

Jacques Lacan

Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*

The Object Ophelia

As a sort of come-on, I announced that I would speak today about that piece of bait named Ophelia, and I'll be as good as my word.

Our purpose, as you remember, is to show the tragedy of desire as it appears in *Hamlet*, human desire, that is, such as we are concerned with in psychoanalysis.

We distort this desire and confuse it with other terms if we fail to locate it in reference to a set of co-ordinates that, as Freud showed, establish the subject in a certain position of dependence upon the signifier. The signifier is not a reflection, a product pure and simple of what are called interhuman relationships — all psychoanalytic experience indicates the contrary. To account for the presuppositions of this experience, we must refer to a topological system without which all the phenomena produced in our domain would be indistinguishable and meaningless. The illustration shows the essential co-ordinates of this topology.

The story of *Hamlet* (and this is why I chose it) reveals a most vivid dramatic sense of this topology, and this is the source of its exceptional power of captivation. Shakespeare's poetic skill doubtless guided him along the way, step by step, but we can also assume that he introduced into the play some observations from his own experience, however indirectly.

Shakespeare's play contains one shift in the plot that distinguishes it from previous treatments of the story, including both the narratives of Saxo Grammaticus and Belleforest and the other plays of which we possess fragments. This shift involves the character Ophelia.

Ophelia is present, to be sure, from the beginning of the legend on. She appears in the early versions, as I've said, as the bait in

the trap that Hamlet doesn't fall into, first because he's warned in advance, and then because Ophelia herself refuses to have any part of it, having long been in love with the prince, according to Belleforest's version. Perhaps Shakespeare merely extended her function in the plot, which is to capture Hamlet's secret by surprise. But she thus becomes one of the innermost elements in Hamlet's drama, the drama of Hamlet as the man who has lost the way of his desire. She provides an essential pivot in the hero's progress toward his mortal rendezvous with his act—an act that he carries out, in some sense, in spite of himself. There is a level in the subject on which it can be said that his fate is expressed in terms of a pure signifier, a level at which he is merely the reverse-side of a message that is not even his own. Well, Hamlet is the very image of this level of subjectivity, as we shall see even more clearly in what follows.

1

Our first step in this direction was to express the extent to which the play is dominated by the Mother as Other [*Autre*], i.e., the primordial subject of the demand [*la demande*]. The omnipotence of which we are always speaking in psychoanalysis is first of all the omnipotence of the subject as subject of the first demand, and this omnipotence must be related back to the Mother.

The principal subject of the play is beyond all doubt Prince Hamlet. The play is the drama of an individual subjectivity, and the hero is always present on stage, more than in any other play. How is the desire of the Other manifested in the very perspective of this subject, Prince Hamlet? This desire, of the mother, is essentially manifested in the fact that, confronted on one hand with an eminent, idealized, exalted object—his father—and on the other with the degraded, despicable object Claudius, the criminal and adulterous brother, Hamlet does not choose.

His mother does not choose because of something present inside her, like an instinctive voracity. The sacrosanct genital object that we recently added to our technical vocabulary appears to her as

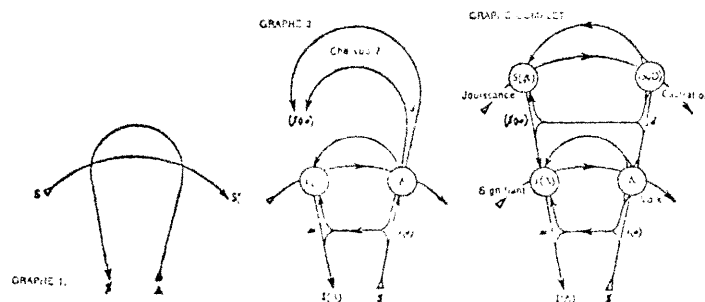
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an object to be enjoyed [*objet d'une jouissance*] in what is truly the direct satisfaction of a need, and nothing else. This is the aspect that makes Hamlet waver in his abjuration of his mother. Even when he transmits to her—in the crudest, cruellest terms—the essential message with which the ghost, his father, has entrusted him, he still first appeals to her to abstain. Then, a moment later, his appeal fails, and he sends her to Claudius' bed, into the arms of the man who once again will not fail to make her yield.

This fall, this abandon, gives us a model that enables us to conceive how it is that Hamlet's desire—his zeal with respect to an act that he so longs to carry out that the whole world becomes for him a living reproach for his perpetual inadequacy to his own will—how this zeal always flags. The dependence of his desire on the Other subject forms the permanent dimension of Hamlet's drama.

To get a better grip on the problem we must go into a psychological detail that would remain utterly enigmatic if it were not placed in the total orientation that determines the direction and meaning of the tragedy: how this permanent dimension touches the very nerve and sinew of Hamlet's will—which would appear in my diagram as the hook, the question mark, of the *Che vuoi?* of subjectivity constituted and articulated in the Other.¹

¹ Lacan refers repeatedly in these sessions of his seminar to a series of diagrams with which his audience is already familiar from the previous year. Three of the diagrams are reproduced here as they appear in the text "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir dans l'inconscient freudien" (1960; in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* [Paris: Seuil, 1966], pp. 793-827; graphs, pp. 805, 808 [not reproduced here], 815, 817). The reader is referred both to the theoretical development provided by the essay and to the remarks on these graphs in the "Table commentée des représentations graphiques" prepared by Jacques-Alain Miller for inclusion in the second and succeeding editions of the *Écrits* ("Les graphes du désir," pp. 907-908). Cf. also the English edition, *Écrits: A Selection* (Norton, 1977) pp. 334-335.—Tr.



The end-term that buttresses this model of the subject and his question, is symbolized on our graph by the barred subject (\$) in the presence of the object a —in the economic system of the psyche we call this the fantasy. Desire, which can be situated on the line A [$\$ \diamond D$] at a variable indeterminate point, finds in the fantasy its reference, its substratum, its precise tuning in the imaginary register.

There is something mysterious about the fantasy; indeed, it's ambiguous and paradoxical. It is on one hand the end-term of desire, and on the other hand, if we approach it from one of its aspects, it's actually located in the conscious: ambiguous indeed. Insofar as the fantasy marks every human passion with those traits which we call perverse, it appears in a sufficiently paradoxical form to have long ago motivated the rejection of the phantasmatic dimension as being on the order of the absurd. In this respect an essential step was taken in the present age when psychoanalysis undertook the interpretation of the fantasy in its very perversity. This interpretation was made possible only by placing the fantasy in an economy of the unconscious—this is what you see in the graph.

On this graph the fantasy is hooked up on the circuit of the unconscious, a very different one from the circuit commanded by the subject, which I call the level of the demand [*demande*]. In the normal state of affairs, nothing from the unconscious circuit is carried over to the level of the message, of the signified of the Other, which is the sum and module of the significations acquired by the subject in human discourse. The fantasy is not communicated to the message level: it remains separate and unconscious. When, on the other hand, it does cross over to the level of the message, we find ourselves in an atypical situation. The phases in which the fantasy makes this crossover are of a more or less pathological order. We shall give a name to these moments of crossover, of communication, which, as the diagram indicates, can take place only in one direction. I underscore this essential statement, because our purpose here is to refine our understanding and application of this apparatus.

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For now, let us consider only how the moment in which Hamlet's desire becomes distracted and deflected functions in Shakespeare's tragedy, insofar as this moment must be related back to the precise adjustments of his imaginary register. Ophelia's place in this constellation is on the level of the letter a as it appears in our representation of the fantasy. [...]

With respect to the object a , at once image and pathos, the subject feels himself to be in an imaginary situation of otherness. This object satisfies no need and is itself already relative, i.e., placed in relation to the subject. It is obvious from simple phenomenology (and this is something to which I shall return in a few moments) that the subject is present in the fantasy. And the object is the object of desire only by virtue of being the end-term of the fantasy. The object takes the place, I would say, of what the subject is — symbolically — deprived of.

This may seem a bit abstract to those who have not accompanied us along the road that has led up to this point. What is it that the subject is deprived of? The phallus; and it is from the phallus that the object gets its function in the fantasy, and from the phallus that desire is constituted with the fantasy as its reference.

The object of the fantasy, image and pathos, is that other element that takes the place of what the subject is symbolically deprived of. Thus the imaginary object is in a position to condense in itself the virtues or the dimension of being and to become that veritable delusion of being [*leurre de l'être*] that Simone Weil treats when she focuses on the very densest and most opaque relationship of a man to the object of his desire: the relationship of Molière's Miser to his strongbox. This is the culmination of the fetish character of the object of human desire. Indeed all objects of the human world have this character, from one angle at least. [...]

The opaque character of the object a in the imaginary fantasy determines it in its most pronounced forms as the pole of perverse desire. It is the structural element of perversions, insofar as perversion is characterized by the complete emphasis in the fantasy

on the strictly imaginary term, *a*. In parentheses with it we also encounter *a* plus *b* plus *c* and so forth: the most elaborate combinations of sequelae, of lingering traces combined by chance, by means of which a fantasy has crystallized and functions in a perverse desire. But however bizarre the fantasy of perverse desire may appear to you, never forget that the subject is always in some way present and involved in that fantasy. In the fantasy the subject always stands in some relationship to the pathos of existence — to the suffering of existing itself or that of existing as a term in a sexual configuration. For a sadistic fantasy to endure, the subject's interest in the person who suffers humiliation must obviously be due to the possibility of the subject's being submitted to the same humiliation himself. This is the phenomenological point to which I was alluding a few moments ago. It's a wonder indeed that people could ever think of avoiding this dimension and could treat the sadistic tendency as an instance of primal aggression pure and simple.

2

The time has come to articulate the true opposition between perversion and neurosis.

Perversion is indeed something articulate, interpretable, analyzable, and on precisely the same level as neurosis. In the fantasy, as I have said, an essential relationship of the subject to his being is localized and fixed. Well, whereas in the perversion, the accent is on the object *a*, the neurosis can be situated as having its accent on the other term of the fantasy, the *§*.

The fantasy is located at the extreme tip, the end-point of the subject's question, as if it were its buttress [*butée*: lit., abutment], just as the subject tries to get control of himself in the fantasy, in the space beyond the demand. This is because he must find again in the very discourse of the Other what was lost for him, the subject, the moment he entered into this discourse. What ultimately matters is not the truth but the hour [*l'heure*] of truth.

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This is what permits us to specify the factor that most profoundly distinguishes the fantasy of neurosis from the fantasy of perversion.

The fantasy of perversion is namable. It is in space. It suspends an essential relationship. It is not atemporal but rather outside of time. In neurosis, on the contrary, the very basis of the relationships of subject to object on the fantasy level, is the relationship of the subject to time. The object is charged with the significance sought in what I call the hour of truth, in which the object is always at another hour, fast or slow, early or late.

I have said before that hysteria is characterized by the function of an unsatisfied desire and obsession by the function of an impossible desire. But beyond these two terms the two cases are distinguished by inverse relationships with time: the obsessive neurotic always repeats the initial germ of his trauma, i.e., a certain precipitancy, a fundamental lack of maturation.

This is at the base of neurotic behavior, in its most general form: the subject tries to find his sense of time [*lire son heure*] in his object, and it is even in the object that he will learn to tell time [*lire l'heure*]. This is where we get back to our friend Hamlet, to whom everyone can attribute at will all the forms of neurotic behavior, as far as you want to go, i.e., up to character neurosis. The first factor that I indicated to you in Hamlet's structure was his situation of dependence with respect to the desire of the Other, the desire of his mother. Here now is the second factor that I ask you to recognize: Hamlet is constantly suspended in the time of the Other, throughout the entire story until the very end.

Do you remember one of the first turning-points we focussed on when we were beginning to decipher the text of *Hamlet*? During the play scene the king becomes unsettled and visibly reveals his own guilt, incapable of viewing the dramatization of his own crime. Hamlet relishes his triumph and mocks the king. But on the way to the meeting he has already arranged with his mother, he comes upon his stepfather in prayer: Claudius is shaken to the depths of his being by the scene that has just shown him the very coun-

tenance and program of his deed. Hamlet stands before this Claudius, who by every indication is not only in no state to defend himself but also does not even see the threat that hangs over his head. And Hamlet stops, because it's not time. It's not the hour of the Other: not time for the Other to render his "audit" to heaven. That would be too kind, from one point of view, or too cruel, from another. That might not avenge his father properly, because prayer, being a gesture of repentance, might open up the way to salvation for Claudius. In any case, one thing is sure: Hamlet, who has just managed to "catch the conscience of the king" as planned—stops. Not for a moment does he think that his time has come. Whatever may happen later, this is not the hour of the Other, and he suspends his action. Whatever Hamlet may do, he will do it only at the hour of the Other.

Hamlet accepts everything. Let's not forget that at the beginning, in the state of disgust he was already in (even before his meeting with the ghost) because of his mother's remarriage, he thought only of leaving for Wittenberg. A recent commentary on a certain practicality that is becoming more and more typical of present-day life, used this as an illustration, noting that Hamlet was the best example of the fact that many dramatic crises can be avoided by the prompt issuance of passports. If Hamlet had been given his papers to travel to Wittenberg, there would have been no drama.

When he stays on, it is the hour of his parents. When he suspends his crime, it is the hour of the others. When he leaves for England, it is the hour of his stepfather. It's the hour of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern when he sends them on ahead to death—with a casualness that amazed Freud—by means of a bit of hocus-pocus that he brings off not half badly. And it is the hour of Ophelia, the hour of her suicide, when the tragedy will run its course, in a moment when Hamlet has just realized that it's not hard to kill a man, the time to say "one" . . . he won't know what hit him.

He receives word of an event that in no way seems to promise an opportunity to kill Claudius: a tournament, the rules of which have been worked out to the last detail. They tempt him with the

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stakes—all precious objects, swords, fittings, and other things that have value only as luxuries; this should be followed in the text, for these are the nuances of the world of the collector. Hamlet's sense of rivalry and honor is aroused by the assumption that Laertes is the more skillful swordsman and by the handicap thus granted to Hamlet in the terms of the wager. This complicated ceremony is a trap for him to fall into, laid by his stepfather and his friend Laertes: we know this, but Hamlet does not. For him, going along with the wager will be a lark, like playing hookey. Still, he feels a slight warning signal in the region of his heart: something troubles him. For a moment here the dialectic of foreboding brings its special accent to the play. But, all in all, it is still at the hour of the Other, and what's more, for the sake of the Other's wager (for it is Claudius, not Hamlet, whose possessions are at stake), wearing the king's colors, for his stepfather's sake, that Hamlet enters into this supposedly friendly combat with a man considered to be a better swordsman than he. Thus Claudius and Laertes have aroused his sense of rivalry and honor as part of a trap that is calculated to be foolproof.

Thus he rushes into the trap laid by the Other. All that's changed is the energy and fire with which he rushes into it. Until the last term, until the final hour, Hamlet's hour, in which he is mortally wounded before he wounds his enemy, the tragedy follows its course and attains completion at the hour of Other: this is the absolutely essential framework for our conception of what is involved here.

This is the sense in which Hamlet's drama has the precise metaphysical resonance of the question of the modern hero. Indeed, something has changed since classical antiquity in the relationship of the hero to his fate.

As I have said, the thing that distinguishes Hamlet from Oedipus is that Hamlet *knows*. This characteristic explains, for example, Hamlet's madness. In the tragedies of antiquity, there are mad heroes, but, to the best of my knowledge, there are no

heroes—in tragedy, I say, not in legends—no heroes who feign madness. Hamlet, however, does.

I am not saying that everything in his madness comes down to feigning, but I do underscore the fact that the essential characteristic in the original legend, i.e., in the versions of Saxo Grammaticus and Belleforest, is that the hero feigns madness because he knows that he is in a position of weakness. And from that moment on, everything hinges on the question of what's going on in his mind.

However superficial this characteristic may seem to you, it's still the thing that Shakespeare seized on for his *Hamlet*. He chose the story of a hero who is forced to feign madness in order to follow the winding paths that lead him to the completion of his act. The person who knows is indeed in such a perilous position, marked for failure and sacrifice, that he is led to feign madness, and even, as Pascal says, to be mad along with everyone else. Feigning madness is thus one of the dimensions of what we might call the strategy of the modern hero.

Thus we arrive at the point at which Ophelia must fulfill her role. If the structure of the play is really as complex as I have just portrayed it as being, you may be wondering, what is the point of the character Ophelia? Ophelia is obviously essential. She is linked forever, for centuries, to the figure of Hamlet.

Some people have reproached me for the timidity with which they feel I've been proceeding. I don't think that's the case. I wouldn't want to encourage you to produce the sort of hogwash that psychoanalytic texts are full of. I'm just surprised that nobody's pointed out that Ophelia is *O phallos*, because you find other things equally gross, flagrant, extravagant, if you just open the *Papers on Hamlet*, which Ella Sharp unfortunately left unfinished and which it was perhaps a mistake to publish after her death.

Since it's getting late, I just want to stress what happens to Ophelia in the course of the play.

We first hear Ophelia spoken of as the cause of Hamlet's sad state. This is Polonius' psychoanalytic wisdom: Hamlet is sad, and

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that's because he's not happy, and if he's not happy, it's because of my daughter. You don't know her—she's the very finest there is—and I, of course, as a father, could never permit her to

We first encounter Ophelia—and this makes her quite a remarkable figure already—in the context of a clinical observation. She indeed has the good fortune to be the first person Hamlet runs into after his unsettling encounter with the ghost, and she reports his behavior in terms that are worth noting.

My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
Ungartered, and down-gyvèd to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosèd out of hell
To speak of horrors — he comes before me.
... ..
He took me by the wrist and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow
He falls to such perusal of my face
As 'a would draw it. Long stayed he so.
At last, a little shaking of mine arm
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And with his head over his shoulder turned
He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
For out o' doors he went without their helps
And to the last bended their light on me.

(Act II, Sc. I)

And Polonius cries out: This is love!

This distance from the object that Hamlet takes in order to move on to whatever new and henceforth difficult identification, his vacillation in the presence of what has been until now the object of supreme exaltation, gives us the first stage, which is, to use the English word, one of "estrangement."

That's all we can say. Nevertheless, I don't believe that it's

excessive to designate this moment as pathological, related to those periods of irruption, of subjective disorganization which occur when something in the fantasy wavers and makes the components of the fantasy appear. This experience, called depersonalization, in the course of which the imaginary limits between subject and object change, leads us to what is called in the strict sense the fantastic dimension [*le fantastique*].

This dimension arises when something from the imaginary structure of the fantasy is placed in communication with something that normally reaches the level of the message, i.e., the image of the other subject, in the case in which that image is my own ego. Moreover, some authors like Federn note with great precision the necessary correlation between the feeling of the subject's own body and the strangeness of that which arises in a certain crisis, a certain rupture, when the object as such is attained.

I may have forced things here a bit for the purpose of interesting you by showing you how this episode is related to certain types of clinical experience. But I assure you that without reference to this pathological schema it is impossible to locate what Freud was the first to elevate to the level of analysis under the name of *das Unheimliche*, the uncanny, which is linked not, as some believed, to all sorts of irruptions from the unconscious, but rather to an imbalance that arises in the fantasy when it decomposes, crossing the limits originally assigned to it, and rejoins the image of the other subject.

In the case of Hamlet, Ophelia is after this episode completely null and dissolved as a love object. "I did love you once," Hamlet says. Henceforth his relations with Ophelia will be carried on in that sarcastic style of cruel aggression which makes these scenes—and particularly the scene that occupies the middle of the play—the strangest in all of classical literature.

In this attitude we find a trace of what I mentioned a moment ago, the perverse imbalance of the fantasmatic relationship, when the fantasy is tipped toward the object. Hamlet no longer treats Ophelia like a woman at all. She becomes in his eyes the childbearer

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to every sin, a future “breeder of sinners,” destined to succumb to every calumny. She is no longer the reference-point for a life that Hamlet condemns in its essence. In short, what is taking place here is the destruction and loss of the object. For the subject the object appears, if I may put it this way, on the outside. The subject is no longer the object: he rejects it with all the force of his being and will not find it again until he sacrifices himself. It is in this sense that the object is here the equivalent of, assumes the place of, indeed is—the phallus.

This is the second stage in the relationship of the subject to the object. Ophelia is at this point the phallus, exteriorized and rejected by the subject as a symbol signifying life.

What is the indication of this? There’s no need to resort to the etymology of “Ophelia.” Hamlet speaks constantly of one thing: child-bearing. “Conception is a blessing,” he tells Polonius, but keep an eye on your daughter. And all of his dialogue with Ophelia is directed at woman conceived as the bearer of that vital swelling that he curses and wishes dried up forever. The use of the word “nunnery” in Shakespeare’s time indicates that it can also refer to a brothel. And isn’t the relationship of the phallus and the object of desire also indicated in Hamlet’s attitude during the play scene? In Ophelia’s presence he says of her to his mother, “Here’s metal more attractive,” and wants to place his head between the girl’s legs: “Lady, shall I lie in your lap?”

Considering the great interest of iconographers in the subject, I don’t think it excessive to note that the list of flowers in the midst of which Ophelia drowns herself, explicitly includes “dead men’s fingers.” The plant in question is the *Orchis mascula*, which is related to the mandrake and hence to the phallic element. You’ll find “dead men’s fingers” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, both under “finger” and in an entry of its own under “D,” where Shakespeare’s allusion is duly cited.

The third stage, to which I have already directed your attention several times, is the graveyard scene, in the course of which Hamlet is finally presented with the possibility of winding things up, of

rushing to his fate. The whole scene is directed toward that furious battle at the bottom of the tomb, which I have stressed repeatedly, and which is entirely of Shakespeare's own invention. Here we see something like a reintegration of the object *a*, won back here at the price of mourning and death.

I should be able to finish up next time.

(15 April 1959)

Desire and Mourning

Thus, for Hamlet, the appointment is always too early, and he postpones it. Procrastination is thus one of the essential dimensions of the tragedy.

When, on the contrary, he does act, it is always too soon. When does he act? When all of a sudden something in the realm of events, beyond him and his deciding, calls out to him and seems to offer him some sort of ambiguous opening, which has, in specific psychoanalytical terms, introduced the perspective we call flight [*fuite*] into the dimension of accomplishment.

Nothing could be clearer on this score than the moment in which Hamlet rushes at whatever it is moving behind the arras and kills Polonius. Or think of him awakening in the dead of night on the storm-tossed ship, going about almost in a daze, breaking the seals of the message borne by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, substituting almost automatically one message for another, and duplicating the royal seal with his father's ring. He then has the amazing good luck to be carried off by pirates, which enables him to ditch his guards, who will go off unwittingly to their own execution.

We recognize here a phenomenology that is familiar to us from our experience and our conceptions: the phenomenology of the neurotic and his relation to his life. But I have sought to lead you beyond these characteristics, however striking they may be.

I wanted to open your eyes to one structural trait that is present throughout the play: Hamlet is always at the hour of the Other.

That, of course, is just a mirage, because, as I've said, there's no such thing as an Other of the Other [*il n'y a pas d'Autre de l'Autre*].² In the signifier there is nothing that guarantees the dimension of truth founded by the signifier. For Hamlet there is no hour but his own. Moreover, there is only one hour, the hour of his destruction. The entire tragedy of *Hamlet* is constituted in the way it shows us the unrelenting movement of the subject toward that hour.

Yet the subject's appointment with the hour of his destruction is the common lot of everyone, meaningful in the destiny of every individual. Without some distinguishing sign, Hamlet's fate would not be of such great importance to us. That's the next question: what is the specificity of Hamlet's fate? What makes it so extraordinarily problematic?

What does Hamlet lack? Can we, on the basis of the plan of the tragedy, as composed by Shakespeare, pin down and spell out this lack in a way that goes beyond all the approximations that we have a way of permitting ourselves and that produce the general fuzziness not only of our terminology but also of how we act with our patients and of the suggestions we make to them?

Nevertheless, let's start with an approximation. You can say in simple, everyday terms what Hamlet lacks: he's never set a goal

² This often repeated Lacanian formula helps to distinguish the Other (capitalized) from the other (lower case) in Lacan's own discourse and from earlier uses of the terms by other authors. The Lacanian Other is in no way the complement or the negation of the subject, nor itself essentially a subject. Although the subject may take actual persons, beginning with the father, as incarnations of the Other, the Other functions only in the symbolic register, only in the context of language, authority, law, transgression, and sanction. All this makes it impossible for the Other to have an Other of its own. — Tr.

for himself, an object—a choice that always has something “arbitrary” about it.

To put it in commonsensical terms, Hamlet just doesn't know what he wants. This aspect is brought out in the speech that Shakespeare has him pronounce at one of the turning-points in the drama, the moment when he drops out of sight, the brief interval when he goes away on this nautical excursion from which he will return most rapidly. He has no sooner left for England, still obedient, in compliance with the king's orders, than he encounters the troops of Fortinbras, who has been present from the beginning in the background of the tragedy and who at the end will come to gather the dead, to tidy up, to restore order. In this scene our friend Hamlet is struck by the sight of these courageous troops going off to conquer a few acres of Polish soil for the sake of some more or less pointless military pretext. This gives Hamlet pause to consider his own behavior.

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,

—the expression that is glossed “reason” is “large discourse,” fundamental discourse, what I have referred to in other seminars as “concrete discourse”—

... such large discourse,
 Looking before and after...

—now here's where the word “reason” comes in—

... gave us not
 That capability and godlike reason
 To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be
 Bestial oblivion...

—“bestial oblivion,” one of the key-words by which to measure Hamlet's existence in the tragedy—