Policy Journal of Social Science Review

Online ISSN 3006-4635

Print ISSN 3006-4627

Vol. 3 No. 6 (2025)

THE ABJECT SELF AND CULTURAL TRANSGRESSION IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS: A KRISTEVAN PERSPECTIVE

[1*]Zoya Tariq, [2]Dr. Muhammad Saeed Akhter

[1]M. Phil English Literature Scholar, Depart of English, Riphah International University, Faisalabad Campus, Punjab, Pakistan (Corresponding Author)*

[2]Professor, Department of English, Riphah International University Faisalabad Campus, Punjab.

[1]zoyataqriq277@gmail.com, [2]msaeed.akhter@riphah.edu.pk*

Abstract

This work examines the link between Julia Kristeva's idea of the abject and Shakespeare's tragedies and histories, considering how abjection upsets the sense of self, leadership and morality. The concept of the abject by Kristeva enables a thorough investigation of Shakespeare's repeated interest in grotesque, monstrous and transgressive characters. This study looks at how Lady Macbeth, Richard III and Caliban play out forces that test the traditions separating us from the world and ourselves. By using Kristeva's perspective, we can understand that the characters are facing a greater fear of losing who they are and the boundaries between different cultures. By looking at Shakespeare from a psychoanalytic and poststructuralist view, I argue that the "abject" shapes the way his plays portray feelings and ideas.

Keywords: Abjection, Julia Kristeva, Psychoanalysis, Early Modern Drama, Lady Macbeth, Subjectivity, Madness, Body Politics, Feminist Theory

Article Details:

Received on 10 May 2025

Accepted on 03 June 2025

Published on 05 June 2025

Corresponding Authors*:

zoyataqriq277@gmail.com

Policy Journal of Social Science Review

Online ISSN 3006-4635

Print ISSN 3006-4627

Vol. 3 No. 6 (2025)

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Many scholars have looked at Shakespeare's writing using structuralism, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism and gender studies. In terms of recent readings, Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject is an impressive psychosocial tool for understanding the blacker moments in Shakespeare's dramas. Kristeva states in her book Powers of Horror (1982) that abjection is a way people try to throw off things that are dirty, repulsive or seem dangerous, but those things can remain present even after being expelled. For this reason, abjection is closely tied to things such as bodily fluids, decay and detestable acts which make frequent appearances in Shakespeare's tragic and historical plays. Besides the descriptions and words used, the abject is also present via characters who go against what society values, for example, by looking at how Lady Macbeth is so driven by thoughts of blood and how Richard III is deformed and shows twisted desires. Such figures are, in Kristeva's opinion, "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite," acting as places where both culture and individual identity merge. In Elizabethan England, this was especially true since the structure of the government and religious beliefs often revolved around ideas of purity, order and infection (Dollimore, 2004). Several scholars mention that featuring grotesque physical features, crazed characters and women with a monster-like presence often highlights when something is out of order in the play (Neely, 1991; Greenblatt, 1980). Kristeva's theory describes the abject as shattering mainstream symbols and Shakespeare's work brings this up by having people on stage who defy grouping based on gender or morality. This study sets out to reveal that the raw presence of the abject in Shakespeare's works challenges all aspects of identity, power and order in drama of early modern times.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although many academics have written about the psychological and philosophical parts of Shakespeare's plays, the theory of abjection by Julia Kristeva is still underexplored as a way to analyze his works. While experts have highlighted that Shakespeare's characters deal with monsters, illegality and unclear morals, few have examined how the abject affects his stories. Shakespeare's tragedies and historical plays have numerous abject characters who break both social rules and norms, but Kristeva's psychoanalytic perspective is rarely used to explore these characters. Because of this gap, we do not fully understand how Shakespeare uses abjection to show subjectivity, order and disorder. For this reason, the study will use Kristeva's theory to analyze several texts by Shakespeare.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It helps advance Shakespeare studies and psychoanalytic literary criticism by exploring abjection in Kristeva's terms within a number of Shakespeare's plays. Focusing on abjection as a key idea, this research enhances our view of Shakespeare's ideas about identity, morality and power as well as underlines the value of Kristeva's theory in explaining Shakespeare's plays. Besides, studying these literary works boosts current disputes about self, otherness and social discord—matters that remain significant in the world we live in today. Sophie Heywood-French's book links literature, psychoanalysis and cultural theory, so that the readings are open to modern ideas and critical frameworks.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) What are the signs of Kristeva's abjection theory in various Shakespeare characters, especially in those who break moral, bodily or social rules?
2) In what respects does the introduction of the abject into Shakespearean plays put identity, authority and order into question?

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
Vol. 3 No. 6 (2025)

3) In what ways does abjection observed through a Kristevan lens add anything new to the understanding of the nervous fears portrayed by Shakespeare?

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a long practice of looking at Shakespeare's work through Freudian, Lacanian and feminist points of view to discuss the psychological aspects of his plays and characters. Julia Kristeva's idea of the abject, explained in Powers of Horror (1982), is just starting to be considered in Shakespeare studies. Kristeva describes the abject as something that is situated on the fringes of every person which scares and disgusts us and yet cannot be avoided. It means "what disrupts identity, the system and order" and must be removed for the subject to stay complete (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Its effect on feminist theory can be seen in frequent connections among abjection, representations of women, madness and disorder.

When discussing Shakespeare's plays, people often mention abjection in relation to the grotesque, monsters and issues with the organization of society. According to Jonathan Dollimore (2004), the issues of power, sexuality and corruption are present in Shakespeare's tragedies as a result of authors portraying disorder and change during the early modern era. In addition, Stephen Greenblatt's Renaissance Self-Fashioning (1980) focuses on the transformation and alteration of identity in Renaissance literature, offering an important outline for how people form their sense of self through various cultural and written processes. Even though Greenblatt does not interact directly with Kristeva, his focus on identity as fluid fits well with abjection theory and places self-identity in relation to acts of staging, breakdowns and limits.

Feminist thinkers have lately made it clearer how they use Kristeva's theories. In Macbeth and Hamlet, Neely (1991) sees that Shakespeare often links female characters' madness to their speech and logic becoming unclear, referring to this as an abject experience. Handwashing until she becomes sick shows Lady Macbeth's inner turmoil and Ophelia's irrational behavior shows the collapse of the symbolic structure caused by an overload of emotions. These studies explain that when a woman's body resists boundaries, it creates problems for society and culture.

Gail Kern Paster (1993) is one of the scholars who considers how bodily fluids and humoral beliefs affected thinking about gender and feelings in early modern times. Paster's The Body Embarrassed explains that blood, sweat and vomit are much more than physical substances because they also represent shame, excess and contamination in cultural terms. Like Kristeva, this text considers the abject as related to boundaries of the body and things that an individual may view as unclean.

Although these ideas have been important, there are still not many full studies on abjection in Shakespeare's works based on Kristeva. Most research usually examines the theory only in regard to single characters or topics and doesn't look at how it impacts identity, authority or power overall in Shakespeare's works. This research aims to solve the mentioned problem by looking at how Shake French-Bulgarian philosopher, psychotherapist, feminist, and novelist Julia Kristeva was born on June 24, 1941. She is well known for her avant-garde post-structuralist theories, which challenge accepted notions of identity. With a Charles de Gaulle research stipend in hand, she left the University of Sofia for France, where she fully immersed herself in the post-structuralist movement influenced by Roland Barthes, Lucian Goldmann, and Émile Benveniste. For her 1984 thesis, "Revolution in Poetic Language," which brought together linguistics, philosophy, and psychoanalysis, she started employing an interdisciplinary approach.

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
Vol. 3 No. 6 (2025)

By arguing that meaning is not fixed but rather mediated by other texts, Kristeva's work challenged Saussure's structuralism and revolutionized the concept of intertextuality. This was particularly evident in the ways in which she developed concepts like as the chora, the symbolic, the semiotic, and the abject. Her ideas often conflicted with the French structuralist establishment, positioning her as a key figure in post-structuralism. This thesis will explore Kristeva's psychoanalytic theories, particularly her concept of the subject in process, and apply them to selected Shakespearean plays, analyzing how his subversive storytelling aligns with her theories.

The term "abject" is generally used to refer to disgusting or unpleasant parts of our own bodies, as well as bodily functions that jeopardise their integrity, such as childbirth, menstruation, death, and vomit. The abject is that which traverses and transgresses; puts a structure in jeopardy and finds itself on the wrong side of the barrier, frequently leading to the taboo's defined prohibitions. The boundary is set up to protect systems and operations as well as to distinguish and divide various states, such as life and death and the holy and profane.

Georges Bataille's 1934 essay "Abjection and Miserable Forms" contains one of the early conceptions of abjection. In this essay, Bataille focusses on social abjection, which is the process by which a society's sovereignty is enforced by eliminating a segment of its populace and branding them as morally repugnant. According to Bataille (1934, [1993], 9), these moral misfits were "represented from the outside with disgust as the dregs of the people, populace and gutter." In order to foster a mindset of "us versus them," Bataille describes how people in positions of authority— such as colonial rulers and the wealthier classes—create contempt,horror, or dread towards a specific marginalised group. One of the most important contributions to the idea is An Essay on Abjection (1982), which grounds her argument in psychoanalysis by referencing Freud and Lacan. According to Kristeva, the abject is everything that questions society order, blurs borders, and distorts identity. She contends that the boundaries we draw between the self and the other help to shape our sense of identity, and anything that crosses these lines has to be rejected since it jeopardises our identity.

Kristeva links the abject closely to the human body, especially through the expulsion of waste and bodily fluids, which, while necessary for life, remind us of our vulnerability to disease and death. She explains that these reminders of mortality provoke a visceral reaction because they force us to confront the fragility of our bodies and our inevitable death. The most severe variation of the deplorable, according to Kristeva, is the corpse, which represents the most severe breach of the line separating life and death, causing both fear and disgust as it reminds us of our mortality.

Kristeva's theory extends to the psychological experience of horror. Barbara Creed, in 'The Monstrous-Feminine' (2015), reveals how horror films use images of the abject body such as corpses, blood, and bodily wastes to provoke a powerful reaction in viewers. These films often exploit the abject through the transgression of borders, including those between human and non-human, normal and abnormal, and male and female. Creed argues that these images evoke a mixture of disgust and perverse pleasure, resonating with Kristeva's concept of jouissance" a term describing the complex, often contradictory, feelings of enjoyment that transcend the pleasure principle. Kristeva's theory of abjection remains a powerful tool for analyzing horror, offering a lens through which to explore how the genre engages with the abject to evoke fear, disgust, and pleasure, and how it reflects and challenges cultural constructions of identity spear uses the abject to portray the

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
Vol. 3 No. 6 (2025)

instability of people and the world they live in.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research analyzes different plays by Shakespeare, Macbeth, King Lear and Richard III, by looking closely at how they portray abjection. Through a close analysis of language, imagery, characters and the play's construction, details of the abject are identified in the plays. The films pay a lot of attention to scenes that feature bodily fluids, insanity, wrongdoing and odd physical features, all of which reflect Kristeva's idea of abjection. The film analysis is thematic and based on psychoanalytic and cultural criticism. Secondary academic works help place the main findings in their proper place in any existing Shakespearean and psychoanalytic discussions. The task is to spot these features and also show how they relate to your sense of self, authority and what society expects.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Abjection which is the process of disregarding or letting go of what is deemed a threat or danger to society, is explained by Julia Kristeva in her book Powers of Horror (1982). Kristeva sees the abject, based on Lacan's ideas, as that which disrupts one's sense of self, order and social lines. Analysts use this theory to review Shakespearean plays and spot madness, physical decay, moral degeneracy and signs of the monstrous. According to Kristeva, using her perspective, Shakespeare's dramas depict the related issues of identity and authority, uncovering the challenges and worries of the time.

DATA ANALYSIS

The character of Lady Macbeth in Macbeth offers a strong example of abjection in Shakespeare's plays. In the last act's first scene, when she tries to wash away non-existent blood from her hands, Macbeth captures clearly the effects of Sarah's shame and guilt. Out, I shout! ... I thought the old man would be spent of blood, but he proved me wrong. In Kristeva's words (Kristeva 1982), the abject disturbs our identity and challenges the borders of the self by always remaining "not me". Not that. However, nothing doesn't seem to describe it either. Lady Macbeth refers to blood as a reminder of the crime and its impact on her morals which she cannot remove from her mind. It stands for a breach of the rules that normally guide a person's behavior—bringing guilt, shame and dirtiness into her inner world. Lady Macbeth becomes mad because of her guilty feelings, but it also represents her confronting something tragic from her past. All through the play, Lady Macbeth rejects normal gender behavior and ethics, asking the spirits to alter her nature and turn her cruelest (1.5.38-50). As a result, she tries to suppress her own femininity and the natural traits of a mother to adopt masculine behavior. Nevertheless, the culture's dismissal of the feminine does not take away the vulnerability to emotions and bodily issues she faces. It comes back to her as abjection—she cannot get rid of the blood, she hallucinates and she ends up losing control of her mind. According to Kristeva, Lady Macbeth becomes an abject figure who expresses the blurring of certain boundaries such as between normal and deranged, filthy and clean and alive versus dead. Her story illustrates that, according to Kristeva, sometimes the subject tries to get rid of the abject to maintain their identity and if they fail, it can lead to psychological deterioration that ends in suicide. So, the play illustrates how faced with repressed feelings and past actions, the mind can easily lose its balance and sense of right and wrong.

METAMORPHOSIS AND ABJECTION: AN OVIDIAN INTERPRETATION OF "A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM"

In the first century of the common era, Publius Ovidius Naso, often known as Ovid, wrote the fifteen volumes of the Latin narrative epic Metamorphoses. The poem, which spans

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
Vol. 3 No. 6 (2025)

from the birth of the world until Julius Caesar's death, is difficult to categorise yet is frequently regarded as an epic. In the opening line, Ovid states that the main theme is metamorphosis: "My mind leads me to speak now of forms changed into new bodies" (Ovid 2010, 5). He believes that the gods are responsible for these changes, imposing them either as a form of protection or retribution. Lycaon's transformation into a wolf explains his wolfish nature, and King Midas's ass ears symbolise his folly. Other transformations range from the literal—Actaeon being changed into a deer by Diana and Juno turning Callisto into a bear—to the metaphorical.

Metamorphoses was as influential as Virgil's "Aeneid" and was widely read throughout Ovid's lifetime, even though Emperor Augustus temporarily outlawed it. Shakespeare subsequently utilised Arthur Golding's 1535 English translation as inspiration for "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Romeo and Juliet." Shakespeare was familiar with Latin, and as Geoffrey Bullough pointed out, he may have read portions of Metamorphoses in the original language based on some Ovidian themes in his writing.

Despite being briefly banned by Emperor Augustus, Metamorphoses was read widely during Ovid's lifetime and had an impact comparable to that of Virgil's "Aeneid". Shakespeare then used the English translation of Arthur Golding's work from 1535 as the model for "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Romeo and Juliet." Shakespeare was conversant in Latin, and based on some Ovidian motifs in his work, Geoffrey Bullough suggested that he might have read parts of Metamorphoses in its native tongue.

The notion of abjection is not merely a philosophical abstraction, but a powerful lens through which to examine the social, cultural, and political implications of the human condition. As exemplified in the work of artists like Joel-Peter Witkin, the abject has traversed the realm of aesthetic experimentation, seeking to make visible the fissures and anxieties inherent in the normative and disciplinary constitution of modern subjectivity (Stone, 1967). In this context the abject serves as a tool for challenging dominant social narratives and bringing to the fore the marginalized, the undesirable, and the unspeakable. The inherent cruelty and dehumanization associated with abjection have also been explored in other realms, such as the study of torture and the ways in which perpetrators of such acts come to view their victims as something less than human, as abject "monsters" deserving of the most extreme forms of punishment and aggression. Ultimately, the concept of abjection offers a profound and unsettling exploration of the human condition, illuminating the fragile boundaries between the self and the other, the familiar and the foreign, the acceptable and the unacceptable. (Wilson, 1979).

KING LEAR: THE ERA OF THUNDER AND OBLIVION AND THE SECOND CHILDISHNESS

In one of Shakespeare's most famous speeches from "As You Like It," melancholy Jaques enumerates the seven stages of a person's life. After describing the first six stages, he refers to the seventh and final stage as the "second childishness and mere oblivion." This stage is marked by a return to a state of dependency and forgetfulness, often associated with old age, where a person loses their faculties and independence, eventually leading to death “last scene of all”, According to Shakespeare (1975, 2.7.167-8), this "is second childishness and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything." When Orlando arrives with his obedient servant Adam—who, even at his advanced age, is still capable of serving his master—this perspective is instantly called into question. Adam, who was too weak and fatigued to go on, had begged Orlando to let him die just a few hours before.

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
Vol. 3 No. 6 (2025)

Orlando, nevertheless, brings the elderly man to Duke Senior out of gratitude, and he looks after them both.

Adam is welcomed and treated respectfully even if he is a servant. "Thank you for coming. Put your revered steward down and give him something to eat (Shakespeare 1975, 2.7.169-70). Adam showed Orlando a fatherly concern by sacrificing his life to save him and warn him of impending peril; Orlando later returned the favour in the Forest of Arden.

Janet Adelman contends that Shakespeare "psychologises Jaques's familiar trope of old age as second childishness" in "King Lear," despite the fact that Jaques's pessimistic view of the seventh stage of life does not apply to "As You Like It" (Adelman 1992, 116). Adelman contends that Lear purposefully places himself in a state of infantile need that characterises his experience throughout the play by granting his daughters authority over his kingdom, so making them his mothers (Adelman 1992, 116). When I talk about "second childishness," I mean a phase in which an adult is the target of suppressed maternal urges that have persisted since early childhood. I will first examine the psychoanalytic foundations of Lear's relationship with his daughters in this debate, and then I will investigate how Lear's fixation with the mother figure within him might be revealed by Julia Kristeva's theories.

The play "King Lear" does not have any mother figures. Gloucester informs Kent at the beginning of the first act that Edmund's "breeding, sir, has been my charge." "I am now brazed to acknowledge him, having blushed so often to do so" (Shakespeare 2014, 1.1.8-9). Gloucester views Edmund, who is not of legal age, as his mother's son; however, he observes that Edgar is "a son by the order of law" (Shakespeare 2014, 1.1.18). Edgar, being legal, has his roots in his father, but Edmund, Gloucester contends, is defined by the influence of his absent mother, which is what motivates his evil behaviour throughout the play.

This reflects the early seventeenth-century view of femininity, particularly the suffocating power of the mother figure, as widely accepted during the time Shakespeare wrote his great tragedies. In the aristocratic, patriarchal families led by Gloucester and Lear, as Kahn notes, mothers are effectively absent, with powerful men occupying all significant roles, leaving no space for the feminine (Kahn 1981, 242). Masculine identity in this world relies on suppressing vulnerability and emotions associated with femininity (Kahn 1981, 243). Yet, this repressed feminine force remains potent enough to threaten masculine identity.

Edmund's mother is not the only influential absent mother in ''King Lear''; the second, Lear's wife, exerts even greater influence. Unlike in the source play ''King Leir'', where the king mourns his wife to his daughters, ''King Lear'' makes only one brief mention of Queen Lear (2.2.320), yet her psychoanalytic impact is evident in Lear's interactions with his daughters. Her absence allows Lear's authority to dominate, central to a psychoanalytic reading of his character's complexities. Lear is left to carry out both parental responsibilities after his wife departs, but the play shows that he is unable to do so. This seemingly nonexistent feminine power has been suppressed by Lear for a long time, but it still exists and threatens his identity. This suppressed drive finds its ideal outlet in the first scene's love test, with implications influenced by the mother who isn't there.

LEAR AND HIS DAUGHTERS

Lear's declaration of his desire to "express [his] darker purpose" (Shakespeare 2014, 1.1.35) signals the start of the main events. To "younger strengths," he intends to "shake all cares and business," as he "unburthen'd crawl towards death" (1.1.38–40). One crucial need for

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
Vol. 3 No. 6 (2025)

Lear's resignation from the throne is that he asks his three daughters to compete in a love contest called "Which of you shall we say doth love us most" 1.1.51) in Shakespeare's 2014 play.

"Lear, who has, as he believes, given all to his children, demands all from them," notes Stephen Greenblatt (Greenblatt 1982, 113). Lear looks for the "inward and absolute tribute of the heart" in addition to outward displays of deference (Greenblatt 1982, 113). His only requirement is the unwavering devotion of his daughters, which Goneril and Regan feign to be giving. What psychological rationale behind the narcissistic father Lear's unreasonable demands? The audience sees Lear's excessive wrath at Cordelia's response, which makes this topic much more relevant. After giving up his governmental responsibilities, he feels furious upon learning that he will not win the total affection of all three daughters. How much does Lear need to win his daughters' undivided love and devotion?

In his psychoanalytic interpretation of "King Lear," Arpad Pauncz hypothesised that Lear's erotic affection, which is similar to Freud's Oedipus Complex but inverted, is the source of Lear's sexual demands. This inverted focus is what Pauncz refers to as the "adult libido" or "Lear Complex," characterising it as a father's unique bond with his daughter (Pauncz 1952, 58). This sensual fixation is reflected in Lear's actions, particularly in his rage over Cordelia's rejection, which makes him behave like a "temperamental, fiery, and imperious suitor" (Pauncz 1952, 60).

Pauncz's perspective is supported by research by Maccoby and Jacklin, which shows that dads frequently conflate sexual desire and filial affection, encouraging their daughters to act flirtatiously and wanting them to project an appealing image (Maccoby and Jacklin 1974, 25–26). Kahn suggests that Lear's peculiar demands could be a result of the English aristocracy's patriarchal restrictions, which prevented him from expressing his emotions while he was king. According to Kahn, after giving up his official duties, Lear tries to recapture what he has long been denied because he has suppressed his emotional needs, which are normally met by a mother or other caring figure in his patriarchal society (Kahn 1981, 248).

A deeper understanding of psychoanalysis can be gained by applying Kristeva's theories to analyse Lear's peculiar behaviour towards his daughters. Lear may have a more complicated need for love and affection from his daughters than either Pauncz's or Freud's Oedipus complex. According to Kristeva's theories, Lear unintentionally turns to the semiotic in an attempt to relive a kind of second childhood as he gets ready to retire from the social obligations imposed by society's symbolic system. Lear gives up his title, divides his kingdom, and gives up his symbolic identity and its limitations. Without having to defend his limits, he opens himself up to the despicable. Lear longs to go back to a period when love was given without conditions, and he looks to his daughters for the intense love he believes he is now due when he relinquishes his symbolic role.

THE CHOKING MOTHER IN LEAR

When Lear arrives at Gloucester's house and finds Kent in the stocks, he feels personally humiliated. Carol Kahn notes that this incident, combined with Regan's treatment, triggers mixed emotions of rage, shame, and loss in Lear, who exclaims, “O, how this mother swells up toward my heart! hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow, thy element's below!” (Shakespeare 2014, 2.2.246-8). Lear imagines himself afflicted by "hysterica passio," a term associated with the female womb. Historically, as R. A. Foakes explains, this disease, known as "the mother," was believed to cause choking and

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
Vol. 3 No. 6 (2025)

suffocation in women due to a wandering womb, with marriage and regular intercourse being prescribed as remedies to control this force.

In Shakespeare's time, the father's role as the family's stabilizing force was crucial. However, as Kahn observes, Lear, like Gloucester, is essentially a motherless patriarch in a family where the mother is absent from significant decisions. Lear fails to balance his paternal authority with the maternal role of providing love, which leaves him vulnerable. Stephen Greenblatt argues that Lear's inability to separate authority from love leads to his downfall, as he cannot maintain both.

Lear's daughters' mistreatment exposes his repressed fear of the maternal, a fear rooted in his failure to fully separate from his mother in childhood, similar to Macbeth's experience. As Kristeva theorizes, the abject mother haunts Lear, and in his weakened state, he feels the return of this repressed force, manifesting as "the mother" within him. His daughters, Regan and Goneril, further undermine his authority, treating him like a child who needs control. By demanding the dismissal of his men, they weaken his symbolic borders, leaving him vulnerable.

Lear's struggle with his daughters reveals his internal conflict with the feminine within him. He calls Goneril a "degenerate bastard" but cannot deny his role in creating her. In his rage, Lear realizes that Goneril's corruption is a reflection of his own flesh, a sickness he cannot disown, symbolizing the internalized maternal force that now threatens to overwhelm him.

> We'll no more meet, no more see one another:
> But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter;
> Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
> Which I must needs call mine: thou art a boil,
> A plague-sore, an embossed carbuncle,
> In my corrupted blood,
> (Shakespeare 2014, 2.2.409-14)

Lear's invocation of nature as the cause of his plight can be seen as his desperate attempt to blame the semiotic forces at work: "If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts against their father...touch me with noble anger" (Shakespeare 2014, 2.2.463-5). With his symbolic identity crumbling, Lear makes a final stand against the abject. Marvin Bennett Krims suggests that Lear's refusal to weep represents his last effort to push away the feminine force threatening to consume him (Krims 2006, 142).

In the storm, Lear confronts the darkest form of the suffocating mother, described by Adelman as "the realm of Hecate," where his masculine identity dissolves in "terrifying female moisture" (Adelman 1992, 112). His rush into the storm symbolizes his attempt to escape these feminizing emotions but instead exposes him to the full fury of the feminine. Vulnerable and stripped of power, Lear is overwhelmed by the storm, a metaphorical embodiment of the punitive mother within him.

Lear's regression to primitive sensations, relying on smell to recognize his daughters' treachery, reveals his internalized fear of the feminine. He detects the stench of betrayal and mortality, which Adelman interprets as Lear's recognition of the female corruption within himself (Adelman 1992, 113). His attempts to wipe away the stench are futile, as he comes to terms with the abject nature of his identity.

Kristeva's theory of the abject, particularly the concepts of filth and defilement, applies to Lear's condition. Filth, existing on the margins of symbolic structures, threatens the self by confronting one with the abject. Lear's elder daughters force him to confront

Policy Journal of Social Science Review
Online ISSN 3006-4635
Print ISSN 3006-4627
Vol. 3 No. 6 (2025)

this abject by flaunting his misery, which leads to his descent into madness. The abject, symbolized by the filth on Lear's hands, is both an external and internal force that drives him to the brink of psychosis. During the storm, Lear coexists with the abject, experiencing a moment of revelation amidst oblivion. Kristeva describes the clash between the symbolic and the semiotic as a thunderous discharge, mirroring Lear's psychological breakdown in the storm (Kristeva 1982, 8-9). Lear's madness represents his final submission to the abject, as he loses all contact with reality and regresses into a psychotic state, overwhelmed by the forces he sought to suppress.

'One' Against the 'Twain': The Final Stage

Caught in the storm, Lear sees himself and all men as "poor, bare, forked animals" (Shakespeare 2014, 3.4.105-6), powerless against nature. Reflecting on his daughters deceit he recognizes their destructive nature: "they told me I was everything; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof" (Shakespeare 2014, 4.6.103-4). Goneril and Regan, far from being nurturing, are annihilating mothers seeking his end. Cordelia's return brings calm, signaling stability and the easing of Lear's turmoil. The Gentleman's comment that Cordelia "redeems nature from the general curse" (Shakespeare 2014, 4.6.210-12) marks this shift. Lear's longing for maternal care is fulfilled by Cordelia, who provides the genuine affection he needs.

Adelman notes that mothers, as sacrificial figures, are essential for male identity formation. Cordelia's role as a nurturing figure ultimately costs her life, symbolizing this sacrifice. As Adelman states, "this is the crime that Cordelia must pay for, and pay for with her breath" (Adelman 1992, 128). Lear's survival is tied to Cordelia's presence; without her, he cannot endure.

Lear's reunion with Cordelia reflects a return to the semiotic, a refuge from his elder daughters' abjective forces. He desires to remain in this safe haven, rejecting the symbolic world: "Come, let's away to prison: we two alone will sing like birds I' the cage" (Shakespeare 2014, 5.3.8-9). Lear's death, in his second childishness, represents the final abjection of his being and the end of his individuation. His passing ensures peace for the realm but at the cost of maternal sacrifice.

CODA ON KING LEAR

''King Lear'' depicts a king whose second childishness disrupts his realm. His flaw emerges when he transfers his power to his elder daughters, who, as suffocating mothers, threaten his identity. Stripped of authority, Lear faces the annihilating feminine force, leading to madness. The storm symbolizes Lear's confrontation with his inner turmoil and his mistake in rejecting the nurturing mother. Cordelia's return mitigates the threat of the suffocating mother and provides the unconditional love Lear sought, but at a steep price. Her sacrifice completes Lear's individuation, with his second childishness as the final stage. Lear opts to remain in the semiotic, even at the cost of his and Cordelia's lives.

Viewed through a Kristevan lens, Shakespeare's work offers deep psychological insights, capturing dramatic plausibility beyond conventional realism. His portrayal of extreme circumstances anticipates modern understandings of trauma and psychological impact. In ''King Lear'', Lear's ailments symbolize internal horror and abjection. His quest for unconditional love from his daughters leads him into madness and oblivion, mirroring the abject force attacking his identity.

Rejecting Cordelia's genuine affection, Lear turns to his elder daughters, who flatter deceitfully, exposing himself to the semiotic's annihilating forces. Cordelia, representing the nurturing semiotic, ultimately suffers along with Lear, as his retreat into this realm costs both their lives. The abject disrupts symbolic meanings and evokes a nostalgic, pre-

symbolic state governed by maternal rule, contrasting with the symbolic world's rigidity. Shakespeare's depiction of abjection aligns with Kristeva's psychoanalytic theories, revealing a deep understanding of human psychology and enhancing our appreciation of Shakespeare's dramatic skill.

CONCLUSION

It has been found that Julia Kristeva's idea of abjection provides a solid and valuable tool for studying the thoughts, ethics and imagery in Shakespeare's characters and plays. An examination of Lady Macbeth and other characters like her allows us to see that Shakespeare's plays make use of both fights between people and problems within characters themselves. Shakespeare's plays use the abject to cross the dividing lines between different people, between what is alive and what is dead, between what is morally right and what is not, in the same way that people felt uncertain in early modern times. Thanks to Kristeva, these characters don't only act in plays but stand in for the things that society hides to protect itself from chaos. In this way, this study adds to both Shakespearean criticism and psychoanalytic theory by discussing how the abject appears in Shakespeare's stories and in the way his plays are built, offering new ideas on why his work is still relevant and full of meaning.

REFERENCES

Adelman, J. (1978). Anger's my meat: Feeding, dependency, and aggression in *Coriolanus*. In D. Bevington & J. L. Halio (Eds.), *Shakespeare: Pattern of excelling nature* (pp. 108–124). Associated University Press.

Adelman, J. (1992). *Suffocating mothers: Fantasies of maternal origin in Shakespeare's plays, Hamlet to The Tempest*. Routledge.

Bataille, G. (1979). The psychological structure of fascism. *New German Critique, 19*, 64–87.

Bloom, H. (1999). *Shakespeare: The invention of the human*. Fourth Estate.

Bradley, A. C. (1924). *Shakespearean tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (2nd ed., 17th impression). Macmillan.

Bradley, A. C. (1970). The rejection of Falstaff. In G. K. Hunter (Ed.), *Shakespeare: Henry IV, Parts I and II* (pp. 56–78). Macmillan.

Chodorow, N. (1979). *The reproduction of mothering*. University of California Press.

Freud, S. (1960). Psychopathic characters on the stage (H. A. Bunker, Trans.). *The Tulane Drama Review, 4*(3), 144–148.

Freud, S. (2004). *Totem and taboo: Some points of agreement between the mental lives of savages and neurotics* (J. Strachey, Trans.). Taylor & Francis.

Freud, S. (2010a). Female sexuality. In I. Smith (Ed.), *Freud – Complete works* (pp. 4590–4607). https://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf

Freud, S. (2010b). Negation. In I. Smith (Ed.), *Freud – Complete works* (pp. 4138–4143). https://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf

Freud, S. (2010c). The uncanny. In I. Smith (Ed.), *Freud – Complete works* (pp. 3675–3700). https://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf

Freud, S. (2010d). The theme of the three caskets. In I. Smith (Ed.), *Freud – Complete works* (pp. 2604–2614). https://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf

Freud, S. (2010e). A seventeenth century demonological neurosis. In I. Smith (Ed.), *Freud – Complete works* (pp. 3993–4027). https://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf

Freud, S. (2010f). Some character-types met with in psycho-analytic work. In I. Smith (Ed.), *Freud – Complete works* (pp. 3098–3119).

https://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf

Freud, S. (2010g). *The interpretation of dreams* (J. Strachey, Trans.). Basic Books.

Freud, S. (2011). *The ego and the id*. Createspace Independent Publishing Platform.

Greenblatt, S. (1982). The cultivation of anxiety: *King Lear* and his heirs. *Raritan, 2*(2), 92–114.

Greenblatt, S. (1988). Invisible bullets. In S. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean negotiations: The circulation of social energy in Elizabethan England* (pp. 21–65). University of California Press.

Greenblatt, S. (2012). *The swerve: How the Renaissance began*. Vintage Books.

Kahn, C. (1975). The taming of the shrew: Shakespeare's mirror of marriage. *Modern Language Studies, 5*(1), 88–102.

Kahn, C. (1981). *Man's estate: Masculine identity in Shakespeare*. University of California Press.

Krims, M. B. (2006). *The mind according to Shakespeare: Psychoanalysis in the Bard's writing*. Praeger.

Kristeva, J. (1969). *Sēmeiōtikē: Recherches pour une sémanalyse*. Éditions du Seuil.

Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection* (L. S. Roudiez, Trans.). Columbia University Press.

Kristeva, J. (1984). *Revolution in poetic language* (L. S. Roudiez, Trans.). Columbia University Press.

Maccoby, E. E., & Jacklin, C. N. (1974). *The psychology of sex differences*. Stanford University Press.

Oliver, K. (1993). *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the double-bind*. Indiana University Press.

Ovid. (2010). *Metamorphoses: A new translation, contexts, criticism* (1st ed., A Norton Critical Edition). W. W. Norton.

Pauncz, A. (1952). Psychopathology of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. *American Imago, 9*(1), 57–77.

Shakespeare, W. (1623). *Mr. William Shakespeare's comedies, histories, and tragedies*. Isaac Jaggard and Ed Blount.

Shakespeare, W. (1961a). *Richard II* (The Arden Edition). Methuen.

Shakespeare, W. (1961b). *The first part of King Henry IV* (A. R. Humphreys, Ed.). Methuen.

Shakespeare, W. (1965). *Macbeth* (K. Muir, Ed.). Methuen.

Shakespeare, W. (1966). *The second part of King Henry IV* (A. R. Humphreys, Ed.). Methuen.

Shakespeare, W. (1975). *As you like it* (A. M. C. Latham, Ed.). The Arden Shakespeare. Methuen.

Shakespeare, W. (1976). *Coriolanus* (P. Brockbank, Ed.). Methuen.

Shakespeare, W. (1979). *A midsummer night's dream* (H. F. Brooks, Ed.). The Arden Shakespeare. Methuen.

Shakespeare, W. (1980). *Romeo and Juliet* (B. Gibbons, Ed.). The Arden Edition. Methuen.

Shakespeare, W. (1998). *A midsummer night's dream* (P. Holland, Ed.). Oxford University Press.

Shakespeare, W. (2009). *The taming of the shrew* (D. Callaghan, Ed.). Norton Critical Edition. W. W. Norton.

Shakespeare, W. (2014). *King Lear* (R. A. Foakes, Ed.). Bloomsbury.

Stone, L. (1967). *The crisis of the aristocracy, 1558–1641*. Oxford University Press.

Wilson, J. D. (1979). *The fortunes of Falstaff*. Cambridge University Press.