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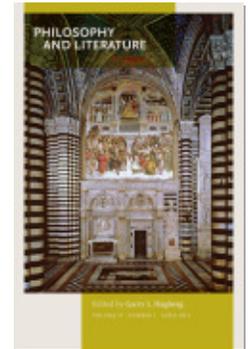
Hamlet and the Ghost: A Joint Sense of Time

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HAMLET AND THE GHOST: A JOINT SENSE OF TIME

Abstract. A deconstruction of Hamlet's ontological metaphor—"the time is out of joint"—indicates Shakespeare has made an implicit commitment to a conception of time that is explicitly and systematically developed by Kant's transcendental philosophy. Consequently, a retro reading explains how Hamlet temporarily identifies with the Ghost's temporal-categorical mind-set, and how Hamlet, who has been acutely aware of the passage of time, loses track of time during the prayer/closet scene sequence. More specifically, I assert that Hamlet's identification with the Ghost's categorical sense of what is possible and impossible in accordance with the passage of outer time is what causes his inaction.

I

AFTER BEING ACUTELY AWARE of the nature and passage of time, Hamlet ironically seems to lose all cognition of how it relates to the movements and circumstances in the prayer/closet scene sequence. Consequently, the man who was considering what was "nobler in the mind" (3.1.57) distorts his sense of outer time and loses restraint with the "rash and bloody deed" (3.4.28) of Polonius's death.¹ But what exactly causes this ironic breaking point? Perhaps Hamlet is right in terms of the way the mind can affect itself: "That inward breaks, and shows no cause without why the man dies" (4.4.27–28). If so, what does that say about Hamlet's subjectivity and related sense of time?

For Nietzsche, with whom Bloom agrees, Hamlet resembles the Dionysian man who has "looked truly into the essence of things" which in turn "inhibits action."² More specifically, since "their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things—they feel it to

be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint.”³ According to this reading, it is some esoteric knowledge that kills action. But can this be formulated more precisely? What exactly is the esoteric knowledge? Could it be that in a Kantian sense Hamlet temporarily identifies with the intuitive temporal form and categorical mind-set of the Ghost?

As will be discussed below, in examining the close of the play scene, along with the prayer scene and the start of the closet scene, Hamlet’s sense of self is temporarily transformed by his identification with the Ghost and its temporal and categorical construction of reality. In fact, his reference to temporality is marked by a double and triple repetition of the word “now” in the three scenes, underscoring his attempt to remain grounded in the autonomous temporal form of the earth, while he is, in reality, connected with the Ghost’s temporal form. Moreover, this connection directly affects his sense of time, to the degree that he misperceives the passage of time in the movements and circumstances relative to himself.

Deleuze aptly notes the poetic formula “the time is out of joint” is indicative of time no longer being subordinate to cyclical rhythms of nature, or as Polonius asserts: “Time is time” (2.2.88), but rather movement being subordinated to time. However, the *Hamlet* text goes further in its prefiguration of Kant’s concept that time is a mysteriously autonomous form.⁴ In this respect, in contrast to Lacan’s reading, which argues the nonrepresentational, and even esoteric, “position of the phallus” and corresponding lack of paternal codification disables Hamlet from identifying with the father, resulting in inaction, it is argued that Hamlet’s temporary identification with the Ghost’s categorical sense of what is possible and impossible in accordance with the passage of outer time is what causes his inaction in the prayer/closet scene sequence.

II

Contrary to contemporary cognitive linguistic theory, which asserts that the concept of time is inherently metaphorical and metonymical, and that in terms of the latter, we never observe time itself—rather we observe events and the successive iterations of a type of event that stand for intervals of time—for Kant, time cannot be deduced from our encounters with objects or as a relation between objects, because time is an a priori condition or presupposition of all of them. In this respect, time is then an “epistemic” or “objectivating condition”—a condition

to which objects must conform if they are to be cognizable by homo sapiens. Kant also asserts that time cannot itself exist as an object of experience, nor can it be a property derived from objects, for we can imagine the world without objects, but not without time.

Building on Leibniz's theory that time is not just the linear stream in which we float but rather a measure of the successive relationship between the events we experience, Kant also asserts that everything that changes and moves, including succession, permanence, and simultaneity, are in time, which does not change or move; it is the form of everything that does. Consequently, time is not a relation between objects, for our relational ideas such as succession and simultaneity are themselves irreducibly temporal. Kant also asserts that time is not a discursive general concept for any particular interval of time that can be thought of only as a segment of a single ongoing magnitude. In fact, the opposite is true: In order to think any determinate duration of time one must abstract it from a series of such durations extending indefinitely toward the past and future. Nonetheless, time is not an eternal form; it is the immutable form of change and movement.

In this respect and in the context of Polonius's dialectical counterpoint, "to expostulate . . . why . . . time is time . . . Were nothing but to waste . . . time" (2.2.86–89), Hamlet's postulation that "Time is out of joint" is quite provocative. Considering how Hamlet invokes Descartes's quest for clarity and certainty in terms of his earnestly seeking out the truth, regarding the Ghost's ontological and moral nature, and initially calling into question his own subjective and limited mode of perception, judgment, and knowledge, it is not idle speculation, as Deleuze points out, that Hamlet's metaphorical expression also prefigures Kant's Copernican revolution. After all, it suggests we are no longer subject to nature, in that our sense of time is not subordinate to the cyclical movements of nature. Rather, it is now movement that is subordinate to time. In this respect, Kant asserts the anthropomorphic character of time and space, such that the ancient conception has been "unhinged" (*KCP*, p. viii).

Correspondingly, Kant is clear about his position on subjective idealism and empiricism. On the one hand, time, as a pure intuition and underlying formal condition, is reproduced via a synthesis of the imagination and does not exist, and in this sense it is "transcendentally ideal." However, the objects of our experience along with our own histories must exist in time, and in this sense time is "empirically real." Regarding this dichotomy, and in keeping with the parallels between

Kant's philosophy, which does not rule out the possibility of other types of sentient beings, and Swedenborg's more mystical bent, it can also be noted that for the latter, "There are two things that, during man's life in the world, appear essential, because they are proper to nature, namely, space and time. But in the other life these two things become as of no account; . . . there is neither space nor time there, but states instead of these, and states in the other life correspond to spaces and times in nature."⁵ In this respect, while our intuitive form of mutable time is both necessary and immutable, for Kant, it is not the only possible form of time, making it a profoundly mysterious and autonomous form.

Hamlet arrives at such a revolutionary insight in two stages. Like Locke, who will later attempt to refute the premise of innate ideas and assert that they are grounded and developed in the universal, cross-cultural historical human experience, it is evident that both Hamlet and Horatio, who have been to Wittenberg and are well versed in Hebrew, Greek, and Roman literature, have a sense of how cultural and historic dynamics can influence one's customs. For example, Hamlet reminds the players that "the purpose of playing . . . is . . . to show . . . the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (3.2.17–21); and he mocks the social behavior and cultural mannerisms of Orsino and his peers: "Thus has he, and many more of the same bevy that I know the drossy age dotes on, only go the tune of the time" (5.2.171–73). Hamlet and Horatio also feel estranged from their historic and cultural peers. Hamlet distances himself from the "heavy-headed revel" of his fellow Danes: "though I am native here and to the manner born, it is a custom more honored in the breach than the observance" (1.4.14–17). Likewise, when directed to "report [Hamlet's] and [his] cause aright to the unsatisfied," Horatio declares that he is "more antique Roman than a Dane" (5.2.323–26).

Secondly, an intensive deconstruction of the condensed manifest metaphorical reference to "time being out of joint" reveals the latent reasons why Hamlet feels that time has become "unhinged." In reading the opening act, one can, like Hamlet, notice a series or chain reaction of ill-timed events: the death of Hamlet Sr.; Hamlet's mother's lack of proper mourning and corresponding hasty remarriage to Claudius; and the imminent threat of invasion from the Vikings, for which the kingdom is feverishly preparing both day and night, as well as on Sunday; all these events disrupt or dislocate the natural cyclical passage of time. Moreover, Hamlet is privy to the view that these same events are set in motion by human evil: Claudius's "most foul and unnatural" (1.5.25)

killing of his own brother, so that the malaise that haunts Denmark is all-pervasive, leading Hamlet to “let go” of the ancient form of cyclical time. In other words, as a result of the political, moral, and militaristic woes that Ellsinore is subject to, time is no longer jointed or secured to the astronomical motions of the heavenly bodies and the corresponding calendar markings. Instead, movement, change, mutability is now subordinate to the form of time that Denmark represents to itself. Likewise, for Kant, time has to do not with the shape or position of objects outside of us; he calls it “the form of inner sense.”

It should also be noted that from Fortinbras’s perspective, the death of Hamlet Sr., the warrior king who killed his father, marks the time that Fortinbras should invade Elsinore. Lastly and moreover, the Ghost, who only appears at a certain time of night, and who must leave before sunrise, also has its own sense of time. In this respect, Hamlet observes how the same event—the death of his father—has different temporal meanings for different parties of interest; and yet, underlying their interest, they have an inherent temporal sense. Likewise, for Kant, time is the nonconceptual element in introspection.

Thus, confronted by the indeterminate chaos of the state of Elsinore, Hamlet, the privy bystander of its state of turmoil, not unlike the Kantian transcendental self, is able to fully possess himself and his world. In doing so, he recognizes how all the new legislative subjects impose an innate sense of formal time on that which lacks an external sense of time, since it lacks the traditional and conventional coordinates to which it was subject. As Kant would note, this autodetermination is neither empirical nor anthropological; rather it is transcendently constituted, contained in the subject’s pure subjective spontaneity. However, as noted above, Kant qualifies that of space and time, “however free their concepts are from everything empirical, and however certain it is that they are represented in the mind completely a priori, would be yet without objective validity, senseless and meaningless, if their necessary application to the objects of experience were not established. Their representation is merely schema which always stands in relation to the reproductive imagination that calls up and assembles the objects of experience” (B, p. 195).⁶ Thus, empirical objects consisting of the strange and indeterminate movement, change, and mutability of Elsinore are now subordinate to the form of time that the different subjects represent to themselves.

III

In terms of Shakespeare's foreshadowing Kant's Copernican revolution, MacCary notes that while Galileo's mapping of individual planetary movements was the model for Hobbes's observations on the contradictory needs of individual men, Shakespeare's relativistic theory of love, which depicts how the experience of the subject is a function of his relation in space and time to the object of his experience, gives a premonition of the full force of the Copernican revolution in terms of being a prestatement of Hobbes's theory.⁷ In this respect, Shakespeare suggests that men should no longer be confident of their fixed place in a well-ordered system, and gives them a premonition of the full impact of the Copernican revolution, which would fundamentally change all areas of men's thinking in the second quarter of the next century (*F&L*, p. 105).

Even more radical is the new kind of thinking that becomes necessary if this circumstance is accepted. After all, if man/woman on earth is not a fixed observer, then all that one sees must be corrected by the factor of one's own wandering. What one sees then depends on where one is located at the time and one's rate of movement. More specifically, MacCary asserts that there is a kind of relativism in Shakespeare's presentation of love. He notes a number of passages in Shakespeare where human relations are compared to celestial movement, the most dramatic and important being Leontes's "mad" speech beginning "Affection, thy intention stabs the centre" (1.2.166). The implication of Leontes's speech is that nothing in the human experience of nature can be constant. In other words, the center does exist, and individual identity is only a function of difference from others (*F&L*, p. 7).

In this respect, Copernicus establishes as an astronomic certitude the regularity in which we trust will in no case be that which we observe, but always and only that which we construe. Consciousness makes the law in the manner of a condition "determining" all phenomena. Thus, following the Copernican inversion, what measures nature is the self and the ego, and with the transcendental turn nature is subjected to a normative pressure of time, which succeeds on the condition of maximizing theticism into pure, subjective spontaneity.

Hamlet's subjective inner sense is also significantly unhinged by the strange visitations of the Ghost. As the nonhuman Other, the Ghost returns for the third time, at the same exact time of night. However, notwithstanding its strict correspondence to astronomical movements, it becomes a portal for the unnatural and otherworldly, leading Horatio

to inquire, “What art thou that Usurp’st this time of night?” (1.1.46). Consequently, it is interesting to question whether Shakespeare is invoking Bruno, whose cosmological theories went beyond the Copernican model in asserting the sun as just one of an infinite number of independently moving heavenly bodies. Like *Elsinore*, the cosmos is out of joint, for “joint” in Greek is *harmonia* and indeed the issue is the harmony of the spheres. With Copernicus that was still possible; it even was still possible for Kepler—but for Bruno it wasn’t, because there was not just one center in the universe, but an infinite number; and hence a cosmic harmony could no longer take place.⁸ Thus, as the Ghost appears for the third time, aligned with a particular star, it might suggest that this one fixed point of reference is the only fixed point in all the heavens.

This one constant temporal coordinate also seems to underscore the Ghost’s strange and unnatural presence, for the sense of order, or, as Hume would note, the constant conjunction comes from outside the system, not from within. By the same token, since time is no longer relative to the cyclical movement of day and night, but rather to the Ghost’s appearance, which comes in and out of the determinate time of the earthly temporal-spatial realm, it suggests an alternative time. What if one’s sense of internal-formal time were replaced by an alternative, even ghostly, sense of time?

IV

The Ghost seems to be able to “slip” in and out of the formal temporal and categorical schema of the earthly realm. It anxiously senses that “(its) hour is almost come” (1.5.3) and it notes: “methinks I scent the morning air, brief let me be” (58–59). It also senses its need for departure at the instant “the glowworm shows the matin to be near, and gins to pale his uneffectual fire” (89–91). Moreover, as related by Bernardo, “when yond same star that’s westward from the pole had made his course t’illumine that part of heaven where now it burns the bell then beating one” (1.1.36–39), the Ghost returns to the castle at exactly the time that it appeared on the prior night. In this respect, while the Ghost’s spatial, moral, and ontological coordinates are unknown, its temporal coordinate is known and becomes the moment that the flow or succession of time in the earthly plane is disrupted, or knocked out of joint.

In this respect, related to Kant’s “logical function of modality” and the “pure concepts of understanding of existence and nonexistence” relative to some determinate time, the Ghost, which—“Tis here!”—exists

in this determinate time frame and—"Tis gone" (1.1.143–44)—no longer exists in this determinate time frame. All this implies some other spatial-temporal frame of reference to which it goes, only to return again, to exist in time, in terms of the human temporal frame of reference. While Hegel and Heidegger do not speak directly of a metaphysical ghost or spirit of another spirit, they do comment on this phenomenon. For Hegel, spirit falls into a time that remains foreign or external to it, even though it has power over it. Heidegger qualifies that "this 'falling' itself has its existential possibility in a mode of its temporalization which belongs to temporality"⁹; in other words, the "fall is from time into time, one time into another."¹⁰

Interestingly, Kant, who speculated about the existence of galaxies other than our own, did not admit the absolute or logical impossibility of alternative forms of receptivity. In fact, in the final section of *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, entitled "On the Character of the Species," Kant draws inferences concerning the intuitive temporal forms and categorical schema of inhabitants of other planets (those known during his time: Venus, Mercury, Mars, etc.), and how they differ from our own.¹¹ In doing so, he considers whether there might be sentient beings who, like us, possess discursive understandings, but whose forms of receptivity differ from our own: "What objects may be in themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our receptivity, remains completely unknown to us. We know nothing but our mode of perceiving them, a mode which is peculiar to us, and not necessarily shared in every being, though, certainly, by every human being" (A, p. 42; B, p. 60).

Thus, extending the thought that other beings with different receptivity might exist, Kant "would not rule out the absolute possibility that sentient beings having alternative forms of receptivity might not be able to achieve the necessary synthetic unity of consciousness with alternative categories" (*RIDB*, p. 34). In contrast, while one can only infer the Ghost's conceptual framework, it does seem to be aware of certain categorical structures that are not only alien to Hamlet but potentially harmful to him; for example, the Ghost notes: "But I am forbid to tell the secrets of my prison house, I could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres" (1.5.12–23); and it tantalizingly adds: But the "eternal blazon must not be to ears of flesh and blood" (1.5.13–22). Kant also relates time to what is "possible" and "impossible," for in this world and related time, some things are possible and others are impossible. In other words, with the passage of time from time-1 to

time-2, cause-1 could only bring about certain effects-2; other effects in such a passage of time would be impossible. But in the Ghost's world, time is associated mainly with what we would in this world consider to be impossible.¹²

More specifically, the Ghost evokes a substantial experience with the related categories of causality and change, and, by modal association, the passage of time. In terms of Aristotle's scheme of causality, his words can be categorized as follows:

Material Cause = Secrets of his prison house

Efficient Cause = Unfolding a tale

Formal Cause = The lightest word

Final Cause = Unfathomable harm to human body and soul

Thus, beyond the technical notion of intrusion as that which disrupts the stasis—in this case Claudius's unexpected rule of Elsinore after Hamlet's father's death—the Ghost represents an intrusion from another world or space-time continuum, alternatively existing and not-existing in the earthly continuum. Moreover, moving a bit beyond Kant, who did theorize about the existence of sentient beings with different forms of receptivity, the *Hamlet* text suggests that not only do they exist, but also how their forms of receptivity might be interchangeable with those of homo sapiens; thereby transforming the latter's corresponding concepts of what is possible and impossible, in a detrimental sense.

V

It is significant to note that Kant differs from Descartes in respect to the Cogito: "I think, therefore I am. I am a thing that thinks." For Kant, our interiority constantly divides us, our introspective I, from ourselves, our ego. More specifically, the apprehension of the self in the transcendental unity of apperception is merely intellectual and without sensible content. It therefore gives one no knowledge of the self as it really is; neither can it give one knowledge of the phenomenal self apart from inner sense, or the nonconceptual element in introspection. Kant notes, "I thus know that I am, but not what I am" (B, p. 56). In other words, the transcendental unity of apperception is not an existent but a formal presupposition or logical prerequisite to which all experience is subject, in that all experience is experience for a subject. Thus, the implicit question posed to Descartes is this: By what form is the "I am" existence determined by the "I think"?

Since the I and the ego are separated by the line of time, with the I carrying out the synthesis, dividing up the present, past, and future at every instant, they are related to each other by time. Thus, while I am separated from myself by the form of time, I am still one because the I necessarily affects this form by carrying out its synthesis and because the ego, which is in time, is necessarily affected as content in this form. By the same token, for Kant, time is a form of intuition, along with space, but the purview of time is more pervasive than space, for time is both the form of our outer and inner intuition, whereas space is only the form of our outer intuition. This means that we as rational beings are never out of time. Hence, for time to be “out of joint” there must be a rupture in the flow of time, an experience of another time, a time different from the one that continues to flow on in our conscious life.

In this respect, Hamlet’s subjectivity diverges from the Kantian transcendental self in an important way. Notwithstanding Kant’s correction of Descartes that one never has a direct empirical impression of the self, but rather that the self-referential I or the transcendental unity of apperception (which is beyond space, time, and categories of understanding) is the necessary and formal condition for experience as a synthesizing activity, Kant does not address how its empty content makes one vulnerable to identification with another’s self. Although Kant speculates about other sentient beings having other forms of receptivity and also considers how they might be interchangeable with human forms of receptivity, he does not actually explore the possibility. In contrast, Hamlet’s identification with the Ghost’s intuitive and categorical mind-set explores this realm of experience, broadening the Kantian sense of rational self by suggesting that windows exist looking into and out from both the ego and time.

As the aforementioned deconstruction of Hamlet’s ontological metaphor demonstrates, Hamlet has already intimated how time is, as for Kant, an autonomous and mysterious form. Hamlet has also intimated how time is heteronomous as well. In fact, the intimation of another space-time continuum and corresponding set of categories weighs so heavily on Hamlet’s mind that even Ophelia senses the subtext of his method, acting, “with a look so piteous in purport as if he had been loosed out of hell to speak of horrors” (2.1.82–84). In this respect, Hamlet has realized how a time that is heteronomous presupposes an ego that is heteronomous as well. In fact, contrary to the Cartesian or Kantian self, Hamlet’s sense of time and ego, both of which have windows, allows for and is passive to the invasion of that which is radically other.

In this respect, there is a strange and even tragic irony to how Hamlet is haunted by the Ghost. As a result of his heteronomous sense of self and time, he is privy to the forthcoming Kantian Copernican revolution in terms of making philosophy, that which is actual or possible human experience, anthropocentric. However, rather than engaging in a dialogue of perspectivism, of multiple points of view, Hamlet makes a leap to a particular one, namely, that of the Ghost. As will be discussed in the subsequent section in greater depth and detail, Hamlet is not only haunted by the words and presence of the Ghost, but by its sense of time and what is possible and not possible in accordance with the passage of time. What he ends up taking solace in, during the prayer/closet scene sequence, is the formal and categorical mind-set of the Ghost, or in Kantian terminology, the unity of consciousness provided by the Ghost.

VI

In comparing and contrasting Hamlet's doubt and madness to that of Descartes, it is evident that without recourse to God to assure him of his cognitive representations, which is the Cogito's discourse against madness, Hamlet is strangely jointed to the Ghost, even though he is distrustful of its mysterious being. At the same time, Hamlet has not been sure of how to "set things right" in Elsinore, forcing him to mask or rationalize his madness with a mask of madness, thus splitting and estranging himself from himself even more. Moreover, based on Kant's notion that the transcendental unity of apperception is not congruent with the empirical self, since knowledge of myself qua object is itself filtered through the categories and transcendental aesthetic, I will discuss how this noncongruence, this fissure, not only detaches Hamlet from his outer sense of time at the end of the play scene and the start of the prayer scene, but opens Hamlet to appropriate the Ghost's seemingly purgatorial sense of what is possible in accordance with the passage of time.

Although not as dramatic and far-reaching as Hamlet's experience, Shakespeare foreshadows the effect that the Ghost has on one's sense of time by twice contrasting Horatio's intuitive temporal sense with that of the guards. First, Horatio is so transfixed by the Ghost's presence that he feels that the Ghost stays only to "tell a hundreth" (1.2.237) while both Marcellus and Bernardo assert, "Longer, longer" (238). Secondly, anxious about the Ghost's reemergence and how it will once again

“usurp this time of night,” Horatio fails to hear the bell strike “twelf” (1.4.3), unlike Marcellus, who does.

In order to fully grasp the formal-categorical distortion that Hamlet experiences, it should be mentioned that for Kant, while the imagination synthesizes the intuitive apprehension of the manifold occupying a certain space and time, and the reproduction of different parts in space and time, it also schematizes the spatial-temporal relations in a conceptual manner in relation to the understanding. In fact, it is the understanding, as a correlation of “I think,” that plays the active role in the synthetic unity of consciousness, or, as Kant notes, the manifold of intuition is “brought to the objective unity of apperception” by the categories (B, p. 141). Thus, through the categories we are true legislators, for the categories are representations of the unity of consciousness; and thus, categories are predicates of the object in general.

Kant also notes two potential difficulties, or lapses of common sense, in terms of there being internal illusions and illegitimate use of the faculties and the resulting lack of accord between them. On the one hand, the imagination sometimes dreams rather than schematizes; for example, rather than applying its intuitive form to the succession of time, Hamlet’s incited imagination proclaims

Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself [breathes] out
Contagion to this world . . . (3.2.356–59)

Moreover, after the staging of the mousetrap, Hamlet is convinced of his mother’s complicity in his father’s death: unlike the player queen, his mother has not kept her word. Consequently, he is concerned that “the soul of Nero [might] enter [his] firm bosom” (362), and so directs himself to “speak daggers to [his mother], but use none” (364). He also acknowledges the split within himself: “My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites” (376).

In this respect, it is important to reemphasize that for Kant, apperception is the a priori intuition of our self and of our inner state, and that the knowing subject is nonexistent or not substantial; it is only a logical presupposition. The representational I is simple and in itself empty, nothing but bare consciousness, which accompanies all concepts. More specifically, I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, and not as I am to myself, but I am conscious only that I am (B, p. 157). However, while Kant no doubt believed, though he did not claim

to know that this form could only be imposed by a noumenal (soulful) self, he presupposed the existence of the latter.¹³ This would suggest that in being aware of the transcendental unity of apperception one is conscious that there is a real (noumenal/soulful) self, though one can never attain any knowledge of its nature.

For Hamlet, though, the presence of the Ghost offers testimony of the immortal existence of his own soul, for when Horatio warns him not to follow the Ghost, Hamlet replies:

Why, what should be the fear?
I do not set my life at a pin's fee,
And for my soul, what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself? (1.4.64–67)

Nonetheless, the split between his empirical self, as formally framed by his transcendental apperception, becomes even more pronounced when Hamlet initially addresses the possibility of killing Claudius during the prayer scene:

Now might I do it [pat], now 'a is a praying;
And now I'll do't—and so 'a goes to heaven,
And so am I [revenged]. That would be scanne'd:
A villain kills my father, and for that
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven. (3.3.80–85)

It is interesting to note the extended repetition of Hamlet's self-referential I. It is almost as if he is trying to convince himself that he is in charge, the repetition compensating for his actual sense of lack of control. Moreover, why would he be revenged; isn't he seeking revenge for the Ghost/his father? Or has the distinction between himself and the Ghost been already blurred?

Significantly, the split is not apparent to his mother, especially at the opening of the closet scene. After all, Gertrude actually fears for her life, or thinks that, literally speaking, Hamlet is about to use his daggers on her, which, of course, are then used on Polonius. In this respect, as a more sobered Hamlet later realizes, himself, he has not been in complete control of himself:

If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,

Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it then? His madness. (5.2.216–19)

Hamlet's substitute of the Ghost for his sense of self-reference also connects with Kant's second point: Instead of applying itself exclusively to phenomena, the understanding sometimes applies its concepts to things as they are in themselves, transcendental employment instead of experimental employment. In this respect, Hamlet's metaphysical reference to hell implies not only his deeply colored vengeful state of mind but also how his understanding is neglecting its own limits; reason has enjoined to exceed the bounds of understanding. Impassioned by the metaphysical image of his father suffering in purgatory, Hamlet wishes to "trip [Claudius] that his heels may kick at heaven, and that his soul may be as damned and black as hell, whereto it goes" (3.3.93–94).

It is significant to note that while Hamlet fears losing control over himself, he begins to compensate for the temporal-spatial slippage. Right before his outburst, which results in Polonius's death, he consistently refers to the time in the present moment by saying "Now" in triplet form at the close of the play scene, as well as in the prayer scene, and twice at the start of the closet scene:

Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself [breathes] out
Contagion to this world. Now, could I drink hot blood
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on. Soft, now, to my mother . . .
(3.2.356–71)

Now might I do it [pat], now 'a is a praying;
And now I'll do't—and so 'a goes to heaven, (3.3.80–81)

Hamlet: Now, mother, what's the matter? (3.4.8)

Queen: Why, how now? Hamlet?

Hamlet: What's the matter now? (3.5.12–13)

Generally speaking, we associate the "here" with the "now"; and yet in his first series of references Hamlet alludes to hell, and the more he slips away from this world, and is subject to the words of the Ghost, he consistently refers to the here and now, almost as a compensation. In other words, in lieu of his formal temporal-categorical absence from

the earthly realm, he reconstructs it by emphasizing a sense of presence in the here and now.

In this respect, somewhat ironically, Hamlet, who has been acutely aware of the nature and passage of time, loses track of time in terms of its passage in his surrounding circumstance on two accounts. First, invoking the modality of the world of purgatory in its categories of causality and change in relation to the passage of time as described by the Ghost, in Hamlet's mind, what is impossible is now possible, for how can Claudius, whom Hamlet has left at the altar of the chapel, climb up to Hamlet's mother's chamber and hide behind the arras, before Hamlet encounters her himself? In fact, Polonius, who has sent Hamlet to his mother's closet, arrives just before Hamlet does, so how can Claudius get there before both of them? This is reflected in Hamlet's confused wishful thought when his mother asks him what he has done after slaying Polonius: "I know not. Is it the King?" (3.4.27–28).

Bear in mind that Kant's revolutionary change in time consists of time that is no longer subordinate to movement, but, rather, movement is subordinate to time. Consequently, instead of judging time by observing movement, we judge movement by observing time. But in Hamlet's case, the time he is observing is the Ghost's time as effected by the Ghost's categorical framework; hence, Claudius's movement, or lack thereof, is perceived by Hamlet via the Ghost's temporal-categorical framework, leading to the misconception of Claudius's possible movement/position in space. In fact, in all fairness to Freud, without adhering to his Oedipal reading of the entire prayer scene, we can say that he aptly notes, "The human intellect has not a particularly fine flair for the truth. We have found rather, on the contrary, that our intellect very easily goes astray without any warning, and that nothing is more easily believed by us than what, without reference to the truth, comes to meet our wishful illusions."¹⁴ In this case, Hamlet's formal sense of time has been led astray by the transcendent employment of the Ghost's sense of modality, leading Hamlet to wish he had acted otherwise.

Also, in keeping with the modality of purgatory, Hamlet believes the impossible to be possible—for after surprisingly finding Claudius, who is seemingly praying in the chapel, Hamlet decides, after some deliberation, to defer the opportunity to kill his uncle on the grounds that he will wait for a time "that has no relish of salvation in't" (3.3.91–92). Wait for a better time: "a more horrid hent" (3.4.87)? But how can Hamlet wait for a riper time, if he is off to England? In fact, at the end of the closet scene, Hamlet reminds his mother that he is sailing to England,

implying that he already knew of the eventual departure well before the prayer scene. He even seems to be pointing out the irony of his having to remind her, after she informed him of his imminent departure, which would also explain how he knows of the decision to send him to England, a decision Claudius arrived at earlier that same day. And despite his charismatic optimism that “[he] will [tactically] delve one yard below their mines and blow [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern] at the moon” (3.4.212–13), he knows well that he might not return to Denmark for some time, if at all. Thus, the opportunity to kill Claudius at some point in the future is not concretely possible, though Hamlet temporarily thinks otherwise.

It should be noted that Lacan interprets this scene as indicative of the fact that “one cannot strike the phallus, because the phallus is a ghost,”¹⁵ and, as such, it is an immaterial abstraction and, invoking Derrida, an absence and lack beyond comprehension. However, as noted above, Hamlet does, in his own mind, grasp something cognitively concrete from the Ghost’s words. However, rather than causing Hamlet to defer to something better, the time “that has no relish of salvation in’t,” because the phallus signals something other, something esoteric and beyond the human realm, the Ghost’s categorical mind-set signals something quite contrary, namely, the killing of Claudius at a later date that is possible, rather than impossible, in accordance with the passage of time. In other words, rather than “the phallus [being] bound to nothing,” causing it to “always slip through your fingers,” Hamlet temporally identifies with and “holds onto” the Ghost’s categorical mind-set, resulting in Hamlet’s inaction (DIH, p. 52).

On a somewhat comical note, Hamlet’s misunderstanding of the passage of time can be contextualized within Kant’s rhetorical remarks regarding how he thought Swedenborg was mystically deluded. Referring to Tiresias and how Juno honored him with the gift of prophecy at the expense of his physical sight, Kant notes, “To judge from the above propositions, intuitive knowledge of the other world can be obtained here only by one losing some of the understanding one needs for the present world . . .”. He also shares an anecdote about Tycho Brahe, and how his coachman said to him when the former claimed to know how to travel the shortest way at night according to the stars: “Good sir, you may well understand the heavens, but here on earth you are a fool.”¹⁶

Finally, notwithstanding his distortion of outer time, it should be noted that Hamlet eventually restores the accord between his faculties, with the imagination and understanding schematizing and legislating in relation

to the categories, such that time is formalized as the succession of time. He, or his I, in fact, assures his mother that “[his] pulse [of his bodily ego] as [hers] doth temperately keep time” (3.4.140). In other words, he is now fully present in the moment, in the here and now, with her.

VII

Having examined how Hamlet’s meditative and metaphorical conception of the noncyclical nature of the passage of time in Elsinore, along with how his direct experience of time in the prayer/closet scene sequence correlates with Kant’s transcendental “expostulation” of “why . . . time is time” (2.2.86–88), Nietzsche’s and Bloom’s contention that Hamlet thinks too well—or as Hamlet says himself, “too precisely on th’ event” (4.4.41)—seems to be misleading, or at least broad and abstract. Instead, Kant’s explication of the autonomous nature of time, and its relative formal temporal-categorical framework, provides a more concrete and specific foundational understanding of Hamlet’s temporal thought and related behavior.

At the same time, in a un-Kantian manner, Hamlet replaces his own formally empty and splintered sense of ego/self with the Ghost’s, further dislocating or disjointing himself from himself. Moreover, due to his split from himself, Hamlet inadvertently ends up identifying with the self-referential formal-categorical mind-set of the Ghost. Implicit in this mind-set is that “day is (not) day, night (is not) night” (2.2.88); rather, day is when the Ghost is “confin’d to fast in fires” (1.5.11) and night when he is “doom’d for a certain term to walk” (1.5.10). Thus, “haunted” by how the Ghost is suffering in purgatory, due to Claudius’s murder of him, Hamlet is concerned with metering out perfect revenge to Claudius. And while it is impossible in the human world within the passage of time for the “lightest word” to have so much effect on the body and soul, it is possible in the Ghost’s world; and so by transitive thought, while it is impossible for Claudius to be in Hamlet’s mother’s closet in accordance with the passage of time, Hamlet thinks it is possible.

By the same transitive logic, while the Ghost is nonexistent in terms of being determinate in time within the human world, and then existent in the same nightly temporal world, and while it is not possible for Hamlet to have a short-term opportunity to kill Claudius in the determinate near future, Hamlet concludes, based on his awareness of the Ghost, that such a possibility does exist in the near determinate time. In sum, somewhat ironically, one recalls the Ghost warning Hamlet:

“howsoever thou pursues this act, taint not thy mind” (1.5.84–85), and how Hamlet’s mind has been poisoned both mentally, via the Ghost’s temporal-categorical framework, and morally, in terms of his judgment to seek revenge.

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1. All quotations are from *The Norton Shakespeare, Based on the Oxford Edition*, 2nd edition, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008). References are to act, scene, and line.
2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 135.
3. Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), p. 425.
4. Gilles Deleuze, *Kant’s Critical Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tamlinson and Barbara Haberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. v; hereafter abbreviated *KCP*.
5. In *Kant on Swedenborg: Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Writings* (Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2002), p. 163, Gregory Johnson quotes Emmanuel Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, Section 2625; hereafter abbreviated *KOS*. Johnson enumerates a number of philosophical parallels between the two figures.
6. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan & Co., 1963). I follow the standard practice of citing, whenever possible, the pagination of the first (A) and second (B) editions. All references henceforth appear in the text.
7. Thomas MacCary, *Friends and Lovers: The Phenomenology of Desire in Shakespearean Comedy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 104; hereafter abbreviated *F&L*.
8. Bruno had already, in 1583–84, lectured at Oxford and had published in England on Copernican theory. *F&L*, p. 10.
9. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), pp. 82 and 436.
10. Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1991), p. 28.
11. Terry Godlove notes in *Religion, Interpretation, and Diversity of Belief* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), p. 34 (hereafter abbreviated *RIDB*), “Perhaps the world they encounter comes packaged in five spatial and six temporal dimensions. For Kant, there is nothing contradictory in such a suggestion.”

12. Derrida notes that the ear is both inner and outer, in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation* (Schocken Books, 1985), pp. 12–15. Hamlet hears the words of the Ghost, which is both in and out of this determinate temporal-spatial realm.
13. A. C. Ewing, *Commentary on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 127.
14. Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1974), p. 129.
15. Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet," in Shoshana Felman, ed., *Literature and Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982) p. 50; hereafter abbreviated DIH.
16. Citing Walford, Gregory Johnson notes that Kant is the only known source of this story, *KOS*, p. 170n57. Johnson also argues that Kant's critique of Swedenborg masks his intellectual indebtedness to him.