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Room for Doubts in a Nutshell

(In)finite Spaces vs. Spatial (In)definition in *Hamlet*

The present paper attempts to map up the spatial world of *Hamlet* through the comparative analysis of both the emblematic and idiosyncratic features of *Hamlet* space. The play's unique position in the Shakespeare canon, its central place in Shakespeare space, is largely due to the phenomenological as well as hermeneutical complexity of its spatial structure. *Hamlet* in this respect is the most controversial representative of the established Shakespearean practice of charging space and its constituents (place, location) – both in the physical, metaphorical and conceptual sense – up with distinguished dramaturgical agency. The spatial design of the play takes shape and gain "habitation" through all the major compositional elements of tragedy in manifold local correspondences of plot, character, language, thought and scenery. In the play of all-pervading duplicities the double agency of tragic space is in full accord with all the other constituents of the tragic experience. It is the primary and primordial signifier and signified, agent and instrument of order, stability, constancy and continuity – the repository of tradition as much as the most authentic and expressive instrument of voicing the characteristically interrogative mood and profoundly sceptical mind of the times, the age of its making.

In the time-ridden, space-bound world of drama much depends upon taking sides. Viewed from outside: "All the world's a stage," indeed, seen from inside: all the stage is a world. A world of "cloud-capped towers" and "bottomless" pits, "gorgeous palaces" and humbling hovels, "beteeming winds" and "direful thunders," speaking stones and walking woods, "foul" fiends and "sweet sprites": "the great globe itself" in a nutshell of redeeming dreams and hellish nightmares – heaven and earth coupled with hell. The three primary and ultimate domains of the tragic experience bodied forth through richly varied local habitations and names in the individual plays. Othello's "affrighted globe" yawning at the huge eclipse of sun and moon, Hamlet's revenge-ridden, distracted globe where "conscience does make cowards of us all" and "great enterprises lose the name of action" under the barren, chilling, "pale cast of

thought,” Lear’s deceased dominions and prison-paradise – “this great stage of fools” and Macbeth’s darkness entombed earth of deep damnation – the stage of furiously sounded idiotic tales signifying nothing. The thought-tormented, tempest-tossed world of decay, disintegration, demolition and destruction where the centre cannot hold any longer, where the ground – the “firm and sure-set earth” – “has bubbles as the water has,” where “airy” nothings gain “local habitation” while “what seemed corporal” melts into the wind, where the “goodly frames” of the “casing air” turn into prisons, cribs and confines – into a global nutshell of wards, pits and dungeons both of the body, the soul and the mind.

Mostly of the latter, at least in the Danish play where “sickli’d” thoughts and mere words constitute the plot and substitute the native world of action. The favourite metaphor of modern criticism – Knight’s, Mack’s, McElroy’s *world* of the particular plays in this case is not so much the world of the senses – like that of Othello, Lear, Macbeth, or Anthony – as that of the sense verging on nonsense.¹ The boundless Renaissance universe squeezed into a ball – Hamlet’s Yoricky globe – the distracted brain, in whose “book and volume” of reformed religion only the worshipped father’s ultimate commandment of revenge can hold a steady seat.

Hamlet – in this respect, too – is the emblematic representative and the challenger at the same time of the established Shakespearean practice of charging space up with distinguished dramaturgical agency. From above, Shakespeare’s dramatic space in the tragedies is the primary and primordial signifier and signified, agent and instrument of order, stability, constancy and continuity – the guardian of both the Dionysian and the Apollonian i.e. the mythical-ritual and the historico-cultural origins, the roots of the dramatic way and vision, sense and consciousness – the repository of tradition. At the same time, it is also the most authentic and expressive instrument of voicing the characteristically interrogative mood and profoundly sceptical mind of the times, the age of its making.

This equivocating orchestration, this polyphonic charge of space and the creative-destructive tension generated by it, is one of the most unique and effective dramaturgical means of Shakespeare, supplying the plays – even the ones lacking in

1. Inspired by Mack’s concise clarification of the enigmatic term in “The World of *Hamlet*,” in *Tragic Themes in Western Literature*, ed. Cleanth Brooks (New Haven: Yale UP, 1955), p. 30, Bernard McElroy rounds down the idea: “Through selectivity and emphasis, a playwright sets forth a self-contained definition of reality within his play, a world which proposes for itself the principles by which life operates within its matrix” (Bernard McElroy, *Shakespeare’s Mature Tragedies* [New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1973], p. 4).

dynamic plotting, vivid characterisation or intensified poetic charge – with an elemental, inexhaustible source of energy and vitality.

The definitive nature of dramatic space, however, is only a localized variation on the more general and universal notion and experience of space – the primary and ultimate domain of being – a key-category of existentialist thought. In Heidegger's commanding definition "The finite and limited character of human existence is more primordial than man himself."²

Beside or within the ontological reference, this definition highlights the essential existentialism of tragedy as well – the underlying and overwhelming sense of primordial determination, which is a cosmic law in the spatial context of existence and a particular experience in the locative text of life.

Hamlet, again, is simultaneously emblematic and idiosyncratic in this respect as well. Nowhere in the Shakespearean world of tragedy is the spatial sense of being – through time out of joint – more palpably confined, the Fryean "claustrophobia of consciousness"³ more keenly felt, still nowhere else is the very same space more vague, blurred, disoriented, incomprehensible and uninhabitable. Overcharged by knowledge and devoid of meaning, it perfectly exemplifies Camus's doctrine about the absurdity of the human condition set in the dystopical nowhereland of eternal exile "deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land."⁴ It does so as persuasively as Bakhtin's definitive statement about composition: "Only on the given person, the dramatic hero, can architecture be built."⁵

If Hamlet is lost amazed in the labyrinth of lies, in terms of both thought, passion and action in the Protean world of pretence, he is also lost in space in between the finite and the infinite, the physical and the spiritual (in the literary sense too), the this-worldly and the other-worldly, the no more and the not yet to come, the unknown and the familiar: the multi-layered, doubled space of body and mind, action and passion, outside and inside, below and above, within and without. The never-ceasing nightmarish awareness of space, place and location – or the troubling lack of them – is due to both formal and substantial components in creative correspon-

2. Albert Camus quoting Heidegger in chapter 1 ("An Absurd Reasoning") of *The Myth of Sisyphus* (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 18.

3. The term is one of the key-words in Northrop Frye's rich contextual definition of the Hamlet-world in his essay on *Hamlet: Northrop Frye on Shakespeare* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986), p. 99.

4. Camus, p. 5.

5. Mihail Bahtyin, *A szerző és a hős*, trans. Éva Patkós (Budapest: Gond-Cura Alapítvány, 2004), p. 11 (my translation).

dence. The solely authoritative direct spatial stage instructions: the “enters” and “exits” as regularly recurring reminders of spatial relations keep alive the inherently spatial sense of the dramatic experience on the stage, mapping up the spaces and carving out the distinguished places of the play’s world carefully adjusted to the larger locations – the major spheres of action and reflection whose interrelations constitute the compound architecture of the *Hamlet*-world.

Hamlet, the play is unusually rich in geography having its story planted in a complex world of wide-ranging directions, fully fledged with contextual and referential spheres, regions and dimensions, both in terms of action and characters in organic interdependence.

The play – built of, on, and around Hamlet as observed and observer, centre and periphery – has, as McElroy suggests, a concentric composition of three clearly distinguishable, still interactive spheres: that of the outside world of those who come from somewhere else to Elsinore, the royal court – mostly the castle’s interior – and the intruding metaphysical world.⁶ The latter, transcending the given interpretative confinements, seemingly extends the spatial composition of the play, though in effect, it rather undermines it, blurring its boundaries and calling the reliability of all sense and the senses – physical and mental organs of orientation, perception and conception – to doubt:

Before my God, I might not this believe
Without the sensible and true avouch
Of mine own eyes. (I.i.59–61)⁷

and:

What may this mean,
That thou, dead course, again in complete steel
Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous and we fools of nature
So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls? (I.iv.51–6)

Approaching the play along this track of Marlowean exploration, drawn toward Shakespeare’s heart of darkness – the hollow centre of the *Hamlet*-universe – do we

6. McElroy, p. 29.

7. All parenthesised and textual references are to the Arden edition of *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London and New York: Methuen, 1982).

find the inner sanctuary, the equivocating polyphonic mind of Hamlet, whose “large discourse” looking before and after, divided from itself like poor Ophelia and her fair judgement, remodels the pattern and turns the world inside out, eliminating all given spatial definition.

The mental metamorphosis, however, works both ways: from the centre toward the peripheries, from the particular to the general and back. Hamlet’s body-minded world of thought by the intense awareness of the carnal and the charnel⁸, of physicality and mortality reduces his mental universe by the mind-forged manacles of his conscience into a dead-locked prison – a short circuit of vain self-definitions. Hamlet is imprisoned both compositionally – by the spherical exteriors of his world – the analogous stories of his generation mates: Laertes and Fortinbras, and conceptually from inside through constant self-comparisons in the hope of gaining a firmer foothold on the shattered ground of his identity measured against the actors: “O what a rogue and peasant slave am I. . .” (II.ii.544), Horatio: “A man that Fortune’s buffets and rewards / Hast ta’en with equal thanks. . .” (III.ii.66–7), Fortinbras: “How all occasions do inform against me” (IV.iv.32) and Laertes: “For by the image of my cause I see / The portraiture of his” (V.ii.77).

Hamlet, like all the major tragic heroes upon whose character and conscience the play’s worlds are founded, is agent and victim, projective and absorptive at the same time. His character is composed of the elements of his local dramatic macrocosm and gets gradually dissolved in it only to recharge, remake, remodel it through sacrificial decomposition planting the seeds of the next cycle – the “brave new world” of Fortinbras and Horatio. This complex dramaturgical pattern – the destructive-creative interaction of exterior and interior spheres, through imitating larger spatial-contextual designs like the cycles of nature and probably those of the universe – give organic life to the fictional world of the play. With, within and without the broader homophonic composition, whose leading voice is that of Hamlet, the thematic leitmotif of the play – the story of the murdered father, the murderer and the avenger – through imitative repetition create a fugue-like organism, a closed system of unique aural, visual and spiritual qualities and climatic, atmospheric conditions.⁹

8. Normand Berlin, borrowing and adapting Harry Levin’s “apt phrase” to his pointed interpretative purposes, builds his reading of *Hamlet & Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* on and around the intertwined themes of death and sex (“Death and sex in knot intricate, prod the mystery, touch the secret cause,” p. 65) in chapter 4 of *The Secret Cause* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981).

9. Northrop Frye, elaborating his concept on archetypal roles in Shakespeare’s “tragedies of order,” distinguishes three “concentric tragic spheres” in the action of *Hamlet*, “each with a

If there is numerical figuration in the architecture of the *Hamlet*-world in accord with its spatial composition, that must be built on the number 3 – the proper amount of generating space in dimensional terms: 3 analogous stories of 3 families – those of Fortinbras, Hamlet and Laertes, 3 key-figures related outwardly to 3 exterior locations as topical qualifiers – Norway, Wittenberg and Paris, 3 scenes of spatial and conceptual transcendence by the 3 appearances of the ghost, 3 recollections of the King’s death by murder – the ghostly tragic offence to which the play is only the dramatically delayed aftermath – one narrative, one dumb show and one live performance, 3 public confrontations of the deadly adversaries, Hamlet and Claudius, 3 meetings of Hamlet and Ophelia, Hamlet’s 3 encounters with death and the 3 Aristotelian structural stages of action – the manifold according beginning, middle and ending.

This now canonical, now fugue-like, densely textured polyphony of symmetrically arranged parts, players, plots and places accompanies in rich orchestration the free verse-like thought-rhythm of the play – the overwhelming questions of Hamlet’s inquisitive mind. This ordering device – like a spatial-structural network of analogies and correspondences – gives solidity and integrity to the play’s body and mind threatened by temporal, spatial and conceptual decomposition and dissolution.

The overall sense of spatial indefiniteness is largely due to the lack of reliable local habitations. The *Hamlet*-world is devoid of spatial signification of characters, who – lacking locational bonds – are merely related to the places of action as itinerant, movable figures of temporary presence, coming and going, leaving and returning – always on the move. Hamlet senior and junior, Horatio, Laertes, Ros and Guildenstern, Fortinbras and the players, by spatial definition, come from and belong to the outer spheres – the merely referential exterior of the play’s world, thus lack locational weight, authority and jurisdiction further increasing the sense of temporality and liminality.

Just like the permanent residents, the habitant signifiers of Elsinore: Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Laertes and Ophelia – the authorized space-makers – who, morally disqualified, also work against the indispensable spatial definition that would make the *Hamlet*-world truly inhabitable. They all gain proper local habitation only in death – the ultimate state of spatial and temporal definition, beyond the confines of space and time.

murdered father and a nemesis.” See Chapter 1 (“My Father as He Slept: The Tragedy of Order”) in *Fools of Time* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1967).

Tragic space, like that of the genre's fathering myths, is always personal, localized by habitations, names and deeds, characters and actions to ensure the required accessibility, familiarity and intimacy for the spectator, to make the world of the play inhabitable for the audience. The actor and his setting – as Camus emphasized – must be in full accord, since “Within three hours he must experience and express a whole exceptional life. That is called losing oneself to find oneself. In those three hours he travels the whole course of the dead-end path that the man in the audience takes a lifetime to cover.”¹⁰ Only in this way will the play and what it represents be whole, unique and alive. The organic sensual-conceptual or formal-substantial metaphoricality of tragic space rests on the dialogue – the interactive relationship of the interior and the exterior – the mental and the physical domains of the play's composite world. The accord, agreement, separation and confrontation of the two spheres is, in itself, a reliable medium of the tragic experience. In the complex spatial design of the play the outside – the dramatic, narrative and lyrical environment of the protagonist, from the spectator's point of view, is also what modern architectural space-theory would call a communicational “transitory space” that provides the audience with guided access to the interior of the tragic mind and creates an authentic sensual-conceptual context for the hero to state himself, to gather a live local habitation.

This bipolarity, the spatial dialogue of the two cardinal spheres is predominant in all the major tragedies of Shakespeare. Macbeth's alternating castles *vs.* his opponents' seats, enclosed interiors and vague exteriors, Scotland and England in the Scottish play, Venice and Cyprus, the dramatic action and the narrated fiction of the Moor's story in *Othello*, Britain and France, the domesticated households of Goneril, Regan and Gloucester *vs.* the Hodological¹¹ (interlocational) spaces of the homeless in *King Lear*, Rome *vs.* Egypt, land and sea, domestic and foreign in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, Denmark *vs.* Norway, Wittenberg, Poland and England, this world and the netherworld in *Hamlet*.

Hamlet's humanistic, conceptualized Renaissance microcosm is devoid of the richly figurative, organic, domesticated space of myths, whose familiar world was a

10. Camus, p. 59.

11. The term “Hodological space” – quasi-synonymous with kinetic space or space of movement – signifies an aspect or dimension of “real” or “lived” space beside “actional,” “coexistential” or “communicational” spaces also of distinguished importance in dramatic context, and was introduced to the scholarly discourse of architectural space concepts by the Heidegger-disciple, Otto Friedrich Bollnow in his seminal book *Mensch und Raum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1963).

natural habitat of analogous locations and names with adaptable and adjustable temporal and spatial confines. Their remote secular successors – the quasi-ritual, pseudo-sacred, heroic-romantic tragedies of passion: *Titus*, *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* recall a more primitive, archaic, openly brutal and violent world of earlier stages of civilization which are set in a more organic, living space of increased vitality – a primary quality, which, being correspondent with both action and character, is indispensable for architecture and composition alike. These plays possess unique spatial character traits – qualities in full accord with other key-constituents of their world. *King Lear* is set in an open dramatic universe of marked vertical and horizontal axes and boundless perspectives localized and made inhabitable by constant movement of search and escape. *Macbeth's* predominantly vertical spaces of sub-stanced, suffocatingly enclosed, claustrophobic interiors are bound mostly to the subsurface layers of its world. *Othello* – using and abusing stereotypical comic patterns in terms of plotting, intrigue, humours, moods and manners – is planted in a predominantly horizontal, social-hierarchical space. In *Anthony and Cleopatra* the protagonists' greatness (in terms of position, reputation, self-esteem and sacrifice) and distance dramatizes the space of multiplied bipolarity (Rome *vs.* Egypt, Octavius *vs.* Cleopatra, masculine *vs.* feminine principles etc.).

At the same time, *Hamlet's* seemingly more homogeneous space gathers shape in a world of elusion, escapism, evasion, avoiding definition and devoid of dramatically habitable locations.

The predominant qualities of the *Hamlet*-world also contribute to the decomposition of traditional dramatic space, dissolving in an equivalent atmosphere, a substituting climate – the authentic spatial correlative of a state of mind replacing dramatic action. This all-inclusive and enclosed state of mind, however, is far from being merely the barren bounds of separation and secession exiling Hamlet to the outskirts of the world of action and experience. In the confounding world of seeming, whose dramaturgical substance is substitution, the Apollonian thinking and talking about the Dionysian constituents of life and vitality in the dramatic sense may prove equivalent to the primary experience itself. Hamlet's world of thought – through the heightened awareness of the flesh and its common fate, of physicality and mortality – reduces his boundless mind to a death-ridden confinement of interior and exterior entrapment where the body is the prison of the ambitious mind no more than the mind for the ever rebellious body, the mortal coil shrinking from annihilation. Thus gains Hamlet's apt and pointing pun on conception equivocal generic and local significance of all-pervading conceptual productivity.

HAM Have you a daughter?

POL I have, my lord.

HAM Let her not walk i'th' sun. Conception is a blessing,
but as your daughter may conceive – friend, look
to't.

(II.ii.182–6)

What could be a more proper subject for Hamlet, the humanist scholar, when reading on a book than a “satirical rogue’s” indecent remarks on ageing and its inevitable physical signifiers in terms of conceptual (i.e. sensual and intellectual) incompetence and impotence “potently” believed by the ready reader? Even the butt for the joke, the blindfolded fool realizes the “method” in Hamlet’s answer, and to fatten the ironic effect, he joins the game finding perverted delight in the fertile discourse on mortality: “How pregnant / sometimes his replies are. . .” (II.ii.208–9).

The deliberate compositional confusion of the particular and the general, the subjective and the objective, the local and the universal, the corpuscular and the conceptional is also apparent in another sphere of the *Hamlet*-world – in the imported *Hamlet*-university substituting the neglected Wittenberg-world of lectures, seminars, courses and discourses on diverse subjects given voluntarily by self-appointed experts of all the fields that come to view within the “gross and scope” of their opinions in the “book and volume” of Hamlet’s world.

Knowledge, like the fat king’s and the lean beggar’s bodies is but a “variable service” – different dishes, “but to one table” set down in Hamlet’s tables wiped “clean of all trivial fond records.”

Upon closer inspection, however, even this last refuge – the only chance of liberation by the infinite faculties of the mind’s univers(al)ity – proves to be a prison: a thematic, subjective, self-imposed confinement, a Beckettian–Pinteresque room with the sole view of the flesh, the body or the thing challenging the mind and the spirit of the king.

Horatio’s recollections of Roman history matched with demonology set in apocalyptic imagery of rich spatial connotation, Claudius’ lecture on heaven, nature and reason, on natural bonds, proper family ties, cardinal virtues and sins related to rules of death and mourning, Laertes’ brotherly sermon to Ophelia on youth, temptation and the dangers of desire confirmed by Polonius’ paternal admonition concerning tenders of love and the blazes of blood, Hamlet’s illuminating account of the evils of habitual drinking, his equivocating, deprecating appreciation of man, the angelic beast, of language, pronunciation, playing and the art of the theatre, proper wifely and womanly conduct and the true path of virtue as well as the progression of the great chain of beings along the ladder of alimentation in the worm’s-eye view, con-

cluded by the grave-diggers' – the professional death-dealers' discourse on decay and decomposition – i.e. all the aggregated knowledge of the play boils down to the ultimate mystery of mortality confining Hamlet's "noble" reason of "infinite" faculties to the limited playground of a nauseating conceptual dance macabre. This is the dramatic agent that gradually gathering weight charges up the barren realm of allegorical conceptions with organic ritual metaphoricality through calling death to life in body and spirit alike. In the death-locked world of Hamlet – cracking "the wind of the poor phrase" in genuine Poloniusian manner – the timeless topos of doubled topicality is that of Atropos.

Death is not only the sole substantial vision of the *Hamlet*-world vocalized and reflected upon in all tones, voices and registers but a structural-spatial agent of division as well. It provides the play with an authentic Aristotelian composition having a beginning, a middle and an ending in full accord through ritual and conceptual correspondence. The three cardinal turns – the delayed protasis of the ghost's repetitive appearance, the crisis, brought about by the mousetrap scene and the catastrophe – the proportionately stretched-to-the-limits closure – provide both the play (compositionally) and the *Hamlet*-world (conceptually) with a geometry generating the illusion of inverted spatial definition. Through the provocative intrusion of the outside all the three are scenes of liminality, exteriority, spatial transcendence and corresponding meta-theatricality. The framing ones are set in markedly positioned locations that simultaneously generate and dissolve space pointing beyond the world of the play and transcending both its physical and mental confines. The "removed ground" of the battlements is a passage between the physical and the metaphysical spheres by the threefold now narrated, now live appearance of the roaming spirit "doomed to walk the night" restlessly, without a local habitation and a proper name as signifier: "thing," "fantasy," "dreaded sight," "apparition," "portentious figure," "illusion," "spirit of health or goblin damned," "poor ghost," "truepenny," "old mole," "worthy pioneer," "perturbed spirit" – a sequence of confused attempts at naming the unnameable.

The other "removed ground" – the graveyard scene – driving home death near the end, bodies forth the forms of things (both beggars, fools and kings) and paves the way for the catastrophe brought about by "proud death's" final feast. The spatial gap between the beginning and the ending – covering the whole play as an intermezzo – is bridged by the striking analogies of the battlement scene and the butchery. Both are scenes of intrusion: those of old Hamlet and young Fortinbras; of possession: those of the mind in the mental and of the body – of Denmark – in the physical sense of the word; and of termination through timing and extermination

through murder and revenge. Both are set in a martial mood stressing the aggressive military spirit of the disjointed times in sharp contrast with Hamlet's helpless humanism. The sentinels' constant guard, the "strict and most observant watch," the enlisted "implements of war," as well as the "warlike form" of the late king is in perfect unison with victorious Fortinbras' martial drive and enthusiasm and the military manners he employs to pay proper tribute to Hamlet: "Let four captains / Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage. . . / The soldier's music and the rite of war / Speak loudly for him" (V.ii.400–5).

The parallels of the two scenes' fictional perspectives further increase the according correspondence in another key of spatial transcendence. The ghost's narrative account of Old Hamlet's life and death retrospectively opens up the play to the past, while Horatio's promised report of young Hamlet's life and death points toward the future to ensure Hamlet a worthy afterlife of honour and respect – the post-mortem justice he should've done to his father. Father and son fallen by treachery, poisoned to death, yearning for purification and seeking ultimate peace thus unite in a sequential cycle, joining the beginning and the ending, dissolving both narrative and dramatic spatial confinements of the doubled yet one Hamlet-story.

The illusory geometry of the plot, however, rests not so much on the two framing pillars as on the structural centre, the deeply planted and precisely pointed meta-theatrical mousetrap scene. This is the peripeteia-like core and axis of the Hamlet-world through double reflection pointing backward and forward in the plot, embedded organically in the body of the primary play. By Hamlet's active, multifunctional agency and involvement (he is author, manager, actor, instructor, audience and critic in one) it turns the play upside down and inside out further increasing spatial confusion. Its keenly calculated central position (the beginning of the live performance following the dumb show is almost by the line the exact structural middle of the play) suggests the illusion of symmetry, balance and order through the form and what it covers: the shadowy substance of hidden truth revealed by mere pretence, and this way generates only further confusion. Facts can be verified only by fiction, truth can be revealed solely by pretence, reality can be confirmed exclusively by illusion. The seemingly sound concord of discord is apparent in the dramaturgically arranged sequential strategy in the spatial "trigonometric" structure of the play built upon a silence-sound, silence-sound-silence, sound-silence pattern. The silent ghost's double dumb show – the two "rehearsals" – are followed by the voiced live performance. The ghost's scene – having the desired audience – is no less theatrical than the performance of the professional actors who also start their play with the appetizing dumb show only to get authoritatively silenced when they re-act out the vocalized

version of *The Murder of Gonzago-Hamlet*. And it is no less meta-theatrical either than the concluding performance – the pre-plotted death-show by the collaborative authorship and agency of Claudius and Laertes. Or the dénouement itself – the four-fold murder followed by Hamlet’s meta- and melodramatically extended and overplayed agony before the concluding silence and the noisy rest: Fortinbras’ phoney afterplay.

Uniting most of the major compositional elements of tragedy (plot, character, thought, diction and spectacle) Hamlet’s overall existential crisis gets manifest in gradually growing spatial indefiniteness loosening all natural bonds, confusing orientation and distorting all relations: natural and man-made, emotional and mental, sensual and conceptual alike.

With time out of joint even the chronotopical complementariness of the two axes of existence gets disjointed. Time, slowed down, almost suspended, works both for and against space. It freezes into the expected fourth dimension further increasing the sense of interior and exterior confinement, at the same time it dissolves the boundaries between now and then, here and there, inside and outside, high and low, holy and profane, extending the frontier of the unknown and increasing the liminality of the dramatic experience. Taking side with Hamlet, we simultaneously get confronted with the threatening spatial fixities of the royal palace’s prison-like interior: the cryptic labyrinth of halls, corridors, rooms and chambers on one hand and the blood-freezing abyss yawning behind the presence and the words of the ghost and the opened graves of beggars, fools, kings and emperors.

The grand-tour of the flesh, the profane pilgrimage of the “thing” disguised as a “king” and disfigured into “nothing,” in its grotesquely ironic temporal and spatial circularity, gravely adds to the horror of being lost in the world of contrary states and stances.

HAM The body is with the king, but the king is not with
the body. The king is a thing –

GUILD A thing, my lord?

HAM Of nothing. Bring me to him.

(IV.ii.26–9)

The threefold locative as well as locational reference and the universal implication of Hamlet’s enigmatic answer to Rosencrantz’s inquiry even further widens the gap between seeming and being, fact and fiction, illusion and delusion, the ideal and the real. Since both king, thing and nothing can equally be related to the Ghost, Claudius and Hamlet, the one time potent, now impotent and potentially competent future ruler-figures – the most authoritative, overruling concept of the past, Frye’s favourite

“royal metaphor” – the emblem of unity, order, concord, safety, stability and meaning – the referential centre of the world, gets disfigured, displaced and dissolved through contrasting division on one hand and sheer physicality on the other, depriving both bodies of the king of everything that could make it more than just a thing of nothing.

Undoubtedly the most potent physical and conceptual promoter of spatial disintegration is revenge itself: the ritual genre-forging force of mythological origin, the fully-fledged supreme metaphor of the play and its kind – act and idea in one – the semi-sacred, semi-secular act of justifying murder and verifying life as much as the supreme idea substituting religious faith. Revenge – this demonic, pagan deity reborn in the Renaissance into a haunting conceptual body – is the avenger’s deed of self-redemption, the only available way in the “brave new world” of pursuing truth, doing justice, restoring order and fulfilling the law. A ritual act of worship and the locational centre of the *Hamlet*-world, multiplied in the minds of Fortinbras, Laertes, Hamlet and the ghost. A counteract of creation, disintegrating the micro-cosmic personality, undermining the existential sense of space, belonging, identity and community.

For Fortinbras it is an enterprise of recovery to regain what is lost in terms of both habitation and name, state and status. For Laertes it is an act of passionate self-statement of rebellion daring damnation. For the grotesquely perturbed ghost, gathering an almost sensual body of passion through his fiery sermon, it is the only way to find his final peace of mind and soul. For Hamlet: a calling, a private, personal and public mission, a deed of redeeming the state of Denmark damned with the “horrible crimes” of fratricide, treachery, lust and incest recalling the second fall. For the prince it is the supreme commandment of the worshipped father restating the biblical declaration of rights slightly modified, localized: “Vengeance is thine” – it says, and Hamlet without hesitation, in fact with doubtful readiness condescends to it. It is not by chance that its power to set things right is called to dramatic doubt in Claudius’ prayer-scene when the seeming act of worship reveals the real nature of revenge by the straight directional contrast of heaven and hell. In the threefold spatial structure of Renaissance cosmology, its carved out passage is a dead end that can lead only downward, to “the other place” – to damnation. Of subject and object, agent and victim alike.

“And thy commandment all alone shall live / Within the book and volume of my brain” (I.v.102–3) – the terminology speaks for itself – and against Hamlet. At least the Hamlet we have known. Memory, table, records, books, copying, volume – the whole paraphernalia of the student and learned humanist scholar of Wittenberg with

MARCELL GELLÉRT

all the forms and pressures of the past that provided him with a joint sense and state of identity is wiped away in an instant as “baser matter” compared to the holy task and the great chance of gaining a genuine local habitation and a name through substantial involvement in life by death.

Hamlet, at last fulfilling his fatal mission, is finally driven home by death to the nowhere-land beyond space and time he has always belonged to by unbounded filial affection to his father’s spirit and boundless spiritual disaffiliation from the world.

Thus unite the local trinity of Hamlet’s anti-world: the Father, the Son and the Death. And thus gains the *Hamlet*-world ultimate spatial definition reuniting the local spirit (the father) and the universal mastermind (the son) – or spatially speaking: the spiritus loci and the genius loci – in the netherworld.