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MILTON
STUDIES

XIII Edited by

James D. Simmonds

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH PRESS

(Samuel, *Dante and Milton: The "Commedia" and "Paradise Lost"* [Ithaca, N.Y., 1966], p. 37).

41. See Empson's discussion of the implications of this phrase (quoted from a speech by Faustus) in *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p. 78.

42. *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. David Masson, 3 vols. (London, 1882), I, 54.

43. MacCaffrey, "Lycidas: The Poet in a Landscape," p. 81.

44. "The Rising Poet, 1645," in *The Lyric and Dramatic Milton*, ed. Summers, p. 4.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 12.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

47. "Lycidas: The Poet in a Landscape," pp. 77, 92.

48. Fletcher, *The Transcendental Masque*, p. 8. See also the passage on "the prophetic implications of the [masque] genre" (p. 25).

49. Harold Bloom, of course, thinks otherwise; see *A Map of Misreading* (New York, 1975), p. 126. For an intelligent rejoinder to Bloom's views, see Northrop Frye, "Expanding Eyes," *Critical Inquiry*, II (1975), 199-216.

50. *John Milton: Poet and Humanist*, ed. John S. Diekhoff (Cleveland, 1966), p. 62. On the indebtedness of *Comus* to Revelation, see Alice-Lyle Scoufos, "The Mysteries in Milton's *Masque*," *Milton Studies*, VI, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh, 1974), 113-42; and for an introduction to the subject of the indebtedness of *Lycidas* to Revelation, see my own essay, "'A Poet Amongst Poets': Milton and the Tradition of Prophecy," in *Milton and the Line of Vision*, ed. Wittreich, esp. pp. 111-29.

51. Tayler, "Lycidas Yet Once More," pp. 106-08; Louis Martz, "Who Is Lycidas?" *Yale French Studies*, XLVII (1972), 187. *Lycidas* "is only intermittently 'pastoral': the opening lines present an 'incompletely realized pastoral landscape,' alerting us to the fact, says Isabel MacCaffrey, that Milton could have, but did not, 'take his bearings in the tradition of pastoral elegy' (*Lycidas: The Poet in a Landscape*," pp. 67, 69, 71). Balanchandra Rajan describes *Lycidas* as a poem of "mergings," noting specifically its conflation of various kinds of pastoral (*The Lofty Rhyme*, p. 54).

52. "Milton's Uncouth Swain," *Milton Studies*, III, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh, 1971), 51.

53. For Warton's note, and Todd's, see *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Henry John Todd, 3rd ed., 6 vols. (London, 1826), V, 9. For the tradition of St. Michael and the Mount of Vision, see A. B. Van Os, *Religious Visions: The Development of the Eschatological Elements in Medieval English Religious Literature* (Amsterdam, 1932), pp. 80-81.

54. "Who is Lycidas?" p. 184.

55. *Some Versions of Pastoral*, p. 6.

56. Shaffer, *Kubla Khan and the Fall of Jerusalem*, p. 155.

57. Marinelli, *Pastoral*, p. 9.

"DEARLY BOUGHT REVENGE":
SAMSON AGONISTES, HAMLET, AND
ELIZABETHAN REVENGE TRAGEDY

John F. Andrews

WHAT, IF ANYTHING, does *Samson Agonistes* have in common with *Hamlet*? Is there any reason, for example, to believe that *Hamlet* was one of the principal sources for *Samson Agonistes*? I'm not aware that anyone has ever suggested so, even though there are scattered lines in several of Milton's poems, including *Samson*, that some scholars have read as echoes of Shakespeare's most enigmatic tragedy.¹ I wouldn't dismiss the possibility that Milton was thinking of *Hamlet* now and then as he composed *Samson Agonistes*, but it is not my purpose here to prove any direct relationships. What I propose is something more modest and informal: a series of tentative probes into aspects of each work that seem to me to emerge with greater clarity when the two tragedies are examined side by side.

I

Let us begin with the later work. It has largely escaped critical notice, I think, that *Samson Agonistes* is, among other things, a species of revenge tragedy. Milton uses the word "revenge" six times in the poem, five of those times in the last 300 lines, as if to invite readers to compare *Samson Agonistes*, not merely with *Prometheus Bound* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, two Greek tragedies with which it has obvious and deep affinities, but also with such Elizabethan and Jacobean plays as *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Hamlet*, and *Antonio's Revenge*.

Shortly after Samson has been led off to the temple of Dagon, his solicitous father returns from the city with the happy news that he has finally persuaded the Philistine lords to accept a ransom in exchange for the release of his son. "Some much averse I found and wondrous harsh," Manoa says, "Contemptuous, proud, set on revenge and spite"; but fortunately he has found others "More generous far and civil, who confess'd/ They had enough reveng'd,

having reduc't / Thir foe to misery beneath thir fears" (1461-62, 1467-69). Before Manoa can finish telling the Israelite Chorus his welcome story, he hears a tumult from the city. Shortly thereafter, a messenger arrives to inform Manoa and his fellow Israelites that the "noise" and "shout" they heard was the "horrid spectacle" brought on by Samson when he pulled down the pillars of the "spacious Theater," killing thousands of Philistines, including all "thir choice nobility and flower"—and sacrificing his own life in the process (1508, 1510, 1542, 1605, 1654).

Hearing of this totally unanticipated development, which means that all his efforts on Samson's behalf have been in vain, Manoa is struck with dismay: "O lastly over-strong against thyself! / A dreadful way thou took'st to thy revenge" (1590-91). He fears that Samson has yielded to despair and brought shame upon himself by committing suicide. But as the messenger details the manner of the hero's death, it becomes clear that Samson's last "great act" (1389) has been an unblemished triumph. Whereupon the Chorus exclaims:

O dearly bought revenge, yet glorious!
Living or dying thou hast fulfill'd
The work for which thou wast foretold
To *Israel*, and now li'st victorious
Among thy slain self-kill'd
Not willingly, but tangl'd in the fold
Of dire necessity, whose law in death conjoin'd
Thee with thy slaughter'd foes in number more
Than all thy life had slain before. (1660-68)

A few lines later, Manoa himself expresses similar acceptance:

Come, come, no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause: *Samson* hath quit himself
Like *Samson*, and heroically hath finish'd
A life Heroic, on his Enemies
Fully reveng'd. (1708-12)

It has always struck me as curious that the word "revenge" becomes important in *Samson Agonistes* only after the agent of revenge has departed and the poem is four-fifths complete, the protagonist himself having never used the word once. This, of course, is in sharp contrast to the usual revenge tragedy, in which the protagonist is preoccupied with revenge almost from the beginning of the drama. One possible interpretation of the contrast, certainly, is that it is a mistake to put too much emphasis on

revenge as a theme in *Samson Agonistes*. Perhaps so; but I think it unlikely that Milton would have repeated the word "revenge" so many times in brief compass if he hadn't intended to summon up memories of the revenge motif in earlier Renaissance tragedies. What strikes me as the more plausible interpretation, then, is that Milton consciously modeled certain aspects of his poem on the structure of Elizabethan revenge tragedy—but did so in such a way as to comment on the substance of many of the works representative of the genre. Later I would like to propose that Milton's treatment of revenge tragedy amounts to something approximating a transformation of the genre—a transformation comparable to, though perhaps less radical than, his transformation of Greek epic in *Paradise Lost* and of Greek tragedy in *Samson Agonistes*.

Before considering any transformation of the genre, however, we must first outline some of the ways in which Milton used the traits of revenge tragedy as part of his artistic design in *Samson Agonistes*.

II

It is perhaps best to start with an examination of the central figure and his situation. The typical protagonist of a revenge tragedy is a man who, because of the distressing conditions in which he finds himself, is in an advanced state of melancholy.² Preoccupied with injustices and injuries that have disordered the past and blighted the present, he is pessimistic about the future and is given to mental disquiet, sleeplessness, world-weariness, impatience, and discontent.³ He declines to take part in a society he regards as unjust and oppressive, and he expresses his contempt for its debased values by scorning norms and forms that others accept without question.⁴ When prevailed upon to be present at ceremonial occasions, for example, he tends to isolate himself from the rest of the court by deliberately indecorous behavior, by ironic or seemingly foolish conversation, and by funereal or disheveled apparel.⁵ While others are making merry with food, drink, and festive games, he stands on the peripheries, wearing black and playing the role of party-pooper, his refusal to join the fun serving as an implicit and often unnerving comment on the superficial, hedonistic, irresponsible escapism he judges so severely.⁶ Much of his acerbic wit is directed at the foibles of women, whom he tends to regard as inherently weak-willed and deceitful; his disillusionment with womankind gives vent, at times, to sexual nausea, and it is not unusual to see him casting off

a lover, a wife, or even a mother with bitter disgust.⁷ When alone in soliloquy, or when in unguarded conversation with a confidant, the protagonist is given to deep, philosophical meditation, fearing that heaven, if it exists at all, has withdrawn its interest in, and influence on, human affairs, and pondering the nature of man in a world bereft of spiritual sustenance.⁸ Feeling trapped in a profoundly unhealthy atmosphere, chained like a captive slave, the protagonist tends to view his state as a prison and himself as a tortured inmate, his moods alternating erratically between a will to break his bonds with wrathful violence and a will to end his troubles once and for all by taking his own life.⁹ In his more hopeful, indignant moments, the protagonist meditates on vengeance, which he sees as the only way of liberating the present from a corrupt social and political order; but even in these moments, he tends to think of his imminent death, not as something to be feared and avoided, but as something to be welcomed, a relief from toil and trouble.¹⁰ Understandably, the protagonist of the revenge tragedy is at times irrational, even neurotic, in his thoughts and actions, and it is not unusual for him to be regarded by others as mad or bordering on madness.¹¹ Frequently he has the wit to use this trait to his advantage, feigning an antic disposition to gain a degree of flexibility he would otherwise lack.¹²

Inasmuch as the protagonist is generally correct in his analysis of the ills and inequities of society, the audience is usually encouraged, at least at the outset, to respond to his anger sympathetically, to see much of his world through his eyes, so to speak, and therefore to be tolerant of his occasional excesses. This is particularly true when the protagonist has an impeccable case against his enemy or enemies—either through a reliable witness, such as a truthful ghost or a trustworthy friend, or through reliable evidence emerging from the events of the play, as happens, for example, when a suspected murderer tips his hand or attempts treachery against the protagonist. Sympathy for the protagonist is also encouraged by the frequency with which he is placed, dramatically, in an intimate relationship with the audience: on the stage alone in soliloquy, for example, or taking the audience into his confidence with asides or ironic innuendos not meant to be heard or understood by others on the stage.¹³

As anyone familiar with the history of *Hamlet* criticism knows, the plot of the typical revenge tragedy normally includes two basic ingredients: (1) a significant delay or hesitation between the moment when the protagonist knows his course and the mo-

ment in which he fulfills it;¹⁴ and (2) a concluding confrontation in which a number of violent, bloody deaths occur, including that of the protagonist himself, either by his own hand or as a consequence of the means he employs to enact revenge on his enemy or enemies.¹⁵ The delay or hesitation may have any of several causes, but its almost inevitable effect is to build suspense, allow for the development of a counterintrigue by the avenger's enemies, and put much of the focus on mental, as opposed to physical, conflict. The protagonist's interior psychomachia, in which he upbraids himself for his inability to take aggressive action, prepares the audience for the explosive release of energy that climaxes and concludes the drama.¹⁶ When all is said and done, the audience is left with the sense that a sort of rough justice has been rendered; virtually every evildoer has paid the ultimate penalty for his crimes, and the avenger himself dies with the satisfaction that he has completed an appointed task. Just what attitude the audience will have toward the avenger at the end depends, in large measure, on the degree to which the avenger's motives and means have become tainted by the evils he has sought to eradicate. If he has clearly acted in terms of a divine mandate, so that it may credibly be affirmed that he has performed his vengeance as a minister of Providence, the audience will approve his actions as those of one of God's deputies. If, on the other hand, the avenger has acted more in terms of private motives, usurping from higher authorities the privilege of punishing crimes and righting wrongs, and using treacherous means to accomplish his revenge, the audience will normally be encouraged to judge him to be a reprobate scourge, a man who has been used by Providence to punish other evildoers, but a man who, once he has completed his role, is himself punished by divine vengeance.¹⁷

III

I doubt that anyone will need to be reminded that most of the foregoing characteristics of Elizabethan revenge tragedy are to be found in *Hamlet*, a play so well known and influential, in fact, that it has now become for many of us the very model of revenge tragedy. It may be of some interest, however, to observe how many of these features of the genre are also to be found, in one form or another, in *Samson Agonistes*.

When we first encounter Samson in Milton's poem, we discover that the prison imagery so prevalent in *Hamlet* is literally applicable to the man who, since his fall, has been chained to a

Hamlet's concluding remarks in this exchange have usually been interpreted as a signal that the hero has overcome his earlier melancholy and near-despair and has now acquired a faith in divine guidance that will enable him to face with serenity whatever lies in store for him.

A few minutes later, Hamlet accomplishes the goal that has drawn him since the beginning of the play. He receives a death-wound from Laertes' poisoned sword, but before the poison takes its final effect he successfully retaliates against the agent ultimately responsible for the treachery—forcing the "incestuous, murd'rous, damned Dane" Claudius to "drink off" the "potion" intended for Hamlet (V.ii.310–11). As Hamlet then lies dying on the stage, young Fortinbras arrives with his Norwegian army to usher in a new era for the Danish throne. But not before Hamlet's loyal companion Horatio pronounces a touching benediction for the expiring hero:

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest! (V.ii.344–45)

The conclusion of *Samson Agonistes* is in some ways strikingly similar to the conclusion of *Hamlet*. Following Dalila's visit to the prison, which has had the effect of stirring Samson from his lethargy, the hero is taunted by the giant Harapha, strongest champion of the Philistines. After Harapha rouses Samson's anger to an even greater pitch than had Dalila, Samson challenges him to combat, not so much to vent personal animosity as to demonstrate "whose God is strongest" (1155). Harapha, a formidable warrior, is reduced by Samson's confidence to the condition of a "baffl'd coward" (1237) and slinks off ignominiously. Next comes an Officer, more dignified than Claudius' messenger Osric, to be sure, but commissioned to similar purpose. He says that the Philistine lords request the hero's presence at a "solemn feast" to Dagon—a celebration "with Sacrifices, Triumph, Pomp, and Games" in honor of the god who has delivered Samson into Philistine hands (1311–12). At first Samson refuses to accompany the Officer to Dagon's temple, saying

Thou knowst I am an *Ebrew*, therefore tell them,
Our Law forbids at thir Religious Rites
My presence. (1319–21)

He tells the Officer that the Philistines have enough "Jugglers and Dancers" to "make them sport" without further humiliating a man "over-labor'd at thir public Mill" (1325, 1328, 1327):

Can they think me so broken, so debas'd
With corporal servitude, that my mind ever
Will condescend to such absurd commands? (1335–38)

After considering the matter a few minutes, however, prompted by the Chorus, which, like the Officer and like Horatio in *Hamlet*, advises the hero to "regard" himself (1333), Samson changes his mind.

Be of good courage, I begin to feel
Some rousing motions in me which dispose
To something extraordinary my thoughts.
I with this Messenger will go along,
Nothing to do, be sure, that may dishonor
Our Law, or stain my vow of *Nazarite*.
If there be aught of presage in the mind,
This day will be remarkable in my life,
By some great act, or of my days the last. (1381–89)

He then leaves with the Officer, not knowing exactly what the outcome will be but trusting in "the living God" (1140) to make provision for him. Shortly thereafter, we learn that Samson has performed his final victory and his greatest.

V

But this is where we came in, isn't it? Let us now pause and reflect on what we've seen. Thus far we have examined a few of the many ways in which *Samson Agonistes* and *Hamlet* are similar. Beginning with a general description of revenge tragedy, we have noted some of the characteristics of *Samson Agonistes* that resemble features of *Hamlet*, the most famous and certainly the most successful example of Elizabethan revenge tragedy.

Now let's reverse field and consider several ways in which *Samson Agonistes* may be seen to differ from *Hamlet* and most other revenge tragedies. For it is only when we are aware of the differences as well as the similarities that we can properly appreciate the relationship between *Samson Agonistes* and such revenge tragedies as *Hamlet*.

VI

While describing the general characteristics of Elizabethan revenge tragedy, I commented that the response of the audience to the protagonist and his actions is normally conditioned by the degree to which the protagonist is depicted as becoming tainted

by the evil he is seeking to eradicate. If the play presents the protagonist as a good man who enacts vengeance in the name of divine justice and as a direct agent of God, the chances are that he will emerge more or less untainted by the evil he punishes; often, but not always, a "good" avenger, such as Macduff in *Macbeth*,¹⁹ will survive the final holocaust. If, on the other hand, the play presents the protagonist as a man who enacts revenge out of personal malice rather than out of a concern for public good and divine justice, the chances are that he will forfeit the moral approval, if not the sympathy, of the audience as a man contaminated by the very evil he endeavors to remove.

The criterion that would have been most familiar to Elizabethan audiences was that found in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, where the Apostle reminds believers that it is un-Christian to return evil for evil and goes on to say that only God or his appointed ministers are permitted to punish injuries or crimes.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. . . . Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God. . . . and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. . . . The ruler . . . beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. (Romans xii.17–xiii.4)

As Fredson Bowers has pointed out in his pioneering study of *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, most of the revenge tragedies performed between 1587 and 1642 present a protagonist who, for one reason or another, finds it necessary or desirable to take justice into his own hands. In most instances, the avenger is, at best, in a morally ambiguous position, and quite often he is presented as having ventured beyond the pale of legal, moral, and religious sanctions. Sometimes, indeed, he becomes a man so steeped in blood that he forgoes all sympathy, however just his original cause, his vengefulness having turned him into a reprobate scourge of God, doomed to perdition.²⁰ Despite the various legal, moral, and religious prohibitions against private vengeance, however, Bowers observes that dueling was not uncommon among Elizabethan and Jacobean noblemen seeking redress for slights or injuries, and that in the latter years of Elizabeth's reign "honor grew more valuable than life" for many courtiers.²¹ "Such being the case," Bowers says, "the audience at the theatres seems to have made the customary compromise between a formal set of

religious and moral ethics and an informal set of native convictions. Under these circumstances, . . . the revenger of the drama started with the sympathy of the audience if his cause were good and if he acted according to the typically English notions of straightforward fair play. It was only, as with Hieronimo . . . when he turned to 'Machiavellian' treacherous intrigues that the audience began to veer against him."²²

In a more recent study entitled *Hamlet and Revenge*, Eleanor Prosser has argued, persuasively in my opinion, that audiences and playwrights were generally less sympathetic to revenge than Bowers and his generation of scholars assumed. Prosser quotes from a variety of Elizabethan materials indicating that revenge was considered blasphemous (with the revenger, like Lucifer, seeking to rival God by usurping Christ's judicial office), rebellious (the private revenger seeking to subvert the authority of the magistrate, God's deputy for the rendering of justice in the state), and unhealthy (for both mind and body).²³

Eternal damnation was not the only penalty for revenge. An age devoted to temporal pursuits was constantly warned that there were penalties in this world as well. The ravages of revenge appear most clearly in the deterioration of the mind. At first, the revenger becomes distracted, shutting everything but revenge out of his consciousness; he "mindeth none other thing, which reason and experience doth wel declare." As he gives rein to his impatience, he "is therewith abstracte from reason and toumed in to a monstrous figure." "To be short, after that anger hath once got the bridle at will, the whole mind and judgement is so blinded & caried headlong, that an angry man thinks of nothing but of revenge, insomuch that he forgetteth himselfe, and careth not what he doth, or what harm will light upon himselfe in so doing, so that he may be avenged."²⁴

VII

Whether we accept Bowers' interpretation of the conventions of Elizabethan revenge tragedy (according to which audiences were expected to be sympathetic to a good number of revengers, even though their actions were difficult to reconcile with Christian religious and ethical principles) or Prosser's interpretation (according to which in all but a few isolated instances audiences were expected to disapprove of private revenge), we face a problem when we approach *Samson Agonistes*. For it is evident from all of Milton's writings that he regards private revenge in much the same way as do the moralists and theologians quoted in the citation from *Hamlet and Revenge*. For Milton, the only kind of

revenge that is justifiable is that associated directly with divine vengeance. God and his ministers may execute vengeance, which thus becomes another term for divine justice; but private individuals who seek to usurp this judicial function do so at their peril. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton leaves no doubt that revenge apart from divine vengeance is unmistakably to be associated with Satanic rebellion. Satan is described in Book I as "Stirr'd up with Envy and Revenge" (I, 35); as studying "revenge, immortal hate, / And courage never to submit or yield" (I, 107-08); and as implacably harboring "considerate Pride / Waiting revenge" (I, 603-04). In Book II, Satan's "dire revenge" (II, 128) is associated not only with envy, hate, and pride, but also with cruelty, irrationality, and despair. And throughout *Paradise Lost*, revenge is synonymous with "falsehood," "deep malice to conceal" (IV, 122-23). Dame Helen Gardner has written an illuminating essay on "Milton's 'Satan' and the Theme of Damnation in Elizabethan Tragedy,"²⁵ but even so great a critic as she hasn't said all there is to be said about affinities between Milton's Satan and the avengers Milton would have found in many Elizabethan tragedies.

So how does this relate to *Samson Agonistes*? Is Samson an avenger in the tradition of the protagonist of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy? Is he in some ways similar to Satan? One recent commentator, Irene Samuel, has suggested so.²⁶ She is wrong, I think, in her argument that Milton disapproved of Samson's last "great act" of violence. And yet, in addition to the six references to revenge I cited at the beginning, there is another important reason for considering the possibility of such an interpretation. In the sixteenth chapter of Judges, the primary Biblical source for the Samson story, Milton would have found the following account of Samson's death.

Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport. And Samson called unto the LORD, and said O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life. (Judges xvi, 27-30)

As F. Michael Krouse²⁷ and other commentators have demonstrated, this was only one of several Biblical references to Samson that would have conditioned Milton's thinking about his heroic subject, and it was a passage that had been submitted to a wide variety of interpretations during the patristic and medieval periods—interpretations that usually elevated Samson's motivations and explained away the suggestion that he committed suicide while enacting a cruel personal vengeance on the Philistines for blinding him. Even so, however, this was, as Milton knew, the primary source of the Samson narrative, and there was no escaping the fact that there were certain affinities between its portrait of Samson and the image of the avenger made popular in dozens of Elizabethan revenge tragedies. How did Milton deal with this problem?

I'd like to suggest three ways. First, he faced the difficulty head-on, and, as we have seen, structured his tragedy in such a way as to echo the form, and thus the expectations, of the traditional Elizabethan revenge tragedy. Second, he included, as we have also seen, six references to revenge, strategically locating five of them near the end of the poem and taking care to have the word "revenge" employed only by characters—namely Manoa and the Israelite Chorus—who have been shown throughout the poem to be of limited understanding. Meanwhile, third, he presented the details of Samson's death in such a way to leave no doubt in the mind of the audience that the hero acted as an inspired minister of God rather than as a reprobate scourge.

Just before Samson leaves with the Officer, he says:

Happ'n what may, of me expect to hear
Nothing dishonorable, impure, unworthy
Our God, our Law, my Nation, or myself;
The last of me or no I cannot warrant. (1423-26)

Like the hero of classical tradition, Samson is here presented as a man of high-minded self-assurance, concerned about honor and worthiness.²⁸ But a close examination of the speech will disclose that Samson invokes these traditional heroic concerns only to place their traditional locus in what Milton would have regarded as a properly subordinate position. For by this point in his life, Samson has learned that *personal* honor is of significance only if it is rightly related to higher values and loyalties. What we find in Samson's last speech, then, is the expression of a faithful champion's assured and unambiguous commitment to a perfectly

aligned hierarchy of duties: first, to "Our God"; second, to "our Law"; third, to "my Nation"; and fourth, to "myself."²⁹

The same unambiguous tone pervades the messenger's account of what happened once Samson arrived at the temple. "He patient but undaunted where they led him, / Came to the place" (1623-24).

At length for intermission sake they led him
Between the pillars; he his guide requested
(For so from such as nearer stood we heard)
As overtir'd to let him lean a while
With both his arms on those two massy Pillars
That to the arched roof gave main support.
He unsuspecting led him; which when Samson
Felt in his arms, with head a while inclin'd,
And eyes fast fixt he stood, as one who pray'd,
Or some great matter in his mind revolvd.
At last with head erect thus cried aloud,
"Hitherto, Lords, what your commands impos'd
I have perform'd, as reason was, obeying,
Not without wonder or delight beheld.
Now of my own accord such other trial
I mean to show you of my strength, yet greater;
As with amaze shall strike all who behold." (1629-45)

As Anthony Low has noted, *this* Samson seems more like Isaiah's Suffering Servant in his passion than like the Samson of Judges begging revenge for the loss of his two eyes.³⁰ *This* Samson,

though blind of sight,
Despis'd and thought extinguish't quite,
With inward eyes illuminated
His fiery virtue rous'd
From under ashes into sudden flame. (1687-91)

As Manoa says, echoing our own "calm of mind, all passion spent" (1758),³¹

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble. (1720-24)

VIII

Most critics find similar "peace and consolation" (1757) in the manner of Hamlet's death, hearing Horatio's "flights of angels" benediction as Shakespeare's means of assuring us of the

beatific destiny of Hamlet's soul. I must confess, however, that my confidence in Horatio as a spokesman for Shakespeare's view of Christian eschatology is severely limited—particularly in light of Horatio's immediately preceding speech in which he threatens to commit a Stoic-like suicide, describing himself as "more an antique Roman than a Dane" (V.ii.326).³² I am similarly skeptical of the consolation many interpreters profess to find in the concluding remarks by Fortinbras:

Let four captains
Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,
For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have proved most royal. (V.ii.380-83)

This, after all, is the rhetoric of political transition; and there is no reason to assume that it is any more adequate to sum up Hamlet's career than Mark Antony's "This was the noblest Roman of them all" speech is adequate to sum up all that we have seen, heard, and inferred about Brutus during the course of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Like every so-called choral speech in Shakespeare, Fortinbras' eulogy for Hamlet must be considered in the context of the whole play. And no small part of that context is the fact that every time we have seen or heard about Fortinbras prior to this moment, he has been portrayed as an irresponsible young Hotspur eager to seize on any opportunity, however trifling, to advance his military honor. Can it augur well for the future of Denmark that "th' election lights / On Fortinbras" (V.ii.340-41)?³³ I seriously doubt that Milton would have considered such an outcome equivalent to the "occasion" for "honor" and "freedom" (1716, 1715) bequeathed to Israel by Samson's heroic death. Samson's death affords the opportunity for political liberation; Hamlet's death merely initiates a different kind of political subjugation.

But how might Milton have responded to the other aspects of *Hamlet's* denouement? Would Milton have regarded Shakespeare's protagonist as an example of the way "rightly to be great" (IV.iv.53)? Unfortunately, we don't have any notes Milton may have made on *Hamlet*. We do have Milton's other writings, however, and it may not be altogether idle to extrapolate from them and speculate for a moment on how Milton might have interpreted *Hamlet*.

In view of Milton's treatment of the subject of revenge in *Paradise Lost* and in *Samson Agonistes*, it seems safe to infer that he would not have assumed, as many later readers have, that

Hamlet from the beginning of the play has a "sacred duty" to wipe everything from "the book and volume" of his "brain" except the Ghost's commandment to revenge the elder Hamlet's "foul and most unnatural murder" (I.v.103, 25). Milton would have examined the text closely to determine whether Hamlet's desire to kill the King is motivated primarily by a quest for private blood revenge or primarily by a quest to overthrow a tyrannous regime as a divine minister for the public good. Here and there Milton would have found hints that Hamlet does state his cause in political and theological terms,³⁴ but I think he would have been disturbed by the infrequency with which Hamlet suggests that his reasons go beyond a passionate desire to obtain a suitable personal revenge for the murder of his father. Milton would have been troubled, too, I think, by the strong indications in the text that the Ghost cannot be a "spirit of health" (I.iv.40).³⁵ And I suspect that he would have been just as alarmed as Horatio and the watch when Hamlet disregards their warnings and speaks to the Ghost without applying any of the traditional tests to prove that it is not a devil assuming the "pleasing shape" of Hamlet's father to "abuse" and "damn" the younger Hamlet (III.i.567, 570). It strikes me as likely that Milton would have regarded Hamlet, in the early portions of the play, as a "desperate" and "distracted" melancholic (I.iv.87; I.v.97), understandably aroused to a fever pitch of indignation at the suggestion that his beloved father was murdered by the slimy Claudius, but so emotionally overwrought that he is incapable of addressing the situation with rational judgment.

In this light, I suspect, Milton would have read many of Hamlet's soliloquies not merely as sincere disclosures of Hamlet's most intimate thoughts, but also as dramaturgical devices by means of which Shakespeare allows the audience to observe Hamlet's emotional, mental, and spiritual confusion at close range. Scrutiny of the celebrated "To be or not to be" soliloquy (III.i.56-88), for example, would have yielded three more or less distinct movements in Hamlet's thought processes. In the first movement (lines 56-65), Hamlet analyzes his situation as "an antique Roman" Stoic might, and thereby views suicide as an honorable and attractive option, given his "sea of troubles." In the second movement (65-82), Hamlet draws back in fear, recalling the Christian prohibition against suicide as a damnable sin. But in the third movement (83-88), as the soliloquy concludes, Hamlet's more habitual orientation toward the Renaissance code of honor drives

him on to upbraid "conscience" and accuse himself of cowardice for allowing Christian ethical and eschatological considerations to frustrate "the native hue of resolution." Here as elsewhere in the play, Milton would have found a penetrating psychological exploration of a troubled man's consciousness, and one that would have shown a "conscience" only intermittently aligned with what Milton—and I think Shakespeare—would have regarded as a proper spiritual orientation. It seems possible, incidentally, that Milton might have learned from these soliloquies a few of the techniques by which he shows such characters as Satan and Adam agonizing—often with similarly convoluted expressions of confusion—in *Paradise Lost*.³⁶

But back to *Hamlet*. Would Milton have seen signs that Hamlet, like Adam in *Paradise Lost* and like Samson in *Samson Agonistes*, eventually emerges into a clearer perception of himself and of the proper response to his situation? There are, of course, indications that Hamlet approaches his problems rather differently toward the end of the play. As he tells Horatio of how he escaped the plot Claudius laid for him by substituting a different commission for the one Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were bearing with them aboard ship to England, Hamlet affirms belief in "a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (V.ii.10-11). This and two similar references to Providence in the final scene of the play³⁷ have led many modern critics to the inference that, however adrift he may have been earlier in the drama, Hamlet has now found his moorings. I'm bothered, however, as I think Milton would have been, by counterindications suggesting that Hamlet's spiritual perspective in act V is not much broader than it was in act I.

The "How all occasions do inform against me" soliloquy, near the end of act IV, is even more tortuous in its "reasoning" than the "To be or not to be" soliloquy, with Hamlet taking a negative example—Fortinbras risking "two thousand souls" "to gain a little patch of ground / That hath in it no profit but the name"—and transforming it into a positive exhortation for Hamlet to prosecute his own cause: "O, from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" (IV.iv.32-66).

In similar fashion, following his return from the interrupted voyage to England, Hamlet analyzes the folly of all worldly vanity in his *memento mori* meditation in the graveyard (V.i.59-192)³⁸ and then immediately reveals himself to be preoccupied with just such worldly vanity in his altercation with Laertes at Ophelia's

grave (V.i.230-70). "Hamlet the Dane" is not to be "outfaced" by a brother leaping into the grave of his sister. Invoking the name of Mount Ossa—significantly, one of the mountains the Titans heaped on Olympus to scale heaven, and thus proverbial as a symbol of hubris—he flies into what he later acknowledges to have been a "towering passion" (V.ii.80).

But what about Hamlet's three references to Providence and his statement that it is "perfect conscience" to slay the murderous, incestuous, treacherous King (V.ii.63-70)? It seems to me that in each instance there is a qualifying context. The "perfect conscience" remarks occur immediately following Hamlet's gloating report about how he has dispatched Rosencrantz and Guildenstern "to sudden death, / Not shiving time allowed" (V.ii.46-47)—punishment that would have been unusually harsh even for convicted traitors, and punishment that seems all the more inhumane considering that the play provides no evidence that Hamlet's former schoolmates are at all aware of the treachery of the King they loyally serve. When Hamlet boasts that "They are not near my conscience" (V.ii.58), we are surely meant to wonder about the Prince's conscience—just as we will probably have been shocked earlier when Hamlet spares Claudius at prayer, not because Hamlet is too sensitive to "butcher a defenceless man,"³⁹ but because he wishes to await a moment when the King is unquestionably engaged in some activity that "has no relish of salvation in't" (III.iii.92), so that he will go straight to hell.

Hamlet's reference to Providence just before he enters the fatal fencing match occurs, we will recall, only after he has expressed some misgivings about participating in the wager. In view of Hamlet's knowledge that Claudius is not above treachery and that Laertes is eager to avenge the deaths of both Polonius and Ophelia, Hamlet's uneasiness is perfectly rational, a fact underscored by Horatio's reply: "If your mind dislike anything, obey it" (V.ii.197). Are we then to conclude that Hamlet is manifesting trust in Providence when he disregards such warnings and proceeds with the match anyway? Surely not. There is every indication that at this moment Hamlet is acting against his better judgment. We will do well to recall a sentence from the earlier Fortinbras soliloquy:

Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unused. (IV.iv.36-39)

Prompted, no doubt, by the same pride that, according to Claudius, evened Hamlet with envy when a visiting young Frenchman gave a "masterly report" (IV.vii.94) concerning Laertes' skill with the rapier, Hamlet puts out of mind any need to take precautions. He is, in short, "remiss" (IV.vii.132) at this crucial moment, and his error costs him his life. The scene is not without parallels in *Julius Caesar*, a play Shakespeare probably composed only a few months earlier, and a play in which Caesar, similarly disregarding misgivings that "would perhaps trouble a woman" (*Ham.* V.ii.195-96), is led self-blinded to his assassination.⁴⁰

Now, if Milton thought about this moment in *Hamlet* when he composed the ending of *Samson Agonistes*, we can be certain that he took great pains to make it apparent to his readers that the inner voice heeded by Samson is the voice of God, not the voice of misguided personal honor. For, despite superficial similarities, the concluding moments of *Samson Agonistes* are fundamentally different in their implications from the concluding moments of *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* may be described, in Horatio's words, as a tragedy of "purposes mistook / Fall'n on th' inventors' heads" (V.ii.369-70), and the protagonist himself is not exempt from the applicability of this judgment. *Samson Agonistes* also involves "purposes mistook / Fall'n on th' inventors' heads," of course, but in Milton's tragedy the irony is applicable only to the Philistines. There is no suggestion of "purposes mistook" in the protagonist's last great act.

In order to respond properly to *Hamlet*, the audience will need to have learned—or at least will need to have been powerfully led to recall—truths lost on the unwitting victims of "purposes mistook." In the process, perhaps, the "judicious" (III.ii.23) will have been reminded of the famous prayer of St. Augustine: "There, but for the grace of God, go I." For in *Hamlet*—as, I think, in other Shakespearean tragedies such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*—"the pity of it" (*Othello* IV.i.192) is that the protagonist dies unprepared, in Christian terms, for his death. This, of course, is the usual pattern in religious tragedy, and certainly in Shakespearean tragedy.

But it is emphatically not the pattern in *Samson Agonistes* or in that play's chief classical prototype, *Oedipus at Colonus*, where the dramatist provides strong indications that the protagonist, far from dying unprepared, dies triumphantly and is received forthwith into the company of the blessed. In this kind of tragedy, which might almost be called a Divine Comedy, the hero grows in self-

knowledge and humility as he profits from his suffering, and he dies purged of much of the pride and sinfulness that precipitated his earlier downfall. Among Shakespeare's tragedies, the only one that seems to me to approach this kind of pattern is *King Lear*, and there is enough ambiguity about *that* play's ending that some critics view it as the darkest of all of Shakespeare's tragedies.

With *Samson Agonistes*, I think, we are on surer ground. For by the conclusion of *this* tragedy there can be little doubt that the hero dies well, that he has been granted a degree of illumination that places him in a mysterious realm beyond the point where any member of the audience can go. We may not fully understand his fate, but we have faith that it is good.⁴¹ For by the end of *his* life, Samson has attained, to appropriate a coda from T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding":

A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything).⁴²

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NOTES

This article is a slightly revised version of a lecture delivered at the Folger Shakespeare Library on April 25, 1977. All *Hamlet* quotations are cited from the Norton Critical Edition, ed. Cyrus Hoy (New York, 1963); other Shakespeare quotations are from *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, gen. ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, 1969). Milton is quoted from *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957).

1. Frank Allen Patterson and French Rowe Fogle, in *An Index to the Columbia Edition of the Works of John Milton* (New York, 1940), list references to *Hamlet* in *Comus* (381, 431, 838), *Paradise Lost* (I, 91, 254; III, 231; IV, 79; VIII, 15; X, 718; XI, 15), and *Samson Agonistes* (1138).

2. Hieronimo in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Titus in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Malevole in Marston's *The Malcontent*, Antonio in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, and Vindice in Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* all suffer the psychological imbalance and philosophical disorientation characteristic of men placed in extreme situations, and all, at one point or another, experience severe melancholy.

3. In III.vii of *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo describes himself with such terms as "wearyed," "tormented," "restless," and "withered." Hamlet's every utterance is pregnant with world-weariness, from his first soliloquy in I.i.129-59 ("How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!") to the dying moments when he bids farewell to "this harsh world" (V.ii.333).

4. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, once aware that he cannot obtain justice from the king, Hieronimo becomes totally alienated from the court. Antonio in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* appears in black, as do Hieronimo and Hamlet; like them, he also utters "wild and whirling words" (*Ham.* I.v.133) and on occasion behaves as a fool.

5. Hamlet's mocking asides and ironic sallies are almost as disturbing to Claudius as his "inky cloak" (I.ii.77); and the "antic disposition" (I.v.171) Hamlet adopts when dealing with Polonius is one of his most effective devices for misleading the court about his true mental state.

6. Though "to the manner born," Hamlet scorns the "heavy-headed revel" pervading Claudius' court; to him, it is "a custom / More honored in the breach than the observance" (I.v.15-17).

7. Hamlet's obsession with his mother's incest poisons his relationship with Ophelia and leads him to a wholesale rejection of womankind ("Fralty, thy name is woman," I.ii.146) and of sexuality ("I say we will have no moe marriage," III.i.143). In later revenge tragedies, sexual depravity—adultery, incest, rape, prostitution—becomes an all-consuming preoccupation: e.g., Tourneur's *Revenger's Tragedy*, Webster's *The White Devil*, Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, and Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*.

8. Senecan revenge tragedy had abounded "in rhetorical reflections on life, death, and fate," and in this as in other respects it had established the genre as a vehicle for intellectual and spiritual deliberation. "The hero was set in a position which, as in *Hamlet*, wrenched his whole moral outlook. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, and to an extent in *Antonio's Revenge*, tragedy came into the life of the hero with sufficient intensity to warp his character, drive him to insanity, and eventually to deal him ruin in victory" (Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642* [Princeton, 1940], pp. 40, 154-55).

9. Hamlet tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that "Denmark's a prison" (II.ii.238), and much of the language and action of *Hamlet* substantiates this observation. The play is dominated by references to restraint and constraint, and the mobility and freedom of the protagonist are significantly limited by his environment.

10. Hamlet gives serious thought to suicide at several points in the play, beginning with his first soliloquy in I.i.129-59 ("that the Everlasting had not fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter") and culminating in his "To be or not to be" soliloquy (III.i.56-88); there remains an air of almost suicidal resignation even in his last meditative statement ("If it be not now, yet it will come," V.ii.201).

11. Madness is a motif in Senecan revenge tragedy (e.g., *Hercules Furens*) and in the Italian novelle that influenced English revenge tragedy, but of course its most celebrated pre-Shakespearean instance is Hieronimo's temporary insanity in *The Spanish Tragedy*.

12. As Fredson Bowers points out, Senecan revengers were "warned to conceal and dissemble revenge lest the chance for vengeance be lost" (*Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, p. 45). Hieronimo's revenge is accomplished by guile in *The Spanish Tragedy* (where, as later in *Hamlet*, a play-within-the-play figures in the revenger's tactics), as is Titus' in *Titus Andronicus*.

13. The protagonist's isolation predisposes a viewer to regard him sympathetically, especially when he is also a social critic and an ethical commentator—as with Hamlet—and when, through aside or soliloquy, he functions as a kind of mediator between the action of the play and the audience in the theater. In *Four*

Stages of Renaissance Style (Garden City, 1955), Wylie Sypher draws an interesting parallel between the soliloquy in *Hamlet* and the "Sprecher" (or "speaker") frequently found in Mannerist paintings—"a sharply accented foreground figure who faces outward toward the spectator, yet twirls inward, gesturing or glancing toward the action behind him" (pp. 143-44).

14. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, in many ways the prototype of Elizabethan revenge tragedy, Hieronimo delays, first, to be certain of the identities of his son's murderers and, second, to discover the most fitting way to accomplish his vengeance. Titus Andronicus delays for three and a half acts because he trusts the heavens to take up his cause; only when he concludes that justice has fled the earth does he take vengeance into his own hands. Amleth in Belleforest (and probably his counterpart in the Kydian *Ur-Hamlet* as well) delays only because he is powerless to act until the proper opportunity presents itself. Shakespeare's Hamlet, too, seems motivated primarily by a desire to await the first clear opportunity, but there are times when he offers plausible alternative motives: corroborating the testimony of the Ghost before concluding that Claudius has in fact committed fratricide and regicide (II.ii.565-72), and securing assurance that Claudius, when he dies, will be damned (III.iv.75-98).

15. The archetype of the vengeful holocaust in Western literature is the slaughter of the suitors by Odysseus upon his return to Ithaca in the *Odyssey*. But one finds the motif also in Greek tragedy (e.g., Clytemnestra's vengeance on her husband in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*) and in Senecan tragedy (e.g., *Thyestes, Medea*), and it is basic to the structure of Elizabethan revenge tragedy from *The Spanish Tragedy* onward.

16. Wylie Sypher argues that in contrast to Mannerist art, which remains largely attenuated and unresolved at the close, Baroque art is characterized by a directional rhythm in which constriction of space and energy at the beginning propels the participant toward "complete release," "dynamic fulfillment," at the close (*Four Stages of Renaissance Style*, p. 204). Sypher quite rightly sees *Hamlet* as less "Baroque" in this sense than *Samson Agonistes*.

17. As Fredson Bowers has observed, in most of the early examples of Kydian revenge tragedy (e.g., *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Hoffman*), an attractive, abused protagonist is presented sympathetically at first, then shown to be excessive and even at times villainous, so that by the time he completes his vengeance the audience sees him as deserving of death. In some plays, however, (e.g., Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*), the protagonist enacts his vengeance with cruelty and excessive zeal but nevertheless, apparently, retains the sympathy of the playwright and his audience. In others (e.g., Chettle's *Hoffman* and Marston's *Revenger's Tragedy*), the protagonist appears to have the playwright's approval until near the end of the play, only to forfeit it at the close. With Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*, a significant shift from tradition occurs: Charlemont is enjoined from revenge by the ghost of his murdered father, but eventually sees retribution visited on the villain D'Amville by a just heaven and learns that "Patience is the honest man's revenge." During the decade between 1610 and 1620 virtually every play dealing with revenge cast the revenger as a villain (e.g., Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, Webster's *The White Devil*), thus implying ethical disapproval of revenge. And during the succeeding decade almost every revenge tragedy provided explicit and "absolute disapproval of revenge under any circumstances" (Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, p. 186).

18. In "Hamlet and His Problems"—first printed in *The Sacred Wood* (London, 1920)—Eliot argued that Shakespeare was simply unable to obtain complete control over his "intractable" source material, so that Hamlet's delay seems caused largely by a vague disgust for his mother that lacks an "objective correlative" sufficiently well defined to motivate a specific action in response.

19. "Sinful Macduff" (*Macbeth* IV.iii.224) is not a man entirely without fault, of course (he may be held responsible for the deaths of his wife and children, inasmuch as he left them defenseless), and his motives are private (to avenge the deaths of his slaughtered innocents) as well as public (to execute a king who has clearly become a tyrant); but there seems no doubt that Shakespeare expected his audience to view him as a divinely approved minister of the public good rather than as a reprobate scourge.

20. In a recent article in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, XXIX (1978), 82-84, R. W. Dent has pointed out that "scourge" and "minister" were not consistently used in Shakespeare's time—or Milton's—to indicate divine disapproval and approval, respectively, of an agent of vengeance. Both terms could be used more or less neutrally, or with implications opposite those assigned here. It remains convenient to distinguish between them, however, as a way of organizing and simplifying discourse about the various kinds of divine punishment. For a full discussion of the theological background of the two terms, see Fredson Bowers, "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge," *FMLA*, LXX (1955), 740-49 (reprinted in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Hamlet*, ed. David Bevington [Englewood Cliffs, 1968], pp. 82-92); and two books by Roy W. Battenhouse: *Marlowe's Tamburlaine* (Nashville, 1941) and *Shakespearean Tragedy: Its Art and Its Christian Premises* (Bloomington, Ind., 1969). Bowers and Battenhouse both interpret Hamlet's reference to himself as heaven's "scourge and minister" (III.iv.179) as an indication that, having mistakenly slain Polonius, he expects some form of divine retribution to be visited upon him. Other statements in this speech, however, suggest that he regards Polonius' death as itself a punishment (both for Polonius, as a "rash, intruding fool" [III.iv.32], and for Hamlet, who forfeited an opportunity for revenge), but one for which Hamlet can and will "answer well" when called to account (III.iv.180). I also disagree with Bowers's view that Hamlet uses "scourge and minister" as contrasting terms here. Whether or not sophisticated members of the audience were expected to think of a "scourge" ("a man already damned for his sins") as different from a "minister" ("if a minister's duty is to exact God's punishment or retribution as an act of good, his hands will not be stained with crime"), as Bowers argues ("Hamlet as Minister and Scourge," pp. 743-44), the context suggests that Hamlet himself thinks of the terms as synonyms, or at least fails to discriminate between them with any theological precision. One may compare similar constructions elsewhere—e.g., "O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else? / And shall I couple hell?" (I.v.92-93); "Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell" (III.i.551)—in which Hamlet manifests a desire to reconcile the irreconcilable.

21. *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, p. 30.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

23. Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge* (Stanford, 1967), pp. 3-13.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

25. *English Studies*, NS I (1948), 46-66; reprinted in *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Arthur E. Barker (London, 1965), pp. 205-17.

26. "Samson Agonistes as Tragedy," in *Calm of Mind: Tercentenary Essays*

on "Paradise Regained" and "Samson Agonistes" in *Honor of John S. Diekhoff*, ed. Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. (Cleveland, 1971), pp. 235-57.

27. *Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition* (Princeton, 1949).

28. John M. Steadman discusses *megalopsychos* in his chapter, "The Critique of Magnanimity," in *Milton and the Renaissance Hero* (Oxford, 1967).

29. Irene Samuel ("Samson Agonistes," p. 246) writes: "The order of that penultimate line in Samson's final words on stage is revealing in its shift from 'our' to 'my' and in its climactic progress: *our* God, *our* Law, *my* Nation or *myself*. It is still something of a monomaniac who speaks, and the mania is still egomania—a not uncommon flaw in tragic agents." Here, of course, everything depends on whether one is reading up the scale of being or down; I think it perverse to interpret the line as a signal that Samson has inverted the accepted hierarchy of values.

30. *The Blaze of Noon: A Reading of "Samson Agonistes"* (New York, 1974), p. 176.

31. See Sherman Hawkins, "Samson's Catharsis," *Milton Studies*, II, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh, 1970), 211-30, for a fine discussion of what these words are likely to have meant to Milton. For a discussion of catharsis in Shakespeare, see my article, "The Catharsis of *Romeo and Juliet*," in *Contributi dell'Istituto di filologia moderna*, ed. Sergio Rossi (Milan, 1974), pp. 142-75.

32. Battenhouse has interesting things to say about Horatio in *Shakespearean Tragedy* (pp. 259-60). For further analyses of "Stoicism" as treated by Shakespeare, see John Anson, "Julius Caesar: The Politics of the Hardened Heart," *Shakespeare Studies*, II (1966), 11-33; and Marvin L. Vawter, "'Division 'tween Our Souls': Shakespeare's Stoic Brutus," *Shakespeare Studies*, VII (1974), 173-95. Ruth M. Levitsky has analyzed Stoicism (along with "Renaissance Aristotelianism" and Christian ethics) in *Hamlet* in "Rightly to Be Great," *Shakespeare Studies*, I (1965), 142-67.

33. Battenhouse discusses this and several other points raised here in *Shakespearean Tragedy*; see esp. pp. 227-44.

34. The clearest instance occurs at V.ii.63-70:

Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon—
He that hath killed my king and whored my mother,
Popped in between th' election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
And with such *coz* nage—is't not perfect conscience
To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damned
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?

35. See Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*, pp. 97-142.

36. See, e.g., I, 242-63; IV, 32-113; IX, 896-959; and esp. X, 720-844.

37. V.ii.48; V.ii.199.

38. Harry Morris's useful article, "Hamlet as a *Memento Mori* Poem," *PMLA*, LXXXV (1970), 1035-40, is limited, I think, by his failure to take into account the contextual relevance of the graveyard scuffle.

39. In the introduction to his 1939 edition of *Hamlet*, G. L. Kittredge argued that Hamlet delays at this moment because he has an elevated "nature and education" at odds with the demands of a primitive, rigid revenge code, so that his cruel speech (which Dr. Johnson thought "too horrible to be read or to be uttered") is

"merely a pretext for delay" until a time when he will not be forced to "butcher a defenceless man" (reprinted in Irving Ribner's revised edition of Kittredge's edition of the *Complete Works* [Waltham, Mass., 1971], pp. 1044-45). Perhaps so; but I would find it easier to believe that "these diabolical sentiments are not Hamlet's sentiments" (p. 1045) if Hamlet did not elsewhere regard revenge as incomplete unless it includes damnation for the victim.

40. Caesar, too, is fatalistic ("What can be avoided / Whose end is purposed by the mighty gods?" II.ii.26-27), disdainful of augury (II.ii.37-43), and too much a "man" to yield to womanly "cowardice" (II.ii.41). "Seeing that death, a necessary end, / Will come when it will come" (II.ii.36-37; cf. *Ham.* V.ii.199-201); he disregards all portents, warnings, and misgivings and is led as a lamb to the slaughter. As Calphurnia says, "Alas, my lord, / Your wisdom is consumed in confidence" (II.ii.48-49); these words apply as aptly to Hamlet, I think, as to Caesar.

41. See Stanley Fish, "Question and Answer in *Samson Agonistes*," *Critical Quarterly*, II (1969), 237-64, for a brilliant analysis of the ambiguities—indeed, mysteries—that remain impenetrable in *Samson Agonistes*. A recent article by Thomas B. Stroup touches in passing on parallels between *Hamlet* and *Samson Agonistes* (see "'All Comes Clear at Last,' but 'The Readiness is All'" in *Comparative Drama*, X [1976], 61-77); Stroup has nothing to say, however, about any significant differences between the two tragedies.

42. From *Four Quartets*. Reprinted by permission of the publishers: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York; and Faber & Faber, Ltd., London.