

**Regressive Progression:
The Quest for Self-Transcendence in Western Tragedy**

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The quest for a higher self is the recurring motif of the three reformative eras of Western tragedy. This recurring theme is obviously manifest in Renaissance Elizabethan tragedy, European nineteenth-century drama, and the Absurd Theater. Throughout these major dramatic periods, the idea of the quest reveals itself in three different manifestations_ action, imagination and inaction. Based on Nietzsche's notion of Dionysian tragic hero whose suffering leads to a greater self, the three major dramatic periods of Western tragedy reflects a progressive directionality that Nietzsche refers to in terms of a "progressus," "task" or "goal" in the way of the quest for a "sovereign individual," (*GM 2*).

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche sees in ancient Greek tragedy the collision of two opposed principles which he calls Dionysius and Apollo. More than Apollo, the thrust of his writing is the celebration of Dionysius who is a creator destroyer giving life through destruction (21). His account of tragedy reintroduces the elements of pain and suffering as he argues that such a self-destruction attacks the phenomenal self and uplifts the individual's identity. For Nietzsche, tragic pain and self-dissolution is the pathway to rebirth and a means of attaining a greater being. According to him, true tragedy dramatizes the celebration of creative dissolution. In his account, tragedy is a self creating agency through offering the Dionysian element of self-annihilation which allows the tragic hero to rise beyond the phenomenal self. Being an example to every individual, tragic hero is thus transcended into a higher being through entering into the state of ecstatic self-loss.

Nietzsche aspires to reach a higher creator self or an oversoul which is beyond the narrow circle of the ego or the superficial self. Such an aspiration assumes his anti narcissistic belief which reinterprets God within himself and acknowledges a higher self. Relating to this notion which in different traditions goes by terms like 'oversoul' or 'perfect self', Nietzsche refers to the original tragic hero, Dionysius, who communicates the spirit of losing the individuality and becomes a great being. Within this context, Dionysius is associated with the ecstasy of self-loss through which individuals enter into the primordial unity or eternal existence and thus attain a higher self. Therefore, based on Nietzsche's idea, individuals are redeemed through immersion into the Dionysian eternal essence which rests on an underlying substratum of suffering.

To counterbalance the effects of such a suffering, Dionysian madness and self-forgetfulness take the individuals to the world beyond the phenomenal world where the self is transcended in the epiphanic moment of self-recognition and joins primal unity, infinity and the divine. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche refers to "tragic", "Dionysian" and "noble" morality as the affirmative agents of self-exploration which emanate from "the eternal joy [lust] of becoming". He asserts that:

Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I recognised as the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet..., to realize in oneself the eternal joy of becoming—that joy [lust] which also encompasses joy in *destruction*, the birth of tragedy was my first revaluation of all values. (TI 8)

Within this context, Nietzsche explains the spirit of Dionysus whose epithet is *Lysios* and conveys ranges of paradoxical meanings as "liberate", "destroy", "redeem", "save", and "heal" (KGW 16). The constructive destruction of Nietzsche's ecstatic process of self-transcendence thus reveals the seemingly

destructive Dionysian effects of self-forgetfulness and madness which are manifest in the elements of tragedy and the suffering of tragic heroes. Nietzsche's uplifting Dionysian spirit then plays an important role in forming a complete affirmative orientation towards self-transcendence.

Based on Nietzsche's notion of tragic self-exploration through Dionysian self-forgetfulness, the degree to which Western tragic characters approximate self-transcendence reveals that the developmental process of Western tragedy is regressively progressive. The process demonstrates that throughout the history of Western tragedy, the more tragic characters submit to Dionysian spirit, the more they are able to approximate a higher self. On the other hand, the more rigidly they are resistant to Dionysian spirit, the more dangerously they are liable to violent rupture. It is in this context that the rational active approach of Renaissance tragic quest is dramatically doomed to failure while the imaginative, Dionysian way of the quest in European nineteenth-century dramas reveals no catastrophic fall. Surprisingly, the inactive quest of the Absurd dramatic characters leads to the characters' spiritual rest which connotes approximating to the longed for higher self.

The active, pragmatic attempts of Renaissance Elizabethan tragic characters demonstrate a specific directionality to re-create a higher self. The preoccupation of these characters with the idea of active struggle in the way of the quest for an exalted self is highly manifest in tragedies of Marlowe and Shakespeare as masterpieces of that specific dramatic era. Tamburlaine remarkably equals action to supremacy and grandeur. He thus asserts that: "My deeds prove that I am the lord but by my parentage a shepherd" (I. ii.). It is even noted that his destructive notion of killing people is a way of making Tamburlaine reach the wished-for elegant self: "Wherein, as in a mirror, may be seen / His honor, that consists in shedding blood" (I. v.). Similarly, In Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, the hero asserts that his courageous military achievements make his identity:

...Let the Volsces
 Plough Rome and harrow Italy: I'll never
 Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand,
 As if a man were author of himself
 And knew no other kin. (V.iii)

Such a notion is manifest in the way Caius Martius attains a greater self through his triumphant battle with the revolutionarists of Volsci which is a city from Corioli dependencies. Following this great victory, Martius ascends to his wished-for identity and is honoured with a new name as Coriolanus. (Abjadian 357).

What Stull mentions about the Adlerian system of strife and the quasi-religious quest for perfection in Marlowian characters significantly interprets the motif that is also the underlying theme of Shakespeare's tragedies as the major representative of the whole Renaissance tragedies. Stull asserts that "the prime mover in Adlerian system is humankind's quasi-religious quest for perfection, understood as self-completeness and fulfilment" (445). The idea describes that even the most destructive and ambitious pragmatism of Marlowe's and Shakespeare's tragic characters emanates from their aspiration for self-perfection. In other words, transgression of all the boundaries of power, knowledge and wealth is the reflection of the desire to reach the absolute whole. It is in this context that Tamburelaine and Faustus explicitly ascribe the image of God to themselves. Tamburelaine states: "Thou supposest that I am a man, but thou art deceived, for I am no other than the ire of God" (II.IV). Faustus also maintains, "Here tire my brains to gain a deity!" (I.i.63) In a parallel way, although Shakespeare's tragic characters do not explicitly mention such an aspiration, the fact that no worldly achievement gratifies them remarkably reveals the desire to reach an unworldly perfection. In my point of view, the concept of 'destructive construction' remarkably defines the devastating attachment to outward means of power, wealth, and magic through which Renaissance tragic characters try to manifest the highest potential of their selves. Relating to this idea, Faustus'

dismissal of divinity and his inclination towards magic is his choice to feed the desire of transcendence: “Why, Faustus hath thou not attained that end? / Highest reaches of humane wit” (I.i.18).

Greenblatt recognizes the same directionality in Shakespeare’s tragedies towards self-making. He argues, “Shakespeare remains the fashioner of narrative selves, having the capacity to foster psychic mobility in the service of power” (254). Macbeth, for instance, considers that being more than a man prerequisites action:

When you durst do it, then you were a man.
Be so and, to be more than what you were, You
would much more than the man. (I. vii. 49-51)

Generally, the overall pattern of the quest for the higher self in Renaissance tragedies of Marlowe and Shakespeare is demonstrated in a pragmatic rational materialism which is completely outward and worldly designed to actualize the self of the characters. Ironically, such an active, pragmatic means of the quest in these tragedies leads the tragic characters to a catastrophic downfall as they are trapped with the pragmatism of the means which acts as a vicious cycle of incessant desires that block the way of self-realization. The unending desires towards satisfaction of the ‘suprapersonal’ lead the characters to new cravings which make them shallow and finally fail to recognize the supreme self. In Nietzsche’s explanation of how one becomes what one is, severe pragmatic approaches are translated as “great imperatives” of the surface consciousness of which the quester should beware of. He adds that: “Beware even of every great word, every great posture, sheer danger! that the instinct comes to understand itself” too soon-while the organizing idea with a calling to rule grows deep down –it beings to command” (*EH* 9). Stull ascribes Faustus’ tragic failure to “the aspiration to Heaven and the commitment to Hell” (449). This kind of commitment, as I believe, is the over-involvement of Renaissance tragic heroes in active pragmatism or excessive rational activities which are the extremism leading to tragic downfall.

While the motif of the quest for the 'higher self' in these Renaissance tragedies generally reveal an outward, pragmatic approach, *Hamlet* manifests a shift of emphasis to an inward journey of self-transcendence. While destructive actions and pragmatic materialism are the means of attaining transcendence with a catastrophic failure, Hamlet introduces inwardness as a foil approach which has the capability to make the hero approximate the lost grandeur. Hamlet is the first Renaissance dramatic hero who undermines the outside world and takes it only as appearance: "But I have that *within* which passes show / These but the trappings and the suits of woe" (I.ii.85-6, italic mine). Unlike his contemporary characters, Hamlet even asserts that action destroys the essence: "For use almost can change the stamp of nature" (III.iv.169).

The epochal positive change from enactment to repression defines Hamlet's delay and signifies the regressive progression of the quest from outward action to inwardness and inaction in Western tragedy. Considering the motif of self-construction, Bloom also emphasizes Hamlet's transcendent "inwardness" as a way of constructing identity or "the internalization of self before anyone else was ready for it" (429). Oscillating between thinking "too precisely" (IV.iv.41) or madness, Hamlet enters to Dionysian world of "bestial oblivion" (IV.iv.40), following what he was challenging with as the possibility of "transformation" (II.1.5). Hamlet's Dionysian inward approach then verifies Nietzsche's idea about the impracticality of consciousness as a means for self-realization. Hamlet's constructive transition to doubt and incapacity is the result of his recognition of conscience as disabling and corrupt. He then believes in the impracticality of consciousness and finally switches to Dionysian madness. Hegel's symbolic concept of an old mole who cannot live on the earth describes Hamlet's dissatisfaction with consciousness as a means to transcend his self. As an old mole who tunnels through earth toward the light, Hamlet tunnels from his consciousness toward feigned madness. He switches to Dionysian self-forgetfulness and freedom from blocking world of reason. The analogy of the mole describes Hamlet's specific way of the quest that is penetrating into the dark

realm of imagination and inwardness making a shortcut to the manifestation of the truth.

According to Nietzsche, it is Hamlet's Dionysian faculty and nausea which inhibit action and let him look through the essence of things. Nietzsche asserts that through the ecstasy of the Dionysian state Hamlet is separated from the phenomenal world and becomes repellent of action. "Action needs veils of illusion: that is the doctrine of Hamlet, not the cheap wisdom of Jack the dreamer who reflects too much and as it were, from an excess of possibilities does not get around to action. Not reflection, no true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth, that outweighs any motive for action" (*Birth of Tragedy* 39). Here, Nietzsche refers to Hamlet's especial kind of reflection that is different from negative, obsessive rationalism implied in the analogy of Jack the dreamer whose analytical passive reasoning blocks his way towards a decisive end. According to Nietzsche, Hamlet's delay is the result of his Dionysian imagination not obsessive rationalism. It is a Dionysian withdrawal from the outward world which suspends action and makes him penetrate into the very essence of the truth. Hamlet's final announcement of the lost grandeur at the grave scene demonstrates the relative success of Hamlet's Dionysian approach which has made a shield of oblivion from the threats of the phenomenal world: "This is I / Hamlet the Dane" (V.i.252). Rayner also refers to Hamlet's final success obtained through an inward inaction. He refers to Calderwood's close analysis of action and consciousness and argues that, "Hamlet begins in an act of mourning" and adds that "such mourning is a positive act based upon an absence, leading toward the creation of an identity as a symbol" (111).

Unlike other tragic characters who like Lear or Macbeth even confess their failure either implicitly or explicitly, Hamlet declares his regained lost identity in his victorious shout. Hamlet is victorious at the end of his Dionysian madness for other reasons as well. The throne is again back to Hamlet that was excluded from him by his mother as he is buried like a king. He is successful in fulfilling his vocation in putting right what has been wrong bringing the true essence back

both to himself, other characters, and Elsinore. In one word, his duty is performed. The rest is then Hamlet's final spiritual rest or self-transcendence as Horatio implies: "Good night sweet prince, / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest" (331-2). Within this context, Hamlet's imaginative inaction finally leads him to claim the lost sublime identity in contrast to the catastrophic downfall of his contemporary tragic characters. When action cannot resolve the crises, Hamlet clings to the other option left for him that is inaction_ a strategy that is unique to modern heroes. Hamlet's inward model of the quest is then contagious to the modern dramatic characters and becomes the pole of transition between early modern and modern tragic characters. In this context, Hamlet becomes the first Romantic tragic hero and the shift of emphasis from outward action to inward world of vision is transferred to other dramatists like Ibsen and Chekhov.

The transition from external world to the inward world of spirit in the way of the quest for the higher self is manifest in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* when the hero conveys the idea of transcendence- "once redeemed" or "uncreated spirit"- through passing "from banks of flesh to banks of spirit" (92-3). In a similar vein, Brand refers to the inward world as the specific approach which makes him be born again:

Within, within that is my call
That is the way I must venture' that is my path
There shall the vulture of the will be slain
And there shall the new Adam at last be born
again. (114-15)

In relation to this context, Ibsen's three dramatic periods demonstrate a major dominant line of internal struggle where the spirit, ill at ease in material surroundings, tries to find its true home. The romantic motif of freedom and idealism underlies the central challenge of the characters from Ibsen's early dramatic poems to his final symbolic dramas. Even in social and realistic phases of Ibsen's dramas where the action is for the most part concerned with men's deeds and outward lives in connection with society and the world, the ideal of

personal honour still appears as the underlying motif of the drama based on the characters' internal arena of conflict for a higher self. Although with *The Pillars of Society* Ibsen's style demonstrates emancipation from the thrall of Romanticism, the motif of the ideal personal honour reveals the underlying liberating Dionysian spirit of manifesting the greater self.

Ibsen's third dramatic phase is however the culmination of the Dionysian spirit where the liberating symbols like the wild duck, the mill race, the tower, or the open sea in *The Wild Duck*, *The Master Builder*, and *The Lady from the Sea* are but the external tokens of something inward. In *When we Dead Awaken*, Irene explicitly refers both to the need for self-transcendence and the inward approach of attaining it:

I must! I must! Thus bids me a voice
In the depth of my soul and I will follow it
Strength have I and courage for something better
For something higher, than this life. (551)

The mystery of Ibsen's tragic world is then unraveled under the Romantic characteristic of the unique self which needs to be transformed to the unimagined splendor through Dionysian rapture and the release of energy and reminds mystic principle of self annihilation. Ibsen's Dionysian characters like, Peer Gynt, Brand, Hedda Gabbler, and all other Romantic characters demonstrate full ecstatic dissolution through madness and drunkenness as the entrance door of Dionysius. Such dissolution offers an occasion when the reason fails. In *Peer Gynt*, Peer thus delightfully celebrates his farewell to the world of reason and enters to a self-annihilating realm: "Reason is dead and gone: long live Peer Gynt!"(227) Elsewhere, Peer beautifully demonstrates the powerful role of fantasy and imagination in self-forgetfulness:

Little peer and I sat at home together
We knew of no better remedy than forgetting
One person uses liquor, another tries illusion

Oh yes, so we used fairy tales
 Of princes and trolls and all kinds of creatures
 (146)

Although the manifestation of the higher self is transitory and the imaginative world of the dream is often shattered by the reality of the phenomenal world, based on Nietzsche's idea of Dionysian healing power of self-loss in imaginative world, the interpretation of the dreams leads the tragic character to the ultimate truth, heals and protects the ill spirit. Ibsen's *Brand*, which is the best representative of his Romantic dramas, is the starting point of self-realization within the protective Apollonian world of the dreams. Moreover, if breaking down the boundaries of the superficial self leads to complete dissolution of the ego, it can be still considered as a victory since it offers a rise from the mundane phenomenal world. The ethical teaching of Ibsen's great dramas as Jacobs believes makes the characters who lack perfection rise above the mundane considerations of society, paying a paltry price for it. She finally asserts that "if the attainment of this (self-perfection), though the price of attainment of this thing be a sacrifice of life itself, is a victory rather than a defeat, a triumph rather than a tragedy" (430).

What the Button Moulder announces as his motto is generally the incarnation of the motif of self-annihilation Ibsen explicitly introduces in *Peer Gynt*: "To be oneself is to slay oneself" (235). The central mystic motif of self-annihilation and self-transcendence in Ibsen's dramas appears in the notion of death and rebirth as Durbach asserts: "The desire for spiritual transformation, for resurrection from the sleep of death into a state of Ednic perfection, finds expression in nearly all of Ibsen's plays. A paradise regained through the artifacts of the artistic imagination." He adds that: "The essential self can discover its analogue in the epiphany of natural supernaturalism" (16). Durbach's "Ednic perfection" symbolically adheres to the individual's absolute manifestation of the ultimate whole which occurs after annihilation of the corporeal life. This motif

also reflects itself in Peer's symbolic attempt in his baptismal cleansing which leads him to ascend or "go up":

I'll wash myself clean
In a bath of scouring wind!
I'll go up, and plunge right in
To that bright baptismal font! (291)

The manifestation of self-transcendence through self-annihilation represents itself in *When we Dead Awaken* where the heroes reach the height of their tower only when they pass through the tunnel of mists and frost symbolically connoting self-abolishment.

This triumphant passage from the mundane world to the infinite world of imagination and annihilation gives the characters a sense of fullness in Ibsen's dramas. Reviewing Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, Northam analyzes the constructive role of discarding the outward world in offering the manifestation of self-recognition. He then refers to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as another example of sever detachment which leads to approximating the sense of fullness. His analytic study verifies the basic argument of this study which deals with the regressive progression of Western tragedy regarding the underlying motif of self-fulfilment. He argues that unlike Shakespeare's *The Tempest* where he demonstrates the process of transformation from individual's self to the social self of outward civilization, the lavish exaltations of the primitive life of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* and the renounced world of *Beckett's Waiting for Godot* indicate that "the characters endlessly try to restore a sense of fullness out of their own creative moral imagination". He then explains the world as "the reversed and reduced form of Shakespearean world" (197). Here, Northam concludes that the attainment of self-fulfilment is possible but not in life:

Not, at least, in life. Thus where Shakespeare's play ends with a return from the isolation of the island to society, Ibsen's ends with departure from society into the ultimate isolation of *an intensely private death*. Only

there, can Rosmer and Rebekka *achieve the essential union of their different virtues*, the traditional and the individual. (198, italics mine)

Ibsen's dramatic symbolism, lyricism, and the arena of inwardness, act like Chekhov's overall pattern in conveying the Romantic Dionysian spirit of self-forgetfulness and self-transcendence. Similar to Ibsen's dramatic world, imaginative inwardness is then the overall pattern of the quest in Chekhov's dramas. Chekhov's dramatic characters reflect Hamlet's Dionysian transition from outward action to inwardness. In Sokolyansky's words Hamlet's "interior conflict" is a common feature shared between Hamlet and modern figures specifically Chekhov's characters whose dilemma "to be or not to be..." represents their inwardness and their preoccupation with illusion. As Shestov asserts, these characters act, but their "actions develop just from nothing" (39). This specific kind of passivity in Russian dramatic characters which is called "Russian Hamletism" emanates from Hamlet's imaginative inwardness and is the particular characteristic of modern characters describing the "romantic interiority with the incapability of action" (Sokolyansky 103).

A more inclusive range of this romantic interiority coming from the melancholic inwardness of Hamlet is also manifest in other modern dramatists in modes of Chekhovian, Pirandellian, Shavian, Odestian, Brechtian, and Becketian as Keyshian also believes (74). In *The Seagull*, Treplev summarizes Chekhov's overall pattern of the quest selected by his characters: "...Living characters! I must show life not as it is, but as it appears in my dreams" (416). In *The Three Sisters*, Irena explicitly demonstrates what is ideally missing in the life they have: "I must try and find another position, what I wanted so, what I dreamed of, is what's exactly not there. Work without poetry... I can't, I am tired" (170). What Irena refers to as poetry in the life remarkably reflects the imaginative feature of life for transcendence.

Influenced by inwardness of 'Hamletism' and the general Romantic spirit of freedom in the nineteenth century, Chekhov's major dramatic characters like the

three sisters, Nina, Vershinin, Lopakhin, Petya and others reflect Hamlet's obsession with delving deep into their own inwardness without doing anything. In *The Seagull*, Treplev reflects the characters' obsession with the artificial world the characters create for themselves to escape the false and corrupted world of the outside reality: "Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love ..." (478). Such characters obviously disregard the outside world of reality and live in their own imaginative world of dream and fantasy. In a similar vein, the powerful dream of going to Moscow completely takes Irena from the outside world of reality in *The Three Sisters*: "... Oh my Lord God, I dream of Moscow every night, I am like someone completely possessed..." (170).

The specific approach that Chekhov's characters demonstrate is an endless delving within themselves which is positively considered as a 'mystic' movement. Along with the inward approach of Chekhov's characters, there is a specific kind of lyricism and symbolism which breathe a Dionysian spirit into the body of Chekhov's dramas and make the characters meet a manifestation of their wished-for higher self in the transitory world of dream and imagination. Lucas also sees the visionary realm as a means to satisfy the self in Chekhov's characters. He considers Chekhov's four masterpieces – *The Three Sisters*, *The Seagull*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *Uncle Vanya* – as "the evocation of a visionary realm in which the longing of the self may be satisfied in all four of the plays" (37). The role of the imaginative world in restoring the wished-for higher self is reminiscent of Jacques Lacan's theory of "the mirror stage" in the formation of the identity where the characters construct a sense of wholeness and totality that replaces fragmentation through objects, scenes and the images they fantasize in the dreams. Lacan believes that the image of wholeness is perceived as being placed outside the subject. Lacan's theory implies that the image of the self is constructed based on the external source and the discourse of the other. Referring to Lacan's theory, Schleifer explains that the objects reflect the desire for the individuals, but the dissolution of the self to the scenes, images and objects acts as the discovery of the ultimate salvation. He adds that according to Lacan,

objects, imageries, visionary scenes and even dialogues equal continuity, and the impersonality of salvation. After meditating on these, the individual self is thus transformed (887). In a similar process, as Schleifer argues Chekhov's characters create the space of desire by dialogues and subjects through which they achieve ultimate freedom (888). It is possible to expand Schleifer's idea about Chekhov's use of dialogue in creating the space of desire for the characters. Chekhov's characters dissolve their phenomenal self to the objects of the world of fantasy and visual spaces to construct the wished-for identity and discover the ultimate salvation of the self. The idea can be obviously seen in Nina's identification with a seagull or Solovyov's mystical dissolution to the lake in *The Seagull*. Such an idealizing transference is reminiscent of Dionysian self-forgetfulness and Apollonian healing power of the dream.

Modern dramatic characters then demonstrate an imaginative journey for self-transcendence wounded by the physical reality caused by incurable stress concerning life and existence. The modern domain of the search are then imaginative creativity, hallucinations, illusions and dreams. Modern drama is the reflexion of a metaphorical journey into the transcendent self. It is the excavation into the very depth of the self to regain the the real existence. The regressive journey is from the outside world to the world of solitude and death in order to meet the spiritual liberty and the individual soul. Within this context, the imaginative inaction and the identification with the objects of the dream world demonstrate the regressive journey to self-realization in Chekhov's dramatic characters. As Gilman argues, this kind of inward quest links them to Beckettian characters of the Absurd Theatre in their "eventful immobility or movement around a still centre" (177).

Ibsen's *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* are also reminiscent of the introspective fantasy world of the Absurd theatre where the action shifts from the external world into the protagonists' dreams of fantasies. Durbach explores the idea of selfhood in *Peer Gynt* as a test case and finally implies that the attempt towards self rebirth is a recreating process possible only through death that is also

manifest in Beckett's works (398). The paradoxical notion of death and rebirth is the motif which links Ibsen's works to the Absurd Theatre. Although the introspective dream-like world of the Absurdists immediately echoes the inner vision and the fantasy-stricken characters of Ibsen's and Chekhov's dramas, Hamlet is the first Western dramatic character who grows the seed of Dionysian illusion for the achievement of the lost higher self. Therefore, the seemingly absurd notion of inaction of the Absurd dramas is reminiscent of the Dionysian inwardness of Hamlet empowered and emphasized by the imaginative world of nineteenth-century dramas. Within this context, while the outward, active pragmatism of Renaissance tragic quest ends in complete failure, the romantic arena of Dionysian inwardness, introduced by Hamlet and followed by Ibsen's and Chekhov's characters, demonstrates a course of development that despite being regressive, inactive, and inward in its overall pattern, is progressive considering the approximation to the higher self.

Hamlet's indirect method of the quest for self-realization which lies on his withdrawal from the real world precludes the contemporary dramatic characters who are uncertain about the reality and their illusion ironically leads to a higher level of self-recognition. In "Self-commenting drama of our times," Rao refers to Raynold's interpretation of Polonius advising his son to find directions out through indirection as a "fresh approach to reality which is different from realism." Within this context, Rao then asserts that Polonius' advice "unconsciously defines Hamlet's technique as well as that of contemporary self-commenting drama. Hamlet uses indirections most of the time in the play, because to his contemplative mind reality is not fixed." He adds that: "Contemporary man experiences Hamlet's uncertainty in the face of reality. The supreme example of Hamlet's indirection is the use of illusion to find out reality" (224-5). He finally concludes that it is possible to reinterpret the so-called void, silence and nothingness of the Absurd dramas like those of Beckett, Pinter, and Stoppard positively based on Hamlet's specific technique of indirection which as he believes rejects the idea of absurdity and uplifts them from the usual approach

of seeing the truth to discover it (226).

Followed by the relative success of the European nineteenth-century dramatic characters in their inward imaginative way of the quest, the Absurd characters try to negate themselves through complete detachment and inaction in order to be safe from the destructive alluring of the outside world which shatters the manifestation of the higher self. They try to approximate the point of zero in order to start a new beginning. The point of Zero is an absolute, inexhaustible, fascinating poverty that is the only wealth for the Absurd characters where they return into proximity to the essence of being. Based on Nietzsche's idea of Dionysian self-dissolution, the detaching, reductive attempts of the Absurd characters can be interpreted as the atrophying vocation which makes them able to approximate the innermost heart of things that is for them the essential being.

What Vladimir advises Estragon can be considered as the symbolic motto of discarding the outward world and reducing to the very essence: "Boots must be taken off every day. *I'm tired telling you that. Why don't you listen to me?*"(371) The characters of the Absurd Theater successfully manifest the approximation to a higher self recognition through perfect self-renunciation. The focus changes from discarding the material world to self-renunciation where the blocking element appears to be the body itself: "There's man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet" (372). The diminishing means of the quest reveals itself in the clown-like features and the abbreviated names of the tramps in *Waiting for Godot*.

The concept of waiting is itself a reductive means. Ghosh indicates that the act of waiting " can have as consequence a consummation that provides a clear understanding of the self and its relation to the situation- a state of being-free from the morbid transition of matter"(308). That is why after the consummative act of waiting, a new birth appears as Vladimir announces that the tree is sprouting immediately after his delightful explanation about waiting: Wait ...we embraced...we were happy...happy...what do we do now that we're happy...go on

waiting...waiting...let me think...it's coming...go on waiting...now that we're happy...let me see...ah! The tree! (439)

Severe self-reduction and discarding the phenomenal world in Beckett's dramas can be considered as the continuation of Nietzsche's directionality towards Dionysian self-exploration. It is not unwise to claim that the self-imposed suffering and pain of Beckett's characters reminds Nietzsche's idea of wanderings over and through the mountains and valleys of Primal Pain to approximate the Primal Unity. It is also reminiscent of Nietzsche's doctrine of tragic suffering which leads to the final recognition of the tragic hero. The motif of self-abolishment in Beckett's characters reflects the idea of minimizing the access to the phenomenal world. Such a motif reflects Nietzsche's constructive mystery of tragic suffering in the way of attaining the sovereign individuality. Relating to this idea, Coe states: "Beckett's characters allow themselves to be mutilated, becoming armless, legless, featureless, in an effort *to approximate to their quintessential 'selves'*" He adds that "*they try to die, and dying, strive to detach their 'selves' from the unhappy accident of incarnation, hoping thereby to redeem at last the catastrophe of spatial and temporal identity only to discover that their 'personality' against all the odd survives*" (34, italics mine).

The developmental course of descent then follows the suspension of the phenomenal world through Dionysian self-forgetfulness offered by the imaginative world of nineteenth-century drama. Such an ascending descent culminates in complete abolishment of the physical faculties in the Absurd Theatre as a means to manifest the essential, inner self. This kind of manifestation reflects Hoffman's general view about the modern self in the obsessive inclination towards the reduction which ends in immortality and self-assertion (46). The Dionysian attempts of cherishing the physical life is manifest in Beckett's characters who endeavour to detach themselves from the world of flesh that is similar to the mystic notion of the abolishment of physical life to attain self-transcendence. Mobility is explicitly rejected when Hamm condemns Clov to pollute the air while he moves a little in *The Endgame*: [Enter Clov immediately.

He halts beside the chair.] “You pollute the air!” (1932)

In *Happy Days* Winnie also sees the ultimate happiness in destruction of physicality: “and if for some strange reason no further pains are possible, why then just close the eyes- (she does so) and wait for the day to come-the happy day to come when flesh melts at so many hundred hours”(15). Berensmeyer’s review of mystic tradition links mystic view of disregarding physicality to Beckett’s denigrating references to physical organs as signs of mystic illumination:

Perhaps, the denigrating references in Beckett to the “eye of flesh”, even “this filthy eye of flesh”, eyes that are safer closed, like those of protagonists in *Film*-because then they can open themselves to an *inner light, an “illumination”* that would abolish all “trace” of exterior “always the same place” to self-assertion. (487)

Beckett’s characters finally demonstrate a state of spiritual rest which foreshadows Nietzsche’s attainment of the primal unity and reminds mystic manifestation of the ultimate whole that is as Cornwell describes the transference from “the first zone to the third zone” in a releasing process of “progression- or regression” from the external reality (44). In *Happy Days*, Winnie implicitly refers to her spiritual bliss at the end of her self-abolishing attempts:

Though I say not
What I may not
Let you hear
Yet the swaying
Dance is saying (16)

Parallel to the mystic idea of ‘annihilation and rebirth’ and Nietzsche’s idea of primal state, Beckett’s characters attempt to reverse the process of birth and speed their return to the state of pre-conscious non-being which indicates the spiritual satisfaction of the self. Having been transferred, the heroes enter to a peaceful state which is the “lost Eden” as Cornwell exhibits. This lost Eden then is

the genuine being that Beckett's characters have lost. In line with Nietzsche's idea of suffering and rebirth which is also reminiscent of the mystic idea of self-mortification and rebirth, Robinson also asserts that in Beckett's world, the lost paradise is the hidden reality of the self they have lost at birth. He states:

They [the characters] connected suffering to the paradise that had been lost at birth and sought to suffer more for in those moments when the mortal microcosm is open to the suffering of being it is most deeply aware of its existence and perhaps closer to the hidden reality of the self. (290)

The paradoxical notion of self-confinement and self-realization also appears in Pinter's dramas. In *The Room* Rose unravels the secret of her room in its capability to make her know herself: "You know where you are ... you have got the chance in a place like this" (25). She implies that self-recognition happens while she is detached from the outside world. Similar to Rose's idea, in *A Slight Ache* Edward indicates: "Sometimes, of course, I would take shelter, *shelter to compose myself*" (13). Self-composition is then possible through utterly self-confinement by Pinter's characters. The characters' narcissistic attempt in delving deeply at themselves is searching for identity in Pinter's characters. Closely related to self-confining attempts, Almond refers to the paradoxical idea of emptiness and fullness in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*:

The Eckhartian soul we will recall is 'empty of self and freed from the knowledge of objects, emptied to prepare a space for the birth of the word in the ground of the soul. *The birthday party* is the story of such birth—the story of the 'emptying of a human being. (184)

Within this context, at the end of this play, the hero is promised to find relief which follows his self-annihilation: "Someone is coming in a van today to cart you away_ to cart you away! When the knock on the door finally comes, you will not run but will welcome it with relief" (86). The final silence of *The Room*

also implies the hero's final annihilation similar to the long silence which occurs in the final scene of *The Caretaker*. After escaping her real identity offered by his father Riley, Rose accepts her actual identity and submits herself to the truth. She finally touches his father's blind eyes, the back of his head and his temples with her hands. Her final annihilation is manifest in her blindness after touching her father's eyes. In a similar vein, Rose is ultimately transcendent to Sal as his father calls her so symbolizing her salvation:

Rose: What did you call me?

Riley: Come home, Sal.

.....

Riey: Come home now, Sal.

Pause (she touches his eyes). (31)

In a similar vein, in the final scene of *The Caretaker*, there is a long pause after Davies' incessant plea to Aston asking him to live in his house. The long silence connotes Davies' final stage of the quest for self-recognition that is complete will-lessness followed by his desire to stay with Aston. In other words, in his way of the quest for the wished-for identity, once he has detached himself from the outward world and self-exiled in Aston's house, he finally discarded his desire completely. Such a complete annihilation is manifest in the long pause following his final speech: "I'll tell you what though ...them shoes ...them shoes you give me ...they're working out all right ... they're all right. Maybe I could ... get down [to Sidcup and get my papers], *a long pause...* (78)."

Evaluating silence and the moments of pause in Pinter's works, Esslin considers them to be "speechlessness of annihilation" or "the gradual inevitable dissolution of human personality itself" (222). This kind of ending where the characters demonstrate complete withdrawal from phenomenal world is reminiscent of Nietzsche's mystic notion of self-annihilation and rebirth. The ultimate state of such spiritual peace then indicates the approximation of the characters to the wished-for self-transcendence which approves the triumphant negative self-assertion of the Absurd dramatic characters. Such a victory then

verifies the idea of regressive progression in the developmental process of Western tragedy from anxious disappointment of the Renaissance tragic characters to the spiritual peace of the Absurd anti-heroes.

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