



‘Alas Poor Yorick!’: Hamlet and Kristeva’s Imaginary Father

Elise Denbo

Queensborough Community College
City University of New York

Most psychological approaches interpret Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* within a Lacanian/Oedipal revenge narrative. This paper, however, explores Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* through theories of Julia Kristeva, who develops a term called ‘the imaginary father,’ which she revisions from Freud’s ‘father of individual prehistory.’ The notion of an archaic/imaginary father as a hybrid locus (a mother-father amalgam) within the semiotic domain not only introduces new perspectives to consider the role of fatherhood but also the affective (and material) nature of transference/countertransference in Shakespeare’s plays. The dramatization of Hamlet’s “inner mystery” as opposed to his outer “show” has not been explored as an *intrapsychic* activity regarding an archaic father of imaginary ambivalence. Despite the scene’s brevity (5.1), considering Yorick as Hamlet’s father of individual prehistory reconfigures symbolic mastery to explore the unfolding development of Shakespearean character as a metaphorical process, a presymbolic *activity* rather than fixed representation, dramatizing the corporeal struggle for psychic and creative space.

To cite as

Denbo, E., 2017, “Alas Poor Yorick!’: Hamlet and Kristeva’s Imaginary Father’, *PsyArt* 21, pp. 143–158.

Most playgoers are familiar with the unique encounter between Hamlet and Yorick, the long departed court jester unearthed from his grave, that Shakespeare positions in counterpoint to the early appearance of King Hamlet’s ghost, an event which combined with his mother’s sudden marriage to his uncle sets the play in motion. Although I plan to correlate Hamlet’s transformation in the pocket-like space of the graveyard with Julia Kristeva’s theories regarding psychic space, I would first like to consider Shakespeare’s

play as a living event within the matrix of the early modern theatre, a heterogeneous and communal site that offered a new sense of space/place for its audience.¹ It is hard to apprehend the excitement – in sixteenth-century London – of a newly-created public playhouse, an exemplar of the imaginary and mysterious transference that occurs somewhere between the actor’s body, his fictional role, and the audience made up of high, middling and low classes, both literate and illiterate. The theatrical metaphor (*totus mundus agit histrionem*), the motto inscribed on the Globe, not only compares the whole world to the playhouse but implies the paradoxical nature of theatre: the actor both is and is not himself – *is* and *is not* his role – or as Shakespeare tells us in “The Phoenix and the Turtle”: “Had the essence but in one/two distincts, division none.”² As such, the reciprocity between the ‘I’ and the ‘not I’ is consonant with the affective nature of theatre: the very gap that enables distance makes possible a primary identification, not yet the idealized image fixed within the mirror nor the law of the father, but a suspension of judgment within an energy-laden space of imaginary play not yet positioned within (or limited by) what Kristeva would refer to as the “two-sided units of the linguistic sign.”³

What is especially notable, Kristeva makes possible a reading of *Hamlet* most critics do not explore. Kristeva develops a term called ‘the imaginary father,’ which she revises from Freud’s ‘father of individual prehistory,’ a presence, Freud tells us, that “lies hidden” behind “the origin of the ego ideal.”⁴

¹ The multidimensional platform stage encouraged various perspectives. The heterogeneity of the public theatre itself, located in the Liberties, contributed to its liminality, especially for anti-theatricalists of the period. Phillip Stubbes *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) John Northbrooke’s *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays and Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes* (1577) viewed theatre as dangerous to gender and class positions. Contrasted with religious depictions of the Passions or earlier guild plays, Stubbs believed the public theatre had the power to corrupt sensory ‘portals’ of the body to affect/imprint the mind as well as disrupt humoral balance.

² While an audience identifies with the illusionary ‘I,’ the character on stage, the audience is positioned outside the illusionary frame (the ‘not I’). It is through this doubling of self ‘as/and’ other that affective transference takes place. Kristeva’s depiction of the ‘not I’ addresses the *aporia* of maternal passion as a gift toward the ‘other’ of desire, a space through which the early subject abjects the maternal container and transfers to a third site within primary narcissism to emerge into being.

³ Julia Kristeva, “Within the Microcosm of the Talking Cure” in *Interpreting Lacan*, eds. Joseph H Smith and William Kerrigan (New Haven: Yale University Press): 35, 37.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and The Id*, trans. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 26. Although Freud states that “from the very first individual psychology...is at the same time social psychology as well,” Freud refers to the ‘father of personal prehistory’ as the most important identification of earliest childhood, one that takes place prior to ‘any object-cathexis’ or any fixed understanding of sexual difference, whose effects will be ‘general’ and long lasting: “This leads us back to the origin of the ego ideal; for behind it there lies hidden an individual’s first and most important identification, his identification with the father in his own personal prehistory. This is apparently not in the first consequence or outcome of an object-cathexis; it is a direct and immediate identification and takes place earlier than any object-cathexis.”

Like the anamorphic image -- its well known example, the floating yet oblique skull in Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* that comes into shape when viewed from the side -- Kristeva's theories, and her re-elaboration of primary narcissism as a three-tiered structure, allow us to take a sideways view, an anamorphic perspective, to make manifest a moment of "intimate revolt," the emergence of psychic space within a subject's prehistory. *Anamorphosis*, a trick angle or view, developed in response to the fifteenth-century discovery of linear perspective, which enabled artists to create the illusion of a three-dimensional world on a flat or two-dimensional surface: the vanishing point (where all lines converge) within the frame posited a viewing point outside the frame, presenting impressions of interiority and exteriority, presence and absence, in new ways.⁵ Although Leon Battista Alberti's *On Painting* (1435) developed a system of linear perspective that emphasized a position of mastery, Nicholas of Cusa's *On Learned Ignorance* (1440) addressed the limitation of a central perspective, reinforcing the notion of paradox as that which 'confounds reason.' Since Hamlet is considered the prototypical text for an emerging subjectivity, the presence of a positive rather than vengeful father becomes, for Shakespeare, the dramatic lining of the tragedy itself, a cross-fertilizing (and anamorphic) play upon borders that resists prohibition and judgment, engaging a poetic, more fluid, eye which has ethical and cultural significance for us today.

Perhaps other than the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, no image or iconic representation is more recognizable than that of a young man holding a skull in his outstretched arm as he peruses and addresses it with attention. No visual emblem – not even the nocturnal meeting with his ghostly father – marks the play more than the exchange in the graveyard between Hamlet and Yorick's remains. Even when Hamlet is absent, Yorick's skull alone serves as insignia of the play, a *memento mori* expressing the liminal position between life and death, illusion and reality that is the condition of all humankind, reminding the audience that to be conscious is to be mortal, that to love is also to lose. "Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times" (5.1.171-73).⁶ While King Hamlet's ghost speaks as a means to suit Hamlet's action to his word, to revenge his "most unnatural murder," Yorick remains silent, "quite chop-fall'n" with no voice or tongue to sing; yet the echo of Yorick's "gibes," his sprightly "gambols," offers an indeterminate space – a space of

⁵ Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (New York: Routledge, 1997). 27. Phelan notes that perspective is a "theatrical technology.... The illusionary indicative that the theatre animates, allows for the construction of depth, for the 'invention' of physical interiority and psychic subjectivity."

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, Shakespearean quotes are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katherine Eisaman Maus. 2nd edition. New York: W. W. Norton, 2008.

play through which Hamlet has access to his childhood and through which we, the audience, have access to the child-man as he surfaces in the drama.

What is especially striking is that this scene may well be the first time a human skull was used on the stage. Although the ‘portrait’ of a young man ‘contemplating a skull’ had a long tradition in Renaissance art, “Shakespeare’s presentation of that scene was a striking innovation on the London stage when he introduced it in or about 1600.”⁷ What is further notable is that this scene does not appear in Shakespeare’s earlier sources for *Hamlet*: No mention of Hamlet’s detour through a graveyard nor any figure of childhood affection such as Yorick appears in the Hamblet/Amleth myths (neither Belleforest nor Saxo Grammaticus).⁸ In addition, it is unlikely that the graveyard scene appeared in the lost *Ur-Hamlet* since there is no reference to it in any Renaissance text. Unlike the skull in *memento mori* paintings, what distinguishes the scene in *Hamlet* is that Yorick is individualized: he is named! “This same skull, sir, was Yorick’s skull, the King’s jester” (5.1.166-67). Andrew Sofer notes, “naming the skull transforms the scene. It is a moment of ‘unmetaphoring’ in which the conventionalized figure of speech has become humanized,” transfigured into a “living character” placed ‘center stage in the act of performance.’”⁹

As such, 5.1 is a ‘groundbreaking scene’: it not only rewrites earlier sources but sets the stage for a new theatrical event, one that distinguishes it from traditional revenge tragedies and anticipates what Kristeva (borrowing from Freud) might refer to as “a new psychical action,”¹⁰ a metaphorical process (transference/countertransference) that takes place between the crossroads of embodied fictions and the cultural (and liminal) setting of the early modern theatre.¹¹ The moment Hamlet responds to Yorick’s skull, we too, are transported to an elsewhere within yet outside the play: the ‘felt absence’

⁷ Roland Mushat Frye, “Ladies, Gentlemen, and Skulls: Hamlet and the Iconographic Tradition.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 30.1 (1979): 15. DOI: 10.2307/2869658

⁸ Francois de Belleforest’s sixteenth-century *Histories Tragiques* or his translation Saxo Grammaticus’s twelfth-century *Historica Danica*.

⁹ Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 98; also Graham Holderness, ‘I covet your skull’: Death and Desire in Hamlet” in *Shakespeare Survey: Volume 60: Theatres for Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Holland. (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 229. Naming is a creative act that calls forth an emerging ego: however, the sonorous traces of Yorick’s songs evoke an echoing otherness behind the reflection, enriching yet destabilizing the rigidity of its borders.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, “On Narcissism” in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 548. Freud states, “there must be something added to auto-eroticism – a new psychical action – in order to bring about narcissism.”

¹¹ Anthony Dawson, “Participation and Performance” in *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare’s England*. eds. Anthony Dawson and Paul Yachnin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 29. The public theatres, Dawson comments, were “powerful, even greedily appropriative institutions, ingesting and transforming a whole range of cultural phenomena and making them its own.”

within Yorick's fragmented globe is at once an imprint of ourselves as well as an empathic intuition of otherness.¹²

For Shakespeare, the physicality inherent in poetic language calls forth the "lingering power" that for early modern writers remained in sacred objects like the consecrated Eucharistic or 'taboo-like' objects such as a human skull, the physical marker of what once was a person, at once uncanny and abject.¹³ Even today, the impact of a human skull on stage is disturbing. When André Tchaikovsky, a Polish composer and pianist died in 1982, he bequeathed his skull to the Royal Shakespeare Company. Although Mark Rylance requested to use Tchaikovsky's skull in a rehearsal of *Hamlet*, his wife, Claire van Kampen, noted its unsettling effect. Since several members of the cast felt "a primitive taboo about the skull," it was replaced with a lifelike model.¹⁴ Tchaikovsky's skull was not used until the RSC's 2008 production of *Hamlet* with David Tennant, yet due to a good deal of media "gossip" prior to production, "the skull was eventually cut from the bill when its fame began to compete with that of Mr. Tennant."¹⁵ (There is an interesting history of those who have bequeathed their skulls to play Yorick.)¹⁶ "Mediators," Bruno Latour

¹² Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, 90.

¹³ Michael Witmore, *Pretty Creatures* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 143.

¹⁴ Pascale Aebischer, *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies: Stage and Screen Performance* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 86. Von Kampen notes that although the company felt privileged to rehearse the scene with a human skull, "we agreed that as the real power of theatre lies in the complicity of illusion between actor and audience, it would be inappropriate to use a real skull during the performance." Van Kampen is quoted in Aebischer; also see Holderness, "I covet your skull...", 230.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Williams, "Yorick's Afterlives: Skull Properties in Performance in *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* VI.1 (Spring/Summer 2011), 13. www.borrowers.uga.edu

¹⁶ Historically, the court jester is 'one of the world's oldest figures.' Unlike the monarch's scepter, the fool's bauble mimics the law and enacts motley play, both disrupting/doubling the subject to demonstrate that no person is 'singular,' all is in process of oscillation and flux. Yorick as performing object and theatrical artifact has assumed a notoriety usually reserved for more traditional and high-minded subjects from Shakespeare. Although human skulls appeared on the early modern stage, the practice of using skulls increased with productions of *Hamlet*, accruing special value when used in proximity to well-known actors who had played the title role. Early on, skulls were used for shock value and surprise as revealed by a midnineteenth-century troupe of actors performing *Hamlet* in a converted chapel in Lancashire where a Dr. Banks had once preached. Tired of a particularly pompous Hamlet, the actor playing the gravedigger announced in performance that the skull he held up was not Yorick but in fact Dr. Banks. Highly upset, the actor playing Hamlet insisted it was Yorick only to be told once again, "No!! – it is "Dr. Banks!" The audience, as would be expected, laughed aloud but with some confusion, affirming the notion that a human skull on stage is an unruly object, an actant, disrupting, mediating, crossing boundaries on stage and off. Lezlie Cross focuses on one skull, which played Yorick repeatedly, now archived in Horace Howard Furness's Collection on at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Although this skull is imprinted with signatures of famous actors including Charley Kean, Junius Brutus Booth, etc., the original person remains unknown. Notably several actors have bequeathed their skulls to be used in performances of *Hamlet*: the nineteenth Irish actor George Frederick Cooke, who is said to "have made a postmortem appearance in *Hamlet*"; as noted, Andre Tchaikovsky, a concert pianist who, upon seeing Michael Pennington play the role in 1980, donated his skull

comments, “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry,” evoking “uncertainties and controversies about who and what is acting when ‘we’ act.”¹⁷ The matter of Yorick tells us about the way “objects and subjects animate one another.”

Shakespeare’s dramatic rendering of *anamorphosis* disrupts oedipal judgment to question human exceptionalism, Hamlet’s “what a piece of work is a man!” (2.2.293-94). Similarly Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* displaces man’s worldly achievement by inserting a death’s head as a blur near the feet of the ambassadors Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selves. Although Stephen Greenblatt regards the skull “as an object in the painting... at once human and completely natural,” he maintains in order to ‘see’ the skull, “we must distort and, in essence, efface” the subject.¹⁸ In a similar vein, Lacan points to Holbein’s use of *anamorphosis* as “an exemplary structure” whereby the subject, annihilated within the Real, can never be present unto itself. Shakespeare, however, dramatizes an innovative scene to body forth some-‘thing’ ‘other’: the skull “stubbornly refuses to play dead,” slipping back and forth between ‘thingness’ and “uncanny vitality.”¹⁹

The graveyard scene marks the very ground, the physical place, where psychic space emerges. Until this moment, Hamlet has been wrapped within a whirling melancholia, an “antic disposition” put on but not quite put off, one that seems to possess his person rather than articulate any real sense of agency or choice. After 5.1, however, Hamlet is notably different, more receptive, more ‘ready’ and sincere. Although most critics attribute Hamlet’s altered personhood to a “sea change” upon his return to Denmark from England, if one places him/herself ‘sideways’ to the central viewing point of symbolic mastery, an anamorphic image emerges not unlike the veiled skull hovering beneath the two men in Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*. “Eyed awry” (R2 2.2.19), Yorick’s skull reveals a material artifact of death and decay, yet unlike pictorial depictions of *anamorphosis*, the skull’s personalization dramatizes the double movement between material abjection and idealized attraction toward a heterogeneous in-dwelling site of amatory identification. Drawing on the

to the Royal Shakespeare Company; Jonathan Hartman who, after not receiving a call back in the production (or any others), willed his skull to the RSC, requiring that the billing read “the skull of Yorick is played by the skull of Jonathan Hartmann”; and Del Close, an American actor known for his improvisational work with Mark Meyes and Bill Murray, who, upon his death in 1999, contributed his skull to the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. See Lezlie C. Cross, “The Linguistic Animation of an American Yorick” in *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things*, eds. Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Robert H. Bell, *Shakespeare’s Great Stage of Fools* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 105; Aebischer, *Shakespeare Violated Bodies...*, 2004; Beatrice Otto, *Fools are Everyone: The Court Jester around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39, 45.

¹⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance-Self Fashioning; From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 19-20.

¹⁹ Williams, “Yorick’s Afterlives,” 2011, 3.

motility of “thirdness,” Shakespeare makes use of theatrical space, the locus where characters remain ensconced within illusion, and the plateau, the border of the stage where the illusion is broken. Hamlet is the only character to stand on the threshold, to step outside the illusionary locus to address (and question) both stage and world. As such, he is the central consciousness of the play. For better or worse, we link our journeying through Hamlet.²⁰

No longer enclosed in soliloquy, in 5.1 Hamlet reveals his emotions within a site of social equality where gravediggers, common folk, and young prince alike touch heel to toe, where ‘arms’ are no longer representations of combat or economic status, but arms of human labor – (Could “he [Adam] dig without arms?” [5.1.34-5]) – and *Einführung* as affective touch.²¹ Hamlet’s encounter with Yorick points to Shakespeare’s intimation of the imaginary, how the presence of a loving father “bodies forth the form of things unknown,” invoking primal energies as well as “shaping phantasies that apprehend / More

²⁰ Kristeva. *Tales of Love*, 1987, 22. Such a “transference...implies that one hears the discourse that is performed there starting with the advent-and-loss of the subject – which is *Einführung*.” See also *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, ed. Ross Mitchell Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); *New Maladies of the Soul*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia UP, 1995); *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia UP, 2001); *Intimate Revolt and The Future of Revolt*, trans. by Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer. (New York: Columbia UP, 1988); “From symbols to flesh: the polymorphous destiny of narration” in *Key Papers in Literature and Psychoanalysis*, eds. Paul Williams and Glen O. Gabbard (London: Karnac, 2000), and other books including *Black Sun*, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, *Desire in Language*, *Melanie Klein*, *Nations Without Nationalism*, etc..

²¹ Kristeva, *Tales*, 1987, 44, 24, 25, 31. As noted, Kristeva refers to the ‘narcissistic structuration’ as the “earliest juncture (chronologically and logically) whose spoors we might detect in the unconscious.” For Kristeva, *Einführung* as an immediate transference is the “assimilation of other people’s feelings.” While Freud worried about the hypnotic power of a despotic leader as a “collective hysteria in which crowds abdicate their own judgment,” preoedipal transference (“laden with libido”) to a ‘third’ (the imaginary father as a magnet of attraction for primary love, primary identification) is immediate, direct, and empathic since objectless. Neither subject nor object exist within the imaginary realm; rather intuition as an assimilation of otherness corresponds to the oral phase of development, but unlike autoeroticism as a taking in or incorporation of matter, a new psychical action within autoeroticism brings about primary narcissism, a chewing on words, assimilating, incorporating “the speech of the other – precisely.” Since Kristeva is concerned with the dearth of psychic space as an inability to love or to articulate a discourse for love, she looks to psychoanalysis and art. The analyst takes on a nourishing but also distant function, attuned to semiotic expressions in borderline patients as a means to support transition to the symbolic. “Concentrating for a while, one’s thoughts on love within analysis acutally leads one to scrutinize in the treatment, not a narcissistic merger with the maternal container, but the emergence of a metaphorical object – in other words the very splitting that establishes the psyche and, let us class this splitting ‘primal repression,’ bends the drive [as motility, movement or a heterogenous displacement or transference filled with libido] toward the symbolic [presymbolic] of an other.” See also Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt and Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). This addresses psychic space as ‘intimate revolt’ in relation to the value of such metaphoric motility (and space) to cultural and social issues.

than cool reason” (MND 5.1.14-15; 4-5). Although writers such as Laurence Sterne and Salman Rushdie reconstruct fictional ‘Yoricks’ who narrate their stories, Yorick is rarely indexed by his own name in critical studies of *Hamlet*. While a good deal of ink has been spent on this scene, only a handful of critical writers take time to consider Yorick as a father figure, “an affectionate model of play” (Watterson), Hamlet’s “first mentor and companion” (Garber), or “the good ghost in the tale” (Austin).²² While Hamlet has been discussed in relation to his mother Gertrude and his double fathers (King Hamlet and Claudius), the dramatization of Hamlet’s “inner mystery” has not been explored as an *intrapsychic* activity regarding an archaic father of imaginary ambivalence, what Kristeva would describe as a “two-sided and double-gendered figure of kinship.”²³ Rather than framing Hamlet’s actions within an Oedipal structure, considering Yorick as Hamlet’s imaginary father explores the unfolding development of Shakespearean character as a creative, inter-animating, and presymbolic process, a metaphorical *activity* rather than a fixed image or representation. As the locus of energized transference, the imaginary father mediates the distance (division) between the corporeal body and the ideal image to support the crafting of psychic space. The archaic yet three-dimensional site that Shakespeare evokes in 5.1 becomes for Hamlet and his audience what might be considered the Ur-scene of the subject as well as creativity itself.²⁴

Shakespeare’s presentation of a positive father who surfaces as an outlier within the drama correlates with Kristeva’s re-elaboration of primary narcissism, a ternary “‘structurization’ whose spoor we might detect in the unconscious.”²⁵ As Kristeva tells us, “in his journey through the land of love Freud reaches Narcissus.... Amatory experience rests upon narcissism,” a

²² William C. Watterson, “Hamlet’s Lost Father.” *Hamlet Studies* 16 (1994): 10-23, presents the fullest treatment. Watterson comments: “Brief as they are, Hamlet’s memories of his boyhood companion constitute a benign inscription of paternity in the play, one which actively challenges the masculine ideals of emotional repression and military virtue otherwise featured so prominently in Shakespeare’s drama of revenge,” 10; see also Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 507; Norman Austin, “Hamlet’s Hungry Ghost.” *Meaning and Being in Myth* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990, . 170.

²³ Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, 1995, 22.

²⁴ A moment of ‘intimate revolt,’ a return, re-returning, creation/self-creation, the retrospective construction of psychic space involving risk (emptiness/thanatos) and labor (responsibility in crafting) within the maternal dimension toward a third term within primary narcissism. In *Tales*, 134, Kristeva regards Narcissus rather than Oedipus as “logically, quite normally, the obliged creator of the world.” Similarly, Sylvie Gambaudo, *Kristeva, Psychoanalysis and Culture: Subjectivity in Crisis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 169-70. Gambaudo refers to “being as origin” but to the creator as the “one who links being to image, a step first achieved, albeit archaically in narcissism.” Notably Ovid was Shakespeare favorite source, yet interestingly the Oedipal myth is “glaringly absent” from the *Metamorphoses* while Narcissus and Echo are notably present, the pairing of two reflections, image and sound, as parted yet needing each other to confront emptiness and loss to confer the heterogeneous emerging ‘I.’ As Spivak comments, Narcissus “fixes” and Echo “disseminates.”

²⁵ Kristeva, *Tales*, 1987, 44.

narcissism founded on self-love, but also as Pleshette DeArmitt states, a narcissism for Kristeva which is “unthinkable and unlivable without the other.”²⁶ The notion of a positive father as a hybrid locus (a mother-father amalgam) in individual prehistory not only introduces a new perspective from which to consider the role of fatherhood but also the affective (material/maternal) nature of transference in Shakespeare’s plays. In contrast to Lacan, who reads Hamlet’s duel with Laertes in 5.2 as a Hegelian fight to the death, Hamlet embraces the paradox of mutual recognition ambiguously refracted through Yorick.²⁷ Such a rendering of “intimate revolt” (a return and a re-turning, a reconstruction of the past) offers both antidote and ‘model’ to help heal what Kristeva regards as “dearth of psychic space,” the flattening of human compassion as an estrangement between words and their affect.

As such, in 5.1, the interaction between a (pre)subject and (pre)object engenders what Leonard Barkan might refer to as the “energy gap – the sparking distance” of material artifacts “unearthed from the past” (xxxii) or what Kristeva would refer to as the emergence of psychic space supported by to transference to a preoedipal and loving father intuited through the ‘otherness’ of imagination rather than an enclosure of law.²⁸ As a metaphorical *process*, this contrasts with Lacan’s notion of the ‘creative spark,’ which defines metaphor as a linguistic substitution or replacement, “one word for another.”²⁹ The signature moment of 5.1 addresses the abiding power of fiction

²⁶ Kristeva, *Tales*, 257. Pleshette DeArmitt, *The Right to Narcissism: A Case for an Im-possible Self-love*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 14.

²⁷ Hamlet’s earlier “to be or not to be” transitions to the rhythms of time, the “fall of a sparrow,” and the natural cycle of “let be.” Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 24, refers to the “paradox of mutual recognition and revisions oedipal narratives of Freud and Lacan in relation to preoedipal theories of ego-psychologists (Mahler and Fairburn), and object-relation theorists (Winnicott and Klein). Benjamin notes the mother not only needs to “reflect back what the child asserts; she must embody something of the not-me; she must be an independent other who responds in her different way.... [As the child] increasingly establishes his own independent center of existence, her recognition will be meaningful only to the extent that it reflects her own equally separate subjectivity.” While Benjamin focuses on the child’s relationship with the mother, Kristeva’s depiction of the ‘not I’ addresses the *aporia* of maternal passion as well as the void through which the ego is founded: similarly the mother is not passive but a person in her own right. As such the imaginary addresses the reciprocal motility, a separation and coming together in love, which for Kristeva engages both transference and countertransference, an empathetic listening with the body predicated on the heterogeneity of the exchange.

²⁸ Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001): xxxi. See also Joel Fineman’s discussion of transference in “The Pas De Calais,” *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition*, 49

²⁹ Jaques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton): 157 This contrasts with Lacan’s notion of the ‘creative spark,’ which defines metaphor as a linguistic substitution or replacement, “one word for another.” Lacan states: “The creative spark of the metaphor does not spring from the presentation of two images, that is of two signifiers equally actualized. It flashes between two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present through its (metonymic) connection with the rest of the chain.”

to move across thresholds of time and space, matter and form, linking Yorick's memory to the threefold convergence of present, past and future. For that which touches the child in Hamlet also touches the child in ourselves, evoking archaic processes of identification and loss through the uncanny figuration of love and death.

While Shakespeare's comedies display light-hearted play, voices of childhood loss linger behind adult actions and disturb the borders of his more serious dramas. Even as Hamlet's age remains ambiguous, either sixteen or thirty, Shakespeare draws on childhood anxieties to reveal Hamlet's struggle between inner potential and outer obedience. More than most, "Shakespeare had his eye trained on children." Even though our eye has been trained, like Hamlet's, to regard his father's ghostly word or his mother's incestuous desire, Shakespeare transfers our attention (in 5.1) to that which has been occluded from view, a seven-year old Hamlet haunting the margins of the drama, a trace of lost childhood now made immanent on stage.³⁰ Even as Hamlet the man demonstrates a failure to maintain psychic space – a cohesive self able to negotiate boundaries between desire and the law – *Hamlet* the play enables a figuration of three-dimensional space ironically dramatizing its psychological and social importance. More than most playwrights, Shakespeare allows us – his audience -- our own ability to access psychic space.

As noted, King Hamlet (his ghost) and Yorick (his skull) stand in counterpoint to each other: While Hamlet's ghostly father impales the night, remindful of a cataclysmic event when "stars with trains of fire" bespoke "disasters in the sun" (1.1.106.10-11), Yorick's 'unburial' is far more prosaic, his grave rendered tenantless to make room for the 'other.'³¹ As Hamlet kneels at the gaping hole of what (unbeknownst to him) is Ophelia's grave, he looks at Yorick's skull, whose unrelenting materiality mixes abject horror with the nothingness that is death. Rather than the clean and proper Lacanian image, Hamlet is at first repelled by the darkened mirror of mortality – "how abhorred

³⁰ In early modern England, sons were required to be imitations, copies of their father; however, around the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, narratives such as the prodigal son or the mythic Icarus who flies too near the sun (as son) engendered flights of poetic fancy as a potential space of exploration and hybridity that informed such imitation.

³¹ What was Yorick's grave makes room for Ophelia, whose 'rites of mourning' offer a new passage for Hamlet. In many ways Ophelia and Yorick, like Echo, provide resonance to Hamlet's befuddled image. Both offer access to Hamlet's 'prelapsarian' self. As the material remains of living other, Hamlet is able to abject the body yet en flesh the skull ("Here hung those lips I have kissed I know not how oft") as he gathers memories from his buried history to reconstruct past and present, inside and outside. Such an interaction between abjection and identification recreates archaic space – the primal wound of separation – as such, the void of inaugural loss presents enormous risk for the fragile beginnings of an ego. If supported by transference to a loving father, such a third presence within primary narcissism provides a "screen over emptiness" and helps calm borders around chaos. In *Tales*, 24, Kriseva notes: "the emptiness that is intrinsic to the beginnings of the symbolic function appears as the first separation between what is not yet an ego and what is not yet an object...narcissism protects emptiness, causes it to exist, and thus, as lining of that emptiness, insures an elementary separation."

in my imagination it is. My gorge rises at it” (5.1.173-74) as well as the smell of decay, “And smelt so? Pah!” (185). Like the skull and recently dug grave, the body of the abject is a ‘devouring’ body that swallows back what is trying to separate from it. “Nausea, distaste, horror, these are the signs of a radical revulsion (or expulsion) which serves to situate the ‘I’ . . . to create a first, fragile sense of ‘I’ in a space where before there was only emptiness”³² As pre-(or partial) object, the grinning skull is abject, that which threatens existence by its ‘inexorable materiality.’ Shakespeare, however, shows us that renewal lies not in any “cold image” or “fixed law” but in the heart of a child, in a living ‘copy’ of the individual. Quite simply, Hamlet’s enfleshment of Yorick as a ‘living’ other (“Here hung those lips I have kissed I know not how oft. . .”) dramatizes Kristeva’s re-configuration of primary narcissism as an archaic and loving process between self and other, a creative space Shakespeare asks us to enter, to assimilate, and to participate in its crafting.

Although Lacan’s view of the subject changes over time, his distinction between the subject of ‘enunciation’ as a “subject who speaks” and a subject of the ‘utterance’ as a “subject who is spoken” provides a means to consider Hamlet’s relation to symbolic and imaginary fathers. Placed in a universe of other’s desires, Hamlet is “spoken through” his father’s command,” which ironically reverses the biblical “Thou shalt not kill.” For Kristeva, the ‘thetic’ phase marks the “deepest structure” of the possibility of enunciation: “the semiotic which also precedes it, constantly tears it open, and this transgression brings about all the various formations of the signifying practice that are called ‘creation.’”³³ Although Yorick cannot speak, his presence opens a space of

³² Toril Moi, ed. *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 238, 4, 16.

³³ Kristeva, *Revolution*, p. 44, 62. In *New Maladies*, 106, Kristeva comments “after all the imaginary economy is what makes the subject of enunciation come forth – which is the psychological precondition for language acquisition.” Kristeva explores the thetic as permeable, the “habitation of the semiotic within the symbolic.” Sara Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis and Modernity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004, 66, 62; 70; 205. For Kristeva some kind of thirdness is present prior to object love that is not the “breakup of the bodily exchange between mother and child, but brought about within it, and thanks to it.” Unlike the Lacanian metaphor which structures language, for Kristeva, meaning is absent from the semiotic; as such an imaginary paternal function neither displaces nor divides; instead it serves as a drawing power, ‘the actual drifting of a possible metaphoricality.’ Presymbolic structures reveal what needs, as Beardsworth comments, to “be given symbolic form” in order to have meaning: although the symbolic function is necessary for social being and order, Kristeva explores a “symbolic accommodation of the semiotic” rather than her earlier emphasis on revolution: without a cohering and dialogic connection, anarchy leads to chaos. “Form-giving” engages the expressions of the body, pain and the pleasure “without which there is no real otherness, only survival.” Such form giving applies to transference phenomenon with the early modern theatre, especially on the platform stage, which is multidimensional and in which indirect and direct address occur between character and audience as playwrights metdramatically call attention to their fictions. See also Katherine Rowe “Minds in Company: Shakespearean Tragic Emotions.” *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works: The Tragedies*. eds. Richard Dutton and Jean Howard, vol 1. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 47-72, esp. 58. Rowe comments that the “active spirits in a

resonant (loving) exchange between primal abjection and identification that enables Hamlet to emerge as a subject of enunciation, not as a “subject who is spoken” but as a “subject who speaks”: “This is I/Hamlet the Dane” (5.1.241-242).

From the moment Hamlet enters the drama in 1.2, he confuses inside from outside. Suspended between maternal and paternal demands, he continually struggles for *space*. “Longing for the dissolution of the ‘too, too solid flesh,’” and “rage over ‘union’ of the ‘too, too sullied flesh,’” Hamlet is a play “straddling a great historical divide”³⁴ Depressed by his father’s death and his mother’s marriage, Hamlet is beset with emotion: disgust with his mother’s sexuality and a profound melancholia. Toward the end of act 1, Hamlet promises his ghostly father to “wipe away...all forms, all pressures past... Thy commandment alone shall live/Within the book and volume of my brain” (1.5.99-104). Yet Hamlet pauses, delays, then berates himself for his inability to act: he is “a dull and muddy-mettled rascal,” “a pigeon-livered” coward” (2.2.544; 554). With so much pressing upon him, Hamlet is caught yet awash in a sea of troubles: “Denmark is a prison.” In 2.2, he tells his childhood companions (who are there to spy on him): “If I were bounded in a nutshell I would count myself king of infinite space – were it not I have bad dreams” (248-250). By 1600, a new sense of ‘space’ (unlike place) was emerging, “no longer situated in the physical world but in the subjectivity of the human mind that formally shapes the world.”³⁵ Shakespeare’s fictional yet worldly Globe is at once Hamlet’s miniature globe and Yorick’s extinct yet paradoxically living ‘globe.’ Befitting Kristeva’s re-elaboration of primary narcissism, it seems quite appropriate that Hamlet will locate a sense of space within such a “groundbreaking scene.”³⁶

player’s body were understood to move an audience’s mind by a kind of classical energeia, passing through eyes and ears to excite similar physical motion.” Such motions circulate intersubjectively within theatrical space and between “feeling subjects.” Strong emotions could overwhelm their subjects but were powerful sources of love and ethical growth with guidance and imaginary coherence. As such, theatrical forms (fictions on stage as well as the playing space of the theatre) give expression to passions by means of an art that shapes their transmission and becomes a means to model and reform ways of being and acting in the world.³⁴ David Hillman, *Shakespeare’s Entrails: Belief, Skepticism and the Interior of the Body* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 116.

³⁵ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 136.

³⁶ Hamlet himself has traversed kingdoms (and seas) before he stumbles upon Yorick and brings him to light, but it is Yorick as artifact, only in part, while the gravedigger as midwife and “maker” of houses lasting “till doomsday” unsettles him from the earth then gives him his name. “This same skull, sir, was Yorick’s skull, the King’s jester” (5.1.178-79). Once personalized, Yorick resonates in Hamlet’s prehistory while the prince’s sudden transference to his childhood not only generates empathy for his character but also energizes access to our own. Even as Yorick’s skull is a foreordained reading of Hamlet’s death as well as an uncanny reminder of our own, his material presence as part object recalls an absent past that engages material abjection (“And smelt so? pah!”) with loving identification (“He hath bore me on his back a thousand times”), enabling transference to Yorick’s loving memory, fleshed out and reconfigured anew in Hamlet’s voice and mind’s eye.

When Freud and Kristeva correlate the father of personal prehistory to an immediate identification prior to object choice, they link material/biological functions with an in-dwelling psychic presence. Although Yorick is not portrayed as a locus of maternal desire, his presence disrupts the opposition between ideal and degraded father, creating a third space (for young Hamlet) to negotiate the either/or binaries of maternal chaos and symbolic prohibition. Kelly Oliver comments, rather than subverting the maternal, “Kristeva’s notion of the imaginary father undermines the maternal/paternal dualism” that limits a third space of possibility.³⁷ As Shakespeare dramatizes, Gertrude’s desire is ambiguously directed: King Hamlet, Claudius, and quite likely Hamlet, her son. It is possible, although not evident within the text, that Yorick, so fondly remembered by Hamlet would have provided Gertrude with her own space of laughter, a pleasure (or maternal *aporia*) directed toward the play of imaginary otherness.

During the early modern period, theories of the imagination were located within changing notions of the body. “The inextricability of selfhood and corporeality” formed a large part of Galenism, the prevailing medical view based on Greek humoral theory of the human body as open and porous.³⁸ Even as writers like Montaigne celebrated the “marvelously corporal” quality of being human, early modern views were shifting from a pre-Cartesian world to the skepticism of a closed body erecting a more rigid boundary between inside and outside.³⁹ Shakespeare’s theatre re-vision the central eye of power

³⁷ Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-Bind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 69.

³⁸ Such a view (a one-sex model based, where genitalia, inverted in the female body, dropped down due to men’s greater heat) reinforced gender positions (women’s leaky and unruly bodies versus men’s reason and order). however, new attitudes toward the body and its functions, what Norbert Elias refers to as the civilizing process, resulted in a new awareness of shame, or as Gail Kern Pasteur notes, the “body embarrassed.” Distinctions between private and public behavior advocated by manuals and treatises such as Erasmus’ *De civilitate morum puerilium* promoted proper manners, ways of expressing the body in public that eventually separated individuals from their own corporeal interiors. As noted, Elizabethans believed in a permeable body affected by corporeal influences referred to as the humours as well as the corresponding need to achieve balance within and without: the body’s exits and entrances needed to be guarded and regulated in order to maintain good health. Similarly, Kristeva’s designation of the imaginary relates to the body/mind interaction inherent in the early modern period when passions served as conduits between the body and the environment.

³⁹ Hillman, *Shakespeare’s Entrails*, 10. In this way, men and women grew more distant from their bodies. Even as the civilizing process fostered new manners and forms of fashioning, notions of an earlier, more open, body coincided with the nostalgic loss of sacred and communal being felt in the “stripping of altars” and the whitewashing of images in places of worship. In 1571, John Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s father, had overseen that the stained glass windows in Stratford-on-Avon’s guild chapel were shattered and replaced by clear glass while later images were whitewashed on church walls, leaving their traces behind. As such, the power of loss as well as evocations of sacred images became “faultlines” for the early modern theatre, hidden dimensions of feeling that Shakespeare dramatizes yet often veils. The early modern public theatre, however, adapts notions of the sacred and the profane as a Dionysian (and feminized) site of otherness, a public house or container that embodies illusions, dramatizing feats of action and offering a new means of articulating the passions.

whereby spectacle not only complies with the scopic field, the Lacanian look and the gaze, but also the hidden interiority of the body, which ‘speaks.’ Filled with *heteroglossia*, the voices of others, “the word lives” as it were on the border, the thetic interface between psyche, soma, and society; “each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life.”⁴⁰ Rather than codifying language within an abstract system of rules, Kristeva, like Shakespeare, returns to a more primal ‘text’ whereby the ‘word’ is enfolded through the body.

Characters like Hamlet struggle through human processes as if they had “interior being,”⁴¹ yet theatrical personages are representations, embodied fictions put on and off, a living moment, yes, but one that will soon disperse into air. Once the doors to the theatre are closed, the stage is an empty space waiting to be filled. No matter how hard Hamlet may try to reach his audience, no matter how hard we may try to reach back – Hamlet must remain within Elsinore. Yet somehow we have assimilated his voice, his moods, his story into our own *making*. We will watch as his body is carried off the stage, remember his final words, “the rest is silence.” And yet, there is something more, a ‘lingering’ that transfers across the borders of the stage where theatre pauses, catches its breath, and something ‘other’ begins.⁴²

“The counterchange,” Shakespeare will later write in *Cymbeline* “is severally in all” (5.6.397-98). When ‘transported’ to a literary text or theatrical event, reader-response, psychological and cognitive critics such as Norman Holland, Blakely Vermeule, and Lisa Zunshine recognize that we respond emotionally to characters *as if* they were real, feeling sadness at their losses, excitement by their successes, fearful for their dangers, leaning forward to share intimacies or jumping back at an unexpected noise or violent action. Theatre as Jacques tells us is a living event: “All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players” (AYL 2.7.138-39). In the matrix of imaginary space, Shakespeare’s characters and audiences are all intermediary, distinct yet one, an open vessel through which his voice speaks, albeit in another body and another disguise, engaging the very space through which our voice and our eye/“I” merge and cross over.⁴³ Reading Hamlet’s Yorick as a

⁴⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 284; 293. Using Bakhtin’s depiction of the grotesque body as the other side of language, Kristeva renders the presymbolic as an “interanimating” space within and without the symbolic. In relation to early modern views of the humoral body, Kristeva’s notion of the imaginary as a hybrid site of renewal applies to Shakespearean characters who return, even if unexpectedly, to an archaic dimension that offers compassionate support to renovate psychic space and enrich their sense of ‘I.’

⁴¹ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s Plays, ‘Hamlet’ to ‘The Tempest’* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 1.

⁴² See also Michael Witmore, *Shakespearean Metaphysics* (London: Continuum, 2008), 91.

⁴³ The imaginary construction (as an imaginary father) is not unusual to Shakespeare’s plays, characters such as Duke Senior (*As You Like It*), Falstaff (*1 & 2 Henry IV*), Paulina (*The*

semiotic (or preoedipal) ‘narrative’ activates the body, the oral as well as the written text, whereby subject and object do not diminish the other but offer a percipient space through which affective transformation can occur. As such, the graveyard scene in *Hamlet* is consonant with psychoanalytic, new materialist, and postcolonial critics as diverse as Julia Kristeva, Jane Bennett, and Homi Bhabha, who challenge oppositional structures of subject or object, colonizer or colonized, nature or culture to explore a heterogeneous site which enables other positions to emerge. Despite the brevity of the scene, Yorick opens a “space of negotiation,” what Edward Said might refer to as a less visible narrative missing from the “official story.” As such, the matter of Yorick reminds us that “physical materials are neither inert nor passive, but instead actants with particular frequencies...and potentials”;⁴⁴ “materiality itself is always already a desiring dynamic” at once energizing and enlivening,⁴⁵ not only translating, mediating, but also intimating the ethical responsibility inherent in the act. Like, yet not like Holbein’s painting, Shakespeare points us to an ‘other’ tale.

Today we value the promise of the imagination even as we respect the dangers of its excess, especially in a postmodern society in thrall to the electronic image, a hyper-reality that dissolves borders between the virtual and the real, the image and its referent, dispersing the material body as it flattens human compassion. While critics such as Jean Baudrillard explore America as a kind Disneyland whereby the excesses of fantasy exist within as well as outside its gates, Shakespeare and Kristeva reassess the value of borders, which presuppose the in-between as a polyphonic and third space. Concerned with the excess of idealism as well as prescribed images and practices that construct the postmodern subject from without, Kristeva develops a counter-narrative, one that posits an imaginary father as an antidote to what she considers a weakness in an archaic paternal function and the corresponding need to revitalize psychic space.

John McLeod comments: “Living at the border, at the edge, requires a new ‘art of the present.’ This depends upon embracing the contrary logic of the border and using it to rethink the dominant ways we represent things” (217).⁴⁶ While new historicism stresses the discourses and practices through which a literary work is constructed and read, Linda Charnes comments that the “consequences of literary study are ultimately bound up with what we use it to do” (65), how the “realities” of the past offer ways to explore ethical concerns

Winter’s Tale), are only some who engage the role of a fleeting yet loving presence within a subject’s prehistory.

⁴⁴ Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy, eds. *Peforming Objects and Theatrical Things* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 2.

⁴⁵ Karen Barad, “Interview” in *New Materialisms: Interviews & Cartographies*, eds. Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (Open Humanities Press: University of Michigan Library, 2012), 59.

⁴⁶ John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (New York: Manchester Press, 2000), 217.

of the present and future.⁴⁷ Similarly, Shakespeare's fictions as well as their many historical and cultural retellings -- asks that we revisit what may at first seem overused or traditionalist terms to reconceive the interaction between psychic and social space. An important aspect of this study is to consider not only the wonder of Shakespeare's imaginary, but how his dramatizations translate into personal and social awareness, dialogizing past, present, and future in what Bakhtin would refer to as "creative understanding."

⁴⁷ Linda Charnes, "Shakespeare, and Belief, in the future" in *Presentist Shakespeares*, eds. Hugh Grady and Terence Hawke (London: Routledge, 2007), 65.