

At the same time an entirely different, but perhaps related, method of criticism had its beginning in a footnote. In his *Interpretation of Dreams* Freud observed that the two greatest tragedies in the Western tradition had a common denominator, the Oedipus complex:

Another of the great creations of tragic poetry, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, has its roots in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*. But the changed treatment of the same material reveals the whole difference in the mental life of these two widely separated epochs of civilization: the secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind. In the

Oedipus the child's wishful phantasy that underlies it is brought into the open and realized as it would be in a dream. In *Hamlet* it remains repressed; and—just as in the case of a neurosis—we only learn of its existence from its inhibiting consequences. . . . Hamlet is able to do anything—except take vengeance on the man who did away with his father and took his father's place with his mother, the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his own childhood realized. (V.D.b.)

Hamlet hesitates to kill Claudius because Hamlet identifies with Claudius: Claudius has fulfilled Hamlet's own infantile fantasy of taking his father's place in his mother's bed. The theory was developed and situated in the tradition of *Hamlet* criticism by Freud's disciple and biographer Ernest Jones (*Hamlet and Oedipus*). Most discussions of it have focused on the problems it shares with Bradley's work—that it is fanciful in creating a childhood for Hamlet that the play does not provide. Also like Bradley, Freud assimilates Hamlet to a type. For Bradley Hamlet represents the disaffected romantic hero, whose sensitivity makes him incapable of action; for Freud Hamlet represents the power of the Oedipus complex—universally experienced by male children—to determine character. In fact, Freud's theory provides a useful gloss on several key scenes. It certainly explains Hamlet's confusion of suicide and the murder of Claudius in "To be, or not to be," and also the centrality of the closet scene. In the first, we have a wonderful example of the power of the unconscious to shape the sequence of conscious thought, and of course it is in the soliloquies that we expect to find the character least inhibited in expressing the deep structure of his thinking. (This is also true of the first soliloquy: the imagery of "rank and gross" reveals the character's obsession with the mother's body and all its attendant guilt.) It has been objected of the Freudian interpretation of the closet scene that there is no original stage direction for a bed in the room—indeed, that "closet" in Elizabethan English meant private library, or withdrawing space. Even though it might be anachronistic to present on stage that chamber as dominated by the bed, on which Hamlet can throw his mother as he rails at her, nevertheless, it cannot be denied that here Hamlet does intrude into his mother's private domain, and there abuse her in the most specifically sexual terms. We should also recall that his references to "incestuous sheets" are not confined to this one scene. It is fair to say that Hamlet shows a prurient interest in his mother's sexual activity. We might say of his expressed abhorrence of this what Gertrude herself says of the Player Queen's expression of devotion to her husband: he protests too much. This becomes an illustration of Freud's basic concept of *Verneinung*, "denial or negation." The unconscious mind makes material known to the conscious, but there it is censored. The stronger the id makes its contents known—"my mother's body fascinates me"—the sharper the ego's rejection: "my mother's

body disgusts me.” A similar argument can be made on the other side of the Oedipus complex: Hamlet’s virulent hatred of Claudius, his reduction of him to subhuman monster, derives its energy from his own repressed desire to kill his father.

This much, then, is clear: only the most conservative (i.e., repressed) critics dismiss Freud’s suggestion and the specific way in which Jones applies it to the question of Hamlet’s delay. There is much more, however, in Freud’s original conception and in other aspects of his remarkably elaborated model of the human mind, which can be appreciated in its application to *Hamlet*. First, it is historically specific: he distinguishes the cultures from which the two tragic masterpieces sprang. Since Oedipus actually does kill his father and marry his mother—though unknowingly—Freud reckons this as an indication that the Greek culture behind Sophocles could tolerate such a manifestation of incestuous desire and aggression. Since Freud’s interest at the time was specifically dreams, and their revelation of the contents of the unconscious—to which he compared art, as revealing the latent fears and desires of the whole culture—he draws our attention to Jocasta’s all but last words on the subject:

What should a man fear whose affairs
are ruled by chance, and he can foreknow nothing.
It is best to live life lightly, as he can.
You should not fear the marriage bed of your mother:
Many men have dreamed before now—and heard from oracles
—of sleeping with their mother. But he who thinks
such things are nothing, lives his life most easily. (*Oedipus Tyrannos* 977–83)

Jocasta speaks these lines to the man whose essential virtue is intellectual curiosity—Freud was shocked when his students engraved a medal honoring his fiftieth birthday that depicted Oedipus solving the riddle of the Sphinx, a scene he himself had long taken to be emblematic of his career—and she contradicts the motto of Apollo, the god of poetry and philosophy, whose temple at Delphi was inscribed: “Know thyself.” Freud compares Hamlet to a dream:

The prince in the play, who had to disguise himself as a madman, was behaving just as dreams do in reality; so we can say of dreams what Hamlet says of himself, concealing the true circumstances under a cloak of wit and unintelligibility: “I am mad north-by-north-west.” (480–81)

This is not a facile comparison. Freud meant to suggest that Hamlet’s madness, though feigned, reveals in distorted form his true emotions, as do dreams. He plans to kill Claudius, but cannot fulfill that plan; he abuses his mother for her excessive sexuality and cannot stop thinking about it.

In another of Freud’s profoundly perceptive essays, he distinguishes between “Mourning and Melancholy.” In the former, he argues, the patient goes through a normal process of gradually relinquishing the object of his desire when it has been lost to him. The energy invested in the lost object is then reinvested in the ego of the subject. In the latter, the process is complicated and incomplete. For the melancholic, the object has shown itself to be unworthy, but in withdrawing his erotic energy from the disparaged object, he introjects it into his own ego, so that “a shadow falls across the ego.” This should remind us of Hegel’s description of “the beautiful soul: “Its activity consists in yearning, which merely loses itself in becoming an unsubstantiated shadowy object.” Hamlet’s object is his mother, whom he disparages, but he cannot let her go; hence, the shadow that falls across his ego. We see then a conjunction of the psychologically specific and the philosophically general. The choice of the impossible object—usually incestuous, as Werther’s obsession with his friend’s wife—can be metonymic: *taedium vitae* is figured in the sexual relation. Even Hamlet’s mourning for his dead father is abnormal: Claudius and Gertrude tell him that loss of fathers is “common,” and wonder why his grief is so “particular.” In Freud’s model we can see that guilt and envy complicate his emotions. Notoriously, the most pathological mourning is that of the child who harbored repressed desires for the parent’s death. These children are often haunted by the ghost of that parent. We shall pursue these issues in discussing the contributions to Hamlet criticism of those working in the psychoanalytic tradition two or three generations after Freud’s original observation.

In 1919, reviewing two recent scholarly books, the great Anglo-American poet and critic T. S. Eliot made the charge that *Hamlet* is an artistic failure, since “Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear” (25). It seems likely that Eliot knew of Freud’s citation of *Hamlet* when he wrote this. He therefore obliquely suggests the difference between conscious and unconscious thought in art. It is precisely Hamlet’s difficulty in expressing the cause of his malaise that makes his play so fascinating as a work of art. (Jacqueline Rose, for example, has referred to Hamlet as the “*Mona Lisa* of Literature.”) It could be argued that only the more accessible, less profoundly disturbing work of art offers what Eliot requires here, an “objective correlative,” “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion.”

Freud's original observation, that Hamlet cannot kill Claudius because he identifies with him, since Claudius has fulfilled Hamlet's own oedipal desire to take his father's place in his mother's bed, was set within the context of con-

ventional criticism of the play by his disciple and biographer Ernest Jones. Among other observations, Jones called attention to the anti-oedipal character of Hamlet's fantasies. He identifies with his dead father and has to be warned twice by the Ghost not to take hostile action against his mother. Classical scholars had already cited Hamlet's affinities with Orestes, who was required by Apollo to avenge his father Agamemnon's murder on his mother Clytemnestra, becoming thus a matricide. (We have already noted that both Hamlet and Oedipus enter their mother's chambers with their swords drawn.)

At the heart of Freud's reading of *Hamlet* are two related propositions that are fundamental to all his psychology: the powerful influence of infantile sexuality on the patterns of unconscious thinking in the lives of adults. Naive resistance to Freudian interpretations of *Hamlet* usually derives from failure to appreciate this connection. We are not meant to see Hamlet as a three-year-old child; rather we are asked to consider how his strange behavior in maturity might reflect the normal experience of early childhood. By definition, neurotic symptoms develop in the adult when a trauma occurs that precipitates fears or desires suspended in the unconscious since childhood. For Hamlet this trauma is double: "his father's death and [his mother's] o'erhasty marriage." Freud's insistence on the universality of the Oedipus complex—all sons desire to take their father's place in their mother's bed—helps explain the universal and seemingly similar appeal of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*.

Conventional critics falter when they misread Freud, thinking that he sees only sexual significance in the plays. On the contrary, both plays combine plots of a transparently sexual nature with intellectual and religious themes expressed in imagery that relates "carnal knowledge" to rational thought and emotional disturbance. In Sophocles' play, "seeing" and "knowing" are parts of the same verb *oidea*, which is then found at the root of Oedipus's name, which also means "swollen foot." Oedipus has seen his mother's body and known her carnally; his virtue is intellectual curiosity, and his wife-mother Iokaste tries to inhibit his search for the truth of his identity by telling him, "Many men have dreamed of sleeping with their mothers . . . best to forget such things and bear life lightly." As long as Oedipus has sight in his eyes, he remains blind to the nature of his crime; only when he blinds himself does he begin to have the "insight" that has been the virtue of the "blind seer," Tiresias, throughout the play. Tiresias himself had lost his sight when he offended the goddess Hera. She and Zeus disputed whether the man or the woman had greater pleasure in sexual intercourse. They appealed to Tiresias for an answer since he had started life as a man, been turned into a woman, and then returned to a man. (The two occasions when he changed sexes both involved his interruption of the coupling of two snakes, which is usually interpreted as

childhood curiosity—and jealousy—over parental sexuality.) Since he had enjoyed sex as both man and woman, he was the expert witness Zeus and Hera required. His reply, that if there were ten parts of pleasure in sexual intercourse, nine belonged to the woman, offended the prudish Hera, so she blinded him. Zeus could not undo that punishment, but in compensation he gave Tiresias "second sight." In both cases, then—that of Oedipus and Tiresias—a sexual crime is punished by blindness. Among the functions of "dreamwork" traced by Freud is "displacement": dreams disguise their content by displacing action from one object onto another. This is "displacement upward," or sublimation: the talion punishment ("like for like," as in the biblical "eye for an eye") for incest is castration, but here that punishment is displaced upward onto the eyes. The eyes are the organs of seeing, and therefore of knowing, so the Oedipus myth and Sophocles' play examine the relation between incestuous sexual relations and extraordinary intellectual activity.

In Freud's analysis, the male child gives up his claim on the mother when he recognizes sexual difference: he sees that she "lacks" a penis and thereby fantasizes that he himself might be deprived of his penis by his father in retaliation for his claim upon her (castration anxiety). This "normal resolution of the Oedipus Complex" sets in between the ages of three and five and leads to the latency period, which lasts until puberty. With that sudden rush of new sexual energy, the adolescent male displaces his interest in his mother onto other women, sometimes remarkably like the mother. We might think here of the close relations between Gertrude and Ophelia. Not only does Gertrude twice announce—contradicting Polonius and Laertes who insist Hamlet is out of her sights—that she had hoped Hamlet and Ophelia might marry, but she also describes Ophelia's death. They are, of course, the only two women in the play. Most important, Hamlet's misogyny is displaced from his mother onto Ophelia: having convinced himself that his mother is a whore, all women are whores, including the innocent young Ophelia, whom he abuses in the nunnery scene, where "nunnery" carries a secondary meaning of "whorehouse."

Other details of *Hamlet* that might be related to Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex include the congruence of the relations in the royal family with the relations in Polonius's family: whereas Hamlet sees his oedipal desires fulfilled by his uncle Claudius, the father he actually kills is Ophelia's father, Polonius. We have already noted the close relations between Gertrude and Ophelia; both Polonius and Laertes inhibit Hamlet's desire for Ophelia and Hamlet kills them both; while the most obvious importance of Polonius's and Laertes' proprietary interest in Ophelia is their repression of her desire, it nevertheless creates the dynamics of a "female Oedipus complex": the daughter acquiesces in her father's sexual prerogative over her. All this is worked out in the intricate theme of madness: Polonius keeps insisting that Hamlet's madness

is due to unrequited love for his daughter, when we know that the madness is in fact feigned, but even were it true, it is his father's death and his mother's remarriage that unhinges him; Ophelia goes mad in fact, and this is due to her father's death, murdered by her would-be lover, Hamlet. The two cases conflated suggest the equation of madness with a father's death and unrequited love.

Shakespeare presents a similarly complex problem in *Lear*. There, two of Lear's daughters betray him and one is faithful; he goes mad. Of Gloucester's two sons, one betrays him, and one is faithful, pretending to be mad; Gloucester is blinded. Both of Lear's faithless daughters are sexually promiscuous, as is also Gloucester's faithless son. What is the power of the father to control and direct the desire of his child? Here we seem to approach the "Freudian myth" of *Totem and Taboo*: in the primal horde the father kept all the women for himself, so the sons rose up against him and killed him; this oedipal crime is commemorated in the paradoxical worship and then ritualized sacrifice of the animal by which a tribe identifies itself.

Other of Freud's treatises that also seem to have a bearing on *Hamlet* are "On Narcissism" and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." We have seen that in "Mourning and Melancholy," Freud distinguishes between normal mourning and pathological obsession with the loss of a love object. In the former he sees the necessity for a "working through" of the grief: the mourner relives shared moments with the dead person and gradually separates himself from the other, narcissistically preserving himself from complete identification with death. In the latter, this is not possible because the relationship was not a "happy love" to begin with. Here the lover was not accepted by the beloved, so to protect himself, he disparaged the object of his desire, but so completely did he continue to identify with the beloved that that disparagement reflected itself upon him, so that "a shadow falls across his ego."

It is not coincidental that Freud chose the same term for this malaise as Shakespeare did for Hamlet's condition. Melancholy is established in the tradition of philosophical and psychological writing before Shakespeare and continues throughout the romantic period and into the late nineteenth century to be particularly associated with unrequited love. I have already mentioned Goethe's young heroes Werther and Wilhelm. All of this can be traced back to the courtly love tradition founded by the troubadours of the twelfth century: the young poet chose as his object of desire the woman who was impossible for him to win—his master's mistress. So completely does the lover rely on the beloved to give him a sense of his own authentic being that when she is unresponsive or unfaithful to him, his sense of himself and of order in the world dissolves. Shakespeare's most compelling portrait of such a love is Othello's. Early on he confides to Iago of Desdemona: "Perdition catch my soul but I do love her, / And when I love her not, Chaos is come again."

In this context we can immediately see why Polonius is confused by Hamlet's behavior. The literary as well as the philosophical-psychological tradition insisted that the melancholic was unhappy in love. In Act I, scene ii, before Hamlet assumes his "antic disposition," Claudius and Gertrude complain that Hamlet's mourning is excessive: "Why is it so particular with thee?" Freud in fact interpolates a position between normal mourning and melancholy, where the mourner feels guilty for the death of the beloved. This, then, would support the oedipal interpretation: Hamlet's grief for his dead father is excessive because that death fulfilled his desire, and therefore he feels guilty. But the death of his father is not the only loss he feels. More pressing on him, as we learn from his first soliloquy, is the unfaithfulness of his mother: the world has become "rank and gross" because of her, "an unweeded garden." He mourns the actual death of his father, but also the image of his mother as chaste and pure, his fantasy of her before this double disaster. His wish for death—"Would that this too too sullied flesh would melt"—derives more from his mother's disgrace than his father's death. Freud therefore precisely describes Hamlet's melancholy: he has disparaged the object of his desire and yet continues to introject that object, so "a shadow falls across his ego."

In his essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction," Freud presents the argument that the ego can invest itself libidinally. Indeed he claims that this kind of object choice in maturity derives from the most archaic level of object relations: "The child has originally two objects of desire, himself and the woman who tends him, and the second leans up against the first." Here Freud's frequent insistence on the extreme selfishness of the very young child—"His Majesty the Baby"—and its tendency to promote its own well-being to the extent of ignoring or even harming others takes precedence over any inclination to push oedipal orientation back into the preoedipal period. The mother is first loved only because of her nurturing role, and not recognized as desirable in and of herself. We shall later see indications that even oedipal attachments are not pure and simple, but rather a function of fantasized competition with the father. That is, the male child's love for the mother throughout the early period of development is part of a dynamic of self-definition and assertion. Freud projects this dynamic forward into maturity in interesting ways that might remind us of Hamlet. First, he describes the cold, anaesthetic quality of the narcissist, unaffected by the sufferings of others, completely focused on his own narrow needs, determined to find some proper setting for his own excellence. This recalls the description of the Greek youth Narcissus himself as presented by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (III.339–510). He is beloved by both men and women, but responds to none; one of his disparaged lovers curses him, the gods hear, and he falls in love with his own image in the pool. There he retires to admire his own beauty, and he gradually wastes away because he cannot

achieve consummation of his desire; finally the gods take pity and change him into the flower narcissus, which leans over the bank of the pond, reflecting its beauty back upon itself.

This reasoning becomes fundamental to Freud's later analyses of the structure of the psyche and the outlets it finds for its energy. He associates narcissistic orientation of desire, or ego instincts, with the death drive and the investment of libidinal energy in others with life itself. We cannot help but see Hamlet in the posture of Narcissus—remembering always that if there are ten parts of borrowing from classical sources in Shakespeare, nine are from Ovid—contemplating himself in the mirror of his soliloquies, insensitive to the suffering and death he causes others. His coldness to Ophelia, in particular, might recall Narcissus's treatment of the nymph Echo, who could only repeat the last words spoken to her and never initiate speech of her own: "Soft you now, / The fair Ophelia. Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins remember'd." She then becomes the antithesis to narcissistic object choice: she depends on others to give her some sense of herself.

The other direction in which Freud takes narcissism is toward homosexuality. Homosexual object choice in maturity is structurally related to infantile narcissism, a sort of recapitulation. The clearest Shakespearean text on this phenomenon is the *Sonnets*, where the Poet seeks in the Fair Youth the younger, more beautiful image of himself, his nostalgically reconstituted, narcissistically invested self. We might also see in the Dark Lady some premonition of the fear and loathing of the mature female expressed in Hamlet's vision of his post-lapsarian mother. Twice Hamlet seems to be taunted with the specter of homosexuality: Claudius calls his grief "unmanly" (I.ii.94), and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern pick up on his innocent reference to mankind with knowing nods: "Man delights not me—nor women neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so" (II.ii.301–3). More important is his devotion to his friend Horatio, who serves as the antitype to the hypocrisy represented by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
And could of men distinguish her election,
Sh' hath seal'd thee for herself. (III.ii.63–65)

Clearly, to the extent that Hamlet is capable of loving another, his object is Horatio rather than Ophelia. Later, when we project Freud's theories forward into the theoretical developments of his followers, we shall consider Horatio as Hamlet's "self-object"—one whom he invests libidinally only because he considers him a part of himself, inseparable and unthreatening, representing to Hamlet the very virtues—compassion and constancy—he sees lacking in himself.

"Beyond the Pleasure Principle" is one of Freud's most difficult and influential texts. It begins innocently enough with a bit of "baby watching": Freud observes his eighteen-month-old grandson, who he insists is not precocious, playing a game. He has a spool on a string, and as he throws it out of his crib, he cries, "Fort!" ("Gone"), and as he reels it back in again, he cries, "Da!" ("Here"). According to Freud, the spool represents the child's mother; so unhappy is he in her absence that he tries to manipulate his reality, pretending that he can send her off and bring her back by his own will. That the child would repeat painful moments of deprivation might remind us of the normal mourning process. Freud goes further, correcting his own earlier view that most of human behavior can be explained as the pursuit of pleasure. Now he admits that there is something beyond this and decides it is atavistic or phylogenetic. Pleasure is excitation that demands satisfaction; the organism seeks homeostasis, the restoration of equilibrium. This, like the attempt to restore the primary stage of narcissism, is nostalgic. The organism knows homeostasis only before birth and at death: there is then a death drive that takes us back to our preconscious origins. As Freud puts it, "Every living thing follows its own unique path to death." He also related the death drive to the Second Law of Thermodynamics: "Every closed system suffers entropy," meaning that if no new energy is infused, the machine runs down. He thinks here, as always, of libidinal energy: the subject who is focused on himself is death directed; only the subject who invests an external object with his energy and receives reciprocal energy from that object can continue to live.

Can we relate this mechanical model to Hamlet? He wants to die because the world has become for him "a sterile promontory." Perhaps we can see him regressing along a path that takes him back through previous stages of development. We would expect him, as his mother does, to move forward and choose a wife. Instead he rejects the fair Ophelia, having associated her with his mother, whom he now considers unworthy. All he is left with is Horatio, who might be considered that narcissistically constituted primitive object, the self-object, which represents the child's first attempt to mirror himself in the world. Indeed at the end of the play, Hamlet insists, again narcissistically, that Horatio absent himself from bliss a while (i.e., continue to live), to report Hamlet's story aright to the world. Horatio then becomes almost literally Hamlet's ideal ego, that corrected image of himself he would project to the world. We have already seen that Horatio also represents Hamlet's ego ideal, that figure in the world whom he chooses to emulate. We shall come to see that Laertes and Fortinbras represent Hamlet's aggressively invested self-images, those figures in the world with whom Hamlet must compete in order to ensure himself of his continued authenticity.

Moving from Freud forward along the divergent lines in the development of psychoanalytic theory, we might concentrate on two: the Anglo-American

school of object-relations theory and the radical rereading of Freud by the French analyst Jacques Lacan, who is as much philosopher as psychologist. Melanie Klein, a German analyst who emigrated to England before Freud, first began to expand and elaborate Freud's theory of the relation between subject and object, emphasizing its dynamic interplay. Rather than continue to use such Freudian analogies as the amoeba's putting out its pseudopod to ingest a piece of foreign matter, Klein spoke of the subject-object relation as conceptual and interactive: the nursing child splits the maternal breast into good and bad objects and then introjects these objects so that he both projects his own emotions onto the mother (fantasizing the mother herself as ravenously hungry and therefore threatening to eat the child: the "Hansel and Gretel complex") and responds emotionally to his image of her, feeling guilt for his animosity and envy of her power.

Klein developed intricate techniques for studying the emotional life of the very young child, employing toys and patterns of play. She remained faithful to Freud's fundamental principle of investigating the images of objects that the subject forms and assimilates to rather than focus on what actually exists in the world—"real" objects.

Klein was followed in these paths of research in England by D. W. Winnicott and in America by Otto Kernberg. Winnicott insisted on the power of the mother to determine the child's image of himself: "the first mirror is the mother's eyes." Kernberg focused on the infantile origins of pathological narcissism, that borderline condition between neurosis and psychosis where the subject is not completely broken from reality (the psychosis of schizophrenia) but cannot quite distinguish the alterity of others (the neurotic relates with objects, but in obsessive and compulsive ways). The pathological narcissist can see others only as parts of himself or invests others as "self-objects." The classic case is the relation of Achilles to Patroklos in *The Iliad* (see my *Childlike Achilles*). Achilles sends Patroklos into battle wearing his own armor, so that when Hektor kills Patroklos, stripping the body and donning the armor himself, Achilles, in vengeance, must then face a mirror image of himself on the battlefield, essentially committing suicide by killing Hektor. (It is fated that Achilles himself must die soon after he kills Hektor.) We can then say that Patroklos and Hektor represent for Achilles erotically and aggressively invested self-objects, respectively.

We see something of the same dynamics in *Hamlet*. Doubling is the essential trope of the play, reaching up from the rhetorical level (hendiadys) through plot to character and theme. The play is full of sons who avenge their fathers: Laertes, Fortinbras, Pyrrhus (Achilles' son in the Player's speech). From the perspective of the analysts who emphasize the importance of very early childhood development, we might see such reverse images of Hamlet as

a reactive formation against the power of the mother. Certainly we see Horatio that way. His relation to Hamlet is precisely the same as Patroklos's to Achilles: the honest, straightforward, perhaps slightly simple-minded, but wholly supportive friend who poses no threat of competition or antagonism. If, with Klein, we see Hamlet as having split the maternal imago into good and bad—she tells him in the closet scene that he has "cleft her heart in twain" and he tells her, "O, throw away the worser part of it"—the good is that image of the Lady of the courtly love tradition, pure and serene, maternal without being sexual, the Virgin Mary; the bad mother is the whore. The world is the mother's body, so it has become "rank and gross." Nature is simply "she who gives birth." It should not surprise us to find among Klein's works a study of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. Clytemnestra is the whorish and murderous mother: she dreams she has suckled a snake, and it has drawn blood along with milk from her breast; this is Orestes come home to kill his mother for her having killed his father. Shakespeare has captured the same kind of mother in Lady Macbeth, who wants to un milk her breasts, fill them full of gall, and would gladly snatch the child nursing from her breast and smash its brains out rather than break her word. Janet Adelman has studied this type in Shakespeare in her *Suffocating Mothers*.

Jacques Lacan disparages the object relations school of psychoanalysis, but many of his concepts can be shown to have been derived from its most important theorists. Everything is changed, however, in the prism of his extraordinarily complex system of thought. Intellectually, he is most influenced by the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and the philosophies of Hegel and Heidegger. In 1959 Lacan devoted seven seminars to *Hamlet*, within a series devoted to the subject "Desire and Its Interpretation." Lacan reads the play as Hamlet's attempt to assume his own desire, to become the subject of desire rather than its object for another. Following Freud, Lacan speaks in terms of the phallus as the locus of desire, but he insists it signifies lack: "to be the phallus for the other, one must oneself be castrated."

Hamlet begins the action of the play caught in the desire of his mother. Here Lacan uses one of his pseudomathematical figures: $\$ \diamond \langle a \rangle$. The subject is barred—deprived of authentic being—because he is subjected to the desire of a figure who has assumed for him the position of his own lost or compromised image of himself. His mother was the locus of his original conception of himself; he depended on her for reflecting to him, as in Freud's Fort-Da game, his sense of his own existence. In Winnicott's terms this would be "the transitional object," some perhaps originally tangible thing (like a blanket) that represents for the child an external, alienable self. This "thing" is he himself—we recall here all the uses of reflexive pronouns in the play—with which he attempts to fill the void he recognizes in the agony of weaning

and the other processes of distancing that the very young child suffers. Melanie Klein had argued that the original object is the breast, but then the male child focuses on the penis, attempting to become that for the mother, whom he sees as castrated. Pre-oedipal and oedipal fantasies are merged or layered with each other so that the child would take the place of the absent father but sees himself only as his own fantasized image of the father, the castrated penis. Lacan claims that Hamlet's mourning is for this image of himself, which becomes merged in the graveyard scene with the dead Ophelia: he is not ashamed to make the equation Ophelia = phallus.

All this talk of phalluses is embarrassing and offputting for the non-Freudian, especially those with some sense of the patriarchal imperative lying behind Freud's original use of the term. It is important to avoid two attempts at revision when reading Lacan: one must not simply replace the phallus with the concept of power, and one must not ignore his insistence that the phallus signifies lack. The difference between the penis and the phallus is that the penis is a biological fact, but the phallus is a fantasy: it suggests power, but like everything else in the imaginary world, it is not what it seems but in fact the opposite. The penis becomes erect when the sexual desire of the male is aroused. This indicates lack: if the subject were complete in and of himself he would not feel the need of another. (One might think first of Adam here, and then of Jesus, as Hamlet so often does.) The phallus comes to stand in Lacan's analysis for the deprivation of authentic being that any thinking subject—notably Hamlet—begins to feel, but this is not just an amorphous, unconnected sense of inadequacy. Rather, it is specifically tied to and derived from early childhood deprivation. Lacan, like Shakespeare and the Greek tragedians, insists on materializing his metaphysics: their characters are caught in domestic situations (incest, parricide, etc.), and from these they extrapolate philosophy. If Lacan had known more Greek, he might have seen that Ophelia's name can be etymologized from *opheilo*, "to owe, to be obligated," which is frequently used in constructions denoting wish: "would that . . . !" In Homer it can be spelled *ophello*, which is another verb, meaning "to increase, magnify, swell." Probably unrelated, except through "false etymology," is *ophis*, "snake," that phallic creature crawling through the garden, who is responsible for all man's separation from plenty and completeness.