Sometimes many are one in dreams and other works of the imagination. Angus Fletcher suggests that "the allegorical hero is not so much a person as he is a generator of other personalities [that] are partial aspects of himself. . . . By analyzing the projections we determine what is going on in the mind of the highly imaginative projector" (1964, 35). If readers want to understand Redcrosse in *The Faerie Queene*, for example, they can list the tests and adventures—essentially the other figures encountered—"so as to see, literally, what aspects of the hero have been displayed" (35–36). The related phenomenon of "doubles" in literature, that is, when two or more characters represent a psychological whole, has often been discussed along psychoanalytic lines (Rogers 1970). Thinking about fragmentations of self and other along semiotic lines, which assumes that the most important signifying unit in art is the text itself, the whole work being a supersign composed of a hierarchy of lesser sign elements (Lotman 1977; Riffaterre 1978), also leads naturally to the theoretical possibility that important characters in literary works often represent aspects of a single self, a self that may be designated holistically in the title of the work.

It will be convenient to assume three working hypotheses, one literary and two psychological, during the following exploration of configurations of self and other in *Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth*, and *Lear*. First, in each of these plays the essential intactness, or wholeness, or psychological integrity of the titular hero at the beginning of each narrative can be thought of as breaking up into constellations of self and other that enact through
the medium of interpersonal relationships the predispositions to conflict present in a single personality. Thus Hamlet, for example, as a character in the play, represents both the composite (titular) Hamlet and a component thereof (the unconsciously rebellious oedipal son guilty of wishing his father dead), while Laertes can be regarded as another aspect of the composite (the loyal, uncritical son quick to take revenge for his father’s death). Second, these tragedies can be regarded as revolving around the deep-seated depression or anxiety each protagonist experiences as a result of some form of separation or loss. Third, “when the loved figure is believed to be temporarily absent the response is one of anxiety, [and] when he or she appears to be permanently absent it is one of pain and mourning” (Bowlby, 1980, 27). Hamlet’s loss is evident, his depression manifest. Othello, to the extent that he loves “not wisely but too well,” may be said to love anxiously in a story where anxiety about possible loss ironically brings about actual loss. The intensity of the anxiety Macbeth displays can be regarded as deriving not so much from fear and guilt concerning Duncan’s murder as from “loss” taking the form of counterfeit nurture and maternal aggression. And the story of King Lear dramatizes, with greater profundity than any in literature perhaps, the disastrous psychological effects of loss taking the form of abandonment.

As I present fresh interpretations of these representative Shakespearean tragedies, I shall have occasion to revise some of my own earlier readings in order to emphasize the greater degree of illumination that can be derived from a person-oriented theory of object relations.

How well does Freud’s drive-oriented theory of the oedipus complex illuminate the dynamics of Hamlet? One reason why Hamlet seems so oedipal is that Freud explicitly mentions Hamlet when he formulates his theory of the oedipus complex, first in a letter to Fliess (1954, 227) and later in The Interpretation of Dreams (1900: 261–66), so that in a sense the theory can be said to be based on both the Oedipus myth and Shakespeare’s play. For Freud there is not much difference between the Oedipus Complex and the Hamlet Complex except that Oedipus literally consummates incest with his mother, however unintentionally, whereas Hamlet represses his incestuous desire. And Oedipus literally kills Laius whereas Hamlet only symbolically murders his father when he kills Polonius and Claudius. In any case, Freud’s oedipal reading of Hamlet, including the elaborations of it by Jones (1949) and many others, has been so influential that it constitutes a necessary point of departure for alternative readings.
When I discussed the topic of Hamlet's losses in an earlier paper (Rogers, 1982), much of my commentary addressed sexual factors germane to the standard oedipal interpretation. I even went so far as to argue that if words heard from the stage signify every bit as much as actions performed on the stage, and if the images of ears and daggers in the text of the play acquire vaginal and penile connotations in this text, then Hamlet can be said symbolically to commit incest with his mother when he speaks daggers to her in her bedroom: "I will speak daggers to her, but use none." Part of this speech involves his elaborate, almost masochistic rehearsal of the sexual crimes he charges her with:

\begin{quote}
Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty—.
\end{quote}

(3.4.92–95).

Gertrude's plea for mercy ("O, speak to me no more./These words like daggers enter in mine ears") constitutes both an admission of her guilt and a sign, to the audience, that Hamlet has penetrated the portals of her body with his erotically charged language.

Instead of accentuating the sexual overtones of this scene, my present inclination is to emphasize the rage expressed by Hamlet's dagged speech while treating the erotic elements as adultomorphic permutations of an earlier and fundamentally nonerotic, nonincestuous set of feelings and needs. Considered in this perspective, a line like "Frailty, thy name is woman," while it obviously refers to sexual fidelity in adult relationships, can be seen to exhibit attachment concerns underlying the oedipal phase. In this view Hamlet's angry feelings toward his mother, Claudius, Polonius, and Ophelia stem not from reexcited yet frustrated libidinal impulses but from his profound sense of loss because of the death of his father; from the loss—just when he needs her most—of the internalized good mother, a loss resulting from Gertrude's transformation in Hamlet's mind into someone no better than a whore; and from the psychologically comparable loss of Ophelia because of Polonius's edict. There is also the temporary loss of his birthright, the crown, to Claudius (loss of the role of ruler being the loss of an aspect of the internalized good father). What makes it all so wrenching is that Hamlet's very selfhood partly disintegrates as a consequence of his object losses, as Ophelia tells us when she laments: "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!"

Besides serving in part as a model for the oedipus complex, Hamlet
also functions as a model for melancholia. Freud mentions only one individual in “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), other than the analysts he cites, and that is Hamlet. Hamlet furnishes Freud the model for an individual who redirects toward himself the reproaches he unconsciously directs toward the lost object who is perceived as an abandoning object. The result, says Freud, is that loss of the object becomes transformed into an “ego loss” as the conflict between the ego and the loved person becomes transformed into “a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification [with the lost object]” (249)—transformations Freud accounts for in terms of libidinal dynamics. “If the love for the object—a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up—takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering” (251). According to Freud, “the melancholic’s erotic cathexis in regard to his object has thus undergone a double vicissitude: part of it has regressed to identification, but the other part . . . has been carried back to the stage of sadism . . . . It is this sadism alone that solves the riddle of the tendency to suicide which makes melancholia so interesting—and so dangerous” (251–52). Although Freud does not mention in “Mourning and Melancholia” the probable connection between Shakespeare’s loss of his father shortly before writing Hamlet and the theme of the loss of fathers in the play, Freud does make much of this conjunction in his discussion of the play in The Interpretation of Dreams.

Sharpe (1929) picks up on this connection in her discussion of splitting in Hamlet. She assumes that the conflicts in the play reconstitute elements of conflict in the author’s mind so that “in externalizing the introjected objects in dramatic form,” Shakespeare experiences something like a catharsis of these introjects:

The poet is not Hamlet. Hamlet is what he might have been if he had not written the play of Hamlet. The characters are all introjections thrown out again from his mind. He is the murdered majesty of Denmark, he is the murdered Claudius, he is the Queen, Gertrude, and Ophelia. He is Hamlet. . . . He has ejected all of them symbolically and remains a sane man, through sublimation that satisfies the demands of the super-ego and the impulses of the id. (205)

Sharpe makes no distinction here between the splitting of self and the splitting of other, which is understandable enough, given her emphasis. That Freud makes no such distinction in his discussion of splitting in
melancholia seems rather more surprising. Freud concentrates on subjective splitting, a splitting of the ego, as he refers to it, an idea that will lead him in due course to his formulation of the superego. It does not occur to him—in spite of the fact that he has Hamlet in mind—that a splitting of the object might also be one of the consequences in mourning. In short, it does not occur to him that the work of mourning needs to be talked about in terms of the splitting of both self and other. For that one must turn to Melanie Klein.

Even Klein does not make a direct connection between splitting of the object and the work of mourning, but the connection is indirectly implied in various ways in her work. Whenever grief arises, writes Klein, “it undermines the feeling of secure possession of the loved internal objects, for it revives the early anxieties about injured and destroyed objects” (1952a, 217). Thus mourning involves “a repetition of the emotional situation the infant experiences during the depressive position” (218) when the infant struggles to reconcile good with bad internalized objects. This is when ambivalence sets in. “Ambivalence, carried out in a splitting of the imagos, enables the small child to gain more trust and belief in its real objects and thus in its internalized ones” (Klein 1940, 132). How does ambivalence enable the child to do what is in part the work of mourning? Ambivalence does so by facilitating a process that is incremental rather than sudden:

It seems that at this stage of development the unification of external and internal, loved and hated, real and imaginary objects is carried out in such a way that each step in the unification leads again to a renewed splitting of the imagos. But as the adaption to the external world increases, this splitting is carried out on planes which gradually become increasingly nearer and nearer to reality. This goes on until love for the real and the internalized objects and trust in them are well established. (132)

What can be said about adult experience of loss in view of Klein’s ideas is that real loss inevitably reactivates the processes of what Klein calls the depressive position, including object splitting, idealization, and “omnipotent phantasies, both the destructive and the reparative ones” (131).

Applied to Shakespeare, virtually all of the text of Hamlet exhibits a complex set of splittings (idealizations and denigrations): a set of omnipotent fantasies eventuating in the destruction of self and other—except, of course, that young Fortinbras, who succeeds Hamlet, can be read as an aspect of Hamlet himself. Shakespeare responds to the loss of his father in part by generating a radically split pair of paternal imagos, the gist of
his fantasy being: “I must destroy my bad father in order to revenge [make reparation to] my good father [for the hatred I feel toward him for leaving me].” But because the genre is tragedy, this and other splittings rush toward disaster instead of leading toward reconciliation and integration. Paralleling in *Hamlet* the splitting of the psychological father into an idealized figure and his evil counterpart (“so excellent a king, that was to this/Hyperion to a satyr”), and into a beloved and comic Yorick versus a scorned and ridiculous Polonius, is the splitting of maternal figures: the mother who “would hang on him [Hamlet senior]/As if increase of appetite had grown/By what it fed on” as compared to the faithless, shameless, lecherous matron Hamlet attacks in the bedroom scene. To mention but one of the many subjective splits discernible in the play, one notes the disjunction between the “noble mind” of the courtier-soldier-scholar passionately dedicated to his father’s call for revenge and the mental turmoil of the “rogue and peasant slave,” an “ass,” who “must like a whore unpack [his] heart with words/And fall a-cursing like a very drab” instead of taking action. It is the rogue and peasant slave who compares his own mourning so unfavorably to that of the actor who merely imitates grief:

> 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,  
> For Hecuba!  
> What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,  
> That he should weep for her?  

(2.2.539–44)

If loss is so crucial to understanding the psychology of *Hamlet*, how far does that assumption go toward explaining Hamlet’s delay in executing revenge on Claudius, a problem the Freudian interpretation solves with great economy by attributing it to Hamlet’s unconscious identification with Claudius as an oedipal criminal? It is worth noting in this regard that the first thing Hamlet accuses his mother of—well before he has heard from the ghost—is her failure to mourn long enough:

> O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason  
> Would have mourned longer.  

(1.2.150–51)

There is a sense in which Gertrude stands for Hamlet here. So short a period has passed since the death of his father that Hamlet himself has
had insufficient time to perform the labor of mourning, the difficulty of which, in his case, is commensurate with the depth of his unconscious ambivalence toward the psychological father that is dramatized throughout the play. The mere “trappings and the suits of woe” do not help much in performing this arduous labor:

’Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play,
But I have that within which passeth show—
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

(1.2.77–86).

What Hamlet needs above all is time to deal with that within which passeth show, time for working through his grief, which is exactly what he does not have when the cascading events represented in the play begin. In his discussion of mourning Bowlby repeatedly emphasizes that one of the most important factors in handling loss is the prolonged duration of the mourning process, even in normal as distinguished from abnormal mourning (1980, 8, 10, 100–103, 130). And as Freud so well understood, what is so painful about mourning is that it is always conflictful. Loss begets hatred toward the abandoning other before the work of mourning can eventuate in a benign internalization of the departed other. It may therefore be that Hamlet’s delay in taking revenge, a delay he himself experiences as intolerable, corresponds in part to the time-consuming restructuring of representations of self and other that the mourning process requires of us.

Loss begets anger at the lost object. This anger takes the irrational form of wishing for the death of the lost object, a wish that gives rise, in turn, to fear of losing the precious object, a fear at odds with the impulse to destroy that object, thereby creating an unconscious conflict that produces the kinds of inaction and deflected action—such as play-acting—that constitute the very stuff and matrix of the play, not just with regard to Hamlet and his father-surrogates but also with respect to his relationship with his “lost” mother and the “lost” Ophelia. In other words, this reading attributes Hamlet’s indecision both to the conflict involved in
mourning his losses—the oedipal conflict between warring impulses being a spinoff of that process—and to the time required to deal with that conflict. Hamlet devotes much of the time required for working through his conflicts to verbalizing them. For Hamlet, words are both an expression of the problem and a solution to the problem. With words he creates the idealized good object (“See what a grace was seated on his brow:/ Hyperion’s curls, the front of Jove himself,/An eye like Mars, to threaten and command”) and the denigrated bad object (Claudius is “a mildewed ear”). Hamlet’s omnipotence of thought becomes omnipotence of speech: “A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.” The Prince of Wordplayers plays with words transferentially, as transitional objects, showing us, in this instance, “how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar,” that is, showing us the bad object (Claudius) reduced to feces from a beggar’s bowels.

A reading of Hamlet stressing loss differs markedly though not completely from the traditional, incest-oriented, mainly oedipal interpretation of Freud. What it offers is another kind of Freudian reading, the object-relational one partly implicit in but not elaborated on in “Mourning and Melancholy.”

Like Hamlet, Othello can profitably be viewed as a macrosign within which Othello and other characters in the play represent components of a complex set of conflicting inclinations symbolized by the titular hero. A number of commentators notice that Othello and Iago appear to be differing aspects of the same person, an hypothesis that explains how a deeply jealous person who believes his wife has been unfaithful (Iago) can so readily convince “one not easily jealous” (as Othello describes himself) that Desdemona has been cheating on him. Among the commentators, James Joyce has Stephen Dedalus say of Shakespeare, “in Othello he is bawd and cuckold. . . . His unremitting intellect is the hornmad Iago ceaselessly willing that the moor in him shall suffer” (1934, 219). And F. R. Leavis contends that the source of Iago’s power over Othello comes from representing something in Othello: “The essential traitor is within the gates” (1937, 264).

During the course of developing this line of interpretation further (Rogers 1969), I have suggested, among other things, that Cassio also functions as a component of the Othello Complex. Much of that argument hinges on a demonstration that male figures in the play subscribe to the sexual double standard by either idealizing or denigrating women. As
for Cassio, I point out that Shakespeare allows him an overelaborate verbiage in speaking of Desdemona that Cassio does not ordinarily use elsewhere in the play—one distinctly artificial as compared to Othello’s sublime yet controlled praise of Desdemona—such as the hyperbolical speech with which Cassio announces Desdemona’s arrival in Cyprus:

Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds,
The guttered rocks and congregated sands,
Traitors ensteeped to clog the guiltless keel,
As having sense of beauty, do omit
Their mortal natures, letting go safely by
The divine Desdemona.

(2.1.68–73).

Cassio gives further evidence of his idealization of women during Iago’s futile attempts to arouse in Cassio an erotic interest in Desdemona. When Iago speculates about how voluptuous Desdemona must be in bed, Cassio, the perfect gentleman, responds primly with polite compliments about the “exquisite lady.” Yet Cassio has his whore. He laughs about Bianca’s passion for him when Iago mentions the possibility of marriage: “I marry her? What, a customer? Prithee bear some charity to my wit; do not think it so unwholesome.”

I argue that this division of female objects present in so exaggerated a way in Cassio can be discerned in Othello as well, in both subtle and extreme forms. In this connection I note that Kirshbaum calls Othello a romantic idealist who overvalues Desdemona: “He loves not Desdemona but his image of her” (1944, 292). In contrast to Othello’s inclination to see Desdemona as either a saint or a whore, Shakespeare presents her to the audience as lovely and devoted but at the same time as a real and hence fallible human being, one who prevaricates about losing the handkerchief when straightforwardness might have saved her, and who somewhat basely begs for her life as Othello is about to kill her (“Kill me tomorrow; let me live tonight”). I then go on to claim that the play as a whole enacts the endopsychic drama of a composite Othello whose principal components can be understood as a Psychotic Othello, personified by Iago, who can experience neither affection nor lust except in perverted form; a Romantic Othello, a refined, sensitive, idealistic person whose impulses in these respects are exaggerated in Cassio; and a Normal Othello, a man more gifted than the average, but normal and healthy psychologically in that he possesses control (“Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them”), awareness of reality, and self-respect. This is the
"noble Moor whom our full senate/Call all in all sufficient," the man
"whom passion could not shake." He is good and trusting, "of a free and
open nature/That thinks men honest that but seem to be so." He is a
manly, masculine man, a more or less integrated, sensual man who under
ordinary circumstances can combine the currents of affection and lust.

One of the revisions I would like to impose on my earlier reading of
the play has to do with the motivation of Iago. My earlier assessment of
him was based upon the interpretations of Wangh (1950) and Smith
(1959). They regard Iago as a paranoid personality suffering from re-
pressed homosexuality who unknowingly perceives Desdemona as a rival
for the love of Othello, an interpretation depending heavily on the views
about paranoia, especially in regard to delusional jealousy, that Freud
expounds in the Schreber case. Diagnosing Iago as a psychotic of the
paranoid type (his suspicions about Emilia are quite literally delusional)
still makes sense to me, but Freud's claim about the etiology of paranoia
in repressed homosexual impulses no longer holds up. Besides that, Wangh's
idea that Iago's interpersonal relationship with Othello represents an
\textit{object} relation, however unconsciously, does not jibe with the view that
theirs is a \textit{subject} relation (as components of a divided self). What defines
the relationship of Othello and Iago, as I thought all along but did not
understand clearly enough before, has to do with the differing ways they
relate to women.

Another revision I would like to impose on my earlier reading is to
shift the emphasis of the relation of men to women in the play from a
focus on adult interpersonal relations, especially sexual relations, to a
concentration on the early needs and structures those adult permutations
reflect. As part of that shift I would pay more attention to the pre-oedipal
features of Desdemona's function as a maternal surrogate in contrast to
my earlier discussion of the idealization of sexual purity in women as it
relates to the oedipal son's false attribution of sexual purity to his mother.
I wrote earlier, "One trifle light as air, the handkerchief, tends to confirm
because of its history and multiple symbolism that Desdemona enjoys the
natural position of being a surrogate of Othello's mother" (Rogers, 1969,
213). In addition, I would now call attention to the obviously maternal
cast of Desdemona's lines as she defends the insistence of her suit to
Othello to restore Cassio to his former position:

\begin{quote}
Why, this is not a boon;

*Tis as I should entreat you wear your gloves,
Or feed on nourishing dishes, or keep you warm,
\end{quote}
Or sue to you to do a peculiar profit
To your person.

(3.3.76–80)

I would point especially to the psychological overtones of the part-object and whole-object imagery of a speech in which Othello appears to equate the integrity of his faith in Desdemona with the place of his earliest origin, the person/breast/womb/vagina he refers to as the “fountain” from which his current runs and from which he cannot stand to be displaced:

But there where I have garnered up my heart,
Where either I must live or bear no life,
The fountain from which my current runs
Or else dries up—to be discarded thence,
Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads
To knot and gender in—.

(4.2.57–62)

These possibilities he cannot bear.

Considered in the context of separation anxiety, Othello’s fear of being abandoned appears to be expressed in an especially significant way elsewhere in the play. “She’s gone,” he says when he begins to believe his fears:

Haply, for I am black
And have not those soft parts of conversation
That chamberers have, or for I am declined
Into the vale of years—yet that’s not much—
She’s gone. I am abused, and my relief
Must be to loathe her.

(3.3.263–68).

The passage “She’s gone. I am abused” treats Desdemona’s imagined sexual departure metaphorically as a departure in space. It is precisely the correct metaphor for expressing the literal departure in space that can generate so much anxiety in young children, especially in children already made into anxiously clinging ones because of prior experiences of their mothers’ departures—the point being not to insinuate that Othello is childlike but rather to illuminate the origin of the emotional value he attaches to Desdemona’s sustaining presence as represented in the play by her faithfulness.

According to this line of thinking, one can scarcely overestimate the psychological importance of the otherwise minor scene of Othello’s reunion with Desdemona after their separation during the sea voyage—a
scene that falls so naturally into the story’s sequence of events as to excite comparatively little notice. Shakespeare does not tell us that this separation made Othello anxious, at least not directly. What he does tell us about is Othello’s joy at being reunited with Desdemona:

It gives me wonder great as my content  
To see you here before me. O my soul’s joy!  
If after every tempest come such calms,  
May the winds blow till they have wakened death!  
And let the laboring bark climb hills of seas  
Olympus-high, and duck again as low  
As hell’s from heaven! If it were now to die,  
’Twere now to be most happy; for I fear  
My soul hath her content so absolute  
That not another comfort like to this  
Succeeds in unknown fate.

(2.1.181-88)

This representation of separation from and reunion with a maternal figure in the narrative present of the play reinforces the idea that Othello’s “loss” of Desdemona later in the play re-enacts at the deepest levels of his being some prior, painful separation from his mother as a child, an experience of separation that led him to become an anxiously clinging, jealous man in the field of love even though he is an otherwise stable, confident man, one well able to tolerate deprivations and travails of all kinds on the “flinty and steel couch of war.” If Klein is to any degree correct about idealization being a defense against persecution anxiety (1957, 193), then Othello’s proneness to idealize his wife as the “cunning’st pattern of excelling nature” and as a heavenly creature (“If she be false, O, then heaven mocks itself!”) serves to defend him against the persecutions imagined by Iago. The Iago part of him defends in an alternative way by externalizing the danger, that is, by projecting the jealousy onto someone else. It never works, of course, because, as Leavis says, the essential traitor remains within the gates.

Whereas Hamlet reacts to actual loss by mourning rather than with anxiety, and Othello responds to the threat of loss by becoming anxious, Macbeth, who at the outset of the story seemingly faces gains rather than losses, may in fact be seen to experience a special kind of object-relational threat, one that generates in him a maddening anxiety. Macbeth experiences a paradoxical form of loss: loss of the other in the presence of the other. I describe his loss at the beginning of this chapter as deriving
primarily from counterfeit nurture and maternal aggression. He also suffers the loss of a dimension of his selfhood—his autonomy—because the intensity of the anxiety provoked by the manipulations of the witches and his wife obliges him to comply with the dictates of a ruthless, suffocating maternal introject.

Various discussions of psychological splitting portrayed in Macbeth provide a useful avenue of approach to comprehending the problem. Freud calls attention to the way Shakespeare's apparent inconsistency in characterizing Macbeth and his wife exhibits an extraordinary complementarity such that "the hesitating, ambitious man" becomes an "unbridled tyrant" while his "steely-hearted instigator" turns into "a sick woman gnawed by remorse":

The germs of fear which break out in Macbeth on the night of the murder do not develop further in him but in her. It is he who has the hallucination of the dagger before the crime; but it is she who afterwards falls ill of a mental disorder. It is he who after the murder hears the cry in the house: "Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep..." and so "Macbeth shall sleep no more"; but we never hear that she slept no more, while the Queen, as we see, rises from her bed and, talking in her sleep, betrays her guilt. It is he who stands helpless with bloody hands, lamenting that "all great Neptune's ocean" will not wash them clean, while she comforts him: "A little water clears us of this deed"; but later it is she who washes her hands for a quarter of an hour and cannot get rid of the bloodstains: "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."... Together they exhaust the possibilities of reaction to the crime, like two disunited parts of a single psychical individuality. (1916, 322-24)

Jekels (1952) subsequently writes that in an oedipal context Macbeth, Banquo, and Macduff are all son figures, with Macbeth switching to the role of the psychological father when he becomes king, a lead I follow when I argue that Macbeth and Macduff thus form a composite hero such that the latter part of the drama depicts symbolic restitution for the crime committed in the first part (Rogers 1970, 49).

Barron's interpretation adds an entirely new dimension to the psychoanalytic reading of Macbeth. Although he explicitly opposes his interpretation to Freud's by claiming that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth cannot be regarded as a composite personality because they represent "a mother and son who have failed to achieve separate identities" (1960, 151), Holland notes that the two interpretations are not so much conflicting as complementary because Barron "is showing beneath the oedipus conflict...an earlier, oral understructure that shapes the form of the phallic or oedipal..."
conflict in development” (1966, 227). Barron links the influence of the witches as evil mother figures with that of Lady Macbeth on her husband-son, shows that the witch-mother is not only treacherous but treacherous in the feeding situation, sees the bearded weird sisters and the “unsexed” Lady Macbeth as domineering, masculine women who instill their own “vaulting ambition” into the husband-son, and argues that Macbeth has qualms about his masculinity because he submits to the maternal authority of the witches and Lady Macbeth rather than to the paternal authority of Duncan.

As I read it now, the fundamental strength of Barron’s interpretation stems from its person-oriented object-relational features, such as when he observes that Macbeth progressively tries to cut himself off from his wife’s influence (first murdering Duncan at her instigation, then murdering Banquo after giving her no more than a hint, and finally killing Macduff’s wife and children without prior communication), so that by the end of the play her death elicits no more than a remark that “she should have died hereafter.” The main weakness of Barron’s interpretation derives from its Freudian posture with respect to sexuality, especially orality. The title of his paper, “The Babe that Milks” (alluding to Lady Macbeth’s “I have given suck, and know/How tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me”) reflects this emphasis. In contrast, I would now contend that the many oral images in the text of the play should be read broadly, as analogical metaphors encoding relationships, rather than narrowly, as signs that characterize the nature of these relationships in a literal way. I would say the same thing about the innumerable phallic images of the play that once seemed so sexually significant; they now appear more meaningful for the way in which they define Macbeth’s intrapersonal failure to identify with the oedipal father except in a manner that incorporates the pre-oedipal mother’s subversive, ruthless dictates. And whereas I formerly construed Macbeth’s anxiety in the Freudian, mainly oedipal context of castration anxiety, as Barron does in part, I would now emphasize early interactional sources of anxiety, as Barron also does, though he tends to see the problem to a considerable extent in terms of oral deprivation.

The extent to which Macbeth exhibits anxiety can scarcely be overstated. Though fearless in battle prior to seeing the witches, Macbeth becomes anxious almost immediately afterward when he thinks about killing the king:

Why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seared heart knock at my ribs
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.

(1.2. 135–39)

Lady Macbeth, who berates him for being a coward for hesitating to kill Duncan, deals with his fear of failure by saying, “But screw your courage to the sticking place/And we’ll not fail.” After murdering Duncan, Macbeth refuses to take the bloody daggers back to the scene of the crime: “I am afraid to think what I have done;/Look on’t again I dare not.” After Lady Macbeth mocks him for his fears, she exits and then he hears Macduff’s knocking at the gates: “How is’t with me when every noise appals me?” When Lady Macbeth returns, she exclaims, “My hands are of your color, but I shame/To wear a heart so white.” After the murderers fail to kill Fleance along with Banquo, Macbeth declares,

But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly.

(3.2. 16–19)

By act 5 Macbeth has become so anxious he cannot resist mocking a servant for being a “cream-faced loon” and “lily-livered boy” whose “linen cheeks” are “counselors to fear.” He shouts, “What soldiers, whey-face?” Shortly thereafter he orders, “Hang those that talk of fear,” and announces, “I will not be afraid of death and bane/Till Birnam Forest come to Dunsinane.”

The concept of castration anxiety can by no means account for the whole of Macbeth’s anxiety, including that represented by his wife. In terms of attachment theory, Lady Macbeth’s command that her bedroom be continuously lighted at night betokens not so much provision for seeing her way as she sleepwalks as it does her fear of the dark—a form of separation anxiety. There is one feature of attachment theory that goes a long way toward explaining the ultimate sources of Macbeth’s anxiety, an anxiety so intense as to breed his psychotic delusion of the hallucinated dagger and his vision of Banquo’s ghost at the banquet, not to mention the apparitions of act 4. The feature in question is the paradox that “threats of separation from the mother, acts of physical rejection by her, and alarming conditions in the environment are presumed to activate the system [of attachment behavior] at particularly high intensities” (Main and Weston, 1982, 33). In other words,
when an attached infant is subjected to threats from an attachment figure who simultaneously rejects physical contact, he is placed in a theoretically irresolvable and indeed self-perpetuating conflict situation. This is because threats of any kind, stemming from any source, arouse tendencies to withdraw from the source of the threat and to approach the mother. If (as is the case with mothers of avoidant infants) the mother is not only threatening but also forbids approach and contact, the conflict is not resolvable. The mere fact that approach is forbidden when it is most necessary should activate still further the attachment behavior system; it should also activate angry behavior; but approach is still not possible; and this should activate still further the system. Thus, on a theoretical level, a kind of [destablizing] positive feedback loop develops. (ibid., 53)

Assuming the underlying maternal cast of Lady Macbeth’s relationship to her husband, exactly this general situation obtains between them, especially in the famous scene where she attacks him for hesitating to carry out the plan to kill Duncan:

I have given suck, and know
How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me.
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this.

(1.7.54–59)

The only significant difference between the scene hypothecated by Main and Weston and the one dramatized by Shakespeare is that the threat is one of total annihilation. As Macbeth is this babe in arms, he has no choice but to comply with her demands. What he never does do, anywhere in the play, is to exhibit any anger toward his “dearest partner of greatness,” no matter how often she belittles him by saying things like “Are you a man?”, “What, quite unmanned in folly?”, and “O, these flaws and starts/ (Imposters to true fear) would well become/A woman’s story at a winter’s fire.”

What I have been explaining from the rather outside-oriented perspective of attachment theory Willbern comments on from the more inside-oriented view of classical object relations theory, particularly Winnicott’s concepts of mirroring and potential space. Willbern observes that Lady Macbeth’s phrase, “while it was smiling in my face,” replicates in language “the perfect mirroring of other and infant that founds familial harmony: it locates the infant’s smile ‘in’ the mother’s face” (1986, 527). Willbern reads this “perfect mirroring” as symbiotically destructive: “This paradox-
ical pathology suggests a potential hazard of the necessary reciprocity between mother and infant in human development.... Perfect reciprocity institutes no difference. Individuation is therefore a process of breaking out of this exact mirroring without breaking the mirror (the reflecting relationship)” (530–31), a process that Winnicott says requires gradual “dis-illusionment.” Lady Macbeth provides a suffocating symbiotic fusion instead of the “potential space” of developing difference, Willbern is saying, her only alternative offer being that of the catastrophic disruption of plucking her nipple from the boneless gums of her nursing infant in order to dash his brains out: “Here the space of difference is neither initiated by the infant nor mutually sustained by the mother, but suddenly and catastrophically created by her: from mother’s breast un-timely ripped” (531). Willbern concludes that “in the play of Macbeth Shakespeare provides his audience with a framed potential space where-in he presents a character, Macbeth, for whom such space is closed off” (535).

Stern’s discussion of “affect attunement” in the development of intersubjectivity distinguishes, along lines similar to Willbern’s discussion, between the perfect “imitation” of mirroring and the “cross-modal” differential matching that instantiates difference in affect attunement. Stern specifically defines affect attunement as “the performance of behaviors that express the quality of feeling of a shared affect state without imitating the exact behavioral expression of the inner state” (1985, 142). If one looks at Macbeth’s problem in terms of Winnicott and Stern, and also in the context of Lichtenstein’s concept of mothers who “imprint” identity themes on their infants (discussed in chapter 4 above), one is tempted to regard Macbeth as a psychological clone of his mother. After Lady Macbeth asks “murth’ring ministers” to “Come to my woman’s breasts/And take my milk for gall,” which is virtually what Macbeth does, she adds,

Come thick Night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark.

(1.6.48–51)

Her keen knife cannot see to see. As Brooks (1947) notices, Macbeth is her knife, her tool. Brooks means this only in the sense that she succeeds in manipulating him. But the connection lies deeper than that. Macbeth is his wife’s knife—a lethal extension of her destructive personality. Her own fell phallicism has been “imprinted” on him in a way that oblige
him to screw his courage to the sticking place, thereby complying with an imposed identity theme, or psychological mission, in much the same way that Winnicott's false-self personalities conform to the will of others.

Lear's agony leads him into madness. That is something he has more or less in common with Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth. Sooner or later, in one form or another, they all exhibit some signs of psychotic behavior, though the other three do so less obviously than Lear. One sign of Hamlet's madness, other than what he feigns, is that whereas Horatio and the guards also see the "real" ghost at the beginning of the play, Hamlet hallucinates the ghost in the bedroom that Gertrude cannot see. Othello's madness appears not so much in the "fits" that take hold of him as in the way the demonic Iago takes possession of his mind, Iago himself being clinically paranoid in his delusional jealousy. In a way that parallels the example given from Hamlet, both Macbeth and Banquo perceive the "real" witches in act I, but no one except Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost at the banquet.

Where does madness come from? The answer provided by Winnicott, mentioned in chapter 5 in relation to Pip's being temporarily lost at sea, is that traumatic separation in childhood can induce madness: "If the mother is away more than x minutes, then the image fades. . . . The baby is distressed but this distress is soon mended because the mother returns in x plus y minutes. . . . But in x plus y plus z minutes the baby has been traumatized" (1971, 97). "Madness here simply means a break-up of whatever may exist at the time of a personal continuity of existence," madness being a set of primitive defenses organized to defend against any repetition of such an "unthinkable anxiety" (97). Whereas Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth glance at the origins of madness rather indirectly in terms of varying responses to widely differing situations of loss, King Lear dramatizes in a relatively direct way that madness ensues as a consequence of "departures" of attachment figures. What the play veils is that the purest and most radical form of all departures is the abandonment of a helpless infant by its mother. It veils this theme by presenting us with the helpless infant masked as an aged man in his second childhood, and with mothers masked as daughters.

Some interpretations of the play pay heed to the theme of childhood, but none that I am aware of sufficiently recognizes the importance of separation as the vortex of recirculating pain, a vortex out of which emerge lines as various as Gloucester's despairing "As flies to wanton boys
are we to the gods;/They kill us for their sport" and Lear's cosmic cry of "Howl, howl, howl!" The psychoanalytic interpretations considered by Holland fall into three categories: statements about the play's mythic implications, notably Freud's paper on the theme of the three caskets; claims that Lear is a childish, narcissistic person; and contentions that Lear suffers from unconscious sexual impulses towards his daughters (Holland 1966, 218). One recent instance of the many analyses falling into the third category may serve as representative: "I see in the play the outbreak of a lifelong, unconscious, incestuous passion. When that passion emerges late in life, it is by no means weakened by age. On the contrary, passion in the elderly can erupt more strongly than in the young" (Blechner 1988, 323). As for the other two viewpoints, I will pass over the mythic one for now in order to concentrate on the one that looks upon Lear as a child. What should be born in mind about these commentaries is that the child they perceive is very much a Freudian Child, that is, a narcissistic, oral-incestuous, pre-oedipal Oedipus as distinguished from the potentially anxious Interactive Infant of Sullivan, Bowlby, and Stern.

The most significant of the commentaries on childhood in the play is that of Ella Freeman Sharpe (1946). She suggests that King Lear represents "a conflict not of age but of childhood and infancy re-activated in the poet's maturity" (218), that psychically Lear regresses "to the loves and hates of early childhood" (219), that "Child Lear's phantasies are dramatized in the play" (223), and that Lear's daughters represent different aspects of Child Lear's mother (223). So far, so good. What does not become clear until later in the chapter is that what Sharpe refers to as "Child Lear" is really a condensation of Lear's hypothetical childhood and Shakespeare's actual childhood. Whatever the theoretical perils of such an assumption, they might not pose an insuperable problem were it not that paralleling the hypothetical separations and frustrations young William Shakespeare may have experienced at the advent of siblings born when he was two-and-a-half and five years old are what Sharpe assumes to be similar events occurring at a similar time in the life of Child Lear. Sharpe declares, "Categorically I have to assert that mother-Goneril's pregnancy is the cause of child Lear's 'storm' in the play," that is, her pregnancy constitutes "the reason for his anger" (225). No shred of textual evidence supports Sharpe's notion that Goneril is pregnant, and even if she were, Sharpe provides no effective argument to support her claim that that is the primary basis for Lear's rage. Her claim rests entirely on the supposi-
tion that Child Lear stands in for Child Shakespeare, who must have been angry about his mother’s pregnancies (as well he may have been).

Besides presenting Goneril’s supposed pregnancy as the main basis for Child Lear’s anger, Sharpe offers a number of other reasons for it. These include certain traumata, “observed menstruation” of the mother being one, and another being Child Lear’s tantrum about an unseen primal scene—his grievance being that the parental bedroom doors are bolted against him. Sharpe also mentions the hate-generating “frustrations” of “loss of the breast” and loss of attention to “His Majesty the Baby,” grievances constituting “a subtle defence used unconsciously to fool his father and to hide from him and himself his knowledge of the father’s sexual love for the mother” (231). Besides taking it for granted that Child Lear desires his mother as a “sexual object,” Sharpe insists that “rejection and hate of the mother is a confession of incestuous desire” (231). That Sharpe’s Child Lear is essentially a child of Freudian theory becomes clear in the context of her discussion of the banishment motif: “Everyman resents ‘banishment’ from the Garden of Eden of infancy and phantasy to a world of reality” (224), that is, banishment as Sharpe imagines it is from an indulgent, oral-incestuous paradise as distinct from banishment in the sense of separation.

I believe Sharpe might have read the play rather differently had she had a more scientific object-relational paradigm available to her. While continuing to insist that the drama depicts “a conflict not of age but of childhood,” I think she might have dispensed with the incest theme and the various supposed sexual traumata. Without insisting on the presence of a pregnant female in the cast, Sharpe might have realized that Goneril does not have to be pregnant to be experienced as a cruelly rejecting maternal figure by a man who, as the Fool says, has made mothers of his daughters. Goneril—and Regan, too—are not so much absent mothers as depriving ones, though they do effectively become abandoning ones, abandonment being symbolized in the play mainly by Lear’s “unbonneted,” exposed, shelterless condition on the moor during the storm, and by his extreme isolation in madness. Sharpe might have become more aware that what accounts for Lear’s special vulnerability to abandonment is not a latent set of revivable oedipal impulses so much as the inevitable dependency of an aged man in his second childhood who must, as he himself says, “unburdened crawl toward death.” Sharpe, who has surprisingly little to say about Cordelia other than designating her as a good mother figure, might have paid more attention to the attachment impli-
cations of Lear’s remark about Cordelia: “I loved her most, and thought to set my rest/On her kind nursery.” Sharpe might eventually have come to realize that Lear feels abandoned by Cordelia not so much because she seems to withhold affection in saying “Nothing” in response to his greedy call for expressions of love in the opening scene but because he creates the separation himself when he banishes her by saying, “Hence and avoid my sight!”—the same words he uses as he banishes Kent a few moments later. Besides realizing, in Goneril’s words, that “old fools are babes again,” what I think that Sharpe might have noticed above all is that King Lear is a story about a parent who, having abandoned his “children” (including Kent), is represented with devastating dramatic irony as being punished for this crime by having to experience, as a child, the maddening emotional consequences of being abandoned by the children who now serve him as parents.

While it might be said that Lear as a component figure in the play is, as he sees himself, more sinned against than sinning, the titular Lear, a great tragic figure, must suffer for the primal parental crime of abandoning his children. What misleads so many readers is the theme of “filial ingratitude.” But this play is no more about “How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is/To have a thankless child” than Macbeth is simply a play about “vaulting ambition.” King Lear is a play about the emotional turbulence of the aftermath of abandonment. Individuals (of varying chronological age) representing children in some sense abandoned by their primary attachment figures include—besides Lear—Cordelia, Kent, Edgar, the Fool, and Gloucester. Cordelia is literally a daughter abandoned by her father. Kent, who assumes a care-taking role after his banishment, is the symbolic son of his king. Edmund “arranges” for Edgar’s abandonment by his insufficiently trusting father, and Edgar, as Poor Tom, suffers in a way that parallels Lear’s madness. Because of Cordelia’s absence, we are told, the Fool “hath much pined away.” And Gloucester experiences abandonment in the form of almost total helplessness after being blinded, a dependency comparable to what Lear experiences in his madness. Lear also “abandons” Goneril and Regan by totally rejecting them; that the rejection is deserved does not alter the tyrannical tempestuousness of Lear’s manner of dealing with his dog-hearted daughters.

At one point in his three-caskets essay Freud brings up the problem of accounting for the “overpowering effect” of King Lear. His own explanation of the power of the play involves his perception of its mythic dimen-
sions. At the end, Lear is an old man, a dying man, and when Lear carries the dead body of Cordelia onto the stage she is Death herself: “If we reverse the situation it becomes intelligible and familiar to us. She is the Death-goddess who, like the Valkyrie in German mythology, carries away the dead hero from the battlefield. Eternal wisdom, clothed in primaeval myth, bids the old man renounce love, choose death and make friends with the necessity of dying” (1913, 301). A complementary way of understanding the overpowering effect of the play is to regard death as another abandonment, an irreversible separation, an irrevocable loss, a final parting from all loved persons.

The theme of abandonment becomes a sounding board that magnifies the power of all painful scenes and wrenching lines in the play. “O thou side-piercing sight!” exclaims Edgar when he encounters Lear on the moor, mad and bedecked with flowers. When he feels utterly abandoned, Lear can no longer love. He says to blinded Gloucester, “I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost thou squinty at me? No, do thy worst, blind Cupid; I’ll not love.” The scenes of reunion, of Edgar and Gloucester and of Lear and Cordelia, achieve an indescribable poignancy against the backgrounding resonance of the separation motif. Edgar and Gloucester are not simply reunited. They bond again, with roles reversed, the blinded Gloucester stoically dependent on a madman’s guidance, as he thinks, and the filial Edgar sturdily leading his father’s faltering footsteps to the edge of the imaginary precipice, Gloucester despairing at his failed suicide (“Is wretchedness deprived that benefit/To end itself by death?”), and Edgar sustaining and encouraging him after the imaginary fall:

Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither;
Ripeness is all.

(5.2.9–11)

At the reunion of Cordelia and Lear, in contrast to Lear’s severing command at the beginning of the play—“hence and avoid my sight!”—Cordelia says simply to the kneeling, bowing Lear:

O look upon me, sir,
And hold your hand in benediction o’er me.
You must not kneel.

(4.7.57–59)

As for the unutterable pathos of Lear’s final loss of Cordelia, no words but Shakespeare’s can register the pain of such a severance following so close upon reunion:
Howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones.
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever.
I know when one is dead, and when one lives.
She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking glass.
If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,
Why then she lives.

(5.3.258–264)