

“ALAS POOR YORICK!” BODIES OUT OF JOINT IN SHAKESPEARE,
BAUDELAIRE, SEAMUS HEANEY, ANDREAS VESALIUS AND GOVARD
BIDLOO

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines intertextually and cross-mediatcally representations of skeletons as tokens of death and *memento mori* injunctions to argue that such representational output draws upon a shared culture’s collective imaginary. From Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* through early modern anatomy books like Vesalius’s and Bidloo’s to Baudelaire’s and Seamus Heaney’s poems, skeletons, and in Heaney bog mummies too, are subjected to a double anamnesis. One form concerns a fanciful philosophico-medical recreation of their past to suit the present’s epistemic needs; the other issues a remember-the-future warning which often circumscribes the *memento mori* motif on various ethical, theological and epistemic grounds, to carve an emotional foothold for the present. Beyond such concerns, though, looms the issue of participation in a game of power and agency. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak’s critique of representation, I argue that the drama, poetry and anatomical illustration examined here intimate the patriarchal politico-epistemic stakes of highlighting representation as *Darstellung* (likeness) whilst obliterating representation as *Vertretung* (standing-for).

KEYWORDS: representation, skeleton, *memento mori*, *Hamlet* (Shakespeare), *Les Fleurs du mal* (Baudelaire), bog-body poems (Seamus Heaney), *De humani corporis fabrica* (Andreas Vesalius), *Anatomia humani corporis* (Govard Bidloo)