



## Men, Loss and Spiritual Emergency: Shakespeare, the Death of Hamnet and the Making of *Hamlet*

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*How does a father manage the death of his son or his father? What might a playwright do? This article proposes that confronted with the multiple loss of his son Hamnet and subsequently his father John, William Shakespeare experienced a transformational consciousness event or "spiritual problem" (DSM IV), defined by Grof and Grof as a "spiritual emergency" (SE), which he explores through the making of his masterpiece Hamlet. The play's central male character is a fine example of an instrumental masculine response to coping with loss. It is argued that the depiction of Hamlet's struggle towards self knowledge can be explained in terms of Stan Grof's model of transformation. In his play Shakespeare expresses a unique view of complicated masculine grief and loss. Through Hamlet's soliloquies he explores and maps the terrifying terrain and rich interior world of his own psychic journey and transformation.*

Men may consider the possibility of death and of all forms of loss in the course of a lifetime. Grof and Grof (1990) have suggested that confrontation with the issue of death is a pivotal part of the self-actualizing process and "an integral component of most spiritual emergencies" (p. 57) as they liberate individuals from the fear of death and lesser losses by opening them "to the experience of immortality" (p. 58). But how well equipped are individuals to manage the ensuing crisis of consciousness, or understand the potential impact it may have upon their lives? This article discusses male grief, loss and transformation by investigating one man's very personal tragedy and how by his genius and his art he is able to manage and to resolve it.

This article contends that faced with the death of his son Hamnet, William Shakespeare uses the making of *Hamlet* (Dover Wilson, 1972) to re-conceive and externalize an inner representation of his dead son. On one level, Shakespeare's public portrayal of the lost object of his affection enables him to accept its reality and repositions him to address a number of universal questions that arise from this change in relationship. On a deeper level it is hypothesized that the playwright's personal loss caused him to experience a transformed or non-ordinary state of consciousness, coined by Grof and Grof (1989) as "spiritual emergency" (SE). Put simply, Shakespeare's experience of loss triggers a significant crisis of consciousness which guides him towards a state of engagement with the collective unconscious,

enabling a spiritual transformation to occur which leads to his personality rebirth and healing.

It is proposed that Shakespeare may have used his experience of psycho-spiritual crisis to shape the content of *Hamlet*. The action of the play, and specifically Hamlet's soliloquies, mirror the playwrights terrifying psychic journey and its conclusion, whilst the memory of his deceased son, Hamnet, intentionally gives substance to the play's principle character.

Marking a significant breakthrough in the acknowledgment of transpersonal experiences as non-pathological (Lukoff, Lu & Turner, 1998), SE is recognized in the relatively new diagnostic category "Religious or Spiritual Problem" in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV)* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). In *Hamlet* Shakespeare presents his audience with a number of notable characteristics of SE: "shamanistic initiatory crises," a rite of passage for shamans-to-be in indigenous cultures, commonly involving physical illness and/or psychological crisis (Kalweit, 1998); processes of rebirth and renewal; sudden occurrence of paranormal experiences (Grof & Grof, 1989); peak experiences; and communication with spirit guides (Grof & Grof, 1990).

#### *Understanding Men: Loss and Gender*

In recent years, traditional Eurocentric stage models of grief and loss that encourage *decathexis* have been challenged by the healthier notion that the mourner maintains an ongoing relationship with the deceased (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996). Similarly, assumptions that men all grieve in the same manner has been superseded by the belief that an individual's response to death is unique regardless of gender. Nevertheless, even though men are notionally free to maintain their relationships with the deceased and grieve their losses across a spectrum of gender responses, they still conform to established patterns of behavior and societal expectations. Men continue to fail to disclose their feelings to each other and to their families and make less use of mental health services than women.

In America, for example, Chethik (2003) claims that between 60 and 90 percent of the clients who use the services provided by hospital chaplains, bereavement counselors and hospices are women. He suggests that men avoid them because these services do not tend to reflect their styles of grieving, and that men perceive grief services as being for women.

#### *Men and Depression*

The World Health Organization reports an estimated 450 million people worldwide to have a mental health problem and that one in ten adults are affected by mental illness (Powell, 2002). In Britain, 1 in 4 people experience some kind of mental health problem in the course of a year and the most commonly diagnosed mental disorder (nine percent) is mixed anxiety and depression. However, it is suggested that depression in men may have been under diagnosed because they often present with different symptoms (Mental Health Foundation, 2008). Mental illness now contributes to 40 percent of the burden of disability in Europe and the Americas with 12 percent of men experiencing major depressive disorder during their lifetime (Powell, 2002).

Masculine and feminine depression share similar origins in important experiences of psychological loss and emotional trauma, and similar dynamics in the unconscious or conscious experiences of helplessness, hopelessness and feelings of low self esteem (Lynch & Kilmartin, 1999). In men, loss not only causes grief but is also a major cause of depression (Harvey & Miller, 2000). Pollack (1998) explains male depression as a traumatic disruption of their early holding environment, experienced as a premature psychic separation from both maternal and paternal caregivers and that, in order to protect themselves against further loss, men block all strongly overt feelings, except for anger and sexual feelings. Anger is valued as a false self-sufficiency through a process he calls “defensive autonomy” (p. 147).

Male depression can be disguised in physical illness or destructive behaviors (Lynch & Kilmartin, 1999) and unreported depression can lead to completed suicide (Pollack & Levant, 1998). British men are three times as likely as women to die by suicide, and in New Zealand suicide is the second most common cause of death for men (Bray & Hutchinson, 2007). Currently statistics indicate that women are diagnosed with depression twice as often as men (Lynch & Kilmartin, 1999). This suggests that men typically resist ideas that they might be depressed as it is unacceptable to their self image and they are less likely than women to express overt affects or mood shifts (Chethik, 2003; Staudacher, 1991). Clinicians too, unconsciously affected by societal gender stereotypes, are reluctant to ask men about depressive symptoms or inquire in any depth in the face of male resistance (Pollack & Levant, 1998).

#### *Grief Loss and Gender Coping Styles*

The literature suggests that men prefer “problem-focused” strategies to manage their grief, whilst strategies used by women, generally more accustomed to attending to their emotions and more able to carry out the tasks defined in grief work, are shown to be marginally more effective (Stroebe & Schut, 2001). Stroebe and Schut suggest that this is because men are more “avoidant in their coping styles” and by immersion in work block their emotions (p. 361). Surprisingly, Parkes (2001) notes that although psychoanalytic theory might suggest that repression of emotion should lead to mental health issues for men, research indicates the opposite. However, it is important to note that in the research neither gender’s assigned coping strategy in adjustment to grief has yet been conclusively proved superior to the other.

As most individuals do not fall neatly into stereotypical gender categories they have traits that Martin and Doka (2000) call “blended” suggesting that “while patterns of grieving are certainly influenced by gender, they are not determined by gender” (pp. 99-100). They assert that different styles of grieving are based on many complex factors including personality, gender and culture and that the interaction of these factors creates different outcomes for different people. Thus Martin and Doka’s continuum of styles of grieving does not identify differences in coping specifically in terms of gender. Simply, at one end of the continuum is the “intuitive griever” who manages feelings by focusing on the emotional dimensions of the loss through social support in keeping with the nature of traditional female coping styles. At the other end of the continuum is the “instrumental griever” who focuses more on the cognitive aspects of loss and grieves through activity and problem solving.

This style tends to be more solitary and private, concentrating on the management of thought, and is a style more usually associated with men. Martin and Doka suggest that individuals use a combination of both intuitive and instrumental ways of engaging with loss and grief rather than that most traditionally assigned as appropriate to gender.

Similarly with the experience of SE, although gender provides an initial predictor of coping style, it is only part of a complex interaction of developmental, cultural and biological components that will generally result in a blending of both stereotypical male and female responses.

### *Loss and Spiritual Emergency*

It is suggested by Grof & Grof (1990) that loss of a loved one and the subsequent changes to future expectations caused by such losses may be significant enough to create the right environment for SE to present itself. As it makes these developmental adjustments, the psyche temporarily and powerfully attracts and submerges the ego allowing an opening for the influx of non-ordinary material, or "holotropic" (moving towards wholeness) phenomena. This may be experienced as a gradual emergence of consciousness or as the difficult but ultimately positive expression of SE. Significantly, according to the claims of Stan Grof's holotropic theory, an individual's cognitive abilities remain fully functioning throughout this experience (Grof & Grof, 1989).

### *Grof's Cartography of the Human Psyche*

SE is the subject of Grof and Grof's *Spiritual Emergency* (1989), and *The Stormy Search for Self* (1990), but the "new paradigm" in which they find their context was crystallized in some detail by Stan Grof in his groundbreaking *Beyond the Brain* (1985). With a few exceptions, the basic principles of the paradigm and its cartography remain the same. In this archetypal map of the unconscious Grof adds to an existing psychodynamic "biographical" dimension two further dimensions which he describes as the "transpersonal" and the fundamental biological dimension, the "perinatal."

Grof and Grof (1990) note the significance of death, death of the self in the self-actualizing process of transformation, and in the process of human birth. As Grof's (1985) consciousness model is much richer and more complex than Jung's, the perinatal dimension not only represents an interface between the individual "and elements of the collective unconscious" but also functions as an organizer of materials from "deep, intrinsic spiritual dimensions of the psyche" (p. 100).

Transpersonal experiences do not differentiate between the worlds of spirituality, mythology and archetypal forms, and the world of consensus reality. They offer, without the negotiation of the senses, direct access to the non-ordinary information of the collective unconscious where "all limitations appear to be transcended" (Grof & Grof, 1990, p. 151).

Transpersonal experiences, or Non-Ordinary States of Consciousness (NOSC) are genuine manifestations of the psyche that reveal that dimensions of human consciousness reach far beyond what is currently accepted by psychology and psychiatry. At a recollective-analytical level these transpersonal experiences are clearly "biographical" in nature. At an existential-experiential level experiences of

the perinatal dimension reflect strong connections with birth and death. Thus perinatal experiences represent an intersection between the personal and the transpersonal, which in turn reveal connections between the individual and the cosmos (Grof, 1985, 1996, 2000).

Grof's (1985) map of the psyche outlines the domains of prenatal existence and the processes of birth itself. In the perinatal dimension Grof asserts that the fetus is conscious during its nine months and that pre- and perinatal events play a critical role in an individual's psychological history, and creates systems of condensed experience (COEX), or memory aggregates, that constellate around these events. COEX have different layers of biographical, perinatal or archetypal material made accessible in the holotropic state.

Consequently, Grof's subjects were not just able to access the personal or biographical dimensions of the unconscious, but eventually came to relive the traumatic processes of their own births, to unfold outwards beyond individual biography and access symbolic, visionary, collective, archetypal, and transpersonal levels of experiencing.

Grof (1985) describes the distinction and the link between the personal and the transpersonal as being at the level of the Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPM). He defines BPM as four dynamic constellations or experiential patterns of the deep unconscious each "characterized by specific emotions, physical feelings, and symbolic images," the COEX, corresponding to the four consecutive periods of biological delivery in childbirth (p. 499). The first matrix corresponds to undisturbed existence in the uterus. The second resonates with the trauma associated with the onset of uterine contractions against a closed cervix. The third describes the titanic struggle as the cervix is opening and delivery becomes possible. Finally, the fourth matrix represents delivery and the physical separation of the baby from the mother.

Thus, disturbances and experiences at any stage of the intrauterine and birth processes have been established by Grof as corresponding to certain generic existential conditions and psychopathological categories. For Grof, complex modes of human experience and behavior, both "normal" and pathological can be understood, and therapeutically influenced, by relating them to these foundational structures. By approaching them via these critical access points to the complex dimensionality of the psyche, Grof is able to reinterpret the standard biographical dimension. The inclusion of the perinatal aspect of personal psychology provides the doorway to transpersonal experience revealing a level of universal consciousness beyond the individual's ordinary reach. Indeed, the perinatal trauma of SE, Grof suggests, might be as easily experienced by a group, or a culture, as it is by an individual.

#### *Experiencing Spiritual Emergency*

Grof & Grof (1990) propose that spiritual transformation, as a process, can be experienced subtly over time, whereas SE can be dramatic and sometimes more problematic. The latter inner experience can be felt as a suddenly spontaneous challenge to existing beliefs, and to existence itself, and may alter perception and bring discomfort with a once familiar world. SE is often experienced physically, as forceful energies and spontaneous tremors. At the perinatal level this is experienced through the archetypal "theme of war" and associated with male aggression, which

is “an important standard and characteristic aspect of experiential sessions” (Grof, 1985, p. 406).

Often the individual feels bound to disclose his or her non-ordinary state. It represents an enormous challenge to the individual, as he or she comes to terms with changes associated with both inner resources and outer relationships with the world. This can engender tremendous fear of the unknown and loss of control so that getting through the day and functioning in a familiar way becomes problematic. Normal activities become troublesome or overwhelming. Concentration is difficult to maintain. Experiencing frequent changes of mind may cause an individual to panic, and there will be feelings of powerlessness, guilt, and ineffectiveness. Commonly, individuals confront a sense of fear, vulnerability, and loneliness, which can range from “a vague perception of separateness from other people and the world to a deep and encompassing engulfment by existential alienation” (Grof & Grof, 1990, p. 52).

As boundaries that have been previously maintained between the consensus reality of the biographical dimension and the transpersonal and perinatal begin to dissolve, so the individual’s worldview is disintegrating, increasing emotional responses, physical stresses and pain. In an attempt to disassociate themselves from emerging memories, which are associated with or contain some fear, individuals become alienated from themselves. Confronting the notion of death is a “pivotal part of the transformation process and an integral component of most spiritual emergencies” (Grof & Grof, 1990, p. 57).

During SE the logical mind can be bypassed, or temporarily dies, while intuition, inspiration, and imagination assert themselves. The intellect too is superseded by true insightfulness. This process of renewal sees that the old pattern of thinking that is blocking the transformative process is destroyed by it in order that new learning, experience, and insights may take its place. In dealing with the traumas of the birth of the new the death of the old self must necessarily be mourned. Typical of the inverse logic of spiritual language, Grof and Grof (1990) suggest that, “what feels like total destruction of the ego is a broader, more encompassing sense of self” (p. 62). In the initial stages of SE they note that people may only briefly encounter heightened realms of experience, but the frequency can increase commensurate with the individuals’ awareness, acceptance and understanding of their transforming levels of consciousness. Ideally, in therapeutic settings, Grof and Grof argue that the individual must be allowed, without any form of medication that will block its natural progress, to work through the transformational process until peace and feelings of inner consistency that engage and link the positive experiences similar to those of BPM I and IV are achieved.

It is important to note the paucity and limitations of research into SE, as a relatively new and potentially controversial area of study, there is little or no statistical information relating to gender coping or incidence. All that one might say is that men and women may be reluctant to disclose such a deeply disturbing experience through conventional channels of support.

## *Coping with Loss: Shakespeare, Hamnet and Hamlet*

### *Shakespeare's Loss*

It is suggested that in creating Hamlet, Shakespeare must have drawn upon some profound personal experiences.

Whatever he determined at the time, Shakespeare must have still been brooding in late 1600 and early 1601, when he sat down to write a tragedy whose doomed hero bore the name of his dead son. His thoughts may have been intensified by news that his elderly father was seriously ill back in Stratford, for the thought of his father's death is deeply woven into the play. And the death of his son and the impending death of his father - a crisis of mourning and memory - could have caused a psychic disturbance that helps to explain the explosive power and inwardness of *Hamlet*. (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 8)

Shakespeare's son Hamnet died in 1596, at the age of eleven, and his father John in 1601. Grof's research indicates that such losses can trigger transformative experience and although there is no biographical evidence to indicate how Shakespeare might have responded to these deaths there is a body of critical opinion that suggests that these events must have influenced his work in some way (Bloom 1998; Greenblatt, 2004; Hammill, 2006).

Perhaps Quennell's (1963) speculation that Hamnet's death provoked some kind of moral crisis might suggest the kind of inner scrutiny that precedes a crisis of consciousness. For example, Shakespeare's *King John*, which is generally thought to date between 1594 and 1597 placing it at the time of Hamnet's death, contains the opening version of a theme that runs through many of his later tragedies:

"Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale  
Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man..."

The human condition is both cruel and meaningless, and, because it lacks any discernible meaning, not only dark and tragic but wearisome and insignificant. (Quennell, 1963, p. 162)

In addition, Constance's speech in *King John*, beginning with "Grief fills the room of my absent child" also draws upon Shakespeare's grief at his great loss. Similarly, the lines "I am not mad: I would to heaven I were!" and "If I were mad, I should forget my son" (Act III, iv), are deeply reminiscent of the existential tensions within Hamlet.

It has been suggested that that from 1601 onward Shakespeare's plays have been charged with a greater inner energy and consciousness (Greenblatt, 2004) and "a profound change in the weight and emphasis" (Welsh, 2000, p. 37). Certainly, loss of son and his father does seem to resonate with one of the major themes of *Hamlet* which explores the father and son dyad in four relationships. As Everett (1989) notes, these two losses "became one in Shakespeare's mind, the seed from which his tragedy of a son began growing" (p. 34). This point is confirmed by Logan (2004) who notes Berryman's observation that Shakespeare wrote a "father dominated tragedy," which made him a "tragic playwright by two devastating crises." What is

perhaps more telling is Berryman's suggestion that Shakespeare is able through *Hamlet* to create "an imagined life for his dead little son Hamnet."

#### *Continuing Bonds: Hamnet as the Inner Representation of the Dead Child*

Rubin (1993) has suggested that as an extension of the father's self, a son is expected to rectify his father's errors, and care about and support him in his dotage, make a difference in the world and provide a second chance to replay and re-experience aspects of the father's childhood. However, when a son dies it "leaves the parent with unfulfilled dreams for their offspring" and because "the chain in their generational lines has been broken – a loss of continuity in the life cycle occurs" (Leming & Dickinson, 2007, p. 508).

Loss need not be experienced as a severing of bonds, subject to prescribed stages or be gender specific. For example, Klass' (2002) findings indicate that many fathers manage their losses through the solace found in the maintenance and integration of a new and ongoing relationship with their deceased children in their day-to-day lives. The father, as part of this self-actualized bond with the son, holds and engages with an "inner representation" of the child, with all his "characterizations and thematic memories... and the emotional states connected with the characterizations and memories" (p. 78). Thus, it is speculated here, that Shakespeare has creatively externalized his inner representation of Hamnet as Hamlet, which both strengthens and immortalizes their bond and enables him to vividly depict his own journey of psychic discovery. Klass (2002) indicates that phenomena such as "a sense of presence, hallucinations in any of the senses, belief in the child's continuing active influence on thoughts or events, or a conscious incorporation of the characteristics or virtues of the dead child into the self" could also have been experienced by Shakespeare, which would have added themes to both this inner representation and the outer representation of the play (p. 79).

#### *Shakespeare, Hamlet and Psychoanalysis*

In the analysis of Shakespearean biography much is speculation and to assume that a dramatic character speaks to the full inner experience of its creator rather than simply answering the needs and devices of the drama and the audience is perilous. Greenblatt (2004) notes that the motivation of Shakespeare is extensively researched but thoroughly unknown. Nevertheless, he suggests, this "is no reason to suppose that Shakespeare was unaffected by his son's death" (p. 9). Equally, many agree with Welsh's (2000) contention that in *Hamlet* Hamlet's "ego belongs to Shakespeare himself" (p. 36).

Freud's (1900) suggestion that in *Hamlet* the audience is confronted with "the poet's own psychology" (p. 7) observes that following the deaths of both his father and his son, Shakespeare was made more vulnerable to his own "childish" feelings towards his father and presumably to his needs as a father. Freud is very clear about the psychological effects on Shakespeare and suggests that these "neurotic symptoms" influence the creative construction of the play that argues a therapeutic process for the creator in its creation. Claire (1985) adds that Freud presumed that as a typical response to mourning *Hamlet* reflects "Shakespeare's own suicidal longings, his own weariness with this sterile promontory, his own sexual fantasies and conflicts" (p. 298).

Freud (1997), recognizing the significance of Shakespeare's losses, also infers a connection between Hamnet and Hamlet "It is known, too, that Shakespeare's son, who died in childhood, bore the name of Hamnet (identical with Hamlet)" (p. 160). Loss from bereavement, as Grof (2000) suggests, might well have exercised Shakespeare's existential concerns and it is suggested here that this cathartic act of creation provides him with an opportunity to explore, vent and resolve his own very real psycho-spiritual crisis. In this case the process of SE has a positive outcome. Greenblatt argues that in *Hamlet* the playwright, arguably at the height of his powers and with greater awareness, begins to allow the "inner logic" of his creation to direct his writing and explains that Shakespeare's "excision of motive" for Hamlet:

must have arisen from something more than technical experimentation; coming in the wake of Hamnet's death, it expressed Shakespeare's deepest perception of existence... The opacity was shaped by his experience of the world and of his own inner life. (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 9)

### *Shakespeare's Use of the Transpersonal*

Belief in transpersonal phenomena was widespread in Jacobean England. James I, Shakespeare's most significant patron, wrote a tract on the nature and reality of witches. As he was aware that such beliefs were popular currency, it is not surprising that Shakespeare should wish to please his patron and his audience by incorporating the transpersonal in the advancement of plots and characters. The reality of transpersonal phenomena were roundly debated in Shakespeare's time and belief in ghosts owes much to the demonological traditions and beliefs of the Renaissance (Nighan, 2004) and to the Elizabethan cosmological worldview (Tillyard, 1975). For example, in *Henry IV, Part One* (1597) there is a heated argument between Glendower, who claims that he can "call spirits from the vasty deep" and indulges in "deep experiments," and Hotspur who regards such talk as "skimble-skamble stuff" (3.1.52, 48,150). In *Hamlet* (1601), the argument is repeated when Horatio initially and skeptically suspects the Ghost of Hamlet's father as originating from Marcellus' fantasy but is later explained in terms of the transpersonal phenomena that occurred before Julius Caesar's death. The Ghost is seen on three key occasions and its force hovers darkly over a dissolute Denmark. Although the Ghost strongly affects his son's opinion and behavior, it allows him a high level of pre-cognition without diminishing his ability to master his notions of "self-slaughter," cognitive functioning and effective communication.

Transpersonal concerns are a recurring theme in many of Shakespeare's plays. In *Richard III* (1592), it is a conscience-ridden hallucination, whereas in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* (1605), the transpersonal is an integral and substantial part of the structure of the plot (Greenblatt, 2001). In *Macbeth* a floating dagger, unearthly witches, and prophetic apparitions supplement Banquo's jeering and bloody phantom. Thus the transpersonal realm of experience provides a catalyst for action, an insight into character, and augments the impact of many key scenes. Significantly, Shakespeare's early comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595), perhaps written at the time of Hamnet's illness, encompasses three worlds or dimensions. Two of Grof's cartography of the psyche are featured here: the biographical workaday world of the rude mechanicals and the romantic world of the aristocratic lovers; and the

transpersonal fairy world of Titania, Oberon and Puck, later reincarnated as Ariel in *The Tempest* (1610). In the former, the perinatal dimension is activated as all three worlds become intertwined during the course of the play. The transpersonal world dominates the others but as both the lovers and the mechanicals engage with the “children of Pan” they are literally and metaphorically transformed by their experience.

Shakespeare’s accumulated losses are, perhaps, evidence enough of the possibility of heightened spiritual awareness or SE. At the very least, Shakespeare’s inclusion of transpersonal material does speak of an understanding of the transpersonal and may support evidence of direct personal experience of the kinds of phenomena found in SE.

### *Hamlet’s Spiritual Emergency*

Hamlet illustrates male grieving along a continuum (Martin & Doka, 2000). As an “intuitive griever” Hamlet does not always follow a macho script: he is reflective rather than action-oriented, and concerned to maintain strong links with his natural parents. However, as an “instrumental griever” he identifies with and measures himself against other males; seeking the confidence of other young men, he must mourn his losses privately. Measured against the general research and the myth of stereotype, Hamlet is typical in the way that he “blends” both genders’ grieving styles. However, his responses are unique and individual.

In *Hamlet’s* dialectic between reality and appearance it is Hamlet’s self-conscious belief that whatever is happening to him is stranger and deeper than is represented by his mourning. Indeed, Claudius’ description of Hamlet’s “transformation” (2. 2. 10) as a dual process involving exterior and interior change suggests that it is so great that Hamlet is no longer recognizable as the same young man, suggesting that transformation initiated by loss has become Hamlet’s central point of focus.

### *Mapping Hamlet’s Perinatal Journey*

#### *The Soliloquies*

Hamlet’s seven soliloquies provide a window to both the character’s and his creator’s inner processes and simultaneously to their perinatal and transpersonal experiences. As noted above, complex modes of human experience can be therapeutically influenced by relating them to foundational structures called Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPM) which, when activated, “can result in complex and realistic reproduction of all the experiences ... associated with various forms of war” (Grof, 1985, p. 412). The perinatal dimension also provides access to transpersonal experience which would normally be beyond the reach of the individual psyche. An analysis of *Hamlet* using these trans-dimensional access points enables a reframing of the standard postnatal biographical explanations of Hamlet’s behavior. It is suggested here that Hamlet’s and, by inference, Shakespeare’s behavior and experiences can be developmentally mapped and interpreted through his seven soliloquies.

*Soliloquy One:* O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt... (1.2.129-149)

The first of Grof's matrices, "primal union with mother" (BPM I) describes the symbiotic relationship between mother and child. Thus, the first soliloquy indicates Hamlet's harmonious family relationships prior to the onset of SE and the death of his father. In its expression of his idyllic past, painful awareness of his present loss, and imminent change in his future prospects, it vitally illustrates the shattering transition between Grof's first and second BPM. Here Hamlet examines his past and his particular disappointment and suffering around the loss of his father and remarriage of his mother, reiterating the theme from *King John* that life is "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable." Denmark has become "rank and gross in nature" and there are few recollections of good experiences and feelings. The new husband, Claudius, is experienced as a threatening and destabilizing influence and Gertrude, his mother, the literal source of Hamlet's inner security, is revealed as inconstant. Grof and Grof (1990) have observed that in BPM II individuals view the world negatively, "the persons reliving episodes of intrauterine disturbances, or 'bad womb' experiences, have a sense of dark and ominous threat and often feel they are being poisoned" (p. 147).

*Soliloquy Two:* O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?... (1.5.92-112.)

"Cosmic engulfment and no exit or hell" (BPM II), is the first clinical stage of birth, where there are uterine contractions but the cervix is closed. At this point in his SE Hamlet, firmly embedded in BPM II, as a helpless victim accesses COEX of a dark and menacing world, claustrophobic, torturous, nightmarish, the religious prototype for Hell and his descent into this underworld is a common experiential variant of the second matrix. Hamlet's second soliloquy is a painful, emotional and physical response to his father's ghost accompanied by a persistent sense of paranoia. It is his response to a negative COEX system, a powerful cluster of emotional events drawn from the biographical, perinatal and transpersonal dimensions. Grof has suggested that,

Reliving this stage of birth is one of the worst experiences we can have during self-exploration that involves holotropic states. We feel caught in a monstrous claustrophobic nightmare, exposed to agonizing emotional and physical pain, and have a sense of utter helplessness and hopelessness. (Grof, 2000, pp. 41-3)

*Soliloquy Three:* O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!... (2.2.555-612)

This soliloquy indicates a transition between BPM II and III and takes Hamlet into the "the death-rebirth struggle" (BPM III). In this second clinical stage of delivery, uterine contractions continue and the cervix is open, allowing for the gradual propulsion of the fetus down the birth canal. The fetus makes contact with a variety of biological materials, and experiences crushing sensations, suffocation, and struggles for survival, as the body is propelled down and out of the birth canal. Grof observes that in this matrix individuals experience a discharge of energy, sexual excitement, and an inter-play of self-destructive and destructive experiences. The distinction between this matrix and the last is Hamlet's stronger association with the roles of the aggressor and an observer rather than the victimized and downtrodden. Hamlet,

emerging painfully from his appalling encounter with the Ghost and the truth, is tremendously energized, but this power is initially unfocused in his frenetic outpouring until he is able to establish a plan to 'catch the conscience of the king'.

*Soliloquy Four:* To be, or not to be, that is the question... (3.1.56-89)

The fourth and fifth soliloquies are specifically resonant of BPM III. These soliloquies appear in Act III of the play. In the fourth soliloquy Hamlet swings into an almost detached contemplation of existence that could be reframed as a growing acceptance of his death-rebirth process and accommodation of holotropic experiences. Nevertheless, his sexual arousal so clearly focused on Ophelia, becomes destructive as he rushes to free himself from the maternal body.

*Soliloquy Five:* 'Tis now the very witching time of night... (3.2.391- 402)

Although this soliloquy is consistent with the characteristics of BPM III it also regresses to recover elements of BPM II and dangerously reasserts the transpersonal dimension prior to the manic confrontation of his mother.

*Soliloquy Six:* Now might I do it pat, now a' is a-praying... (3.3.72-96)

The sixth soliloquy firmly establishes Hamlet in BPM III and also recovers the detachment of the fourth soliloquy as he enjoys a moment of control toying with the possibility of killing Claudius. However, Hamlet's transformative process is unguided and in this vortex of intense energy and trauma it is spontaneously directed toward action untempered by conscience with the murder of Polonius, "When the experience of BPM III comes closer to resolution, it becomes less violent and disturbing. The prevailing atmosphere is that of extreme passion and driving energy of intoxicating intensity" (Grof, 2000, p. 48).

*Soliloquy Seven:* How all occasions do inform against me... (4.4.33-66)

In Act IV, soliloquy seven illustrates a transition between BPM III and IV the "death and rebirth experience." Consequently, Hamlet may be viewed in Act V as having many of the experiences consonant with BPM IV including the heightened awareness associated with completion of the birth process. In this third clinical stage of delivery propulsion through the birth canal is completed and followed by an overwhelming sense of relief and relaxation. The eventual severing of physical connection with the mother is both an actual separation and a final resolution. In the play an exiled Hamlet is literally and metaphorically disconnected from his mother and motherland, and in terms of development he is forced into a full separation from the parent figures. This repositions Hamlet and allows previous reference-points, formed and imprinted by the trauma of birth, to be destroyed. In this "ego-death," which is a purely symbolic event, he is stripped of all resources and possessions save his physical self (Grof & Grof, 1980, p. 28). Grof (1998, p. 151), quoting Abraham a Sancta Clara, a seventeenth-century German Augustinian monk, sums up Hamlet's new position as, "The man who dies before he dies, does not die when he dies." This "dying before dying" has played an important role in all religious traditions and Hamlet is able to lose his fear of death and become more comfortable with its experiential territory - an indication that Shakespeare's own fears are mitigated.

For some this death is experienced as fearfully as the real thing. However, ego-death is not the death of the ego since this is still required for functioning. It is simply the ultimate detachment from the old and familiar existence – the ego being destroyed in order to accommodate a more expanded self-definition. What is actually dying is Hamlet's false self and he is able to return to Denmark as a young man in the final process of healing and transformation. This heightened consciousness of the playwright truly emerges on a cosmic scale in Hamlet's seventh soliloquy when his painful personal experiences of loss are weighed against humanity's capacity for self-destruction and deception, which suggests to him that his perception of consensus reality is flawed and his inaction perhaps justified rather than shameful and his final lines are delivered with sardonic humor.

#### *Act V: The Transformation of Hamlet*

The powerful transformational journey of Shakespeare so graphically described in *Hamlet* is articulated by Grof's holotropic process. At a biographical level Hamnet's loss influences the creation of Hamlet and *Hamlet* enabling Shakespeare to reinforce his inner representation of the deceased son and to nourish their ongoing relationship. At a transpersonal level Hamnet is resurrected as Hamlet so that as the Ghost father Shakespeare is able to feel affective, forgiven and unforgotten in this newly reframed relationship. And at the perinatal level Shakespeare is confirmed and reassured in his position as both father and mother of Hamnet as he is reconceived and birthed as Hamlet by his father/playwright in and from the body of *Hamlet*. Thus the matrices encompass the lambent pre-perinatal characteristics and increasingly painful spiritual opening of Shakespeare/Hamlet's loss in Act I, through to Shakespeare/Hamlet's birth as an individuated, reconciled, broader and intentionally aware consciousness in Act V.

Hamlet returns to Denmark to face his death with a deeper understanding of himself, which as Tillyard (1975) notes to the Elizabethan, is a paramount human task "To know your self was not egoism but the gateway to all virtue" (p. 79). Shakespeare returns to himself. *Hamlet* scholars and critics alike have puzzled and argued over the play's final Act. There is no doubt that Hamlet is finally and tragically redeemed and the source of his redemption lies in his journey of psychic renewal through a practical process of mourning not consciously self-directed but spiritually inspired – the exposed unconscious of a playwright arguably at the height of his powers.

#### *Conclusion*

Seen alongside male grief and loss theory, Grof's holotropic cartography provides a useful heuristic device to illustrate and discuss how men might better understand, explain, and manage loss. Just like the loss that triggers it, SE is a choiceless event and plunges individuals into changes in consciousness that they might be poorly prepared for, cannot manage and do not understand. Like Shakespeare, men are faced with accepting and integrating this new material over time as best they can or to seek ways to suppress its influence.

As caring friends and interested professionals, the experience of SE challenges our beliefs about the world and deepens our understanding of the grieving process and what men need to get through it. Men in SE need to be given

the opportunity to safely express their inner transformations, to be heard and to be understood. However, there is little awareness in our communities of what consciousness transforming crises as a result of loss might be like for men and it is suggested that such deeply personal events go largely unreported or unrecognized.

There is considerable research which supports and recognizes spirituality, spiritual practice, and balance as having a positive affect on an individual's overall health and resilience. Perhaps, it is time to raise awareness about how men have been transformed by their losses and to more closely examine how that inner transformation has occurred and can be used to support others.

## *Appendix*

### Hamlet – The soliloquies

#### Soliloquy One

(1.2.129-149)

O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt,  
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew, (130)  
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed  
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God, God,  
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden  
That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely. That it should come to this,  
But two months dead, nay not so much, not two,  
So excellent a king, that was to this  
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother, (140)  
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven  
Visit her face too roughly-heaven and earth  
As if increase of appetite had grown  
By what it fed on, and yet within a month,  
Let me not think on't...frailty thy name is woman!  
A little month or ere those shoes were old  
With which she followed my poor father's body  
Like Niobe all tears, why she, even she-  
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason  
Would have mourned longer-married with my (150)  
uncle  
My father's brother, but no more like my father  
Than I to Hercules, within a month,  
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes  
She married. O most wicked speed...to post  
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!  
It is not, nor it cannot come to good,  
But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

### Soliloquy Two

(1.5.92-112.)

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?  
And shall I couple hell? O fie! Hold, hold, my heart,  
But bear me stiffly up...Remember thee?  
Ay thou poor ghost whiles memory holds a seat  
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?  
Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past (100)  
That youth and observation copied there,  
And thy commandment all alone shall live  
Within the book and volume of my brain,  
Unmixed with baser matter - yes by heaven!  
O most pernicious woman!  
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!  
My tables, meet it is I set it down  
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain,  
At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark...  
So, uncle, there you are. Now, to my Word, (110)  
It is 'Adieu, adieu, remember me.'...  
I have sworn't.

### Soliloquy Three

(2.2.555-612)

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!  
Is it not monstrous that this player here,  
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
Could force his soul so to his own conceit  
That from her working all his visage waned,  
Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,  
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting  
With forms to his conceit; and all for nothing! (560)  
For Hecuba!  
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,  
That he should weep for her? what would he do,  
Had he the motive and the cue for passion  
That I have? he would drown the stage with tears  
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,  
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,  
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed  
The very faculties of eyes and ears; yet I,  
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak, (570)  
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,  
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,

Upon whose property and most dear life  
 A damned defeat was made: am I a coward?  
 Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,  
 Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face,  
 Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie i' th' throat  
 As deep as to the lungs? who does me this?  
 Ha, 'swounds, I should take it: for it cannot be  
 But I am pigeon-livered, and lack gall (580)  
 To make oppression bitter, or ere this  
 I should have fatted all the region kites  
 With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!  
 Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!  
 O, vengeance!  
 Why, what an ass am I. This is most brave,  
 That I, the son of a dear father murdered,  
 Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,  
 Must like a whore unpack my heart with words,  
 And fall a-cursing like a very drab: (590)  
 A stallion ! fie upon't! foh!  
 About, my brain; hum, I have heard  
 That guilty creatures sitting at a play  
 Have by the very cunning of the scene  
 Been struck so to the soul, that presently  
 They have proclaimed their malefactions:  
 For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak  
 With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players  
 Play something like the murder of my father  
 Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks; (600)  
 I'll tent him to the quick: if a' do blench  
 I know my course.... The spirit that I have seen  
 May be the devil, and the devil hath power  
 T' assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps  
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
 As he is very potent with such spirits,  
 Abuses me to damn me; I'll have grounds  
 More relative than this - the play's the thing  
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

#### Soliloquy Four

(3.1.56-89)

To be, or not to be, that is the question,  
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
 And by opposing end them? To die, to sleep - (60)  
 No more, and by a sleep to say we end  
 The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation  
 Devoutly to be wished to die to sleep!  
 To sleep, perchance to dream, ay there's the rub,  
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil  
 Must give us pause - there's the respect  
 That makes calamity of so long life:  
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, (70)  
 Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
 The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,  
 The insolence of office, and the spurns  
 That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,  
 When he himself might his quietus make  
 With a bare bodkin; who would fardels bear,  
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
 But that the dread of something after death,  
 The undiscovered country, from whose bourn  
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will, (80)  
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have,  
 Than fly to others that we know not of?  
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,  
 And thus the native hue of resolution  
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
 And enterprises of great pitch and moment  
 With this regard their currents turn awry,  
 And lose the name of action.... Soft you now,  
 The fair Ophelia - Nymph, in thy orisons  
 Be all my sins remembered.

Soliloquy Five  
 (3.2.391- 402)

'Tis now the very witching time of night,  
 When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out  
 Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,  
 And do such bitter business as the day  
 Would quake to look on: soft, now to my mother -  
 O heart, lose not thy nature, let not ever  
 The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom,  
 Let me be cruel not unnatural.  
 I will speak daggers to her, but use none,  
 My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites, (400)  
 How in my words some ever she be shent,  
 To give them seals never, my soul, consent!

### Soliloquy Six

(3.3.72-96)

Now might I do it pat, now a' is a-praying -  
And now I'll do't, and so a' goes to heaven,  
And so am I revenged. That would be scanned:  
A villain kills my father, and for that  
I his sole son do this same villain send  
To heaven....

Why, this is bait and salary, not revenge.  
A' took my father grossly, full of bread, (80)  
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May,  
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?  
But in our circumstance and course of thought,  
'Tis heavy with him: and am I then revenged  
To take him in the purging of his soul,  
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?  
No!

Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent,  
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,  
Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed, (90)  
At game, a-swearing, or about some act  
That has no relish of salvation in't,  
Then trip him that his heels may kick at heaven,  
And that his soul may be as damned and black  
As hell whereto it goes; my mother stays,  
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

### Soliloquy Seven

(4.4.33-66)

How all occasions do inform against me,  
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,  
If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more:  
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and god-like reason  
To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be  
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple (40)  
Of thinking too precisely on th' event  
A thought which quartered hath but one  
part wisdom,  
And ever three parts coward - I do not know  
Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do,'  
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means,  
To do't... Examples gross as earth exhort me.  
Witness this army of such mass and charge  
Led by a delicate and tender prince,

Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed  
 Makes mouths at the invisible event, (50)  
 Exposing what is mortal and unsure  
 To all that fortune, death and danger dare,  
 Even for an egg-shell.... Rightly to be great  
 Is not to stir without great argument,  
 But greatly to find quarrel in a straw  
 When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,  
 That have a father killed, a mother stained,  
 Excitements of my reason and my blood,  
 And let all sleep? while, to my shame I see  
 The imminent death of twenty thousand men, (60)  
 That for a fantasy and trick of fame  
 Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot  
 Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,  
 Which is not tomb enough and continent  
 To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,  
 My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

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