Life is a series of isolated incidents. There are no logical or chronological sequence, no cohesion to give shape to the shapeless reality. Man is utterly lonely and completely confused; communication has broken down, the mike is dead.

Closely connected to the question of isolation is the importance of the bonds. In *Hamlet* the bonds are granted a place of major importance. The violation of the bonds result in chaos. Claudius instigates the chaos when he breaks the bonds in killing his brother and marrying his sister-in-law. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern break the bond of trust, loyalty and friendship when they agree to become Claudius's pawns in trying to discover the reason for Hamlet's madness. Polonius violates the bond of trust between father and son when he sends Reynolds to spy on Laertes. Claudius, Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have no regard for the bonds. Therefore, the final chord of their lives is out of tune. Death is futile, leading to the culmination of isolation viz eternal damnation. Hamlet acts correctively in restoring the order by taking revenge. Before Hamlet can carry out his

corrective task the most important bond viz the bond with God has to be reinforced. Hamlet successfully carries out his task to restore the horizontal bonds because the vertical bond which is the conducting-wire of power, meaning and love has been reinforced.

In *Dogg's Hamlet* bonds are non-existent; man and God are non-entities. The absence of a conducting-wire, a vertical bond results in a powerless, meaningless world in which even the slight illuminating spark of horizontal bonds can't exist.

Finally, compassion is the issue of all-encompassing importance. The characters and conditions in which they live can be classified in two groups: Those with compassion and those lacking compassion. A character who has compassion is committed and has respect for the bonds. Compassion is the fruit of love, caring and commitment. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* Hamlet emerges as a ruthless character, lacking compassion. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet is a tragic hero, a man of moral stature who has compassion (as his conduct towards Laertes and his restoration of order signify). The reason for this change is the fact that compassion is non-existent in the world which is found in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*. A character with compassion would belong to the illusory level of the unicorn.

In *Dogg's Hamlet*, confusion leaves no place for compassion. In a world in which love, caring and commitment don't have a place compassion is necessarily also absent. The compassionate tone of the playwright in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* is redeeming. Stoppard doesn't make an unworthy thing of two pathetic men struggling against a surf that is too strong for them. The final response which they invoke is pity and compassion. Stoppard shows man in his pathetic state without dehumanizing him. In *Hamlet* Shakespeare's compassion with his characters is more subtle. Divine compassion is the redeeming chord.

At every twist on man's tortuous paths from *Hamlet* to *Dogg's Hamlet* he has lost a petal. The result is a bare stalk creeping sideways. The only way in which man can gain new petals is to grow upwards instead of creeping horizontally. Diabolo, the devil on two sticks, catch-22 where victory and defeat are equally impossible and grey perplexity is the only reality must be replaced by the black or white victory of chess and the complete control of the only redeeming manipulator, Christ.

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