

VALERY ALEFF

THE FLOWER

Suppose you ask yourself a simple question, ‘Am I a flower?’ And you are likely to answer it at once, without plunging into a sea of doubt, of paradoxes, parallel worlds and quantum mechanics. ‘No, I am not a flower because I am a human being, although, to tell the truth, I wouldn’t mind being a flower instead of buying all sorts of perfumes on which I spend a lot of money. This money might be spent differently, there’s no denying this commercial and private truth. But why spend it? What for? Anyway, you can’t buy the whole world, and even the people you’re in love with can’t be purchased straightaway or even after a while. If you show them your purse, they glance at your hands and heart and brain and say, ‘I don’t care about money. As for you, your genius is conspicuous by its absence, and I don’t appreciate this kind of hole, vacuum and non-existence. I even prefer black holes to what you exhibit in this world of ours. Actually, I’m not even sure this world is yours, if only partly, symbolically. You don’t deserve our world, which I declare without beating about the bush. But if you were a flower, I might appropriate you by fair means or foul, and give you to the woman I’m in love with.’ As usual, talk, small and big and minuscule, eventually turns to the domain of love and often remains in this domain so that what you hear seems to belong to what we call ‘repetitive music’ in the bosom of which the word ‘love’ does its utmost to irritate you beyond measure. You say to yourself, ‘This is the measure I’m talking about. If I hear this word once again, I’ll throw a tantrum.’ You hear the word again and again, and you throw one or two tantrums, but nothing happens, nothing is in a position to combat this word, making it vanish in the wings or on the wings of the condor I saw in a film devoted and almost dedicated to Captain Grant and his children. This bird is capable of removing from the world the world itself, if need be; and this need grows bigger and bigger – daily, if you please. Has this need reached its maximum, its breaking point? Yes, it has, for I can see it is breaking before my very eyes, not far from my nose. It is breaking slowly but surely, and the assuredness of its breaking becomes more and more obvious. Well, now, at the present moment, I see only a few bits and bobs of what we used to call ‘our world’. Now it is *their* world, and we wonder who they are and what we could do with them. Then our mental process switches to what is called ‘the other way round’, and we start thinking about what they could do with us, with our arms, legs and thoughts. We are almost sure they can break our thoughts in two or three, leaving us with another series of odds and ends and so whats. For instance, we should like to look out of the window, but our walk towards it is interrupted somewhere in the middle. Then they cut the last sentence in two, and we realise we are right in the middle of our room, not *somewhere in the middle*, mind you. But where is this middle, for God’s sake? All right – here it is, according to our calculations, conclusions and common sense. But where is our room? Would we really miss this room if it got lost somehow, somewhere? Of course not, because there are no flowers in it. On the other hand, we say to ourselves that only *innocent* flowers can offer us peace and quiet, serving as an example to our genealogy of morals, as Nietzsche used to say, whenever asked a question about human conduct, whims and conservatism. Why are there no flowers in our room? Because we are interested only in innocent flowers, and the ones we found in the market during our morning walk did not correspond to our idea of innocence. All right: it is easier to change our attitude towards innocence and purity than whatever markets and market-orientated individuals are able to enrich our lives with. Habitually, they enrich our lives with thorns and serpents, which accounts for our bruises, wretched lives and dashed, demolished hopes. ‘We allow you to smash my life to pieces,’ you shout in desperation, ‘but please spare my hopes, their glitter, their soothing rhythm and gorgeous thoughts, worthy of Gödel and Nils Bohr.’ Nothing doing: they destroy not only our hopes, our castles in the air, but also Nils Bohr whose biography and achievements disappear from books and laboratories.

Yes, one must acknowledge that contraptions of all kinds poison our lives to the point of rendering it mechanical and unsuitable for normal human existence. We come across screws and nails which hold the parts of some contraption together, but the soul of the above-mentioned apparatus slips away, leaving us with odds and ends, with metals we have no idea of. And what are we supposed to do with these metals, with their parts and tails we come across in the course of our investigations? We do our best to put all of them together, and then we relinquish our projects on account of the fear we experience whenever the whole picture of what we are dealing with appears in front of us, menacing and incomprehensible. It is not an innocent flower we are struggling with – far from it. And even if the contraption looks like a flower, there is William Shakespeare behind it, and this author, according to our recollection, is determined to kill as many people as possible. And even the innocent flower he touched upon in one of his monologues is armed with a serpent whose tail and teeth are about to attack whoever dares approach them. And oddly enough, there *are* people who walk towards them, getting closer and closer to their in-built death or even deaths: they usually strive to leave many victims in their wake. That is why people talk about Our Flower's Wake. Do they look innocent? They might create this impression for a while, but as soon as you pay attention to the tails with which their serpents are abundantly supplied, you run for your life. What is more, even the tails and other instruments of doom run for their lives as if threatened by themselves, by their children and aunts. 'One never knows,' they repeat as they continue to run like Olympic champions, and one regrets their records cannot be homologated, all chronometers being out of order. Why does it always come this way, our destiny, our records? We beat some of them, but our clocks are out of order. So we stop running, break our watches, stamp on them to prevent their resurrections, and begin to construct new watches, new grandfather clocks. But it may take some time, and it does. It does take some time, and during this time our legs grow old and gradually forget their records, the stadiums where their exploits were applauded by numerous crowds. They were the most beautiful ornaments of those stadiums, your records, your legs, your uniforms. You still recall the letters engraved on your clothes, on all of them – not only on the ones you used to wear in stadiums, during the competitions in which you took part. 'What competitions, what competitions!' you exclaim as you continue to explore the mystical corners of your memory. Here is one competition; and here is another. Unfortunately, all these competitions are spoiled by tails, and for years and years you have attributed these tails to serpents mentioned by Shakespeare in his immortal tale entitled *Macbeth*. Habitually they mention the spokes that get into your wheels, and thereby preclude you from zooming alongside our trees and meadows which, originally, were not meant for your cars and bicycles. What were they originally meant for? For females legs, for love discussions, for picnics on the grass, for love – both physical and spiritual. And now you spoil everything with your bicycles which have nothing to do with nature, its beauties. Of course your fathers and uncles often talk to you about the advantages you can enjoy, when riding a bicycle. In the first place, according to them, you can consume (this is their word) far more beauties, sights. And if a beautiful girl appears on the horizon, you can catch up with her in no time; whereas the same girl will mock you viciously if you try to get nearer to her body by using your unreliable legs. Some people still recall your athletic exploits, but you are no longer young, and your legs betray you rather often. They let you down, and it takes you a long time to get on your feet again. Meanwhile the girl proceeded along the road leading her towards another romance, another man whose sexual capacities have not been impaired. Being on a bicycle you can hit this man, counting on the metal you have in your possession and also on the speed, however slow. 'My bicycle skidded off the road and bumped into a man I'd never met before,' you say to a policeman. And if you still have the flower I mentioned at the beginning of my narrative, you can offer it to the

policeman, although it would be much more reasonable and logical to hand it to the girl you are already in love with. There are people who fall in love instantly, prompted, urged on by the atmosphere where they swim as if it were a river in which you can experience your happiness round the clock. Of course you cannot step twice into the river, but this does not really matter, for you never leave the river, being in seventh heaven constantly, without coffee breaks and other nuisances of this kind. As odd as it might seem to us, this state of your body and mind does not depend on delicious meals and any particular water supply. You are just happy because the material or whatever you call it, the substance where you spend your time and even your funeral is felicitous and wholly meant, designed for happiness in the fullest sense of the word. What is this fullest sense, may I ask? You can measure the level of your happiness rather easily. If your toes are unhappy, you wiggle them for a while to make sure they are really miserable, and then you declare to whomever may be found within your hearing distance (the distance calculated in accordance with the quantity of unhappiness stored in your toes), 'I'm quite unhappy, if you wish to know. Perhaps my unhappiness makes you feel elated because you hate mankind and rejoice whenever some of its members shed their tears, unable to restrain them, to hold them back. These tears denote the degree of their wretchedness which can be compared to King Lear's madness and Othello's suicide.' But let us not forget the flower I keep inserting into our field of vision and comprehension. How could this flower change the destiny of humankind on which we are concentrating our thoughts, feelings and empathy; for the time being? Suppose you offer this flower to Othello – on the eve of his untimely suicide. He is sharpening his dagger. And if you ask him why he is doing it, he is bound to answer as follows, 'My dagger is blunt so I'll have to sharpen it.' You answer innocently (you are as innocent as the flower you have in your possession), 'Why are you taking this trouble, pray?' And Othello answers your question, 'My wife betrayed me with one of my lieutenants. Actually I don't remember how many lieutenants I have at my beck and call. Actually I'm not quite sure both Cassio and Iago are my lieutenants. But never mind, never mind. What counts is the certainty invading me as soon as I think about my wife's unfaithfulness.' 'Let me interrupt your speech,' you say, eager as you are to point out that Desdemona is quite innocent. 'As innocent as this flower,' you say as you show the flower in question to the poor Moor. 'Are you sure, this flower is as innocent as you affirm?' asks Othello. 'Quite sure,' you answer, nodding your head. 'Does it have thorns?' asks Othello. 'No, in my opinion,' you answer. 'Is your opinion reliable?' asks Othello. By way of an answer, you begin to caress the flower, and after bestowing upon it a sufficient number of caresses you show the palm of your hand to the Moor. 'There's a lot of blood on your hand,' says the Moor. 'This blood has nothing to do with the flower in question,' you answer. 'A kitchen knife's to blame, frankly speaking.' 'A kitchen knife?' Othello's brows move up and down as if to imply a sort of emotion. What kind of emotion do they give utterance to? An emotion linked to a murder or another violation of human laws. 'Are you about to violate one of our laws?' you ask, turning your head and attention towards Othello. 'No,' he answers. 'On the contrary – I'm about to restore the balance of human justice and fairness. A tooth for a tooth, as they say. You sleep with a man, and I cut your throat. Isn't it fair? Is it what they call fair play?' 'A fair tragedy, rather,' you say as soon as the Moor finishes his remark. 'But actually, if I'm not mistaken, you're supposed to strangle Desdemona in her bed.' 'Her bed doesn't look nice,' answers the Moor. 'The point is, my wife likes to have breakfast in bed on a Saturday morning. But she often forgets to remove the crumbs. And Emilia spends the weekends in her country house. And when Emilia falls ill, I talk to my wife thus, "I'm tired of asking you to tidy your room."

You know that death does not depend upon the way which is chosen for its accomplishment; and life always loses in the presence of death. Of course some of the accomplishments we boast about in the course of our

lives can survive our demise, but, generally speaking, everything is forgotten as soon as the last mote of our ashes falls on the top of our coffin which keeps us company out of sheer compassion. You are forgotten in spite of a few photographs that adorn some chest of drawers about which you may know nothing at all. It is just somewhere, this chest of drawers, having been purchased at some auction sale. You buy a chest of drawers and say to yourself, 'I'll put a photograph on this chest of drawers, and this photograph will always remind me of the person I was in love with for many years.' But then you forget both the photograph and its hero or heroine, and then you get rid of the chest of drawers itself, being fed up with its presence in your intimate life. What aren't you fed up with? Perhaps with flowers, generally speaking. With this flower in particular. And you pick up this flower to corroborate your hypothesis in the hope that no one will ever accuse you of light-heartedness. 'If this man or woman happens to be enamoured of such and such a thing or being, this thing or being becomes so close to him or her that no hurricane will ever tear them apart.' A hurricane arrives at last, but this being and the thing to which he or she clings with all his or her might remains in his or her possession. If it is a woman we are talking about, we are not allowed to use the word 'satellite' – for obvious reasons. So we say to everybody, 'In days of yore, Othello was allowed to strangle his wife. In this day and age his wife is also permitted and even encouraged to strangle her husband with her bare hands.' And what about innocent flowers? They are innocent to the point of being unable to strangle anything or anybody. Of course a mere flower, whatever its size and power, cannot strangle a warrior, especially if this warrior has distinguished himself in many battles, some of which might have taken place in Cyprus or elsewhere.

And then someone interferes and asks the traditional question, 'What are you talking about?' What this person means amounts to the thought which may be rendered thus, 'Why not put this flower around Othello's neck or on his head? Aren't we supposed to crown him for his former victories?' But innocent flowers do not seem to fulfil this duty. After all, they are not triumphant; they are not warmongers in the least. They are innocent and consequently their petals or thorns or whatever have never shed human blood. On the contrary – they caressed this blood, showing to harassment-prone human beings how to placate their brothers and sisters. You just take a needle, stick it into your brother's hand, wait for a few seconds, allowing the blood to leave its niche and caress it openly, fervently. And if you carry this ritual out in the presence of some other creatures, you say to them, 'That's how our blood should be taken care of.' And if someone dares to voice his or her grievances or objections, you remind all of them of Jesus Christ and of the ordeal he was subjected to in days of yore.

On the other hand, you might revert to the situation in which Othello plays the leading part, strangling Desdemona as if determined to annoy all the feminists we encounter every day; and even their companions in fortune. Why don't you let him enjoy the perfume of the flower you are holding in your right hand as if prepared to use it at the earliest opportunity? Well, this opportunity is just in front of you in the shape of Othello, the moor celebrated by Shakespeare and Laurence Olivier. What are you waiting for? Move your hand and fill Othello's nostrils with the scent that is sure to change his life for the better. After all, our afterlife is closely attached to our present life and so Othello must be burning in some corner of Hell; or just in the centre of it, not far from Satan and His acolytes. Othello cannot help admiring the scent I am talking about and says to himself, 'This delicious odour reminds me of something – of Desdemona's hand. I thought her hand was lascivious, but this flower is innocent, to all intents and purposes. So I was mistaken. So my suicide is fully justified, is it not?' But is this flower as innocent as all that? Suppose you find it on the table of a woman you adore even more than those actresses you paid attention to in your childhood, in your adolescence. Even now you stand up whenever Audrey

Hepburn walks to and fro on your screen, on one of your screens. You stand up and remain rooted to the spot, even if the actress is no longer within your field of vision. The point is you have several fields of vision, and one of them is totally taken, absolutely devoted to the image or rather images – you should always talk about her in the plural – of this actress. And it is useless to give any details about her, putting on the list not only the date of her birth, but also that of her death and also the night during which she exchanged a few words – for the first time, mind you – with the man she was to love during her lifetime; and on numerous screens, in countless magazines.

What is more, any flower would grow innocent, whenever in touch with this delicious actress. Even thorns would become roses in her presence, which is not very difficult, given that roses are never really far away from thorns. What *could* be far away from thorns? If something awful happens in your life, you mutter to yourself, ‘Just another thorn.’ Instead of saying, ‘This bloody wound,’ you just evoke one of the thorns, although neither roses nor thorns are really present at the scene of the crime. (Every wound you suffer from is a crime perpetrated by nature or its representatives. But what is outside nature, I wonder?) So even flowers, vehement, pernicious flowers could not spoil the ecstasy one was bound to feel in Audrey Hepburn’s presence; even if this presence was far from tangible. Actually you are permitted to put the last sentence in the present tense: she is still alive, our beautiful actress, for the simple reason that she is immortal. But then our thoughts switch back to innocence and viciousness, and we realise that some flowers, as well as some actresses, are vicious in the extreme. Perhaps it is not really their fault: these actresses are asked to play a number of vicious, depraved and horrendous characters whose moral standards are so low you cannot even find their equivalent in everyday life. And even mythology is of no help in the matter, unless you recall the Gorgon and her eyes. But why should you recall them? On what occasion are you tempted to resort to this stratagem? Suppose you find yourself in the company of a man whose manners and appearance are so appalling you have no alternative but to mention Gorgon’s hallucinating, murderous glance. In his very presence; otherwise it makes no sense, to tell the truth. Of course you do not have to say this in plain English. On this occasion, your English can be discreet, modest, downright false, incorrect and inadmissible. Yet the man whose being deserves your verdict might understand your allusion, turning several leaves in the book of his life. He might begin a new life, thanks to your Gordon-orientated allusion. Sometimes such people do their utmost to deny the comparison, saying, ‘Please, limit the flight of your imagination to our fellow creatures. Do you really think that none of them is as pernicious as your obedient servant? Not even Hitler?’ It is true that you can easily continue this discussion, saying, for instance, ‘This is going too far – of course you’re not as horrendous as Hitler. After all, you haven’t built concentration camps.’ Your victim, the object of your wrath and hate is sure to object to your statement, pointing out that Hitler did not *build* the concentration camps he used in the course of his doubtful and awful reign. Not personally at least. (On this occasion you go so far as to remember the word ‘Reich’.) But all this is unpleasant, considering that there are many other subjects which you might single out for your discussions. You might also touch upon Putin in this connection, as long as you remain within the Gorgon’s reach. He does not seem to have used concentration camps for his purposes, but does this fact exonerate him from all responsibility for the disappearance of people, cities and the arts?

How do our arts disappear? Someone leaves our motherland, and a few critics notice this disappearance, writing in their newspapers, ‘Yet another manufacturer of masterpieces vanished into thin air.’ Of course we often perform the same trick on a daily basis because we cannot remain where we are for a long time, given that we get bored after a while, and this while can last only for a few minutes. Every minute represents a certain while, and many of us get weary after a few seconds only. They are used to going places, as they say somewhere, and often

they do not even take the trouble of choosing the right place, let alone the right time. They just think they are great and whatever they do is great – logically enough, in their opinion. But this is not true – not only because they are always wrong. At least their wrongdoings and wrongthinkings happen daily and hourly so that we can trust neither their judgments nor their actions, acts and exploits. Or glories, as Nabokov put it in one of his novels. So we do not trust them, even if their so-called exploits do unfold in our spheres, in the numerous spheres where we live, think and sleep in our beds and elsewhere, sometimes in the open air. How do we go about it? In other words, I am asking myself how we achieve this tremendous result. More often than not, we just open the air which surrounds us on every side and lie down, mindless of the consequences which await us everywhere: under the sky, under the earth. A number of our accidents are due to the negligence we display, whenever our mind is absent – absent-mindedly, as it were. Our mind is supposed to be present in our lives, and even in our sleep, in our dreams and nightmares we are also protected by our mind and its vigilance regarding which we count every minute, not to say every second. We say, ‘This is just another second,’ and look for our mind, for its unconditional support. And if we fail to locate it, we begin to move our fingers in the hope of laying them on the components of our mind, on its grey cells. Then our arms enter into the spirit of the game which is lost apparently. At least we are bound to admit we have failed once again – instead of conquering the world and its inhabitants. (This last remark or detail goes without saying.) We fail and our failure is tremendous; at least our senses inform us of this undeniable truth. But then we glance upon the flower I have already mentioned in the course of this fairy tale – not once, not twice but many, many times. Does this mean the flower is important? More important than my life? No, of course not. But my life seems to depend on the flower and also on the serpent that lies under it, according to Shakespeare or rather to Lady Macbeth. What do literary critics say about this situation, about Lady Macbeth and her creator, William Shakespeare? They say Shakespeare was Lady Macbeth, and if you raise your eyebrows they remind you of Flaubert and Emma Bovary. And if you say that Shakespeare had a son, whereas Macbeth and his wife had no children, they answer, ‘Shakespeare had a son only because Joyce talked about him in *Ulysses*.

And what about the serpent I have mentioned at some point as if determined to mix Shakespeare’s works with the Bible, which is often done in books, on screens and even in newspapers. ‘Today a famous serpent escaped from our zoo as if planning to take part either in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* or in the Bible, in one of the opening scenes.’ Let us follow the itinerary of this serpent – for the sake of our tale’s completeness. What self-respecting tale can fulfil its purpose without a serpent or the serpent’s assistance? A serpent creates the equilibrium we need everywhere, even when trying to cook a delicious meal in our kitchen. A lack of the harmony I am alluding to may plunge us into a sea of troubles, and even a puddle of troubles is pernicious on account of its negative elements. Of course our serpent is negative too, but if we leave her or him alone, this creature may just disappear round the nearest corner without wreaking havoc upon our life. But if we allow her – let us admit that our serpent and also all other serpents are females – to crawl everywhere, leaving her poison on our cups and plates, in our glasses and wine, we risk being sent to Hell at very short notice. The notice comes and so does the serpent; and they both wreak havoc upon whatever we see at close range and also on the horizon. Wherever our glance accommodates itself, it comes to terms with havoc, and these terms are not advantageous, contrary to what we may surmise in the quiet of our room. These terms destroy us because they are negative, quite negative – extremely negative in relation to our ego, among other things. We have a lot of elements in our constitution, in the composition of our essence, and the terms suggested, nay *imposed* by the serpent, are so destructive we cannot even use our feet for any peaceful purpose, including a quiet walk in the neighbourhood. In short, it is better not

to come to terms, to any terms with serpents, however good-looking and benevolent they appear to us. It is not for nothing that Lady Macbeth talks about her serpents to her husband, creating a contrast between the flower and this animal or insect or whatever a serpent represents in the kingdom of fauna. Lady Macbeth touches upon the flower to impart to her husband the importance of innocent looks; their importance in human life. If you look innocent, you can do whatever you like, and no one will ever reproach you for your behaviour. You slap someone's face, but onlookers do not react, for they see an innocent face upon your shoulders. And if the victim of your slap, of your violent gesture, complains to the police, the police officers say, 'Can't you see the eyes of your adversary? He looks so innocent we can't drag him all the way to the nearest prison. He doesn't deserve this kind of punishment. He doesn't deserve *any* punishment, frankly speaking. He's nothing and nobody but a flower. What we *can* do – and hopefully he has no objections to this idea of ours – is limited to the action of our nose. Yes, our nose is duty bound to inhale a portion of the air situated in proximity to this man's innocence. Don't you wish to display to our world a healthy, vigorous body? Don't forget that the vigour of your body depends upon the innocence of this man. Innocence is free of sin and consequently God endows it with a lot of strength needed for the competition we are submitted to in our streets, cities, on our continents. Darwin thought so, and we agree with this genius. That's why we show our strength everywhere, and our power is as innocent as any flower. Power, flower, you know.'

Let us return to Lady Macbeth. We are so fascinated by this character created on the spur of the moment – for some reason I think she was created on the off chance, as it were – that we walk towards her at the earliest opportunity; just for the heck of it. All right: she is right in front of us and we ask her why she talks about the serpent, being a serpent in her own right. What I mean boils down to this: she can give her husband a big bear hug and then put her body under his body, creating thereby a composition called, 'An innocent flower with a serpent.' All the conditions she mentions in her speech are thus fulfilled and so Macbeth can go straight to the room where Duncan is asleep. The king awakes, spots Macbeth's body and his wife's body appended to his body, to Macbeth's body. To cut a long story short, Duncan sees two bodies that seem to threaten not only his bed but also his crown, the head on which a crown was put several years ago. Duncan begins to analyse the situation he is getting involved in. At the beginning of his analyses he concentrates mainly upon the serpent, alias Lady Macbeth. Why? Because he is a Bible-reading, Bible-fed individual. Every time he takes a seat at his dinner table, he remembers the Bible and says to himself, 'If one day I meet a serpent, I'll kill her, whatever the circumstances. By the way, I'm sure that the serpent is a woman – Lady Macbeth, for instance. Actually she looks like a serpent. Anyway, she doesn't look like a flower, let alone an innocent flower.' And Duncan decides to take advantage of the situation, which is all the more logical and triumphant since he is about to die; and dying is not the best solution to the enigmas and complications we come across in our life. It is better to sleep with a woman or a man, especially if these people are murder-orientated. In other words, while looking at the world, they see only murders; or daggers, which amounts to the same thing, the same sensation, the same result, the same quantity of blood, spilt blood. So Duncan asks himself the question which is supposed to get him off the hook (the dagger in question is a hook, a metaphorical hook), 'Am I about to die or to experience yet another instance of bliss? If Lady Macbeth becomes my lady, I'll feel elated, even though she isn't really my cup of tea. But the matter stands differently: I have to choose between death and a sort of love, an act accomplished on the bed I'm not accustomed to, given that I don't sleep in it every night. After all, I'm a guest in this castle which I'd previously only known only by hearsay. Of course Macbeth tells everyone that I spend a lot of time in this castle of his, for he wishes to convey to the world

the idea of our intimacy, of our friendship which is based only upon his last, his latest victory. But this victory doesn't mean a lot, contrary to what you hear in the play, contrary to what most commentators proclaim offhandedly as if they really knew how the matter stands. Well, I hardly know this castle and my host, but somehow I have the feeling he intends to kill me. Everybody dreams of becoming a king, and my host is certainly no exception to this rule. Why? Because he is human and nothing is foreign to his nature, not even the desire to murder his king and replace him on the throne. So I'd better sleep with his wife, even though her beauty or rather its absence doesn't appeal to my sense of overall harmony. Or had I better sleep with Macbeth himself, with my host, with all his guests, one by one? After all, they're all innocent flowers or rather a multitude of thorns I should keep away from. Stay on the safe side is my motto. And if it isn't the safe side, I should adopt this method, if only once, not for all, as they say. So I'll sleep with Macbeth, leaving his lady alone, on her own. But isn't she in a position to murder me on her own, without any outside help? She is strong enough to pick up a dagger and thrust it into my bosom. What does this mean? This means a double danger from which I should protect myself at all costs. What are the costs I'm speaking about? The costs are my life. Wait a minute – I seem to be getting enmeshed in my own schemes, in the construction I've built within my brain. The point is the murder will take place *outside* my brain, even though my brain may be touched and destroyed in the process. Their dagger runs through my heart and my brain feels its steel and reacts to this feeling. In other words, my brain crumbles and becomes a heap of ashes, as they say during funeral ceremonies. And my brain joins other ashes and soon I see a mountain of ashes right in the middle of the plain I crossed at the end of my journey, not far from this castle where I am to die for the sake of Shakespeare and his genius.'

In short, Lady Macbeth is a serpent and so she is bound to lead someone astray. This time it's all about Macbeth and Duncan, not Adam and Eve. She is not attracted to Duncan; not physically anyway. He is old and our lady prefers the young men with whom she spends a lot of time during her husband's military campaigns. As soon as he leaves their castle and bed, she sends a message to one of her lovers who hurries to their bed – this bed has been *their* bed for some time – and fulfils the purpose of his visit rather hastily. Lady Macbeth asks him why he is so negligent in bed, in the course of their sexual act. After all, this act is sacred for several reasons. Firstly, they do not live together and consequently have to make the most of every rendezvous, every meeting of their bodies, of every mutual touch that God bestows upon them. Secondly, their love deserves better treatment, a longer infatuation – a Faustian moment, in a way. Well, he snaps his fingers – and other parts of his body – at their lovemaking, at the shortage of these episodes which, in her opinion, should elevate his life, its status and significance. Instead of this elevation, however, this lover of hers fulfils his duty – only partly, as I have just pointed out. And this 'partly', this word or action or non-action irritates her so violently, so vehemently that she reflects upon her predicament in the following terms, 'Even an old man is preferable to these unfledged Don Juans. Even Duncan is better, and I'll sleep with him next time, during our next visit to his castle.' So Lady Macbeth rejoices upon receiving the famous letter recited by Maria Callas in Verdi's opera. She realises that one of her dreams is on the point of becoming true because her husband is bent on murdering the king for reasons best known to himself. Of course she is also aware of these reasons, of the causes and sources of his inspiration which will turn the world, their world, upside down. Macbeth was down and so was his wife. Well, not really down, to tell the truth. But their social position, in spite of its relative advantages, of its trump cards, as it were, is nothing in comparison with Duncan's royalty, of his pedestal that is gigantic in comparison with Macbeth's achievements and pettiness. Indeed, he is so insignificant that any witch may attract his attention and fulfil his hopes by muttering

something under her breath. She utters a few words and some of these words sound like ‘king’ or even ‘your majesty’, which leads our hero utterly astray. One cannot say he was addicted to straight lines, but at least he has not murdered any sovereign – until his fatal encounter with the witches. They produce a few sounds and Macbeth yields to the temptation that has pursued or haunted him for quite a while – as if there were no other words or vocations in the world where we spend our time and eternity. (Our tombs or even their absence should be taken into consideration. Our bones, in other words.)

Anyway, Lady Macbeth pins her hopes on Duncan and does her utmost to encourage Macbeth, urging him to accomplish his feat of valour without fail. ‘And what if we fail?’ he asks her. ‘We’ll never fail,’ she answers. ‘Even if we face an arduous and daunting task of killing dozens of kings, we’ll do it and step on the highest floor of the highest pedestal in the world.’ ‘Are those steps called “floors”?’ ‘Not the foggiest. The only thing I know for sure is that this pedestal meant only for our couple exists. And its height is immeasurable.’ ‘Let us just climb on this pedestal and leave Duncan in peace,’ suggests Macbeth. ‘What are you talking about? Don’t you feel like disposing of this bastard as soon as possible? Let me tell you a secret. The other day I was thinking about his body and his talents in the domain of physical love. *Et bien*, I’m prepared to make love to him, even if I get sick as a result of this heroic endeavour. Aren’t you inspired by my bodily and psychological sacrifice? Aren’t you tempted to compete with me, to surpass me in a way?’

During their journey at the end of which lies the corpse of the king, this king and his companions in misfortune admire the beauty of nature and enjoy the freshness and purity or rather innocence of the air. Incidentally, Lady Macbeth might have touched upon the innocence of the air, instead of dwelling upon flowers and serpents. It is true that serpents can live and prosper even in the air totally ignorant of traffic jams and pollution, but let us forget both serpents and their murder for a while. It is all the more understandable since the murder we shall discuss shortly – not in broad daylight, though – was not committed by a serpent, contrary to what many commentators and Bible specialists affirm in their writings. The murder in question was committed in the dead of night, and therefore it is better – from every point of view – to discuss it at night; after midnight at any rate. But why should we discuss this murder? Duncan is dead and that is what counts in the final analysis. But the serpent is alive. In my opinion, serpents do not die after biting their victims. On the contrary – they prosper and prepare their stomachs for their future feasts. And what about the rose and its proverbial innocence? Of course the rose cannot bear the sinister aspect of the whole affair – on account of its fundamental innocence. That is why I think that Lady Macbeth was thinking of a rose when uttering her famous line about the basic innocence of flowers. Of course she knew there were guilty, not to say criminal flowers in the world, otherwise we would not get so many scratches and wounds from them during our walks through the woods and meadows and what not. We walk often in the bosom of nature without thinking about the fragility of our bodies exposed to all sorts of damage. As a result, we often display unwanted and downright ugly vestiges of what remains of our contacts with nature. And if our friends and chiefly enemies point to them, saying, ‘As I can see, you often enjoy the freshness of the air – like Duncan. You seem to be walking in his footsteps. All these scars, however, don’t embellish your countenance, its physical aspect, its visibility.’ What could you say to these destroyers of your internal peace, to these preservers of your eternal anxiety and disturbance? You just quote some passages from *Twelfth Night* and continue your walk, defying the dangers that lie in wait for you almost everywhere. In the same way, you continue your march through life which does not treat you with the respect you think you have deserved in the course of your unflinching struggle with the world and its evils. What do you really get from life? Can you say it lavishes

its gifts upon your destiny? You cannot say anything of the kind. You just repeat a few phrases centred upon the unkindness of your way of life which, to be quite frank, you must have chosen on your own initiative. Of course, from time to time, you say that everything, every tiny detail, is in the hands of God, but in your nightmares, within their contexts and landscapes you contemplate – it does happen now and then – the hands which, in your meditations, must belong to God Himself or Herself. And you are frightened by the weird features of these hands. They look like faces, like sinister and irremediable mishaps. Or horrible acts which cannot be forgiven either within time or even in boundless eternity. These hands move closer and closer to your throat as if they were part and parcel of Othello's anatomy. In the nick of time, however, you succeed in pushing aside these hands by repeating the magic formula, 'My God, my God.'

So Lady Macbeth finds herself in Duncan's bed. As we all know, this bed is located within Macbeth's castle so that his wife is well acquainted with it, although she actually spends her night and part of her days in another bed, in their conjugal bed. According to our traditions, married couples spend their conjugal nights in their conjugal beds. However, we should not forget that, during their holidays, they enjoy the comfort and hospitality of other beds they find in hotels and elsewhere: there are many spots and locations where you can find suitable beds, which accounts for the frequency of your journeys throughout the world. But how does Macbeth spend his time or while away his existence? Usually Macbeth and his wife while away their holidays playing cards in front of the fire. But men often participate in battles in the course of which they are likely to be killed. What is more, they often lie unburied as if taking care of vultures and their meals; and their private enjoyments. But this time neither Lady Macbeth nor her husband avail themselves of the joys associated with cards and their games. Our Lady busies herself in the bed occupied by Duncan, whereas Macbeth sharpens his dagger, for he is not sure its blade is up to Duncan's standards. By these standards Macbeth means the thickness of the king's skin. You do need to be thick-skinned to survive as a king in Scotland, they say, thinking about the Middle Ages and other remote periods of time, of history. Duncan must have been criticised many times, but he was alive on the night when Macbeth's unfaithful spouse enjoyed his body in a bed traditionally allocated to kings and other guests of honour. The future murderer looks at his dagger and wonders whether its sharpness will triumph over Duncan's general thickness. 'He's thick through and through,' mutters Macbeth, and he must be partially right, otherwise he would not waste his time on the blade he sharpens almost hysterically. He is so hysterical about it that, at some point, he sees this dagger in front of his eyes as if someone, a horrid, malicious creature were planning to deprive him of his sight. But the turn of *King Lear* has not come yet, as far as I can judge.

The point is the murderer cannot really practise, keeping his hand in because he has never assassinated kings, being quite satisfied with battlefields where you kill soldiers, officers and commanders-in-chief, whereas our kings as well as Shakespearian ones read dispatches and prepare flowers for victors. Our Duncan contents himself with the reports delivered by soldiers some of whom die right after uttering a few words to the effect that the enemy is now feeding the same vultures. (How many times have I already spoken about vultures?) And now our Lady Macbeth is availing herself of the king's company in the bed she hardly knows. And no news reaches Macbeth's ears – not only because he is not interested in the process at the end of which Duncan may deliver his message to his wife. Well, he is not involved in this process either as a witness or as a doer, needless to say. And although the blade of his sword is now ready for the deed, he does not budge, and even if the most beautiful woman in the world were standing right in front of him, naked and expecting an act of sexual valour, he would not budge because Shakespeare describes a stupor to which Macbeth pays homage. Our life consists of the homage

we pay now to the gods, now to ordinary citizens without whose help we can hardly survive on this Earth. We say to ourselves, 'We should be grateful for the very fact of our sojourn on this planet, and if I don't thank everyone and everything for every second I live through, I won't live through this second, dying somewhere in the middle, in the middle of it.' And some of us die in the middle of a second simply because they do not thank their guardian angels or other divinities to whom, as I have already pointed out, we should pay homage round the clock. The clock turns and executes its round, and as soon as one round is over – we can see its end on clocks and elsewhere – we should pay homage to someone. Better still, we should pay this homage in the plural so the word 'homages' appears rather often in our texts. Sometimes we have no idea to whom we pay this or that homage. What can also happen from time to time concerns our utter ignorance of the identity of persons and things in the presence of which we kneel down and kiss the ground or some part of their own bodies or clothes. Sometimes we just kiss the air, being convinced that an insect or just another minuscule being inhabits the portion of air to which we give our blessing. What we give to the air resembles a blessing or something of the kind, but as a matter of fact we just thank Creation for its very existence. We know that without Creation we would not have been created, born and delivered from our mothers' wombs. And once again we recall our mother's womb and the comfort we enjoyed, availed ourselves of within it, at its bottom. Yes, at some point of our existence we reached the bottom of delights, and you can see this utmost delight in pictures where a garden bestows upon a mere walker all sorts of ecstasies, pleasures, joys and smiles. Such gardens are called 'the gardens of delights' and we often dream about them, and some of these dreams are carried out in daytime. So they are called 'daydreams' and, frankly speaking, it is to one such dream that Macbeth devoted the portion of time he was living in right then, in front of the bed on which his wife was offering her beauty, her stock of delights to the King. Some commentators call her, our Lady Macbeth, 'a source of delights' or 'a bed of delights' as if paying homage to the sexual act that preceded the assassination of Duncan. Sure enough, it was his last cigarette, and if God had bestowed upon his existence a huge period of time, he might have written his memoir in which he would have described Lady Macbeth's talents, the ones she demonstrated in the domain widely known to lovers and ordinary citizens – to those who make love in their beds or merely on floors – as a 'sexual love domain'. But we should move nearer to the assassination we are engrossed in, otherwise the purpose of our work will not be fulfilled. One thing is certain: Macbeth does not look like an innocent flower. Actually, one may wonder how many innocent flowers there are in the world where we sometimes display an innocent disposition. Did Macbeth look innocent, when sharpening the blade of his sword? If you devote your time to such occupations, you cannot look innocent, unless you prepare yourself for some kitchen-rooted ritual, such as cutting a loaf of bread into slices. In other words, you are cooking your dinner in the course of which you are sure to eat a few slices of bread. And yet you suffer from diabetes and so not only pastries but also an ordinary piece of bread is harmful, being a harbinger of death and its consequences, such as coffins, tombs and oblivion. But Macbeth was sharpening his sword or dagger after dinner, and if we maintain this hypothesis, we commit an error which might cost us dearly, if we do not pay enough attention to our delusion. Indeed any murder requires a certain amount of strength, both physical and moral. And if we skip a meal just before engaging in the process that leads to this murder, to our participation in it, we might fail. And such a thing can happen all the more easily since Macbeth touches upon this possibility in the speech delivered in his wife's presence. Consequently you had better avail yourself of a decent meal full of calories and other elements we need for our deeds, for our assassinations and mere murders.

So Macbeth sharpens his sword or dagger or whatever he has within his reach before embarking upon the procedure leading to the death of his King. And this job sharpens his spiritual or psychological appetite, the appetite called 'the will to power'. So, as a matter of fact, he sharpens his will to power which may look like a sword. And this explains the mistake I make, whenever calling Macbeth's dagger a sword: our will to power resembles a sword, or a cannon – a mere dagger is a poor substitute for this sword or atom bomb. But sharpening a bomb is pointless, unless you think it needs to traverse the air much faster than it usually does. In this case, it is advisable to recall Galileo's law, according to which whatever object you use for your evil action falls as fast as any other object. Even innocent objects fall rather fast, which accounts for their actions some of which are really innocent. For instance, you are tempted to throw something out of your window. It may be a crumpled piece of paper, but under some circumstances, this piece of paper, this discarded letter, can kill an old woman walking under your window. (Old women are not necessarily killed by axes.) You look like an innocent flower, but even this flower can kill an old woman if this woman is out of her senses. At least she does not expect a fall, or a bomb, or a flower. And suddenly this flower touches her head and she dies on the spot, surprised by this attack, by this air raid. Suppose this woman suffered, psychologically suffered during the Second World War, and therefore even an innocent flower can remind her of those horrors. The woman is walking down the street of your native city. And the flower chooses this moment for its innocent attack. The flower has no brains, no psychological or mental dispositions, but it falls because a small boy decides to fling it out of his window. The flower falls and its fall takes a few seconds. This stretch of time is sufficient for realising that any old woman walking under the window is submitted to the law of death, especially on account of what she experienced during the Second World War. But the flower flouts conventions and traditions. Traditionally we think before carrying out our actions. We think about their results and the consequences they may entail in the long or short run. Flowers do not think in these terms. They think neither big nor small. They do not think at all for the simple reason that they are not aware of Descartes and the conclusions to which he was driven in the course of his meditations. So our flower just falls, falls and falls, and its fall is reminiscent of Adam's Fall, for it results in a murder induced by the everlasting presence of the serpent. Yes, this serpent was hiding under the innocent flower we have discussed at some length. In a way, it is the serpent that falls from the window we described some time ago. Actually, the window itself, its shape and beauty, have nothing to do with the murder of the old woman whom we may compare to Dostoevsky's heroine. It does not really matter whether you die as a result of an impact performed by an axe or through the gentle touch of an innocent flower. This flower is not as innocent as all that, but never mind, never mind. We are engrossed in the fate of Duncan on whose body Lady Macbeth continues to lavish her caresses, her sexual élans. And Macbeth watches the dagger he will use in the course of his assassination. Sure enough, this dagger is floating now in front of his eyes which stare into the void as if to beguile idle observers into believing our thane of Codor or Condor or whatever his name happens to be under the circumstances has nothing in common with assassins, with evil flowers. At this point we realise that Macbeth is a serpent lying under the innocent flower he created on the spur of the moment. Actually this flower was created by his wife, but Macbeth has no will of his own, being enslaved to his wife and her orders. She gives the command, fire! And he fires, and in this case his fire amounts to the presence of a flower or of a serpent. And the latter is far more dangerous than the former. If you throw a flower out of a window, this flower will provoke a feat of joy on the part of a pedestrian who was not expecting a present, a favour on the part of heaven. This flower will become a symbol of this pedestrian's life, of its future. She will say to herself, 'I've been unfortunate so far. All my husbands have been traitors and poor maniacs. But

from now on I'll lead a happy life, spending my holidays in seventh heaven.' Then she decides to spend *all* her life in seventh heavens, but this stratagem does not work, and so she helps her destiny climb as far as this heaven situated in the sky, in her opinion. This new stratagem does not work either and she invents yet another instance of help, of support. She begins to count her footsteps in the hope that every seventh step will move in the direction of this enigmatic, unattainable heaven. Another magic step, and yet another blissful degree on the map of happiness and everlasting paradise. One, two, three, four. She wastes her time and life on digits, numbers and other components of mathematics, but her life does not budge from where it got stuck at her birth, to put it bluntly. She has felt miserable throughout her life, and even in her early childhood she knew that, whatever happens in her reality, is bound to end in failure, in a sort of crash. For her fourth birthday her father gave her a bike, and her brother borrowed it almost at once, at the end of the birthday party. Her brother borrowed her motorbike and crashed it, perhaps intentionally. At least that is what he said, inexorably drawn by an onslaught of sincerity. He said to his sister, 'It doesn't really make any difference. Anyway, your life is miserable, and there's no way out of the situation, of the predicament you suffer from. Your life is a dire failure, and the earlier you admit it to yourself, the better.' And she followed her brother's advice: she admitted it, probably reluctantly; willy-nilly, as she put it in her diary. Alas, the texts with which you adorn the pages of your diary do not really change your life. 'The best way of summing up my life and its outlets,' she wrote on the eve of her seventeenth birthday, 'is to say that it is "absolute chaos".' She shared this thought with her brother who smiled and said ironically, 'I'd just like to sum up by saying that it's been a tremendous pleasure to live by your side.' 'How do you mean,' said the sister. 'Well, this liaison – let us call it this way – has always given me an opportunity to appreciate the quality of my own life. In comparison with you, I've been extremely, outrageously happy. In point of fact, your life exists only insofar as it augments my bliss, the love I experience every day, when coming to terms with my surroundings.'

To some extent, Lady Macbeth experienced the same spectrum of feelings and disappointments. It is true that she married a man whose riches could rival those of kings and emperors. But he was neither an emperor nor a king, and this fact caused a turmoil from which his wife could not recover, with which she could not deal appropriately, for all her efforts. 'I'm not a queen,' she said to herself every morning and even during her dinners at which she had to propose many toasts, often reluctantly and maliciously. (She could not help being malicious, even when receiving flowers from her admirers and secret lovers.) 'Now, if you'd all please raise your glasses, I'd like to propose a toast to the bride and groom,' she would say, raising her own glass. The point is she was in love with both the bride and the groom, but unfortunately she was already married to Macbeth; and she knew only too well that he was neither an emperor nor even a king.

What happens to you if you marry a king? In the first place, you are supposed to belong to the category commonly called 'women', for kings – even if they reign in a free country – are not supposed to marry their male companions – for the sake of overall decency, as their assistants say to journalists. There are many women in the world, which does not mean they can all marry kings and emperors, even if they are extremely beautiful. Every beautiful woman knows there are other beautiful women in the world. And even if they are convinced they are the most beautiful women in the world, they have to take logic and statistics into consideration; otherwise they may end up in situations from which it is not easy to disentangle themselves. Sometimes it is not easy to realise you are in dire straits, especially if you are convinced your beauty speaks for itself. And what your beauty says to everybody is so overwhelming that no obstacles dare to enter your field of vision, your senses and the set of your intuitions. 'This just cannot happen,' you say to yourself, whenever a doubt emerges within your interior

monologues. So you remain on your pedestal, turning a deaf ear to the remarks which point in the opposite direction. People try to sway you into realising you are no longer on your pedestal. If they dare use the word 'pedestal', you just say, 'You don't know what you're talking about. Actually I've never taken part in any competition – I don't need this kind of exploit. I'm the most beautiful woman in the world, and everybody's aware of the fact. I don't have to prove I'm right because I'm always right. This happens automatically, and I don't deign to get involved in the process. I have no time for such useless trifles.' Of course you might say to this lady, 'Even Lady Macbeth was driven crazy because she didn't manage to make a few spots of blood disappear from her hands.' 'I've got no blood on my hands,' the lady in question answers to her detractors. 'The blue blood that runs in my veins is quite sufficient for the purpose.' 'For what purpose, may I ask?' says the chief detractor. 'I'm the best from every point of view,' answers the lady abundantly praised by her own ambitions and pride.

Well, you succeed in finding a prince whose blood permits him to sit on a throne associated with kingdoms and glory. You sit by the throne and smile, whenever somebody appears in the distance, within walking distance. You know that people take advantage of this distance to approach kings and emperors, which might enable them to reach a higher step on the social ladder; and also on the financial ladder, come to think of it. Our Lady Macbeth celebrates her ascension to her position and orders a few executions, but let us remain where we are, for we think that one can be happy without murdering one's neighbours, next of kin and strangers, foreigners and so on. So we murder no one, but Lady Macbeth does not vanish into thin air: she is still within our field of vision as if she were the dagger that is highly praised in Shakespeare's play. But for this dagger, the murder upon which the whole plot is centred would not have taken place. This does not mean that Macbeth could not have assassinated the king unaided, without any exterior help. After all, he had a pair of hands and his strength was not inferior to that of Othello. (And their faces, their colour have nothing to do with what I am talking about.) But Shakespeare resorted to the dagger's aid for the sake of this immortal scene during which the aforementioned dagger floats, continues to float through the air. This trick cannot be performed by a pair of hands one needs to strangle either Desdemona or any other unfaithful wife or mistress. There is no denying that this pair of hands floats in the air before touching the throat of the intended victim, but that is beside the point.

What is *inside* the point? Lady Macbeth is still by Duncan's side and this is probably more important than the dagger to which we have devoted so much time. Why? Because love is more important than death – for the simple reason that it has triumphed over death very frequently, throughout our history. At least this happens regularly in the domain of poetry. Death is dead and so on and so forth. What is so forth? Poets never go too far in this direction. They just say, 'Death is dead,' and everybody takes this statement for granted. This statement or rather its truth. No one questions the veracity and authenticity of this line: everybody wants to vanquish death once and for all. Of course you cannot triumph over death every day: every day and every morning someone dies and no poetry will ever resurrect this person; and even religion is powerless in the kingdom of death. There are exceptions to this rule, and we all know these exceptions or rather this exception. But is it really an exception? When a poet declares that death is no longer on the agenda, you believe him or her because this person is a poet and poetic license is more or less accepted in the world where poets and their readers prosper. Or at least they do their best to prosper, to live as long as possible in spite of many problems and proofs to the contrary. What proofs? Once again we are duty bound to show a corpse lying either on a bed – let us stay with Duncan on this occasion – or in the grave. The former is easier than the latter; for the obvious reason that should not be explained either at length or with brevity. Here is the bed I am talking about, and here is the corpse lying on it. What more do you

want? Life? Is that what you want? If this is the problem one faces, this one should return to poets, assuming this person has ever parted with the representatives of rhymes, meters and other elements from the kingdom of poetry. Meanwhile the dagger continues to float in proximity to Macbeth's face, which contradicts the statement, according to which death is dead. Not at all – death is alive, and its life can be seen on Duncan's body, all along its surface and wrinkles. Duncan is covered with wrinkles and other testimonies to old age, but being old does not exclude the presence of life, if only partial, incomplete and fragile. This life is so tenuous you should make a tremendous effort to believe in its reality. And then you remember this simple fact; Macbeth has not yet assassinated the king. So, according to your conclusion and reflection, Duncan is still alive as if he could not die on his own, without the dagger's participation in his demise. Many people think it is more advisable to die before one's term – before the decay sets in and poisons one's life, its very roots. Everything is poisoned irremediably, and they usually kill horses, don't they? You even know the French version of this morbid reality: *On achève bien les cheveux*. You can apply this funereal comment to men and women, to birds and insects. This time you resort to it in connection with Duncan, and you re-read the tragedy, bent as you are on refreshing your memory. And what about disposing of your memory? Isn't this procedure more productive? Isn't it the best way of killing death outright? You are on your deathbed, and all your next of kin, all your doctors are aware of the fact. You are the only being in the world who ignores it most maliciously. And when they put you in the picture of your disappearance from this world, from the cosmos where you live, you utter these words, 'How can the government ignore the wishes of the majority?' And when they ask you to elaborate, you explain to them that there are superior forces in the world and also in the cosmos to which they seem to be attached beyond measure. 'Of course I could mention God in this connection, but the notion of God is too vague and demands a lot of commentaries. And I don't feel like making an elaborate speech on the subject. Let us therefore limit our aspirations to the government of our country. At least we know for sure it exists and governs us to some degree. And we know what the majority means in the same context. And this majority isn't inclined to die either at a short notice or in the long run. And for once I agree with the majority of our citizens.'

You lie on your deathbed in the manner which reminds us of Duncan and his untimely death. Of course death's riddles may object to your opinion, saying that their sheer number proves the proximity and efficiency of death which never comes without harbingers: it is preceded by all sorts of signs and warnings. That is why you often hear the words which come from the mouths of your next of kin and other representatives of humanity, 'Be careful! Death has already singled you out from the myriads and myriads of other specimens subjected to the law of disappearance.' Of course you may broach a discussion with these judges who take into consideration your health, decrepitude and overall fragility as they condemn you to utter rottenness. You may say to them that the wrinkles they notice on your face are the scars you received during the battles which immortalised your name and feats of valour. You may add that you are proud of them, and if some young women are present during this discussion, you should tell them that their immaculate appearances lack the vestiges of time, of the time which brought fame and glory to your common country. But all this pales into insignificance beside the number of women you have conquered in the course of your life. You say to these callous women that their predecessors tore your heart to pieces, which accounts for the number of death-vestiges you put on display, whenever you leave your room. 'But you, their successors, do not succeed in tearing my heart apart.' And then one of these women you insult offhandedly and meticulously says to you, 'You'll see if I'm capable of tearing your heart apart or not.' Then this woman slaps your face and you collapse into a sort of heap at her feet. And once again you realise that

whatever you do is useless, pointless and sterile; as sterile as human life. Incidentally, 'sterility' is the last word you utter as you lie at the feet of the woman who tore your heart apart. When writing your testament, you paid particular attention to your participation in the life-process to which we are all willy-nilly submitted. Among other things, you mentioned your entrails, your heart – your body in general. You pointed out that your decrepitude proves beyond any doubt that you are the valorous soldier of truth. 'I have always defended the poor and the feeble-minded. And my deeds, their magnitude and impact surpass whatever Shakespeare's Macbeth ever did on battlefields and in bedrooms. I would have assassinated a dozen Duncans, if given such an opportunity. I would have seduced and conquered a score of Lady Macbeths, and my descendants –' You were about to complete this sentence, announcing to the world an impressive number of kings issued from your blood and ancestors, but your poetic élan was interrupted by some complications connected to your health, longevity and other attributes of your survival.

Yes, as a matter of fact, we survive on this Earth, and our speeches glorifying life as such are as ludicrous as our battles meant to ensure our immortality, conquests, courage and resistance. We resist, resist, resist, and then we fall, but the series of resistances to which we are addicted – such is life – does not cease, and we continue this series rather courageously, resisting vultures and their appetites. But let us not forget that Duncan is still alive. What is more, there are no vultures in the room where he lies and watches yet another sweet dream. Not every dream is a harbinger of disaster; some of them are so sweet they beguile us into believing that no murderer has already sharpened the blade of his dagger. 'The daggers have been put away,' your dreams assure you. 'You can sleep like a log because your immortality is far from threats, blades and the general sharpness of life.' According to some witnesses, Macbeth went so far as to sing a lullaby to the king who thanked him profusely, saying, 'Thank you very much indeed, my prestigious cousin. Thanks to your lullaby I'll sleep on my *deux oreilles*.' Duncan was in the habit of scattering French words through his remarks. At this particular moment, his guardian angel to whom our lady forgot to administer a powerful sleeping mixture, began to whisper the following injunction, 'Don't sleep on your two ears, for it is dangerous and exposes you to the threat which might put an end to your life. This threat is linked to our valorous Macbeth's dagger which, for once, is not directed against your enemies. Let us not forget that your life, my dear Duncan, is not your enemy, but your dearest friend. This friend is much dearer to your heart than Macbeth. If you lose Macbeth – and this can happen in the next battle – you will continue to drink wine and whisky. But if you lose your dear life, you'll lose everything, even down to whisky, vodka and soda. So you should leave one of your ears alone, and when left alone, this ear listens to whatever happens within earshot. I'm not sure this ear of yours will hear the approach of Macbeth's dagger, but your precious knight is accustomed to making use of his nostrils, of his nose and lungs. So he's sure to breathe, when walking stealthily towards your vulnerable body. And your ear, in spite of your venerable age, will hear this act of breathing. And this piece of information – your ear will certainly let you know your cousin is breathing noisily – is a bad omen, you know. It might mean your cousin is about to murder you in your sleep. But if you sleep on one ear only, this murder will not take place because you'll open your eyes and see the dagger with which you might be acquainted, given the frequency of Macbeth's appearances in your life. So you'll open your eyes, raise your head from the pillow, brandish your fists and the danger will disappear of its own accord or rather with your help, your assistance. You brandish your fists and your knuckles knock Macbeth on the head. That's how I'm trying to construct your defence, your struggle for life. You struggle for life every moment – this goes without saying. By eating a sandwich, you engage in competition with starvation. Of course you don't celebrate your victory after every lunch

or breakfast. Nevertheless your death kicks the bucket, whenever you eat or drink or just walk across your room. But this time you should get the better of death by preventing your cousin from disposing of you then and there. Of course, sooner or later the newspapers taking care of the news in your country and abroad will announce to the world the following piece of news, "He fought fiercely, but his opponent easily got the better of him." But who is this opponent, may I ask? Macbeth? No, no, certainly not. Macbeth is a mere pawn on the chessboard of the cosmos. And so you shouldn't become the laughing stock of humanity by offering your body to the attack of an insignificant dagger. And even if this dagger is significant, in your opinion, you should on no account yield to its might. After all, you're healthy enough to protect your being from the unbeing that your destiny has in store for you. "Not this time, not this time," you should proclaim, and your destiny is bound to hear you. And if it doesn't, you'll just dismiss your destiny once and for all, saying to it, "You don't deserve to be my destiny. You're unworthy of my attention, let alone of my life. But if you're bent on murdering someone tonight, I suggest you deal with Macbeth who is my unworthy cousin. I used to hold him in my arms on a regular basis, but lately he disappointed me bitterly and irremediably. I don't think he'll ever redeem his honour. Could you imagine the stratagem he came up with a few days ago? He decided to murder me, removing me brutally from my throne. Why, you may ask? Because he resolved to sit on my throne, and since my throne is not large enough and therefore can't accommodate two persons, he unsheathed his sword or dagger and got in the neighbourhood of my body which was partly disabled by sleep. But luckily for me and my family, I kept one ear open and this ear, my faithful servant, served me well, I must admit. I heard everything – not only Macbeth's movement through the air of my room, but also his intentions, the purpose of his entrance and approach. What am I driving at, I wonder?" The king realised it was pointless to argue with death: we are all mortal and consequently our demises are programmed and skilfully inserted into our lives. But we may ask this demise of ours to postpone its verdict or action. "Let me make just one speech, one instructive speech," you say to your demise. That's why the speech I dutifully transcribed is so long.'

Everything is long with the exception of life – that is what many people think and maintain. But Macbeth was very much of the opinion that life has no purpose and therefore no tomorrow will ever improve upon the pattern of our existence, upon the disastrous pattern of this fateful and worthless existence. He perpetrated many murders because he was convinced that their accomplishment could endow his lifetime with a worthy purpose. But tomorrows came, one after another. An infinite series of frustrations, disappointments and unfulfilled promises. Life promises you golden mountains, as the Russians put it, but instead of gold you get a few pieces of silver. What to do with these pieces? You go to a marketplace and buy a croissant. So what? Is this croissant equivalent to a throne, whatever its size? Of course not. It is obvious that you cannot eat a throne, although this throne might enable you to buy many loaves of bread, huge slices of salmon and even a flat in the centre of London. But is this flat capable of turning your life into a paradisiacal image? Anyway Macbeth decided that only murders could cure life of its perpetual wounds. 'Alternative medicine is a waste of time,' he used to say. People tend to have strong opinions on capital punishment and in the final scene of the play you have no alternative but to conclude that most of those people vote for this punishment, for the death of the hero whose name is Macbeth. Lady Macbeth did not express an opinion on the matter, for the simple reason that she was already dead. She died and then came back to life to say, 'The stains of death will never rub off.' Understandably she wished to stay within the kingdom of life forever and ever, but the stains of death were bound to poison her existence. And she was not fond of poisons, in spite of her addiction to sleeping pills which are poisons in their own right.

But for the moment she is still by Duncan's side and this proximity jars the eye. Whose eye? That of Macbeth. Let us recall the predicament which Duncan had to face at some point – at the point when he was confronted with the problem of the ears. Like other kings he had two ears – I get the feeling that Macbeth speaks of three ears in one of his monologues or remarks – on his head and being firmly opposed to sleepless nights, he was determined to sleep on both ears. But his guardian angel opposed this scheme, and Duncan agreed with his guardian: he had no intention of dying that night. Or any other night, come to think of it. Of course he agreed with those who maintained that men and women were mortal. 'But my mortality is a kingly mortality,' the king would answer to his detractors. 'And a true kingly mortality means immortality, eternity, and even Spinoza thought along these lines.' Actually Macbeth did not have to make use of his dagger for the purpose known as the 'assassination of the King of Scotland'. He might have asked the king what he thought about Spinoza and his philosophy, his attitude towards eternity and time. Duncan would have answered as follows, 'I've no idea what you're talking about.' 'I'm talking about philosophy,' Macbeth would have said. And Duncan would have repeated his previous words, and Macbeth would have humiliated him by pointing out that he was an ignoramus. 'Ignorant lout!' he would have added, causing Duncan's immediate death: kings cannot bear this sort of thing: being humiliated, disgraced, crossed out. It is as if a sheet of paper were put on Macbeth's writing desk. (Macbeth, writing desk – Shakespeare might have used this rhyme in one of his tragedies or sonnets.) The Thane of Codor or Caudor or Condor, according to my earlier statement, looks at the sheet of paper lying on his desk, picks up a fountain pen and writes down the name of Duncan. Then he crosses out this name; on second thoughts, as it were. This kind of murder is easily carried out, and you are not likely to be hanged for it. One wonders why Macbeth chose another way of removing Duncan from the surface of the Earth. Perhaps there were no sheets of paper within the stretch of time occupied by Macbeth's body and thoughts. Or there was a lack of fountain pens.

They also speak about the space of destiny as if destiny could be spacious and not simply narrow-minded. Of course our destiny may be reduced to the blade of a dagger – even swords are too luxurious for this horrible and horrendous notion. What does Macbeth's destiny include? One might say it is limited to the weird sisters who speak to him about kingdoms and power. But you can also affirm that it is just the dagger our hero sees in front of him, and this dagger is meant for both the king and Macbeth who is not a king yet. This dagger floats and being lighter than any stone that is bound to fall, if daring to compete with birds and airplanes, it (the dagger) can turn and direct its blade towards Macbeth's body, his throat or heart. His destiny – we are still speaking about Macbeth – also borrows its methods from his wife whose mind is nourished by awful combinations and decisions. As soon as she learns about the weird sisters' prophecies, she becomes yet another sister – far weirder than the phantoms we meet at the beginning of the masterpiece. These just hover through the air, but Macbeth's legitimate spouse smears the guardians with the same ominous blood, the one of which she endeavours to get rid at the end of her life. He probably tried to get rid of it earlier – in the middle of her life, but anyway her stay on this planet did not last for a century. And we arrive at this conclusion just by putting two and two together. What is 'two' in this context? The epoch which witnessed the denouement and the beginning of this tragedy. In those times the inhabitants of the same planet did not enjoy the fruits of longevity – with a few notable exceptions. Apparently Democritus lived a long, fruitful life of which we know a few material, not to say materialistic, nuances. But let us leave this subject alone, for we are not likely to compete with Democritus in this area, given the sinister approach of the Third World War. Of course the bombs we fear have been falling on our heads for several decades, centuries and probably even for millennia, but since thirty years they have grown so massive, so destructive that

we no longer manage to sleep on both our ears. At least one ear of ours listens to air-raids, sirens and the screams of our neighbours. Today our neighbours' wives do not cry for help because their husbands beat them with sticks and other similar objects. They just open their windows and shout because they are afraid of bombs, of atom bombs and other deadly weapons. And sometimes they do not even take the trouble to open either their windows or their ears: they hear everything. They cannot help hearing the forthcoming destruction of the world.

Does Macbeth's destiny include the destruction of the world? Of course it does, considering the impetus given to his wrath by the flight of one of his intended victims. 'From now on I'll kill all of them on the spot,' he says to himself or to someone else. This flight, the distance covered by the feet and the horse of his enemy, can also be seen within the hero's destiny. Its space grows larger and larger. Many people flee from his castle, and every flight augments both his wrath and his destiny's volume and bifurcations. And soon we are driven to the following thought: the whole world is threatened by Macbeth's dagger which continues to fly and kill both kings and emperors. It also kills a few presidents, although its owner thinks that presidential chairs are beneath his dignity. 'It's not for nothing that I killed a king,' he says to himself. 'I might have killed a dozen presidents instead.' Incidentally, during the famous banquet where a ghost makes his appearance, Macbeth is offered a chair which he does not use. Habitually he does not take advantage of such offers – please, take a seat – because he considers them banal, trivial and ridiculous. 'This chair is designed for presidents,' he says, shrugging his shoulders. But during the banquet he remains standing because the ghost does all it can to put several spokes in Macbeth's wheels. These wheels might convey our hero to other continents and thrones, but the spokes paralyse their movement. For once our rolling stones do not roll and so gather a lot of moss.

As far as I can remember, at some point there resounds through the tragedy the sentence, 'All my little ones.' This is just another death sentence we come across in the theatre where the play is staged and admired and applauded. Or we just sit in our study and re-read Shakespeare to prove to ourselves that we have not gone mad, not yet. Even if you read *King Lear*, you may rejoice at the fact that you recall some details and therefore you are not suffering from Alzheimer's. You may forget a few remarks, a few lines, but on the whole you are satisfied, for you know for sure that Lear is mad. You may have forgotten the death of his dear daughter, but you know it is a tragedy you are reading and consequently a few deaths await you in the final scene, before the fall of the curtain. The curtain falls and you begin to meditate on the genius you have just touched in a manner of speaking, for the word which denotes this capacity of ours is tangible to some extent. It is as if we were touching, literally touching not only Shakespeare but also Cordelia and Ophelia. And also Yeats' poem in which they come together for a few moments. But destiny, our merciless destiny has a terrible blow in store for us. One day, when perusing the books amassed in our library, we notice a few Shakespeare plays, among which *King Lear* sticks out on account of his – the king's – madness. We are particularly sensitive in this domain because we know that if we succumb to Alzheimer's and its feats, we might become the laughing stock of humanity. We just go out, take a few steps in the street we know by heart and a few pedestrians stop in their tracks, pointing their sticks at our heart. (For some reason a lot of people are convinced that all diseases originate in the heart.) They point at your heart as if willing to convey their dearest thought (at this point it *is* their dearest thought): 'This man is crazy, take my word for it.' Then they start watching your gestures and capturing your words and ideas. What are you ideas, by the way? Do you say to yourself, 'I hope all these people don't realise I'm crazy, as mad as King Lear.' But then you add a postscript to your thought, 'Luckily for me, all these people are illiterate and so they don't know anything about King Lear. They just know he was a king, that's all.' As for 'all my little ones,' you cannot help

meditating upon this piece of information. Your Alzheimer's has already removed a few children from this list, and so you just say to some passers-by, 'You know, some of these little ones are alive, and they may even walk in our midst.' The passers-by or pedestrians cannot help wondering about whose children and they talk expansively. They remember wars, a few worldwide catastrophes, but you drop names that literally paralyse their interior monologues. They are completely at sea with all these little ones, big ones, middle ones. As usual they do not know what you are talking about, but this time your talking and even your about are so wild, so wide of the mark that they nod their heads. And every nod of theirs means that you are not far from King Lear and his unhappy ending. To avoid further complications, you just say to them, 'I'm quite aware of your perplexity, but let me relieve your mind. I'm just rehearsing the part I'm supposed to play in our theatre next week. I'm King Lear, you know. I'm also Macbeth and his wife. Can't you see the blood with which my hands have been embellished for several years? But if you think I'm in the grips of Alzheimer's, you're utterly mistaken, and I'm just wondering who has led you astray. You've gone astray, can't you see that? Do you see anything apart from your own madness? The point is I'm playing a part, whereas you're really mad and partially dead. Do you know why you're partially dead? Because every madness plays the part of death. King Lear dies at the end of the play, at the end of his play. And his death is quite logical, isn't it? Actually it's pointless to say to you "isn't it?", because you have no idea what I'm talking about. Well, I'm talking about you, but do you know who you are? If you don't, just consult your passport and you'll soon find out everything about your identity. And if you don't, you're really mad and nothing can save you from asylums and madhouses. As a matter of fact, it's not too late to choose a suitable madhouse. If you recognise your fault – and madness is a fault, if not a crime – you can still be a master of your destiny. To some extent. So you can choose an appropriate lunatic asylum. "What kind of asylum do you prefer?" they may ask. And then they're likely to show you a sheet of paper covered with various colours.' Which colour do you prefer? You are not completely mad; at least that is what you think at the bottom of your heart which thinks even more and longer than your brain. In your childhood you liked the Black Sea, but you called it, 'The most bluish sea in the world.' So, according to your recollection, you liked the blue colour; but you are no longer a child, and you should never let this memory slip away from your brain and also from your heart and even from your intestines. So you say, 'I prefer the blue colour because the Black Sea is blue. And I'd like to swim every morning, if I'm allowed to do so with impunity.' At this point you realise already that you will not be allowed to do *everything*, in spite of the fact that you live in a free country. 'You can vote for our president,' they say to you, 'but you can't swim. Why not? you may ask. Because you didn't take swimming lessons in your childhood. Not even in your youth did you pay any attention to swimming pools, seas and oceans.' Well, you are prevented from swimming every morning, and you have to come to terms with this news. What other items of news do you have to appropriate, to welcome into your life, into your madness from which they promise to cure you in no time at all? The other item of news concerns your afternoons. Apparently you are forbidden to swim not only in the mornings, but also in the evenings, and so you pin your hopes on afternoons as if they were really different from mornings and evenings. In the morning they remove the straitjacket from your body – for five minutes only. And they perform the same act of mercy in the evenings. And what about our afternoons, the ones we are examining at the present moment? You hope that they will liberate you from this compact prison not only to let you brandish your fists, but also for the purpose of swimming in nearby pools. But they point out that there are no swimming pools in the neighbourhood – nay in the whole country. 'Whenever we have this urge, this swimming urge, we go to the United States,' they say to you. 'All right,' you answer. 'I have nothing against the United States of America.

Let us leave at once.’ ‘You’d better pack your things first,’ they say. ‘I don’t need to,’ you answer. ‘You can find everything in New York.’ ‘And what about Boston?’ they ask you point blank. ‘I suppose you can find a swimming pool at Harvard,’ you say to them quite innocently. ‘And what about your underwater exploits?’ they ask. ‘Don’t you wish to explore the mysteries of the world celebrated by Mr Cousteau?’ ‘For once, I can skip this exercise,’ you answer. And then they renew the ordeal by putting the same straitjacket on your body. ‘At least you might have washed these clothes of mine,’ you say to them. ‘What for? Your attachment to cleanliness is one of your trump cards.’ ‘And what are my other trump cards?’ you ask them. ‘You visit the lavatory on a regular basis. You don’t use your bed for this purpose, contrary to what other lunatics tend to do. They can’t see any difference between their beds and the lavatory we offer them, whenever they need it.’ ‘And what about the days when they don’t need it?’ you ask. ‘On these days we offer them their beds,’ you hear. You ask yourself if you should believe your ears, and then you decide to believe them. After all, you have to believe in the world, if only partly.

All my little ones. If you are afraid of becoming yet another victim of Alzhemier’s, of whatever makes you forget not only your name, but also your gestures, you should stick to this formula – *all* of them; otherwise they might question you on the subject. ‘Could you please name the children who were spared by Macbeth?’ How are you supposed to answer this question? Suddenly a sentence crops up in your mind or heart, ‘I applied for the job on the off chance, but I didn’t seriously expect to get it.’ What job (or jog) are you thinking about? Every moment you go through is a job or a jog, and you should apply for it, otherwise you may disappear forever. Well, you apply for the job and this time you are asked to enumerate the children spared by Macbeth and his wife. On the off chance you utter a few names, but the chance you count upon is not on your side. You say ‘John’ and they inform you that John was spared by his destiny, for at the right moment, at the wrong moment he was overlooked by Macbeth’s accomplices. One of them asks another, ‘Where’s John?’ And the other answers, ‘I thought you’d killed him.’ But John was hiding in one of the lavatories with which the castle was lavishly furnished. You have another try and name Khariton, but they let you know that the name you stick to must be of Russian origin, and the Scots had nothing in common with the Russians in those days, except that all of them down to small children were engaged in battles and used to losing their heads almost daily; at least nightly, every blessed night. So it is better not to enter into any discussion on this matter. You just say, ‘All of my little ones,’ and they retort, ‘You’ve got no children.’ So you just say to all of them, ‘I’m prepared to put up with straitjackets and other inconveniences of madhouses, but please leave me alone for the moment. And I choose this moment, its everlastingness in the way my Faust acted many centuries ago.’ Their eyes study you for a few seconds, and then they say, ‘Is this your last word?’ ‘Yes, it’s my last word,’ you answer. That is what human relationships boil down to.

If you put on your Sunday best and even try to enliven your lips with a few touches of your favourite lipstick, they say to you, ‘Your labours are utterly lost. You’re going to die in a few seconds.’ ‘Never mind,’ you answer. ‘Even in my coffin I should look like Aphrodite.’ ‘You’ll never look like Aphrodite,’ they answer: they like contradicting you whenever they can. And they can do it often – all the time, to be frank. But let us not be frank for once. Why should we always be in the midst of spoilsports? For once we shall swell the number of flatterers. So we say to the lady who goes on putting some finishing touches to her Aphroditian beauty, ‘If I were you, I would pay more attention to my cheeks. Of course your cheeks are much more beautiful than mine, but this doesn’t mean you should neglect them. You can make them even more beautiful than they are, although one might think it is impossible, considering the perfection of your face, legs and bosom.’ As for men, they should always imitate Adam: no king will ever surpass him in the domain of influence. A woman says to you, ‘Unfortunately

I'm not impressed by your beauty. As a matter of fact, I even question its presence on your body and inside your brain. So I won't sleep with you, even if you offer me a Ferrari.' Upon hearing this verdict, you can say to the woman, 'So you refuse to engender humankind. Don't you think this is a crime against humanity? I'll report your behaviour to the authorities whose headquarters is well-known, being located in The Hague.' You can also say to her, 'In my opinion, you're not intelligent enough for the task of this magnitude. You should first eat the apple. Do you know what kind of apple I have in mind? As for my looks, I can't change them. That's how Adam looked, and I can't do anything about it. I'm Adam, after all.' And if during your lovemaking she blames you for your failure to come up to her expectations, you just point out that the Fall affected you irremediably. 'Do you know what the Fall means?' you ask her. 'Do you know the *overall* significance of the Fall? Apparently, to all outward and inward appearances, you're not acquainted with our anatomy, with the anatomy associated with males, be they men or chimpanzees. And every fall results in a fall, which seems to be perfectly logical. Just pick up any book on anatomy and analyse our organs related to sex and its variations. When the Fall comes, you have to accept it, otherwise you may land up in some madhouse or other. There are many madhouses in the world, if you must know. And you should study this detail related to our earthly existence. In Paradise the matter stood differently in this domain. Well, in some of these madhouses, women rub their hands, trying to get rid of someone's blood. In others men rub their genitals to counteract the malignant influence of the Fall.' The point is, this influence is manifold and we cannot protect ourselves from its consequences by shutting the Bible once and for all. Even when our ballpoint pen slips from our fingers and reaches the ground, we feel quite unhappy, considering our inaptitude, our physical inconveniences. Let us be more explicit about it: we do not have to demonstrate our weaknesses. We just talk about them, for this frankness makes us happy, for some reason. This reason may be explained by our openness: we open ourselves to the world, and the world expresses its gratitude by a sort of well-being we experience at once, quite unexpectedly. To make a long story short, we are unable to bend down without exposing ourselves to atrocious pains, to a series of pains, oddly enough. It is not odd at all, frankly speaking. These pains stab us in the back, in the stomach, and even in the neck, although our neck does not seem to take part in the process. As we try to recover from this onslaught of our personal misery, we realise that the Fall, the proverbial Fall, has a lot of ramifications. It can see the light of day or rather the dark of night at any moment, even if, according to our expectations, this moment must be blissful; at least to some degree. But what is this degree, one wonders? Those who believe in God and in His participation in our lives often hear His voice which answers their questions and assuages their fears. The Almighty explains to them that feeling a little back pain is nothing in comparison with real suffering. This suffering puts you on your carpet and turns you this way and that. And you are supposed to recall a large worm that wriggles in the freshly dug earth. And God or the Almighty makes you realise that you do not look like this worm, for the simple reason that the suffering you are enduring is not *real* suffering. It is an *unreal* suffering, He seems to suggest. And considering its unreal nature, you might regard the whole story as a proof of your felicity. And you thank your guardian angel through a felicitously phrased speech.

But we are dragging things out. What are these proverbial things? Are they really proverbial? For the time being, it does not really matter, given that Duncan is still alive. What is more, he prospers and probably thanks his guardian angel or God for the piece of luck he is living through on that bed. After all, he is in the company of Lady Macbeth and, judging from the films shot on the subject, this lady is rather beautiful, although her beauty is often distorted by her criminal intentions. And Macbeth is still pursuing the dagger which does what it can to avert the disaster linked to Duncan's life and reign. This is just another instance of the Fall, of its consequences. While

watching the trajectory of the dagger, Macbeth pins his hopes on yet another fall. Sure enough, he believes that the dagger can commit this murder on its own. Why not just fall on Duncan's body from the sky? Or from some ceiling or other? Macbeth's thoughts are no longer ordered in accordance with the laws of logic: the ceiling must be located above Duncan's head, otherwise the scheme is unlikely to work. So the dagger continues its flight, reaches the spot from which it can murder the king, and falls on his head or rather on his throat. But let us not forget that the dagger must be very careful, considering that Lady Macbeth is not far from Duncan's throat. As a matter of fact, she is just kissing him on his neck, and Macbeth applauds the deed: he is sure that this kiss is just another part of the general stratagem. When discussing the deed after its accomplishment, Macbeth said to his wife, 'We must be very careful.' 'Why?' asked Lady Macbeth. 'I was the last person to see the king alive, and suspicion will immediately fall on me. Just another instance of the Fall, you know. Another instance, another consequence.' 'Why?' asked his wife. 'Because no one saw him alive after my visit. Didn't I kill him with the dagger?' 'You did. But I wonder why you didn't kill his guardians.' 'His guardian angel? One can't kill guardian angels, you know. They're more or less immortal. They don't even die after their master's death. But who is the master of whom? What do you think on the subject?'

To some extent, Macbeth wishes to abolish time as if he was aware of Einstein's remark, 'Time doesn't exist.' Actually he wants the deed to accomplish its own destiny alone. On the other hand, he prays to God that the fateful moment will go through time very quickly. In a way, he talks to the moment thus, 'I know that Faust wished to prolong you because you're so wonderful one can't wish for a better development of one's life. If you stay with me, I'll always be happy. I think that's what Faust meant, when uttering his monologue. But you, this moment that belongs to my life, I ask you to go through my life with unparalleled speed because I don't want to see this horror slowly, *au ralenti* as they say sometimes. What a pity you haven't passed yet. I can see the dagger in front of me, which means it's not yet in Duncan's body. Of course this dagger is so powerful it could lift Duncan's body and travel with him through the air, through the continents. What a pity they're not over the States now.' At the end of his monologue Macbeth loses sight of the dagger and sincerely hopes it might be over the States, in some state of this distant country. And Lady Macbeth undergoes the treatment we are acquainted with, thanks to the ritual of love performed in a bed or on a carpet or anywhere else. When you make love to a being you adore, you forget time – exactly as Einstein did. In other words, you find yourself in a black hole, and you have no idea what is going on. You forget not only time but also space. Everything goes through you, through your nerves and tendons, but you just feel something extramundane. And if asked, 'What are you feeling?' you might reply as follows, 'I'm in another galaxy. Or in the void that lives in the midst of galaxies. Do you know what I'm speaking about? Well, I'll allow you to experience this feeling. Just take my place in this bed, by Lady Macbeth's side, and you'll find yourself in heaven.' 'Which number of heaven did you have in mind?' asks your friend. 'Number nine, I suppose.' But if you make the same suggestion in our hero's presence, he is sure to answer brutally, violently, 'Why should I sleep with my wife once again? I've experienced the touch and horror of her body for many years. This body is certainly beautiful, but it's also horrible, unimaginably horrible. It's full of evil thoughts, intentions and schemes. And you can feel these schemes over and over again. They're like knives piercing your body. Of course this sensation is delightful, there's no denying it. But when you leave the bed, you find all these wounds on your body. You're like St Sebastian, to put it mildly. Or you're like a monster whose appearance haunts both Lucifer and Cassius – in some Hell or other. You look at yourself in a mirror and you break this mirror into pieces, being disgusted with your own image. Actually my wife did this many times. That's

why her hands are smeared with blood. Yes, I must admit that my way of making love is also brutal and piercing, so to speak. But now I've other fish to fry. And you're aware of my projects for the future. This future lies in front of me – in the shape of Duncan's body. And I've promised myself to kill this future. And sleep, while I'm at it. If you cannot sleep, you have no future – that's how the saying goes. Even if a beautiful body lies under you, nothing really happens. You just say to this body, "Please, forgive me, but I'm unable to perform any rite today. For some time I've been deprived of sleep and my organ is sleepy, on account of my sleepless nights. And I can't wake my body, for all my efforts." Of course your partner reassures you, saying, "Don't worry. I'll wake your body in the twinkling of an eye." "My eyes can't twinkle either," you complain woefully. "Nothing can twinkle within my body, on its surface. I'm utterly deprived of twinkling." "It doesn't matter," your companion in misfortune replies quite frankly. "Let the stars perform their business. We'll just make love to each other." And your partner begins to rub your organ. And you say to your partner, "What are you doing that for? There's no blood on my penis. Why, you may ask? Because I didn't murder Duncan with my penis. What instrument did I resort to on that occasion? Can't remember. Perhaps I murdered him with my little finger. It just twinkled and Duncan collapsed on the bed from which he was trying to rise."

But black holes, their very existence, bothers both Macbeth and his wife. They think that Duncan can vanish into thin air or rather into a black hole before they have an opportunity to cut his throat. (Did they cut his throat or something else?) In this case, Duncan's son will inherit the kingdom. (Is the name of the son Malcolm? Is he really Duncan's son?) For obvious reasons, a black hole cannot become a king and rule the waves and the rest of the components of which Scotland and other kingdoms are composed. Every kingdom is a composition to some degree, and one may call it a symphony, if one feels like that. If one feels inclined to call it an opera, one may do so without any problem: many people live in this or that kingdom, and all these people can sing accompanied by an orchestra. They can also sing on their own, and this phenomenon is known under the name of 'a capella'. Unless I am bitterly mistaken. One of my friends used to say, "Well, you can be bitterly mistaken or butterly mistaken. In the latter case you're right." So one letter can erase a lot of things; at least our Lady Macbeth thought so. She said at some point, "Water is incapable of erasing our crime from the annals of the world or from my hands. But one letter could do it. Which letter, I wonder?" You can play with words to your heart's content. For instance, you take the word 'consolation' and ask yourself what example you can give to prove the loyalty of this word. You say 'consolidation' and you are proud of your answer to this or that problem. The world is fragile, and Macbeth is quite aware of this deplorable fact. That is why he is bent on murdering his rivals; Banquo, among many other people. What is more, to protect himself from the world's fragility, unreliability and the future – while you are it, you had better protect yourself from the future as well – he decides to kill Banquo's son who flees, unexpectedly and unfortunately. "What about Fleance?" (Or whatever his name is.) "He's fleeing and we can't catch up with him." This is just another wordplay, nothing else. If Banquo's son had borne the name of Stepan, he might have been captured by Macbeth's acolytes. Instead of fleeing, he would have taken a few steps. And his pursuers would have run and caught up with him in no time at all. And they would have cut his throat. It is not for nothing that Macbeth called them 'cutthroats' or something along these lines. We begin our search and go through a few lines, looking for the appropriate word, for the *mot juste*. One of these words is 'murder'. Naively Macbeth thinks it is enough to utter this word and the deed is done, as he puts it somewhere. (Perhaps in another Shakespearian tragedy.) Of course no one forbids you to count on the omnipotence of words and on the futility, sterility of time. You just say to time, "You're sterile and all your hours and tomorrows are just nothing within the

grandiose scheme of things. I say to you, “Stop in your tracks” and you do stop in your tracks. You stop in your *everything*, if you’ll excuse my frivolous use of English grammar. I can also give the same command to the dagger I see in front of me, but if I tackle this problem at some point, I’ll add, ‘You should stop after plunging your blade into Duncan’s body. And you should ensure that your presence in his body is obeyed by his sinews, blood and other elements of life. I don’t think they’re powerful enough to remove you from his body, but let’s make assurance doubly sure.’

Contrary to what might be presumed, Macbeth has time on his hands and so can afford a few interior and exterior monologues – while waiting for Duncan’s demise. So our hero embarks upon yet another monologue during which he considers Duncan’s disappearances in one of the black holes upon which our contemporary scientists meditate with the help of telescopes and space journeys. They send yet another spaceship in the direction of these holes and wait for an answer. In the process they discuss singularities, event horizons and other perplexities which inhabit our world. ‘The behaviour of black holes is quite singular,’ they say to each other. True enough, the black holes’ conduct is bizarre, not to say outrageously disrespectful. But it is not entirely their fault. They change as soon as an observer – yet another scientist – turns his gaze on their entrails or bosoms. The scientists we have in mind affirm that everything gets destroyed in the intestines of these holes. But they add that the quanta memory of Duncan remains in the cosmos. In other words, you cannot really murder this king; and all other kings, in point of fact. They are just indestructible, given the huge power with which our quanta are endowed by God. (Quanta or quantas? What is the name of the famous Australian air company?) Yes, Macbeth is preoccupied by the tenacity of quanta effects, and his worries augment, increase their volume whenever a doctor says to him that his wife continues to rub her hands. ‘Can’t you just accompany her to the nearest lavatory?’ asks Macbeth. ‘I did invite her to one of your saunas, but she said, “You can’t vanquish the pernicious effect of quanta.” What am I supposed to do under the circumstances?’ ‘You should tell my wife that Einstein didn’t agree with Bohr and other physicists who proclaimed the existence of non-local connections. Just say to her that Einstein was sticking to his guns, to his harmony, rather.’ Be that as it may, Lady Macbeth goes on rubbing her hands, and the blood she is worried about drips on carpets, on stones and even on her naked body that her husband admires in spite of his age, of her age. The doctor comes and says, ‘Today your spouse is rubbing her body.’ ‘Is she rubbing her naked body or her clothes?’ asks Macbeth. ‘This time, her body is naked,’ answers the doctor. ‘I’m coming,’ says Macbeth. During the play, he repeats his sentence myriads of times, on various occasions. He is literally elated when one of his helpers says to him, ‘One of your hateful enemies is now within your reach.’ Immediately Macbeth takes off his dressing gown and puts on his armour furnished with a few daggers. He walks towards his future victims, touches one of the daggers and prepares it for the fight. Does he *unsheathe* the dagger? It is not a sword after all. On the other hand, the future victim is not asleep so Macbeth needs his sword that he unsheathes as he continues to walk towards his victim. The victim turns his head and touches his body as he looks for his own sword. The two swords clash in the air and the victim falls to the ground; yet another consequence of the Fall. Or does he fall into a black hole?

Macbeth ponders this problem defined as the ‘black-hole initiative’. Sometimes Macbeth can kill his opponents on his own: he is skilful enough on battlefields and his strength is still on the herculean side. But at the end of his life the number of his enemies exceeds both his powers and determination. Of course he is still determined to rule not only the waves but the whole world. Yet some signs are against him – to such an extent that his servants begin to mention ‘bad omens’. ‘Another bad omen,’ they say as they watch a multitude of trees

march towards the doomed castle. They also discuss the birth of Macduff, the manner in which he was born. ‘Was he really born?’ they ask each other. ‘Yes, otherwise he wouldn’t try to oppose our master and king.’ ‘But even the unborn can fight with him,’ say other servants. ‘How so?’ ‘Don’t forget the fear experienced by our master during the demonstration staged by the weird sisters. A multitude of mirrors showed our master Banquo’s descendants. Our master wasn’t pleased on this occasion – to say the least, so to speak.’ ‘I wish I could push all these assailants into a black hole,’ says Macbeth to his servants. ‘Could you bring me one of these holes?’ ‘But where are we supposed to look for them?’ ask the servants. ‘They can be found within the so-called dark matter.’ ‘Where’s this matter situated?’ ask the servants. ‘I know that you’re the future traitors, a bunch of evildoers. So you must think that my castle is a black hole. But let me tell you that my castle is my home, and consequently it is my castle. And my castle has nothing to do with black holes. It is rather a white hole, if you must know. A brilliant hole, a luminous hole. But let’s not waste our time on idle discussions – just go with this dark matter to the nearest lavatory and fling it into the hole you see under your feet.’ This remark may lead us to a discussion which is more or less foreign to the general topic of this book. Indeed, we are not supposed to discuss the way in which the inhabitants of distant times removed the contents of their intestines. On the other hand, this topic may assist us during our investigation of the universe and its enigmas. And one of its enigmas concerns Macbeth and his desire to become a king, although this post is fraught with dangers that no one denies. Kings are said to lose sleep not only after an assassination but even as a result of a bad crop or something along those lines. Actually sleep often disagrees with kings and their authority, for kings can rule the waves and other trifles but not their rest which is associated with sleep. In this respect they are not different from other representatives of our species. In other words you do not have to kill a king and usurp his throne for the sake of your sleep. What happens on these occasions is rather the opposite: you lose your sleep and begin to rub your hands, even if during your assassinations you used only revolvers and cannons.

But let us try and explain the significance of black holes while we remain in close proximity to lavatories, to their parts meant for the discharge of our impurities. A black hole is such an organisation or locality: you feel that the universe is overburdened with murders and other crimes and point to the nearest black hole, saying, ‘Please, swallow this abomination in the twinkling of an eye.’ This injunction of yours means that you know what kind of action is habitually performed by black holes: they utterly destroy whatever becomes part of their riches. But we should not believe that black holes have no will of their own: there are known for their capacity to attract whatever can be found within their field of vision, especially if the item in question is similar to Macbeth and his wife. One may consequently wonder why Macbeth’s opponents needed a lot of trees and other implements of war to destroy Macbeth’s power, life and posterity. (He was still capable of marrying a woman and begetting a lot of children.) It was enough to push him into one of the holes upon which we recently enlarged to show how murders can be committed without being followed by punishments. One of these punishments is enacted by the hands you cannot wash in spite of the abundance of water and Arabian perfumes. The problem we are dealing with mainly concerns the person who throws the waste which can be described in the following terms, ‘Every day, 30 million gallons of untreated human waste (= excrement) flow from Ciudad Juarez into the Rio Grande.’ In this sentence our black holes are called the Rio Grande. Why should we bother about words and the definitions provided by them? But what is human waste, may we ask? Of course we are forbidden to talk about mediocrities, insignificant individuals, downright nonentities: we are not the Nazi followers. But if you kill a king, automatically you become human waste and they begin to treat you; or rather maltreat you. They throw you into black holes, and if they

think you do not deserve a punishment of this amplitude, they throw you into a grey hole. What is the difference between a black hole and a grey hole? In the latter you are just torn apart, but you are not pulverised, contrary to what happens in the former. In short, you do not become dust and so no one can say, when moving you from one spot to another, 'Dust to dust, ashes to ashes.' They just say, 'Nerve to nerve, bone to bone.' But Macbeth does not waste his time; in other words, his time has not become waste matter, not yet. So he looks either at Duncan and his lady or consults the mirrors offered to his scrutiny by the weird sisters. In the latter case, he says to himself and to the sisters, 'Another black hole. Another black hole. Luckily for me, Banquo's descendants live but do not prosper in black holes.' Actually, Macbeth did his best to protect his lady from black holes, but he did not succeed, one is bound to conclude. An ignorant observer might say, while watching this battle with black holes, 'Our new king is playing the game of football magnificently. Even Pele pales into insignificance, when compared to our king's unquestionable genius. From this point of view, the whole universe is regarded as a stadium where two teams compete for triumphs. There are always two teams, always and everywhere, even if we stop thinking in terms of death and life; even if the whole thing (whatever it is) stops being a question of life and death.'

In this context the importance of Fleence grows immeasurably. (Usually they use another spelling: Fleance, but I think it is a misprint.) Within this stadium there are runners as well as footballers, and in the midst of these runners we recognise Banquo's famous son whose escape from Macbeth's clutches taught a lesson to many sons, victims and contract killers. If you are a contract killer, you sign a contract, according to which you are supposed to kill someone important: killing unimportant individuals is pointless and dangerous. Killing important individuals is dangerous too, but it pays off, in the long run. And inveterate runners (as well as inveterate liars) do not abandon their occupation for the sake of trifles. And the whole is a mere trifle in comparison with their lies and runs. So Fleence – please, mark the spelling – flees, and even his reign is not comparable to this flight, to the record he literally smashed in the course of it; the world record, if you please. Frankly speaking, there was no competition of note at the moment when Fleence made up his mind and made a dash for it. For what? For freedom, life and the kingdom promised to him by the weird sisters. Should I use the capital 'W' on this occasion? Well, I am not sure their weirdness will increase, if I accept this solution to the linguistic problem I am facing. I could go so far as to offer a series of capital letters to this word and also to the word it complements in the tragedy: 'sisters'. But they are weird enough, in my opinion. And capital letters are not weird by themselves: they become weird, when applied to a weird notion, such as the USSR, for instance. So Fleence continues to flee and nobody budes, strange as it may appear. Aren't Macbeth's acolytes supposed to catch up with him at the earliest opportunity? But in this case there are no opportunities to speak of, for no one even *tries* to catch up with him and cut his throat. Incidentally, one wonders why Macbeth calls these people cut-throats. (I wonder if I used the dash, when speaking about this phenomenon for the first time. It does not really matter: the throat was not cut on this occasion. And on many other occasions, otherwise humanity would already have ceased to exist.) So Fleence goes on running, but Macbeth is not inspired by his example: he is still watching the dagger which has just stopped in its tracks as if oblivious of reality at the centre of which there lies Duncan's body – rather majestically, one must admit. But oddly enough, this body is out of Macbeth's reach, and this strange situation originated in the milk of human kindness for which his wife reproaches him bitterly. Apparently this milk prevents him from catching the nearest way. 'You go round and round and round,' thinks his wife. 'Why don't you go straight to the point? Can't you see this point? It's Duncan's throat, for God's sake! If I were you, I'd spill this milk of yours at once, otherwise you'll never catch anything. Even the longest way will remain inaccessible to you.' As a matter of fact, Macbeth

does not go anywhere, being rooted to the spot by various phenomena. Now it is a dagger that seems to invite him somewhere; now his butterflies get the better of him. These butterflies perturb his stomach and he thinks they might interfere at the wrong moment; or at the right moment. All this depends on your point of view, and I suppose you vote for Duncan and his eternal life. Lady Macbeth says to her husband, 'You pay too much attention to these butterflies of yours. You should switch to a foreign language to annihilate them as soon as possible.' Macbeth begins to talk French, but then he stops and says to his wife, 'My knowledge of French isn't brilliant enough to allow me to go on without feeling a few pangs of remorse.' 'Didn't you learn this language in your childhood?' 'Yes, I spoke French with my mother. But the battles I've won (and the bottles I've drunk) since those halcyon days have diminished the size of my memory rather alarmingly. I don't know if I have to add "rather" to the adverb "alarmingly". It's true that everything in my life is *rather* these days, but grammar and languages shouldn't suffer because of my weaknesses.'

Perhaps we should tackle his problem from the point of view of time which, according to Einstein, in one of his remarks, does not exist, being a sort of prejudice, if I remember rightly. It *is* a prejudice and so Macbeth can dismiss it from the problem he faces. 'Anyway, I'll kill Duncan sooner or later. And it doesn't matter whether I kill him later or sooner. Time is a convention of which I must dispose as quickly as possible, otherwise they wouldn't take me seriously in universities and during colloquiums.' And he tells his wife, 'Duncan will leave our castle tomorrow.' And the lady points out that this tomorrow will never see the light of day, which alludes to the presence of other tomorrows upon which Macbeth enlarges in one of his monologues. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. And then his wife interferes to remind him that one of these tomorrows is not supposed to see the light of day. 'What then will it see?' asks Macbeth. 'The *night* of day. Can you see what I'm driving at?' 'Are you talking about the dark matter and the atmosphere it creates on the Earth?' 'Not quite, not quite. You see, Duncan's absence may be regarded by some as an emergence of the colour black, of its domination. Some of these individuals believe that Malevich's *Black Square* was inspired by Duncan's assassination. But Malevich also painted a series of *white* squares and these squares pertain to our bliss, our domestic happiness and our power, our throne.' 'I wish I could see one of these squares right now. Instead, I see a number of black triangles. And these triangles depict our relationship.' 'How so?' asks Lady Macbeth. 'You're still in the bed, lying by the king's side. And I'm standing by your side, by your side and his side. Aren't we a perfect triangle?' 'But we're not *black* triangles,' says his wife. 'We've been swimming in the sea of blood for some time.' 'No, no, no,' says Macbeth. 'You've outstripped the course of time. We haven't killed Duncan and Banquo yet.' 'But you said yourself that time was a convention to which we didn't have to pay any attention.' 'Be that as it may, we should create the sea of blood which will allow us to begin our enterprise with dignity and pomp.' 'Even if you murder Duncan, you'll only get a rivulet of blood, not the sea you're dreaming about.' 'Well, I'll empty a bucket of blood on the floor, and we'll swim in it with pleasure and dignity. You've already wasted too much water on your hands, bent on washing them once and for all.' At this point you may wonder who speaks to whom. You may also wonder about time and its presence or absence. At the beginning of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy says that havoc has been wreaked on the Oblonsky family, and consequently everything is upside down – as a result of topsy-turvy actions and treasons. Well, something similar is going on in the Macbeth household. There is a ball during which Macbeth plays the part of an innocent flower, and some guests are taken in by Lady Macbeth's stratagem. All the guests look at Macbeth and some of them say to each other, 'I think our host looks like an innocent flower. There are many flowers like that in my garden. My gardener waters them every day, and I ask him not to walk on them,

because any contact with humans perturbs and perverts them.’ ‘I agree with you,’ says another guest, nodding his head. ‘Macbeth does look like an innocent flower. So we’d better not walk on him so as not to spoil the effect of his innocence.’ ‘And we’d better not give him a dagger, otherwise he’ll be tempted to murder the king, which would lead to the loss of innocence.’ Macbeth listens to these comments and smiles, for he prefers a kingdom to innocence, however pure and paradise-orientated. ‘I couldn’t care less about my innocence,’ he conveys to his consciousness. ‘A kingdom looks much better than innocence. And if at some point I grow nostalgic and yearn for innocence, for its virginal presence, I’ll invite some young girls who dance little swans in Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake* and they’ll dance for me in my garden. Does it remind me of something, of some cultural event? Of course it does. Something similar happens in Wagner’s *Parsifal*, in the second act of the opera. The action is set in Klingsor’s gardens where a multitude of young girls endeavour to seduce the innocence of Parsifal. It’s a pity I’m not Parsifal who is far more precious than flowers. My wife turned me into a flower. Why didn’t she choose Parsifal? Isn’t she acquainted with Wagner’s masterpiece? I ought to have made her listen to it before turning my thoughts to murders and kingdoms. She listens to the opera and says, ‘One day, one of these tomorrows you speak about so eloquently, you’ll murder the king. But before murdering him, you’ll become Parsifal whose innocence is as immortal as my beauty. Let’s skip the episode during which you pretended to be a flower – an innocent flower at that. I’ve changed my mind – you’re Parsifal now. And Parsifal killed a goose or some other bird, and this happened upon his entrance on the stage of the opera house located in Bayreuth. Of course you kill a lot of birds during your hunting expeditions, but this time you should direct your murderous instincts against your king and protector, your sponsor, as they say nowadays. But first we should decide which morrow or tomorrow won’t see the light of day or the sun. There are so many of them. Actually, I wonder why you embarked upon this silly monologue of yours. Why touch upon so many tomorrows? Isn’t one tomorrow enough, that of our happiness, of our eternal bliss?’

A discussion ensues and naturally enough Parsifal becomes the protagonist of this exchange of words, thoughts and murderous ideas. If you look like Parsifal, one may suspect you of evil intentions directed towards an innocent goose. And while you are at it (murder, perversity and so on) you may as well kill anybody, a human being. And this human being may turn out to be a king to whom nothing human is foreign. But if you are an innocent flower, you cannot harm anyone, unless a serpent is hiding under you, which can happen only if the scene unfolds within the tragedy we are taking apart for the sake of our analysis. Of course it can also happen in real life divorced from theatres and scenes, for people are fond of serpents which enable them to get rid of unwanted characters. Incidentally, Macbeth might have carried out his deed in this fashion, buying a flower and a serpent. All flowers are more or less innocent, and their thorns are not due to malice and inborn cruelty, sadism. They are just furnished with thorns because it is a component of their natures. During the Last Judgement Macbeth will certainly blame his genes for the deeds he performed in his lifetime and probably after his death: such people gain an enormous impetus from which they are unable to liberate themselves. The same goes for Lady Macbeth who speaks about her dispatch that gives sovereign sway and masterdom to the days to come. These days come and what do we see? The naked body of our lady and the hands rubbing each other in the vain attempt to get rid of the former deeds and undeeds. So many things and beings undone through the intervention of this imperial couple. Are they really an *imperial* couple? Or should we just speak about kingly attire? Well, the sway and masterdom reign in the days about which our lady warned us in one of her speeches. But now she seems to be applying her brakes so that the sway and masterdom are supposed to follow in her footsteps, to imitate her

example. Suddenly we hear the screech of brakes and see Macbeth's dear spouse bend over a washbasin, and we expect to witness a huge quantity of blood trickle from her fingers. But nothing happens except that our lady sings a lullaby addressed to her remorse, to the blood which, in her opinion, is trickling from some wounds or just from her hands, instead of sleeping somewhere, in some tomb or other. 'Why don't you sleep in your tomb?' asks the lady. (She is talking to the blood in question. There are so many questions associated with blood. Which question do we have in mind?) 'Don't you find it comfortable?' Our lady does not realise that the tomb she is alluding to exists solely in her imagination, and consequently has nothing to do with reality. Even magical realism resides in a different area so that neither Marquez nor anyone else could describe this situation in which the queen found herself several centuries ago. At some point, however, the queen realises that the blood she sees almost everywhere trickles from her hands and lives mainly on her hands, instead of relishing a sort of eternal rest in an authentic tomb. The doctor whose duty is directed towards his patient's wellbeing explains to her, to our and Shakespeare's heroine, that the blood on which she concentrates her interior and exterior monologues – all monologues are exterior, given Joyce's obtrusive presence – has no tomb and so cannot take advantage of the creature comforts offered by cemeteries. 'I am his tomb,' answers the lady. 'Does he need any other tomb? How greedy these bloods are. You allow them to escape from the veins and other recipients, and they just bother you with their eternal presence, instead of expressing their gratitude. They air their eternal grievances, instead of lying low, of sleeping on both ears. Now I know – it is *our* blood I was talking about to my husband. Yes, it is our blood we should put to sleep, instead of dropping sleeping pills in the cups of Duncan's guards. You make a hole in your body and slip a few sleeping pills into this hole. Not only your blood is likely to fall asleep as a result of this treatment, but you yourself will find your eternal sleep, at last, at last.'

I must be speaking about Macbeth: sleepless nights constituted 80% of *his* problem. Apparently he did what can be read about in the preceding paragraph. That is how he reasoned. Let us think twice before embarking upon yet another narrative. We should take into consideration the following piece of information: Macbeth's castle was stuffed with sleeping pills. So after a party, yet another party he would pick one of these pills up and let it drop into his mouth. He would raise his hand up, direct it towards his lips, open his mouth and let the pill fall into it. The pill falls – yet another instance of the consequences we are following closely – but sleep drags its feet, so to speak. Sleep often acts in this treacherous way, and nothing can prevent it from carrying out its threats. What are these threats, pray? Our sleep says to us, 'I won't come tonight, whatever you do to induce me to change my mind. I'm dead set on depriving you of this tranquiliser, this natural tranquiliser enjoyed by innocent flowers of all kinds.' By the way, all murderers know that they should increase the number of sleeping pills they take after every new murder. So, before committing a murder, before embarking upon this well-known ritual – you embark, embark, embark: such is life after all – you should go to the nearest chemist and buy two or three boxes filled to the brim with sleeping pills. It is true that you need a prescription for these pills, but never mind, never mind. You know a doctor whose kindness will offer you as many pills as you wish. And if you know only reluctant doctors, you must immediately get acquainted with another specimen, another representative of this profession. When choosing an ideal candidate for the job, you must question him or her in this fashion, 'Will you prescribe me as many sleeping pills as I need?' And if, by way of an answer, this doctor does not hand you the five or six boxes you covet or even lust after, you just open the door of his office and go out. Sooner or later you will find what you are looking for: a perfect pill-purveyor. I wonder why our doctors do not make things easier for us. What do we really need them for? They are absolutely useless, except in the area devoted to sleep. In this area we find our

sleep and also a multitude of sleeping pills. Our doctors are not on speaking terms with our sleep so they have to lay their hands on sleep-inducers (or sleep-purveyors). And we realise that they deserve the banknotes we put on their writing desk, after inserting them in some decent-looking envelope.

Of course Macbeth was accustomed to sharing all his worries with his wife, and sleepless nights were one of his major problems to which I attributed 80% of his worries. So he talked to her about his inability to fall asleep, when his sinews and thoughts refused to obey his orders. He feels that his thoughts fail him, and he even goes so far as to say to himself, 'The only thought I still have in my possession is the lack of sleep and the need I experience in this domain that is often called a "kingdom".' For some time, over two or three weeks, he thought he might appropriate a portion of what he called the 'world-sleep' by repeating one sentence. And the sentence he could use on this occasion was 'I should fall asleep'. Well, it is not enough to *will* something, counting on the obedience of the world which is said to supply us with whatever we need or just desire – for the heck of it; whatever Schopenhauer might have said on the subject. But we should be fair: Macbeth did not think the Almighty would obey his orders. He did not even propose to himself the scheme known to all braggarts, to all selfish idiots. 'I say something and this something appears. What's more, this something is now at my beck and call.' No – Macbeth was not an idiot, and one should not confuse him with the famous hero of Dostoevsky's work, which is not less famous than the hero himself. But we must reconcile ourselves to the fact that, during a certain period of time, Macbeth thought he might fall asleep by repeating the same sentence – a procedure known throughout our sleepless world. He failed most pitifully, and he shared his disappointment with his wife, which was his wont: he always shared with his wife his disappointments. And his wife reminded him of the late, assassinated king or rather of the monologue she devoted to him, to his assassination, 'Do you remember what I said? Where to rather shall his day's hard journey soundly invite him.' 'I do remember something of the kind. In those days I thought I understood what you meant, but now I can't make head nor tail of it. Nothing at all. In point of fact, I can't make anything of it.' 'In a nutshell, I'm suggesting you should jump on your horse and ride for an hour or two. Your journey should be hard – as hard as Duncan's journey, the one he made on the day of his assassination. Well, as I recall the events of that day or night, we killed him around 3 a.m. But I might be mistaken – after all, the event took place many years ago, at the dawn of our era.' 'What era?' asked Macbeth. 'Let bygones be bygones. Yet I'm troubled by the trickle of blood issuing from my brain.' 'I can't see any blood on your forehead,' said Macbeth. 'I've always thought you're an intelligent fellow, otherwise I wouldn't have married you. Our marriage is the best proof of your inborn intelligence. Are you following my drift?' 'Do you want me to ride on my horse for miles and miles?' 'On second thoughts I'd suggest you just walk around for several hours. A modicum of fresh air will do you a lot of good.'

That memory, the warder of the brain, shall be like fumes. Just another quotation from the same monologue. As we know, this text was recited by Lady Macbeth, and therefore one cannot help wondering why she did not apply the same procedure to herself, to her own body. Indeed, she offered a lot of wine to Duncan's guards, but no one was mighty enough to prevent *her* from consuming as much wine as necessary for the purpose. What purpose? There are so many purposes in the play that one gets lost in their midst, in the bosom of the general confusion. You lose the thread, whatever this thread might be, and so you content yourself with repeating almost endlessly, 'They killed the king, they killed the king.' All right – they did kill the king and became as world-famous as Shakespeare himself. So what? Doesn't this achievement call for a celebration? At least it offers Lady Macbeth an opportunity to drink like a lord; or like Lady Macbeth. (This addition is inspired by the tenets of

feminism.) The lady follows our advice, asks a servant to fetch two bottles of wine from the cellar and begins to drink like a lady. She drinks one glass and casts a look at her hands. And airs yet another set of grievances, for the blood she curses from the bottom of her heart is still all along her fingers. She continues to bring the glass level with her mouth, and consults the testimony of her eyes sternly fixed on the palms of her hands and also on her fingers. 'Blood, blood, blood,' she repeats. And then she switches to another word which denotes the length and depth of the torture to which she is relentlessly exposed. 'Still, still, still.' Let there be no mistake about the meaning of this word. The blood continues to trickle so that it is not motionless.

But blood is not motionless in every sense of the word – it can be modified. And Lady Macbeth is quite aware of such possibilities. For instance, she says to the Almighty, 'Make thick, my blood, stop up th'access and passage to remorse.' Well, the blood they talk about has been evacuated through various channels, except from Lady Macbeth's hands. At some point, after dinner, Macbeth said to her, 'Look at my blood. Can you see anything? Of course you can't because the blood was washed away a long time ago. By the way, I ordered the construction of a channel through which Duncan's and other people's blood could make its way towards several oceans.' 'You forgot my blood,' said Lady Macbeth. 'My memory isn't big enough to keep the blood of the whole world,' answered Macbeth. 'It is true that my memory still suffers from the presence of the gory locks or whatever I called them. Do you remember Banquo's gory locks?' 'There are enough gory locks in my life and so I don't need Banquo's disfigured face. Do you know how many murders are leading my body to madness? Do you know that I've already outstripped King Lear? The other day I was walking along the road of madness and saw King Lear's body in front of me. I greeted him cheerfully, and he said he would never cheer anyone in his life. I was walking faster than him. I overtook him in no time at all. And as I did so, he said without turning his head, 'Don't forget to rub your hands, although it's pointless to do so. You'll never get rid of your conscience.' 'I have no conscience,' I answered. 'I just have my hands from which I'm trying to remove the blood I've shed only partly. There's such a quantity of blood on my hands that I wonder if I didn't destroy the army carrying the proverbial branches of the wood we all know by heart. We know it through the lessons we followed in our youth. At some point we studied Shakespeare's tragedy and were asked to carry some trees, some branches, which was supposed to make us feel the horror of the situation. And we killed the boy who played Macbeth's part. Of course it was useless and at first we just wounded him. But this Russian teacher of whom you must have heard suddenly cried, "I don't believe the show you're staging before me." And we killed the boy. I wonder if my blood has grown thick in the course of our conversation.' 'You're right. You should make a tremendous effort and turn this liquid blood into a thick element one could smear on one's slice of bread.' 'I don't know why I voiced this wish. Ah yes, I thought that would prevent it from reaching my conscience. But thick blood is no impediment for the feeling of remorse. You're right – God just smears it on your heart and soul, and you become a mere sandwich. Is it better to be a sandwich?' 'They could eat you,' said someone. 'Yes, but they can't murder you with a dagger. Why should they perform such a deed? You can't occupy a throne. A sandwich can't sit on a throne.' 'I think Salvador Dali might create such a picture. Or Magritte,' said someone. 'If Duncan had been just a sandwich, I would have consumed him,' said Macbeth. 'What for? Would you wish to be crowned as a sandwich?' 'Of course not. But I didn't have a choice. I did, as a matter of fact: either to be crowned a king and be killed by a forest or to reign as a sandwich. I prefer the latter solution.'

Be that as it may, Lady Macbeth tried to thicken her blood, using the method with which all the cooks of the world are acquainted. They are on intimate terms with them, one might say. They thicken many substances:

milk, amid other similar molecules. Actually some quantity of cream cheese can block the passage from one's hands to one's heart. But the doctor omitted to mention *fromage blanc* in the lady's presence. Actually, one day she asked for *fromage blanc*, following in her husband's footsteps: she also spoke French from time to time. I think the English also resort to this construction now and then. What about the Scots? I wonder what our lady is rubbing now. If someone says, 'She died a long time ago,' I shall answer, 'Somebody is rubbing something at this very moment. And this person must be Lady Macbeth – she is the world champion of *frottage*.' She is also a champion in the domain of malicious intentions, as I must already have pointed out. There are murderers who do not speak about their minds' disposition. They do not ask the Almighty to fiddle with their blood, making it thicker than water and so on. They proceed quickly and resolutely along the direct line which leads to successive murders, whereas Lady Macbeth thinks in terms of thickness and thinness. I believe she also touches upon her future children, but I do not recall what she meant by making them appear within our mental horizon. Women are often beyond the horizon allotted to men who cannot foresee the variety of combinations of which a female brain and psyche are capable in our world.

In a Russian book I saw a picture of a man shooting an arrow. The caption said, *The Infidel Shooting at the Icon of St George*. Was that a caption or just the name of the picture? Lady Macbeth is famous for her interior monologues, and one must admit that inside these monologues you are likely to meet all sorts of people among whom there stands St George. At first you do not realise he inserted his body into the picture devoted to someone whose arrow aims at the saint. Everything looks like an ordinary account as if both saints and their killers were the common features of our miserable world. Sure enough, life is miserable to the extent of permitting some base individuals to shoot their arrows in the direction of saints whose sanctity is beyond doubt and reproach. So what happens in the first and in the second place? Lady Macbeth does not walk around with daggers and rifles. And even cannons are out of her reach. But her negative intentions pullulate in her head so majestically and violently – these two notions go together from time to time – that every day we can see them outside, in meadows, on squares, presiding over cityscapes and the exhibition we visit when we go to some museum selected for the richness of its collection. Well, Lady Macbeth's behaviour may be compared to the picture I depicted some time ago. Her arrows are invisible and the target she has in mind is a creation of her prolific fantasy. Yet a king cries in his sleep – not on account of yet another nightmare. He cries because a dagger is sticking out of his body. Under the circumstances, he must shout, 'Please, remove the dagger from my veins and sinews.' But he has no strength left to cry out, however modestly and inaudibly.

You are allowed to substitute a king for a saint – there is nothing exceptional and unruly in this substitution. Many kings are saints, and the last Russian Emperor is no exception to the rule. He was sanctified because of the assassination committed by the Soviet rulers. Let us suppose he was murdered by Macbeth. So what? Macbeth did not belong to the communist party, and this nuance was very important in the eyes of those who provided Nicholas II with his sanctity. 'If His Majesty had been killed by Macbeth or his wife, we wouldn't have reacted to the assassination in the same way. But communists are the utmost horrors of our time. Whoever suffers from their arrows or rather from their bullets – let us keep up with the times and their procedures – deserves the title of saint. Of course we're aware of how many people abused our kindness. They would rush towards a group of communists, shouting, "Kill me, kill me, I beseech you! I'd like to become a saint!" Please note that they didn't voice their wish in the presence of Macbeth or some other Shakespearean hero. They knew to what extent both communists and socialists were superior to Shakespeare in matters of horror and utter disgrace.'

But Macbeth takes no notice of these thoughts, condemnations and projects. He is thinking along the following lines, 'I look like an innocent flower – no doubt about that. But where's the serpent I should imitate in the same breath, in the same glance, within the same moment? The serpent I need is actually the dragon, given the magnitude of my task.' The serpent touched upon by Lady Macbeth is under the mask of the innocent flower, which means that Macbeth is following his wife's instructions to the letter. First he pretends he is the innocent flower of which the text informs us and then becomes the serpent under it. The serpent or the dragon. To tell the truth, a dragon is much bigger (and bitter) and far more powerful than a serpent, but this time Macbeth needs a lot of room for his manoeuvres: murders are not easy to carry out, even if your victim is old, decrepit and has only part of his mind. (This time, the victim is a man, so we do not need to add a woman to our description of the murder; unless we wish to remind the whole world of Lady Macbeth's participation in the process which was essential for its success.) Serpents and dragons have a lot in common. In the first place, they can bite their tails; at least I am almost sure of what I am talking about. And whenever they bite their tails, they allude to the circular movement of the world which is infatuated with the doctrine of eternal recurrence. So a dragon bites its tail and begins to circulate – if only mentally – within his own body and also in the outside world, in the cosmos, in the books devoted to symbols. The same goes for our serpent which is also in the habit of biting its tail; or *her* tail, considering the importance habitually attached to the name and title of Lady Macbeth. What does this gesture entail? Banquo comes back to life, being resurrected by his own tail bite; by Shakespeare's tale, rather. That is what Macbeth fears – first and foremost, as one might say. I think he mentions kites and charnel houses in connection with this phenomenon – coming back to our earthly existence. No – I had better check the context, determined as I am to enrich the texture of my book. If charnel-houses are our graves. I am not sure this piece of knowledge – sweet remembrancer, as Macbeth puts it – has already enriched or thickened my narrative. And I am unable to make this assurance doubly sure because my narrative is not a pool of blood that Lady Macbeth can thicken in no time at all. And she can thicken it to such an extent that it becomes like her own hands, undistinguishable from her own hands. As a matter of fact, when rubbing her hands, she rubs in a huge quantity of blood, making it thicker and thicker. And thick blood is frightful in the extreme. Even thin blood is frightful. Let us take one of your fingers. You cut it with a penknife, which seems to reduce the size of your wound, making it look as innocent as the innocent flower we are accustomed to. And you cannot affirm you feel a lot of pain, but the whole episode is quite unpleasant, not to say disgusting; especially if you happen to be a pianist. You ask yourself if you will be able to play as many Beethoven sonatas as you wish, without paying too much attention to your wound. Such a wound is said to poison your musical pleasure to the point of annihilating it altogether. You stop playing, look at your finger, suck it – these fingers are to be sucked – and begin to air your grievances in someone's presence. And if no one is present on this particular occasion, you just cry and shed as many tears as necessary to appease your fears, worries and what not. I wonder what Lady Macbeth would have done under the circumstances. She might have said, 'Bravo! This is Duncan's blood, so he is dispatched to the other world from which he'll never return. Incidentally, from now on we should use this verb in preference to other verbs of the kind. For instance we can say, "Our handsome hero manages to dispatch another five villains." Aren't you handsome, my hero?' 'But who are these five villains you mentioned in your discourse upon the nature of death?' 'Let's wait and see. I'm sure that in a week or so you'll kill dozens and dozens of pretenders to the throne.' 'I'll kill them on the condition that they never come back. And if they do, they shouldn't shake their gory locks at me. Let them shake their locks at you – you're as fearless as the famous killers of vampires. By the way, I'm longing

to ask you one important question. Some time ago you spoke about the importance of the serpent I should turn into, anxious as I am to furnish my identity with an additional instance or incarnation. Should I really choose a serpent for this purpose? Isn't a dragon much better and larger? And more significant, more magnificent.'

The point is, a dragon is so big you cannot put it under a flower, which seems to be the order issued by Lady Macbeth whose life was a series of orders directed to her servants and husbands. According to some sources, before marrying Macbeth she stayed for a while with a knight whose reputation was not beyond all suspicion. Some suspicions linked to his personality were false and should be condemned straightaway, but others can stay and tarnish this knight's reputation. Some people say – their tongues might be called 'evil', if one is inclined to do so – and affirm that he treacherously murdered a few people. Of course, in those distant times, murders were committed daily and nightly. And no one thought it was a crime whose perpetrators deserved immediate death. And yet not only did they deserve this kind of death. According to some evil tongues and brains, this punishment should be carried out by hangmen, not by firing squads. A firing squad is arrayed on a huge, hospitable square, and you block your ears in expectation of the legendary noise associated with many heroes of the past. Suddenly, at the very last moment – in the nick of time, one might say – a stranger comes and says, 'Capital punishment was abolished a long time ago. Are we barbaric tribes? Haven't we been brought up and educated by Leonardo da Vinci?' And the rifles are lowered. One can see a similar image in the famous Russian film which tells the story of a boat, bearing the name of a prince. Its sailors disagreed with the cook whose soup had not come up to their expectations. Generally speaking, they did not dream in terms of turtles and partridges, but they had every right to hope they would not be poisoned by the cook with whom they played dominoes almost every day; at least at weekends.

Kipling thought that a writer could not lie because lies lay outside the domain of fiction where everything is a lie, in a manner of speaking. So we should not lie and therefore must admit we do not feel comfortable, for the problem connected with dragons and serpents has not been solved yet. A serpent is much more flexible, and that is why our lady resorted to this candidate: her husband could not manipulate a dragon during the time required to commit an important murder. Either you fiddle with dragons or murder kings – there is no alternative. Today, many people – not only children, mind you – would choose a toy dragon, for kings are far and few between. And their murders are taken care of by the media. Media attention/coverage/hype/reports, as they say. At no time at all will you find yourself on screens and front pages – before you taking steps leading to absolute power. So students buy a toy dragon, pick up a flower and put the dragon under the flower. When questioned by their teachers, they say, 'I've studied Shakespeare's tragedy most thoroughly. Here's the proof of what I'm saying and proclaiming.' And the students show their constructions to their teachers. And the teachers say in unison, 'You're wrong. Lady Macbeth mentioned the serpent, not the dragon.' 'She was an ignorant ape,' say the students. 'Dragons are regarded as the symbols of evil and diabolical tendencies. Do you know what they say today about Donald Trump? He often if not always chickens out. The same goes for Lady Macbeth. Had she chosen a dragon, she wouldn't have rubbed her hands all the time. Before starting to rub them in her endeavour to get rid of the blood and its spots, she chickened out, you know.'

But the dragon can be easily identified with the serpent in this domain: they are both diabolical, and one can only discuss the size of their involvement with evil deeds and thoughts. Of course the dragon is bigger and so must contain a greater amount of negativity – such a thought may strike you in the middle of your reflection upon this difference. But a serpent can be used stealthily, whereas a dragon is hard to hide: you can see it almost beyond

the horizon. At least the whole space afforded to your gaze can be permeated – the word suits the atmosphere of the discussion perfectly – by the presence of a dragon. The whole tragedy under discussion is permeated by Lady Macbeth's personality which includes not only her thoughts, but also her hands. Just have a look at her hands. Even now they can scare you out of your wits, in spite of their apparent weakness. They are so weak they cannot even remove a few invisible stains of blood. But if you put your throat within their reach – you are in love with Lady Macbeth and so cannot do otherwise – they are bound to hold you in their grip for several minutes, which is quite enough for an exemplary strangulation. Of course you hope you will be able to seduce this lady before she strangles you over her washbasin, but nothing is less certain than the result of this operation, of this seduction. On the other hand, the strangulation I have in mind exists well outside my mind, and is consequently in a position to murder not only kings but also ordinary citizens and even foreigners. Why do you count on your capacity to seduce her under the circumstances? In the first place, she is disappointed by Macbeth's behaviour: even a ghost – Banquo is a good example – can put him off their fatal game. A ghost is nothing, according to Lady Macbeth, to our former lady who has not rubbed her hands; not yet. 'The ghost is the empty chair,' she might have said to her husband. Why? Because he was actually afraid of a mere chair which was vacant and consequently available in every sense of the term. Why not occupy this vacant chair? The Russians say in similar circumstances, 'If you're given something, take it without further ado. If they're about to beat your brains out, protect your brains by flying from them.' So Macbeth was offered a chair, and Lady Macbeth was convinced the guests were not playing a nasty trick on her husband. It was by no means the oldest trick in the book. It was, to some extent, I must admit most reluctantly. As we all know, Shakespeare was in the habit of borrowing his plots and their zigzags from old books, and Macbeth was not an exception to the rule. But no one can say if the trick performed in the book is the oldest trick in the book. Anyway, no one was afraid of Banquo with the exception of Macbeth, and this failure of his – he failed to remain majestic and fearless – perturbed his wife to such a point that she began to rub her hands; for no reason at all, mind you. But before starting to rub her hands, he said to Macbeth the words dictated by her courage, invincible nature and common sense, 'This is the very painting of your fear!' And she went so far as to evoke the dagger, the air-drawn dagger about which we have already spoken at length. This air-drawn dagger was driving him – or leading his body – towards Duncan who was already asleep. Why? Because he did not have to rub his hands. Generally speaking, he had no need to remove anything from his conscience. If we doubt this supposition, we should consult the words that Macbeth devoted to his master, to his king. (He was not yet his *former* king.) To put the matter in a nutshell, he describes Duncan's meekness or meek nature, and adds that destroying this nature would be tantamount to an earthquake or something along these lines. Or along this line, along the fault line of the word 'earthquake'. Of course we might question this comparison by pointing out that during an earthquake a few cities are destroyed. And a city, especially an old, historical city is far more important than the life of one person, whoever this person may be under the circumstances. (And these circumstances are grievous indeed.)

'Take the present horror from the time.' This time we are quoting Macbeth and not his wife, as if there were any difference between them. Both are steeped in blood, although Macbeth does not rub his hands and does not try to remove anything from his body. Sometimes he just takes off his armour, but at some point he might have said, 'I'd better keep my armour on, whatever happens. There are so many arrows in the world. Even Saint George isn't safe. No, not even Saint George is on the safe side. And I'm on the wicked side and so any arrow can pierce me from head to foot. Yes, all arrows come from heaven which is displeased with me, with my deeds.

Whenever I dare to kill someone, heaven opens its mouth and says, “What are you doing, Macbeth?” And I feel tremendous remorse. Alas, I can’t get rid of it by rubbing my hands. I’ve tried the exercise many times, schooled by my wife and her procedures, but it doesn’t work, however strongly I apply my right hand to my left one. Am I still in possession of my hands? What are my hands in comparison with the wood I’m expecting at any moment? Lately I’ve noticed that the trees of these woods wore *souliers*. What’s the English word? Boots? Anyway, they were prepared to march and some workmen paved the way for them. How come? Why do they construct motorways in the neighbourhood of my castle? Are we on the eve of the most destructive war, the one in which woods and volcanoes take part, destroying everything? I have no idea what’s happening in the world. What’s going on? My wife is still rubbing her hands. Perhaps she’s trying to spark a fire. That’s how they burn their enemy’s palace. They rub their hands and a flame is born. And this flame is quite destructive: even woods and their trees are under its command. I’ll be alive and kicking until everyone on Earth begins to rub their hands. Up to now only my wife has devoted her time to this ritual. Does this mean that all other representatives of humanity are as innocent as flowers? I’d better make sure that no flowers are brought to my kingdom. As soon as a flower appears, we must look for serpents. Flowers don’t exist without serpents which are an essential element, an addition. Without a serpent, a flower’s worth is minimal. It doesn’t have any value, to put it mildly. You have no money, so you try to sell something, but you don’t have anything within you reach, with the exception of one flower.’

So you go to a marketplace and offer this flower to various pedestrians, potential buyers. ‘But where’s the serpent?’ they ask. ‘It looks like I’ve forgotten it at home,’ you answer. ‘Well, go back and find the serpent without which your flower is worthless.’ Obediently enough, you retrace your steps, reach your home and begin to look for a serpent. But there are no serpents within the house where you live and suffer. Your wife is still there, rubbing her hands over a washbasin. You go towards her and say, ‘Come with me to the marketplace.’ ‘What for?’ asks the wife. ‘Can’t you carry this flower, showing it to potential buyers?’ ‘I can, but it’s pointless.’ ‘Why is it pointless?’ ‘Because you’re not with me. Aren’t you my faithful wife?’ ‘Of course I am. After all, I helped you murder Duncan. You contented yourself with watching a dagger, but I caught this dagger and plunged it into Duncan’s throat. Have you any remembrance of the fact?’ ‘I said “sweet remembrancer, when addressing you at some party or other.”’ ‘All right, all right. So you do remember something, in spite of your Alzheimer’s. We both suffer from Alzheimer’s, you know. What do you remember?’ ‘I remember Banquo,’ answers Macbeth. ‘Do you remember his ghost or Banquo himself?’ ‘I remember only that someone was shaking his gory locks at me.’ ‘So it was a man, if we believe your short description – only men shake their gory locks at women and other men.’ ‘But women also have locks, flowing golden locks. Lucretia, for instance.’ ‘Are you sure her name is Lucretia?’ ‘I think Pope wrote a poem about her. But I might be mistaken.’ ‘So you remember two persons.’ ‘Three,’ says Macbeth. ‘Who is the third person you remember?’ ‘You,’ says Macbeth. ‘And you ask me to accompany you to the market.’ ‘That’s right.’ ‘Let’s go,’ says Lady Macbeth and they embark upon their journey which lasts only a few minutes, for they do not know where they are going or rather they hesitate as to the direction they should take to go as far as the market. Actually, they have no idea where this market is and if there *is* a market in the neighbourhood of their castle. What might they encounter during their journey? Banquo’s corpse torn to pieces by vultures, by proverbial vultures. Why do we always speak about vultures in connection with corpses? Apart from these ominous birds, there are other hunters, other consumers of human flesh – other humans, for instance. Macbeth goes here and there, and every time he goes out, he stumbles upon Banquo’s corpse or rather upon some

of its parts. He picks some of these morsels and devours them, being strongly influenced by his hatred spurred by the Weird Sisters' proclamation that Banquo would give birth to a royal lineage. Would Macbeth devour one of these sisters, inspired by his thirst for knowledge and omnipotence? You are what you eat, as someone put it. So, if you eat Banquo, you become Banquo and also his descendants, logically enough. And if you cannot become his son and grandson, you may remain what you are; Macbeth, for instance. Of course you can eat Banquo's corpse, if you are hungry and cannot wait for a decent meal, but in this case you should abandon all hope related to the royal lineage I have just touched upon. But you should pay attention to Lady Macbeth who accompanies you on this journey. All right – you are Macbeth and also his wife; to some degree. In his lifetime, Macbeth spoke frequently about his wife. For instance, when asked about Duncan's murder, he would answer rather modestly, 'It's my wife's doing. Although she didn't come up with the idea, she executed her own plan perfectly by smearing a few faces with blood. Unfortunately, in the haste that accompanied her action, she forgot to wash her hands properly. And if you don't wash your hands abundantly after cutting someone's throat, you're likely to endure the torture that still bears my wife's name. This torture is called "Lady Macbeth's remorseful exercise". For some time, I've also been addicted to this drug, so to speak; to this so-called drug. I often rub my hands – for want of anything better, one might say. Upon hearing this explanation, I usually say, "You're wrong." You can also rub your thighs or your forehead. Why not? What prevents you from rubbing your forehead? If you rub your hands, you may be accused of some murder or other, not necessarily of a murder related to a royal family. But if you rub your forehead, you can always explain your gesture by saying that you've just hit upon a wonderful idea you should develop without further ado. "If I postpone reflecting fully on this idea, I may lose it. And this loss may entail all kinds of losses including a billion dollars. So you must realise to what extent my rubbing is important, vital, essential to my life's enduring happiness."'

Macbeth and his lady step into the area where the market disports itself by exposing various goods and price tags. 'I can sell you a flower, a wonderful flower that you refused to buy this morning. You wished to see a serpent under it. All right – here's the serpent I'm proud to introduce to you. Here's my wife, Lady Macbeth, who is also for sale. As a matter of fact, I'm selling her with the flower you saw this morning. You can still see and admire this flower I'm holding in my hands. I'm holding it above my wife's head, so I'm fulfilling my obligations to the utmost.' 'The flower is innocent enough,' say the potential customers. 'As for your wife, she should prove to us her price is as high as that of the flower.' Lady Macbeth walks in the direction of the customers, stops and says, 'Like the poor cat i'th'adage.' The potential customers grow even more potential than before, for they do not understand Lady Macbeth's remark. And they are loath to acquire a woman who does not speak their language. And if she does, she says something utterly incomprehensible. Indeed, they understood only 'the poor cat' and, after a while, they asked Macbeth if he brought this poor cat with him. 'If we saw this cat,' explained the customers, 'we might understand the meaning of your spouse's words. Otherwise we'll remain completely at sea.'

Understandably enough, a discussion ensues, and in the course of this discussion Macbeth analyses the difference between his various offers. He says that bringing a cat to the market place would not change the elements of the deal because he sells a flower and his wife. 'It would be impolite to disregard my wife, for the simple reason that she is woman. And a human being into the bargain. A serpent is not a human being, until further notice.' But one of the customers points out that the fateful (and faithful) participation of the serpent in the Holy Bible denotes its significance in the history of the world. 'Consequently she can be regarded as a human being, *à part entière*.' This bit of French prepares us for a commentary which was written entirely in French, although, as

far as we know, Macbeth was from Scotland and his origin was closely connected with this country. And in those days Scotland was not at war with France, and I am not sure this Northern country took part in the war that England waged in France at some point of history. Anyway, Lady Macbeth is more expensive than a cat, in spite of the preciousness of some animals we are acquainted with. So Macbeth pushes his wife towards the prospective buyers and says she is ready for the deal. 'And where's the flower?' asks one of the potential customers, whereupon Macbeth inserts the flower into Lady Macbeth's hairdo. 'What else do we need to conclude the deal,' he asks all those who witness the scene with curiosity. 'We need money,' says a potential customer. 'Actually I was going to ask you how much money we need?' 'For what purpose?' asks Macbeth. 'If you wish to buy my castle, you can forget about the whole thing – my castle isn't for sale.' 'But your wife is,' says another customer. (How many customers were present on that day, somewhere in Scotland?) 'No,' said Macbeth. 'I'm selling this flower under which I put my wife. Actually, I put my wife under the flower, in this order. Such is the order of the events we're witnessing today at the marketplace. All right, from now on I'll listen to your offers.' But they asked the owner of the goods to explain the sentence dropped by his wife in the heat of the discussion, of one of the discussions. A cat was involved in this remark. 'Like the poor cat i'th'adage.' First the customers pay attention to the poorness of the cat. Macbeth says it is just a figure of speech and therefore should not be taken into consideration. But the customers object to his objection, saying that everything is important, when a deal is on the agenda, especially that many people seem to be involved in the process. So Macbeth answers as follows, 'The cat is poor because you haven't yet paid for her or him.' A customer looks at the cat closely and says, 'We're on the point of buying a cat of female origin.' Macbeth does not react to this addition to the discussion. But is Lady Macbeth equal to the might displayed by serpents – not only in the Bible, needless to say? Macbeth says that his wife is very powerful indeed, and her present weakness is strength in disguise. And her strength is a real blessing. 'As for the cat,' adds Macbeth, 'she wants to eat a fish, but is loath to wet her body, which can happen in the act of eating. But my wife was literally engulfed by the sea of blood, and yet she survived and was able to work with me for the benefit and glory of our kingdom. You can't imagine how many people we've killed together.' But the customers are not satisfied with the result of their business talks. They say that Lady Macbeth's present conduct involving her hands and the gesture she performs round the clock have not been fully explained. 'And you can't get away with it,' say the customers in unison. To ward off the accusations and threats, Macbeth begins to talk about his wife's culinary talent. He says she is a wonderful *maitresse de maison* – some of the customers are French – and her grouse is unparalleled. The grouse tilts the balance in Macbeth's favour and the deal is clinched on the spot. Lady Macbeth weeps for joy: she is fed up with Macbeth who regularly forgoes his masculine prerogatives, leaving his wife behind. He wages yet another war, goes to this war and fights on battlefields, leaving his wife out in the cold. And now she has an opportunity to kiss another man about whose valour she does not really care. What counts at this particular moment is this man's sex appeal.

And yet the role played by Lady Macbeth in the whole business is usually underestimated because everyone remembers Macbeth's dagger, and the rest is almost unknown. Not completely, I must say, given the attention drawn by Lady Macbeth's hands which do their utmost to efface the bloody spots from her fingers. But her voice, her remarks are often overlooked, for people are more impressed by swords, and this woman wields no swords. But she gives utterance to many monologues and remarks. For instance, at some point she does not fail to notice a raven that croaks and even becomes hoarse in the process. And this remark is not as idle and poetic as may appear at first glance. Upon seeing Macbeth undecided, she gives orders and the whole household of the castle

begins to shout – to out-Herod the raven, as it were. Or to out-raven the raven, if you wish. What for, may one ask? Macbeth is in two minds about his wife's project, and his hesitation is so visible that something should be done, according to his wife's meditation, to lead him astray; or rather to lead him straight to Duncan's bed. Our lady sincerely believes that the general croaking – that is what she has in mind – can influence her husband to the extent of making him run in the direction of Duncan's chamber. 'Why don't you run?' she exclaims, her exclamation being accompanied by the croaking of the servants and maids. What maids? It does not really matter: there was a multitude of maids near the castle, and all of them croaked throughout the night. First they did it to encourage Macbeth, and then they began to lament the deed. In a way, their croaking was a sort of requiem of which the king was unaware, especially after his death.

During Macbeth's encounters with the above-mentioned customers or clients, the problem of croaking arose and our lady went so far as to demonstrate her intentions and injunctions. In other words, she croaked and was applauded by the audience. According to many witnesses, it was a standing ovation, and Macbeth was relieved upon hearing this applause: now he was sure that the deal would be clinched. (Thanks to Donald Trump, the word 'deal' has become very fashionable in our societies.) But let us turn to Macbeth whose suffering is often underestimated. Of course people smile and nod their heads, when watching his demise, but there are villains who suffer too much, if one follows the teaching of our Christian guides. The weird sisters tortured him through an abundant use of mirrors where Banquo's descendants disported themselves. Of course Macbeth deserved this particular punishment, but what about his sleep? He says in one of his monologues, 'Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse the curtain'd sleep.' He talks in this manner before Banquo's untimely (or timely) death. But Macbeth's mood and way of life underwent a metamorphosis upon the appearance of Banquo's ghost. No longer would Macbeth speak about the death of nature which was outrageously alive, cheating him of the oblivion provided by sleep and its props. Many people are frightened by wicked dreams, but they feel relieved upon awakening. Macbeth was prepared to experience any nightmare, however horrendous and destructive. 'Please, give me a nightmare,' he implored the Almighty. (It is said he used a Russian icon for the purpose. Why? Because they often talk about Russian bears, and bears sleep soundly throughout the winter.) 'Yes, I'm willing to have as many nightmares as I deserve because any nightmare is far more salubrious than daymares to which I'm currently subjected.' Lady Macbeth's love for her husband was so immeasurable that she even sacrificed her sanity for the sake of his peaceful nights. Rubbing her hands. She did not rub them for herself, to quench her thirst for madness. It was the lullaby designed to reduce her husband's suffering by putting him to sleep. If you rub your hands for an hour or so, you are bound to fall asleep to the accompaniment of this soothing sound.

When we are young, we hardly pay attention to words. Of course we do pay attention to them during the period devoted to the languages we are supposed to speak, but otherwise words mean almost nothing. We say, 'I want a luxurious car,' and point to the car either with our head or with a gesture of the hand. But as the years, our years, advance we realise the power of the words we utter. 'We are yet but young in deed,' says Macbeth some time after the entrance of Banquo's ghost. And he continues to grow, to add hours and years to his lifetime, to the time of his life, to the seconds which elapse, while he walks to and fro. Of course he did not live long, and that was the natural course of events, considering his appalling behaviour, the murders he committed at the drop of a hat. Suppose Macbeth is more successful than his model, the real historical Macbeth who lived and died, once upon a time. I suppose that real Macbeth was killed even earlier than his successor, but never mind, never mind. Suppose Macbeth is 60 years old. Suppose he is our contemporary and so a computer keeps him company more

faithfully than his wife who is still absorbed in her chief occupation: rubbing her hands. He is not decrepit and can walk around his garden without a walking stick or any other prop of life, or survival, or longevity. His memory is rather weak, but he has Shakespeare's masterpiece in his library. And he re-reads it quite often, which permits him to congratulate himself on his good health, on his prudence. Indeed, it is on account of his prudence and patience that he lives without being constantly exposed to thrusts executed by swords and daggers. When re-reading the text for the umpteenth time, he understands at last the significance of the word 'young' and says to himself, 'What a pity I didn't stay young in those times. I ought to have finished this series of murders and then rested on my laurels. But I went on and on, unmindful of my age. Didn't I know this simple formula? Better young than dead in a puddle of blood. That is what I obtained in the course of my murderous expeditions – a puddle of blood. Two puddles of blood, three puddles. I suppose I was drinking blood instead of slaking my thirst with a few bottles of mineral water. I was steeped in blood and my castle's history was steeped in blood. A number of historians had to wade across this river of blood, if they honestly wished to examine my castle and its genealogy. And inside the castle they would continue to wade across this river which was flowing up and down, up and down. Had I stopped after Banquo's death, I would have lived forever. I would have lived through youth and its advantages. And youth has only advantages, in comparison with old age, with rheumatism and sciatica.'

'I am bent to know, by the worst means the worst.' Just another quotation from the tragedy under scrutiny. Actually I am not quite sure about this definition – under scrutiny. Do I scrutinise this tragedy? Can you scrutinise it without enacting some of its subplots? Without taking part in it in earnest? The importance of being in earnest during a reading of Shakespeare's works. I am bent to know. Every scientist worthy of the name is known for this kind of statement. The difference between the scientist and Macbeth lies in the way all knowledge can be obtained; at all costs or not at all costs. A true scientist gets a piece of knowledge by the best means available to science. The right formula, therefore, is, 'By the best means the best.' Only in this fashion can you make spectacular progress in the domain of science; whereas Macbeth chose the opposite solution. He did not even use the expression 'by fair means or foul': his means were always foul. When describing his actions, his contemporaries often resorted to the word 'foulest', which can seldom be heard in our modern cities for all the crimes committed within their walls. And outside their walls, in meadows and parks. You might believe that walkers use benches only when in need of rest or to read a book.

I, for one, do not think that Macbeth always chose the worst means. Let us take his visit to the weird sisters. How could he induce them to tell him the truth? He could not kill them for this purpose: killing is not always productive, contrary to what some of Shakespeare's readers might think. Murder is often counterproductive: you kill a man who might have told you a secret. This secret would have helped you to position your body on the highest step of the social ladder. In other words, you might have become yet another king. But you killed the bearer of the useful information. Perhaps this person was also the bearer of the crown, the only bearer who could have put this crown on your head. You killed him in a fit of pique. And now you regret it bitterly. Of course any exercise is good for your health, but going to fitness clubs is not your cup of tea. Pointless movements made by stupid people – they are stupid in your opinion, and so are the other representatives of our race – and nothing happens, nothing tangible, nothing grandiose. No kingdom is turned upside down: you just turn some wheel or other. And this wheel or lever does not bring you closer to your personal epoch-making achievements. Of course your health improves: now you can walk over mountains and dance on them, if necessary. (And it is always necessary to dance on mountains.) But your social position does not improve because you give no presents to your

boss and his secretaries. And when one of his secretaries asks you, 'Why don't you give me Christmas presents?' you answer, trying your best to hide your guilt, 'I've no time for shopping. I spend my days in my fitness club and walking over the mountains.' You call the fitness centre 'my fitness club' because you think it is more prestigious, and you need prestige badly. And you are quite aware of this omission. Macbeth kept winning battles, but you are unable to wield a sword. You can drive a car, but that is not enough, unless you give a lift to your president, to the owner of the company where you work. But he has two cars and three chauffeurs. Of course you might accompany one of his secretaries to a banquet. Alas, banquets are regarded as preludes to important actions, and these actions are bound to call for the highest level of concentration. What kind of concentration will you resort to? All right, the preliminaries are over, and the secretary agrees to come to your place, on condition that you offer her a splendid dinner and two bottles of champagne. That is no problem, given the amount of money you get at your office. After all you are a secretary yourself; and a chief secretary at that. The secretary comes to your place – of course you pay the taxi driver who carried out the operation – and you take the lift which conveys both of you to the table covered with succulent dishes. And a bottle of champagne is a centrepiece of this arrangement. Extracting the cork from the bottle requests the highest level of concentration. Anyway, a modicum of concentration is necessary, otherwise the cork might wound the secretary, depriving her of one of her eyes. And you admire the eyes of the secretary. You prefer them to her legs which you have not seen yet; not their naked version anyway. So you are not really acquainted with every zigzag, every spot which one is sure to meet, when examining these legs inch by inch. You wonder for a moment if you should examine these legs before making love to their owner. This depends on your level of concentration, on the gift you bear within your constitution. Is this gift sufficiently bounteous to allow you to make love under the circumstances? After all, you know this lady only superficially, your knowledge being limited to her clothes and the perfume she exudes from her face, whenever picking up the sheets of paper lying on your desk and sometimes on your knees. What else do you know about her? You are aware that she is partly in love with you, otherwise she would not have undertaken this journey in a taxi driven by someone she is not acquainted with. And today you can be killed even by a taxi driver, although it is the other way round; or it happens in the opposite order. Never mind the grammar: a murder is committed and we should nurse the victim, although it is quite useless: the victim is dead. But I am describing our first intention, our first action. First we touch the hands of the victim to find out if he or she has a pulse. No and so the scene remains dead; to all appearances. The same goes for the victim whose members we begin to rub, labouring under the delusion that the frottage – Max Ernst's technique – might do him or her a lot of good. But we are not sure yet that the pulse has disappeared forever from his or her wrists. Which wrist is in question now? We clasp both wrists and listen, feel, do a lot of things in the hope that something will come to life in the long run. We rub the hands lying under our very nose, and recall Macbeth and his wife, which does not seem appropriate, considering the situation in which we have been involved for some time. But you always remember *Macbeth*, whether you wish it or not, for the simple reason that every aspect of our life finds its echo in the immortal play. Why? Because we live as long as we hope, although I am not sure that hope dies in the end. It does not: it goes, wobbles towards our new incarnation, hoping to play an important role in it, in its topsy-turvy existence. We often rub our hands, our feet – especially in Siberia – and every time a spot of blood penetrates our field of vision, usurped by Lady Macbeth. She interferes in the procedures to which we devote our time and energy. She always gives us lessons as she watches our way of rubbing the members of our body. And she says from time to time, 'No, no, you'll never get rid of these spots like that!' 'But I've committed no crimes,' you

answer, trying to rebuke her for her crimes and interferences. 'There's always some blood on our hands,' she says, casting a reproachful glance at our face, hands and legs. And then she says, point-blank, 'I thought that old people had a small quantity of blood in their veins. And I was surprised to stumble upon a pool of blood near Duncan's body. Very close to it, by his side. How astonishing! An old decrepit specimen you can hardly call a human being. And so much blood! My God! How disgusting! I don't like blood, you know. I prefer tomato juice. Is it true that in the theatre they often substitute tomato juice for blood? What a pity they didn't do that on the day of Duncan's murder. This substitute would have made things easier for me. I might have licked the juice off my fingers. In my childhood, my father gave me a lot of chocolate – as a birthday present. And I always licked this chocolate off my fingers.'

The doctor in the play explains to Lady Macbeth the importance of blood in human bodies. He says that even old people, even individuals who find themselves on the threshold of death, have a sufficient quantity of blood to cross this threshold. 'Probably I haven't made my point clearly,' says the doctor. 'Well, you need blood for performing daily tasks and also for the gymnastics to which you devote your time in fitness centres. But you also need blood for your last thoughts whose importance can't be denied, according to Leibniz and any reasonable creature. And don't forget the threshold you should cross to put your feet inside the kingdom of death.' 'I'm reluctant to step into this kingdom,' says the lady. 'I'm afraid you can't do otherwise. If you don't perform this action willingly, they'll just kill you. I suppose you prefer the former solution. And for this solution you'll need a huge quantity of blood. Incidentally, your murderer would have to deal with a lot of blood, in case you refuse to cross the threshold of death on your own.' 'I prefer to be killed,' says Lady Macbeth. 'I want them to rub their hands till doomsday. And even in the course of this ominous day they'll rub their hands. And the Supreme Judge will ask them why they do it. And they'll say they are crazy, otherwise they wouldn't believe it is possible to get rid of the blood one spills, when committing a murder.'

At some point – everything is done at some point, as I have already pointed out – Macbeth says that things should be done before they are conceived; let alone seen by others, or scanned, as he puts it. Suppose you find yourself on a desert island, and you live on it, taking lessons from Robinson Crusoe. What lessons do you choose for your instruction? Of course you intend to appeal for assistance to a helper, to a sort of Man Friday. And when Friday does not obey your call, you say to him or someone else, 'You can have any name you wish. If you prefer Sundays to Fridays, I'll call you Sunday round the clock. Or Thursday. I'll call you the Devil or God – I just don't care about names. Of course if your name is Macbeth, you're supposed to commit a few murders, otherwise no one will accept this name, when applied to your persona. Why? Because your persona, your gentle and generous persona, is quite different from the name bestowed upon you. Or you may bear the name of Lady Macbeth: all your life you've dreamt of becoming a woman. Every time a woman appeared at the end of your street, you said to yourself, 'I wish I could turn into a woman. This metamorphosis is most welcome, and I hope the Almighty is aware of my wish, of my dearest longing.' But you are John or Peter, and everybody calls you sir, when it is called for, which happens very seldom. No one addresses you as 'Madam' or 'Your Highness'. Never mind, never mind: in your heart of hearts you are convinced that you are a woman, and today you do not mind becoming Lady Macbeth. After all, she must have been beautiful, given her relationship with Macbeth. And Duncan calls her 'our gentle mistress'; at least he says something along these lines upon seeing her under her battlements. What do you have to accomplish to carry out this metamorphosis? Becoming Lady Macbeth, in other words? You have to receive a letter from Macbeth. Of course you are accustomed to getting letters from men and women alike, but

this time you should receive a letter from Macbeth, otherwise your stratagem will not work. And you are in love with your stratagem or rather with Lady Macbeth whose qualities you yearn to acquire in the twinkling of an eye. All right – you can wait a little longer; two twinklings of an eye suit you perfectly, in point of fact. Your grey eyes twinkle behind the gold-rimmed glasses, but nothing happens. I mean – a lot of events take place in the world, and some of these events are far more substantial than your fictitious metamorphosis. But you do not care about the world and its events which unfold in the distance as if unconcerned about your glasses, attention and destiny. So the indifference you experience towards the world is reciprocated, and you hope this arrangement will last forever, permitting you to commit the deeds habitually frowned upon by the world. Perhaps you do not think in terms of murders: there are other means of ensuring one's superiority in the midst of humankind. Nevertheless, you had better isolate yourself from others who always put spokes in your wheels, plans, ambitions and so on. Of course you will make your appearance at the right moment, when a standing ovation is ripe and ready for your reception. You put your feet on a stage – no matter where it is situated – and the standing ovation gets under way. It lasts for several minutes or for an hour: if you can avail yourself of an armchair during this ceremony, you can disregard its duration. Macbeth was greeted by such an ovation at the banquet he organised on the day of Banquo's assassination, but instead of rejoicing, he got angry: he thought the ovation was meant for his rival, for the ghost. One should not forget that to Macbeth the situation was critical: he mistook the ghost for the real Banquo, for his appearance in the flesh. 'I'm only flesh and blood,' Banquo seemed to say, but all this was too much for our hero; our first hero, to be precise. Even blood would be enough under the circumstances. At least such was Lady Macbeth's predicament: she disregarded Duncan's flesh completely. She was solely preoccupied with his blood – to the detriment of his flesh. Suppose you had someone's flesh on your hands. What could you do? The rubbing ritual to which our lady was literally addicted would not be crowned with any tangible result, with a sort of Tony Award: let us not forget that we are still on the stage or in a studio. In the play we come across an exchange that might put us on the right track. In one of the acts a waiting-gentlewoman says to the doctor, 'I would not have such a heart in my bosom.' She drops this remark as she watches the movements of the lady in whose charge she happens to appear in the play. Well, this is too sophisticated, and it is all the more pointless – this kind of sophistication – since this second lady (or third or fourth) disappears very soon. But her remark stays with us on account of its complexity and dubious sense. Lady Macbeth is a queen, and the lady in waiting must feel envy, whenever she looks at her mistress. She looks at her and the envy overwhelms her to the point of making her feel utterly wretched. And all this takes place even if our lady, Macbeth's faithful wife, does not wear the crown. Even without the crown she may provoke a feat associated in our minds with murderous instincts, thoughts and intentions. For the moment, the lady-in-waiting – we should not call her like that – cannot murder her mistress for many reasons. Actually she has no intention of murdering her mistress because it is quite useless: her mistress directs her steps to the grave without any assistance.

But let us consider and analyse this thought, our second lady's thought. She has no wish to have Lady Macbeth's heart in her bosom and this for many reasons. Firstly she realises that her mistress is on the threshold of death – likewise for many reasons. Firstly her health must be impaired, considering the pressure under which it lives or rather dies. Anyway the heart is not very important in the context: the play will last for another hour and many people will applaud the deeds and the actors' skills. But the rest is of the utmost importance, and the crown is just one of the elements on which we should successfully meditate. In a way, we should send a forest on our errand to equal Shakespeare's glorious achievement. Well, Lady Macbeth must be more beautiful than the

lady we have singled out for our examination. Why? Because Macbeth would not have married her if she had been ugly. Secondly, he would have married the lady in question, the gentlewoman who does not miss the nuances of her mistress's actions. All right – this second lady has no need of her mistress's heart, which emphasises the soundness and reliability of her own heart. Actually, she might feel offended, if someone suggested such an exchange, this useless transplantation. 'What piece of madness is this!' she would exclaim. 'My heart is in good running order.' As for the rest of Lady Macbeth's components, we should think twice before giving our answer to whoever performs this ritual. (Transplantation.) Should our second lady borrow our first lady's face? Yes, judging from the beauty of the actress I recently saw. Should she exchange her hands against those we see in the second half of the tragedy? Let us not jump the gun. Our first lady's hands were quite efficient in the scenes which truthfully depict the central murder of the play. She drugged the guardians and smeared their faces with blood. 'If he do bleed, I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal.' Apparently, I ought to have called the so-called guardians 'grooms', and instead of writing, 'She smeared their faces with Duncan's blood,' I was supposed to use the verb 'to gild'. Anyway, we are bound to admit that Lady Macbeth's hands were almost perfect during these scenes. After watching them, we begin to admire our first lady's courage and are unexpectedly taken by surprise upon witnessing the ritual of rubbing. We expected our lady to slap faces and gild whatever can and should be gilded in our endeavour to cheat the world. So our second lady should think twice before refusing her lady's hands. Of course she should use them prudently, saying 'stop' at the right moment. It is not necessary to gild anyone's face, if no murder has been committed. Of course young boys and girls often paint their faces – even before attending a football game. But the goal they pursue is quite different. Anyway, our second lady is not likely to pay a visit to a stadium where players kick a ball around, cheered on by a mindless crowd of supporters.

'I would not have such a heart in my bosom, for the dignity of the whole body.' This is the sentence the sense of which we are trying to penetrate by fair means or foul. (We had better keep pace with Macbeth, with the tragedy and the hero.) So our dignity depends upon our hearts, but this judgement does not take into consideration our illnesses, our weaknesses. Your heart is weak, and you stumble, whenever you try to cross your room which is not as large as all that. You are afraid of losing your balance, of being unable to restore it immediately. Your fear – this fear is understandable enough in the above-mentioned context – deprives you of your dignity; at least to some extent. Some people might say as they study your gait and face, 'This person is unquestionably dignified, and probably his origins have something in common with nobility. But his present state is pitiful, and this state affects his dignity, making it look pitiful, not to say ludicrous. Of course our diseases should be treated, instead of being ridiculed. But today we're pondering over the reality of the world, and this reality contains ignominy, baseness and treachery. Shakespeare's tragedy is a good example of what we live through every night and every morn. And every afternoon, to tell the truth.' That is what you say to yourself, while studying the picture exposed to your scrutiny. So our second lady should take care of her heart, of its physical state, instead of caring about morals, instead of claiming the moral high ground. It is true that this ground and its height are very important, but this importance pales into insignificance during a heart attack which you might suffer at any moment. You get over this attack and say to yourself, 'All right, I've nothing to reproach myself with, but this won't allow me to live through the night. Probably I'll never see the next morning.' At this moment you are bound to remember Lady Macbeth's words, 'O! never shall sun that morrow see!' And once again you shut your eyes and say to our first lady, 'Why did you pronounce these words? Didn't you know to what extent they're vital to my being, to my survival, to my life? And to my death? I hate those who talk for the sake of talking. All right – you had to push

your husband towards the murder of his and your king, but this sentence is absolutely useless. It is beautiful, I must admit. It is almost as beautiful as your husband's exclamation, "Tomorrow, tomorrow and tomorrow, and yet tomorrow, and still tomorrow, and also the day after tomorrow!" His monologue is justly famous, but Lady Macbeth's contribution to the play really begins when she say, "To beguile the time, look like the time." Several years ago I devoted many words to this remark, and I am not sure I should spend an hour or two on another commentary, another interpretation of this enigma. On the same night our lady also spoke about the raven that croaks to his heart's content. I also commented upon this fact and so I have no idea what passage I could select for my further comments upon the play. Macbeth says to his wife, 'I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?' What kind of noise did Macbeth have in mind? Ah – ah – ah – ah – ah! Something like that? 'I heard the owl scream, and the crickets cry,' answers the lady. I would have driven the point home, had I been in Macbeth's shoes. 'Didn't you hear ah – ah – ah – ah – ah? Never mind the crickets and owls. Did you hear ah – ah – ah – ah – ah?' 'I didn't.' 'So Duncan is still alive, for all my thrusts and daggers.' But Lady Macbeth had no time to lose. Of course she was aware of her husband's inborn obstinacy, so she just reproduced his multiple 'ah' and proceeded as follows, 'Did not you speak?' 'When?' asked Macbeth. Sure enough, one gets lost in the labyrinth of time, and this rule also applies to the present situation which also belongs to bygone days. 'When?' Two centuries ago, three centuries ago. What does it matter! My commentary abounds in exclamation marks, but this is quite logical, given the content of the play. These marks are also a comment upon the plot, upon the conduct of the hero and the heroine.

In the same scene Lady Macbeth says something important, 'Th'attempt and not the deed confounds us.' You prepare a murder, sharpening your sword or your dagger, sharpening your wits, while you are at it. You also sharpen a few objects lying on your writing desk – just in case, as you put it. But is this the case? You wish to murder a king or a queen or someone else, an important person, and you make preparations for your glorious pastime. But then something interferes and you may call it remorse or prudence. You remember your mother, the way she prepared you for your mature life. You remember a few landscapes which were so pure, so innocent-looking – not only flowers look innocent – and you realise you are not prepared for the deed. Your memory is dead set against it, for your memory is full of pastorals and idylls without which you cannot construct your happy life. And you say to yourself that your life is sufficiently filled with bliss and a corpse would tarnish your reputation. Besides, it would jar the eye. Suddenly you recall a recent screech of brakes that jarred the silence. You are an adept of silence, and you do whatever you can to preserve its immaculate nature. If someone comes into your room, you warn this person as follows, 'Please, muffle your steps, otherwise you may jar the silence we all need for our prosperous lives. No life is prosperous without an appropriate stretch of silence. Please, do not talk, for words destroy silence, and their stupidity jars on it. It also jars on my nerves. Let us listen to a piece of music instead.' 'All this looks like preparation,' says your visitor. 'You seem to be preparing a stretch of silence for a shriek of horror. I don't understand your manoeuvre. If you wish to kill somebody, you should put on some music that's liable to drown your victim's screams. But you require silence of your visitors. I've no idea what you have in mind, but this attempt looks fishy. In short, there's something fishy going on here. On the other hand, everything seems strange to me because you look like an innocent flower, and your face's colours clash with the ominous atmosphere of your house. I repeat – it doesn't stand on its own. It's not on its own. Usually it's rooted to the spot, but now it moves, it directs its steps towards the region where a murder is about to be committed. You're not yourself either. Are you really an innocent flower? Hardly. You're a vulture; or, better still – a dragon.

One gets the feeling you hide a dragon under your polite exterior.’ ‘Where could I find a dragon?’ you ask. ‘Dragons are few and far between nowadays.’ ‘You should ask St George. It’s his speciality, and I’m sure he’ll find you a dragon in no time at all. Then you’ll look accomplished, instead of looking unfinished. Yes, you look like an attempt, not like a deed. And to accomplish the deed, you should find a dragon and imitate his behaviour. You should devour your victim. By the way, who is your intended victim? Banquo, I suppose.’ ‘No, Banquo’s already in his grave. Yet I know that the dead have a nasty habit of leaving their tombs and pursuing their victims. Do you know how they do it? They hold a banquet, invite a lot of important people, invite them to a table full of delicacies and take a seat in their midst. And then the murderer comes and realises that his seat is taken by the man he had just got killed by proxy. So he says to the victim, ‘You can’t sit at this table or at any other table, for you’re dead, and I’ll have you buried tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow.’ ‘I’m not dead,’ answers Banquo. ‘It’s true that you made an attempt to murder me, but your acolytes failed rather pitifully. You should punish them for their incompetence.’ ‘So my wife’s prediction has come true,’ says Macbeth. ‘She said I’d be condemned for the attempt, not for the deed. But did my acolytes attempt the murder?’ ‘Of course they did. They put a dagger to my throat. But, as you know, daggers like floating in the air, turning this way and that. So I turned this dagger in the opposite direction. As a matter of fact, it is flying now in your direction, but I don’t know when it will arrive at the scene of the crime, at the scene of your murder. By the way Macduff and I weren’t born of a woman. We were extracted from our mothers’ wombs by an instrument the name of which is slipping my mind. I think it has something to do with Julius Caesar. Or with Brutus. Or with Cassio. Doesn’t matter. Let us take this seat together to beguile both time and space. By the way, if you still need a dragon, you should ask Saint George to lend you one.’

A police officer comes in and says, ‘I’ve overheard your last words. Why did you mention a dragon? What do you intend to do with him?’ Macbeth is at a loss to know how to answer this question. This history of the dragon is very long, and it is probably advisable to begin with the serpent which is at the origin of the whole story. But what is at the origin of the whole story? And then we are duty bound to tell the story of the weird sisters to whom I should append a capital letter. So I seem to have two obligations and both are linked to the story I am supposed to tell. This story concerns an old king whose meekness provokes a lot of cheers on the part of his servants, friends and compatriots. They cheer him, whenever he makes his appearance in public, sometimes for a speech, for the purpose of explaining the current situation to those who will inevitably get involved in this situation. So what could you say to this police officer? Of course you should put yourself in Macbeth’s shoes – first and foremost. And then you should talk to the Weird Sisters who are emboldened by the addition of capital letters to their names, nicknames and passports. And these Sisters tell you that you must do something about your future. ‘My future will come, whenever it pleases,’ you answer, and the Sisters look at each other in astonishment. ‘How come? Do our ears report your words with enviable accuracy? Or do they make mistakes in every word, with every intonation?’ ‘I just think that the future doesn’t like those who put spokes in its wheels. Actually you’re not even supposed to touch the future ever so gently – for fear of getting involved in a murder.’ ‘What do you have against murders?’ ask the Weird Sisters. ‘Some people should be murdered even if they’re as innocent as flowers. You, for instance.’ ‘Why should I be murdered?’ asks Macbeth. ‘Because you’re a potential murderer, a virtual parricide. Isn’t the king your cousin or something like that? You’re all cousins, all of you, so some of you are parricides or patricides.’ ‘But I’m just Thane of Glamis.’ ‘You don’t know what you’re talking about. Such things often happen with the humans who have no sixth sense. Do you think you have a sixth sense?’ ‘Never heard of it.’ ‘That’s what we thought. So you don’t know anything about your forthcoming murder?’ ‘No.’ ‘You don’t

know you'll murder the King of Scotland?' 'Of course not.' 'But even your third sense should have informed you about this deed.' 'What is this sense about?' 'About smells. The smell of blood, in short.'

Incidentally, Lady Macbeth alludes to this component of blood, when she touches upon the perfumes of Arabia which have a lot of problems, when trying to sweeten the lady's hand. By the way, her husband often told you, 'Oh, your hands, your hands. How sweet they are! Please let me stroke your sweet, little hands.' But nowadays the lady's hands, our first lady's hands are not sweet. They are rather bitter, being continuously exposed to the action and influence of bitter tears. Well, Macbeth should answer the officer's question or questions: there are so many of them, come to think of it. So he says, 'My wife's hands were sweet, so sweet in fact that my senses were quite overwhelmed and almost paralysed. Is that what Othello says about Desdemona's hand? Never mind, never mind. As I said, at first my wife's hands were sweet to the point of making we sick. But now they're bitter on account of many murders committed by our enemies. Our king's faithful grooms murdered him in his sleep. And Banquo was killed in the same fashion, except that he was on his horse and not in a bed. No, I'm sorry, I've just made a mistake. Could you please erase it from the protocol? So Banquo was killed by a killer.' 'Was this killer a contract killer?' asks the police officer. 'I think so.' 'Do you have any idea who signed the contract? Did *you* sign the contract?' 'Honestly, I can't remember. I've signed so many contracts in my life, that no wonder I lose the track of them from time to time. What's more, I'm losing my memory. Perhaps I'm suffering from Alzheimer's. What do you think?' 'I'm not a doctor. I'm a police officer.' 'Well, let's wait for our family doctor. For the moment he's taking care of my wife, of her innocent, flower-like hands. What a pity they acrid nowadays, in every sense of the word.'

The police officer's stubbornness is equal to that of Macbeth who seems to be under interrogation. 'Upon going out of the room where the king was devoting his leisure to sleep or rather to death, you were heard saying, "I have done the deed." Perhaps you uttered these words upon coming into the room where your wife was waiting for you. Could you please explain to the police why your wife was waiting for you so anxiously?' 'Because my wife is in love with me, which is natural and bespeaks her tender, wonderful nature. The night was unruly like a boisterous child, and boisterous children can wound you without realising how harmful their actions are and what consequences they can entail.' 'But you have no children, according to the papers which are in our possession. Why are you talking about children?' 'Because I'm in love with these little creatures who are lovable and deserve our utmost care.' This dialogue lasted for more than two hours. It is utterly impossible to enter the labyrinth generously offered by this encounter, by the interrogations at the police station. The upshot of the discussions boils down to the following facts: Macbeth is suspected of several murders, including that of Banquo. He is also accused of longing for the death of Banquo's son whose accession to the throne is a matter of months, if not of days. 'Are you still longing for the death of Banquo's dearest son?' 'I have other fish to fry,' answered Macbeth. Please note the phrasing of his answer, the words he used on the occasion. He did not say, 'Bigger fish to fry.' Understandably enough, he was still reluctant to admit that this son was to become a king: only kings are regarded as big fish by serial killers. But these linguistic trifles are nothing in comparison with daggers and other lethal instruments – with poisons, for instance. And what about Lady Macbeth? Let us not forget the saying 'ladies first'. She says in the course of the third act, 'Things without all remedy should be without regard.' We should not forget our intuition and sixth sense; and also our guardian angels. And our lady's guardian angel uttered these prophetic words, 'By rubbing your hands you can restore to reality the corpses which, in your opinion, are beyond all remedy. Actually, we don't die upon dying. We just slip into another reality. Do you remember what Banquo said

to your husband? He said that the vision pertaining to the Weird Sisters should be analysed at the earliest opportunity. Frankly speaking, I might be mistaken – it is the other way round, in point of fact. I think this suggestion was made by your husband, but it doesn't really matter. What matters is the enigma of black holes which might be at the threshold of another life for everyone who falls into them. You die or fall into a black hole – in other words, so to speak. And suddenly a new life, the one about which Dante spoke so eloquently and beautifully opens its door and you enter, amazed and reassured.'

What else does our lady say in the third act? 'Using those thoughts, which should indeed have died with them they think on.' Now I understand why so many people destroy their children's and parents' photographs. Out of sight, out of mind – isn't that the credo suggested by Lady Macbeth? But Banquo is *not* out of sight, contrary to what one might imagine. Out of sight, out of mind – easier said than done, especially if the person you have in mind – no longer, no longer – is sitting in front of you; on your own chair, into the bargain. My cat often does this, although the context of our relationship is quite different. Actually, it is just the opposite of what happens in Shakespeare's masterpiece. My cat often takes a seat in front of my computer, and I am forced to remove him gently, ever so gently, tenderly and lovingly from the chair I need for my work. Or should I interrupt my work for the sake of my cat's well-deserved holiday? What is to be done? I think our lady often asks this question, and immediately her husband kills yet another innocent man or woman. But I am duty bound to return to the problem of memory which – our memory or its problem – depends on our age, on the medicine we consume, on alcohol and other things of the same nature. It also depends upon our resolutions: if we decide and solemnly promise to ourselves to forget someone, we can do it, especially if we resort to alcohol for the purpose. In alcohol we can drown a lot, with the exception of murders perhaps. I wonder if Lady Macbeth drank a lot during her combat with the blood shed by Duncan and others. With the bloodshed, to put it laconically. The doctor does enquire about this habit of ours so that we continue to wonder whether it was a habit or nothing at all; just a figment of our imagination. And what about the following confession? 'That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold?' What does make you drunk? Of course you may feel like a drunkard during a great theatrical performance; or an outstanding concert. Or when you fall in love and decide to marry the girl – on the spur of the moment and on the spot. But the chamberlains – that is how Lady Macbeth calls them, I suppose – have not experienced such an onslaught of the most delicious feeling one can thank the Almighty for. Lady Macbeth organised a private party for them, and during this party two or three bottles of wine or whisky – let us not forget we are in Scotland – are voraciously consumed. (Is the adverb 'voraciously' the right word? Under the circumstances?)

Humanity is divided into two parts. There are people who grow bolder and bolder as they drink either wine or vodka or any other alcoholic beverage. Of course drinking beer is not as spectacular as emptying two bottles of vodka in a row. And this often happens with Russian drunkards who are euphemistically called 'real drunkards'. (Actually, they should be called 'swine', not swans; even if they sing something as they continue to enjoy their drunkenness.) Well, personally I do not think our lady was fond of Russian vodka, but she might have availed herself of her husband's wine cellar; or rather whisky cellar. Anyway, she was bold rather frequently, and after her husband's meeting with the proverbial, mythical Sisters she was drunk every day. And her boldness bordered on madness. But in one of the most recent stagings of the play the heroine showed a few signs of weakness right after the appearance of Banquo. Of course his ghost did not scare her out of her wits, but her husband's conduct looked rather suspicious. She began to suspect the ominous presence of madness in his manners. She was impressed by these manners to such a point that, on one or two occasions she called them madners. 'My husband's

madners,' she said several times during one meeting with her doctor. That is right – she was talking to him about her husband, saying among other things that he was inclined to be crazy. Obviously she wished to say he was inclined to be lazy, but her tongue and thoughts misbehaved most lamentably. A slip of the tongue, as they say. Why don't they say 'a slip of the thought'? Most people grow mad or crazy gradually so that you cannot really say when they cross the threshold which separates us from 'sheer madness'. In our everyday life, in our cities and even in our meadows you can say about an individual, 'What he does looks like madness.' Or 'like sheer madness' – it depends upon your sense of madness, as they say or do not say. Of course they usually speak about one's sense of humour, but this is no laughing matter so we had better compose ourselves, not wasting our time and mental power on false definitions.

'Death and Nature do contend about them,' says our lady as she goes on analysing the grooms' or servants' or guardians' behaviour. And she says that after describing meticulously – not quite, not quite – their snoring. Do the dead snore? We might feel elated upon learning this truth or untruth. If we can snore after our death, we can count on eternity and immortality; at least on another incarnation. You die, embark upon another life and announce your arrival in the land of the living by snoring. Beautiful, isn't it? But suppose we do not yet know the details of our new life, of our resurrection. Of course many ladies whose presence is required during the process – they cheer both the dead and the living – say to each other, 'We should on no account wake him. After all, he traversed a very hectic period during which life and death contended with each other. And now all he needs is a deep sleep, boundless rest which will enable him to recover. True, we won't be able to say he recovered in no time at all, but never mind, never mind. Let him recover *completely*, and then we'll elaborate on the skilful and magnificent start of a new existence. Even doctors don't say, "I'll recover his senses in no time at all." They're as patient as the rest of the audience.'

Actually, all of them – grooms, servants, the lady whose presence in Lady Macbeth's life was of utmost importance – were patients and did not wish to interfere with the process we have referred to as 'the rubbing of her hands'. She rubbed them to her heart's content. One wonders why she did not play the piano, instead of rubbing her hands to no avail. Music is beautiful, soothing and helps us recover everything, not only our senses. The men who usually complain about their powerlessness in the domain of sex – 'we just can't do anything', they say to each other and also to some women – suddenly rush towards all sorts of beds where they find what they are looking for – a beautiful partner. Of course doctors are against these rushes. They always opt for slowness, assuredness, graduality, if one may say so. One says so and graduality takes the root in the world, and we can see a group of people whose recovery unfolds rather slowly, but surely. They walk towards a multitude of beds, collapsing from time to time, which is a usual procedure: without collapsing (if only once) you are unable to reach your goals. The doctors watch the progression of their patients and applaud now and then as they watch an individual recover his vertical position, checks the solidity and reliability of his legs and swings into action. Sometimes he even performs a jump thanks to which he reaches a bed which promises him a few heavens at once. 'Life is beautiful!' he exclaims and suddenly his glance finds the lady he has been looking for ever since he read *Macbeth* in the original. 'I hope she's not rubbing her hands, because this is the last stage of her life devoted to stage. I'm not sure she'll be able to carry out the whole set of exercises related to sexual games. But at least she'll instruct me in the domain of murder.'

That is how this traditionally happens. You fall asleep or die, and little by little you begin to snore as if it were your personal lullaby or just a song you were infatuated with in your adolescence. This sound reminds

someone – not necessarily a scholar – of the snores resounding in Duncan’s chamber. ‘If we hear these snores,’ says someone, ‘Duncan is still alive, for his death would have awakened his grooms.’ ‘No,’ cuts in another scholar. ‘They continued to snore even after the king’s death. Our snores are more powerful than sleeps and murders and death, whether violent or not. Besides, Lady Macbeth comments thus upon these snores, “They mock their charge with snores.” So our mockery survives sleeps and deaths. We’re so used to mocking our superiors and inferiors that we cannot stop, even if they – our superiors and inferiors – are dead. We see their corpses and begin to snore.

‘Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done’t.’ This remark cannot go unnoticed either. Lady Macbeth seems to be in love with her father who must have been dead for some time. But her reluctance in this matter questions the conclusions for which Sigmund Freud is justly or unjustly famous. We all desire the death of our fathers, but I cannot remember whether this desire concerns only males who are bent on making love to their mothers. Of course every one of them could carry out this ritual – Freud is fond of rituals – even in the presence of his father who does not really mind: he is no longer in love with his wife, being solely preoccupied with his business’ prosperity and prospects. But the ethical side of the problem erects an obstacle on the way of the sons whose love for their mothers beats all the records known to humanity. For some of them it is the point of no return, given that, after tasting their mothers’ delicacies they will never be in a position to fall in love with a normal woman, available to their (their husbands’) caresses and even to some of their perverse inclinations. Perhaps Lady Macbeth was tempted by another kind of murder directed against her mother. Yes, she wished to marry her father, and that is why his sleep did not result in his disappearance from the world where Freud reigns almost exclusively – by Carl Jung’s side.

After much soul-searching, I removed the following bit from the book, ‘I should kill him, for Macbeth is a chicken, a headless chicken at that. And chicken do not murder kings. An eagle is in a position to do it, but not with a dagger, I’m afraid. And we included a dagger into our murderous, ominous once-and-for-all game. Of course Macbeth would be disappointed if I committed this murder on my own. He’s sure to complain about my action loudly, persistently, ‘Is it for nothing that I struggled with this bloody dagger? I attempted to clutch it several times, but it kept eluding my grip. And all this was done and undone for nothing? *Pour des prunes*? Did the prunes deserve such a present? Incidentally, do you know what a *prune* means? Of course not – you didn’t study French in your infancy. You just kept rubbing your hands. A useful occupation, worthy of the future queen.’

That was the real reasons of her incertitude, her prostration, her refusal to commit the murder in Macbeth’s shoes. No – for once his shoes have nothing to do with the matter (and spirit). She just refrained from calling a spade a spade, from calling Macbeth a ‘headless chicken’. How would he have reacted to this accusation? In all probability, he would have answered as follows, ‘Perhaps I’m a headless chicken or a rather headless warrior, like the hero of Maine Read’s novel. (Don’t remember the spelling of his name. Hopefully you don’t mind.) But my hands are full of blood and I should wash them, otherwise our guests might suspect foul play, a foul execution of Shakespeare’s tragedy. In our days, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, they wash their hands because of Covid which destroys humanity methodically and ruthlessly. They were worried about atom bombs and their effects, but a small, infinitesimal virus is sometimes mightier than Hiroshima’s destroyer. And you don’t even have to drop it on the population you propose to erase from the globe and its suburbs. You just sneeze in the presence of your neighbour, and this neighbour of yours dies without Freud’s omnipresent assistance. You’re not acquainted with Freud either, my dear, ignorant wife.’ (Macbeth is still talking to Lady Macbeth, taking advantage

of her immobility, of her hands' immobility. You are irritated, aren't you, when someone rubs her hands in your presence; especially at a table.)

As a matter of fact, he endeavours to explain to her the meaning of their lives and actions – in terms of psychoanalysis. He enlarges upon inorganic matter, upon immobility as such which testifies to our yearning to return to the primeval state of affairs. 'And what's this primeval state, pray?' he asks. Lady Macbeth thinks of the womb which might help her give birth to a son, to a future incumbent of the Scottish throne. 'In the distant future they'll be able to watch our embryo's behaviour. By the way, I'm absolutely sure he'll wear the crown – in my womb.' Macbeth reminds her that first she should give birth to their male descendant. Actually, he emphasises the point, when praising her masculine behaviour and the mental prowess she exhibits during the preparations meant for the perfect execution of the forthcoming murder. Well, once again he returns to inorganic matter and says we have a sort of nostalgia for this immobility which you destroy through your addiction to the removal of blood, through the continuous rubbing of hands. 'Look at this dagger,' he says. Suddenly Macbeth stops in his tracks, for he remembers the movement produced by the dagger – at the wrong moment. Of course if your dagger moves towards the chest you are longing to pierce, its movement is highly welcome. But the movement performed by the dagger – during the performance of the play we are talking about – is just the opposite of what Macbeth intended; and any other murderer would have exhibited the same reaction to the dagger's conduct. As a matter of fact, the dagger did its best to elude Macbeth's grasp, and if you do not grasp your dagger, you will be unable to perform the deed, as Lady Macbeth put it; at least to some extent – partially, so to speak. So the dagger in question cannot serve as an example of what inorganic matter is addicted to – immobility, stability.

On the other hand, the rubbing of our lady's hands to which we devote so much attention is part of what is frequently called 'the pleasure principle' or 'the life instinct'. At least it is just at the other end of the spectrum of human life – in relation to the death instinct. (Death distinct, as they often say.) So, whenever the doctor asked Lady Macbeth to reduce the trembling of her hands, she replied, 'Your duty consists in bringing me back to normal life. What you're doing, however, has the opposite effect – you wish me to make preparations for a sojourn in my future coffin and tomb. Please note that immobility is not my cup of tea.' But Macbeth asks her to forget about immobility and stability. 'I'm not your doctor, after all,' he says, shaking his head resolutely, with vehemence. 'We're talking about the death instinct or Thanatos. Does this notion ring a bell?' And this imprudent remark unleashes all sorts of memories linked to the murder: rings, bells, the knocking on the gate about which many people have written essays and poems. One of these poems seems to recapitulate the whole affair, the plot and its bifurcations: 'Knocking, knocking, knocking / Talking, talking, talking.' Well, Macbeth says to his wife, 'You should keep your hand in. I can see many other murders on the horizon. And I'm sure that not all of our future victims look like your father. And I promise you to stabilise the dagger's behaviour. What does it take itself for?' And then he resumes his conference dedicated to Freud, to his death instinct. 'But you should defend yourself against all threats of death which aren't appropriate to you. For instance, you'll not perish in a battle – this is highly inappropriate for a lady of your rank. But rubbing hands is charming, extremely charming. So you rub your hands and die, slowly but surely. As you can see, I'm not against this exercise of yours. You are supposed to return to the immobility displayed by an exemplary dagger which doesn't flee at the approach of my hand and intentions. In other words, they should be able to put you on a bed installed at the centre of an important exhibition, in a world-famous museum.' 'But who will stay by my side?' asks the lady. 'No one – you're the only jewel in my crown, and there's nothing else in the world.'

But we should not limit our panorama to the presence of one unreliable dagger, for there is a wood within our field of vision, and this wood moves towards Macbeth's impregnable castle; from the owner's point of view. What all this boils down to is the participation of objects in our lives which largely depend on daggers, woods and also on glasses, on ordinary glasses. Let us take such a glass and put it on a dinner table. During the dinner which ensues or follows our manoeuvre, this glass falls on the table and is broken into pieces in the process; after the fall, to be precise. How do you react to this misfortune? Actually, this occurrence may be judged in various terms, from different angles. The Russian angle predicts your happiness, as if every breakage had to be atoned for. You break an expensive vase and they say to you, 'This event foreshadows your happiness, bliss and access to Paradise.' And the wood of *Macbeth* fame? Well, many people say after reading the scene during which the wood walks towards the castle where Lady Macbeth indulged in her rubbing exercise... (Rubbing, rubbing, hail and bubbling, as the Weird Sisters might have put it.) Yes, many people say, 'I wish this wood over there could walk towards my substance, allowing my body to enjoy its fragrance and foliage. Alas, I'm supposed to waste my energy on this manoeuvre, designed for woods and not for humans. You just remain in your armchair, reading a book or fiddling with your computer. And then you see a wood, a lot of trees. And they're not rooted to the spot, as might be presumed. Of course they have their roots which are in good working order, but this order doesn't command them to walk, unless the end of this walk is located within Macbeth's castle where his wife continues to keep her hands in.'

One is drawn to the following conclusion: the tragedy of Macbeth is on the move and so you may not find it in the same theatre on the following day, on the day that follows the première. And we should not forget the opera composed by Verdi and performed all over the world. And it is staged by many stage directors, and consequently the wood we are acquainted with rather closely moves in the course of every performance. In the nineteenth century, one might read in one of the Italian newspapers, 'The world première of the opera will be at La Scala.' But if we are conveyed to our century, we are likely to come across this piece of news, 'Unfortunately Great Burnam Wood didn't make its appearance on the stage.' Of course you are burning with desire to question the stage director on this oversight or fault or negative nuance. You meet him and voice your disagreement. And he answers your question blatantly and insolently, 'I decided to comply with Shakespeare's and Verdi's wishes. They both insisted upon the authenticity of their wood, and I had no alternative but to wait.' 'To wait for what?' 'As you know this wood belongs to the category of walking woods. There are also talking woods in our times and spaces, but let's concentrate on Great Burnam Wood which wouldn't be great if I planted a few abstract trees on the stage I'm supposed to embellish with my inventions. So I'm just waiting – waiting for the wood, as it is. Don't omit to take the ocean into your considerations and reflections. And think twice before criticising my work.'

'Was the hope drunk wherein you dressed yourself?' In this fashion our lady rebukes her husband who is ready to relinquish his superb manoeuvre, destined to overthrow the order of things. 'Yes,' answers Macbeth. 'The hope was drunk, the grooms were drunk, I was drunk – we're all drunkards, you know. I'm sure the grooms, the guardians or whatever you call them will say to future generations, "Alcoholism cost me my job, my health and finally my family." A quite unpleasant confession and situation. I'll kill them to spare their brains and hearts this dishonour.' But for the moment Macbeth is paralysed with fear or apprehension: his reputation is at stake and he is not pleased with what is going on. That is why he does go on; he does not go at all, in point of fact. (Perhaps I overuse these facts, matters and points, but there is nothing but facts in our life and so I cannot do otherwise.) His wife literally pushes him towards Duncan's bed, but he resists to the best of his abilities. Here is an example

of one of his abilities or excuses or explanations, 'I dare do all that may become a man, who dares do more, is none.' What does he dare do, I wonder? He fights bravely and fiercely in battles, during numerous wars, and he speaks to some unknown, more or less weird creatures. Is this last instance a part of becoming a man? Where does this curiosity come from? Cats are curious: it is enough to watch a representative of their species walk through a room it knows by heart. What can we observe from where we sit or stand? Our cat inhales the air surrounding the objects he has seen millions of times. And yet his interest shows no sign of abating. Well, Macbeth is interested in the sisters for the simple reason that he thinks they are not creatures of flesh and blood. They might have some blood in their veins, assuming they have veins or something along these lines, something along their bodies, throughout its surface. Of course he dreams of the throne occupied by Duncan, but for the moment this throne is beyond his ken. What exactly is beyond his knowledge? Well, he is not inclined to think about this throne *passively*, out of sheer boredom. To some degree he is drawn towards it and the Weird Sisters find him inside the space bestowed upon it. And this space includes not only the throne itself, but also the way leading to it; murders and so on. What does this 'so on' amount to? The legendary dagger, for instance: we cannot meditate upon the throne of Scotland without appending to it the dagger which, according to Leibniz, has been attached to it from time immemorial. And also Great Burnam Wood, although this wood begins its march after the murder, some time after the thrust of the dagger, of Macbeth's treacherous hand.

Lady Macbeth watches her husband whose weakness surfaces once again, and this time its appearance is most unwelcome. She begins to talk to him about the wood which has no legs, no hands and therefore cannot use daggers and suchlike. Nevertheless this wood marches towards the castle and actively participates in Macbeth's assassination. At this point time and space no longer count, except that the wood is praised for its handling of space and human psychology. Macbeth thinks along the same lines as he realises that the wood walks in spite of its lacking not only legs, but also a walking stick and other implements of what we regard as contributing to walking, crossing a stretch of space. 'You should take lessons from Great Burnam Wood,' says our lady to her husband. 'What are you talking about? About the future? Are you as knowledgeable as the Weird Sisters? Are you one of them? Do you confirm the enthronement of Banquo's son? And what about the lineage of kings, the new royal lineage? Are we excluded from this lineage? Do you know what they say now in Russia? In 2025? The world has no meaning without Russia. We don't need the world from which Russia is conspicuously, ostentatiously absent. And what about the lineage I'm talking about? Do we need the lineage which doesn't feature our sons and grandsons?' But for the moment Macbeth does not manage to overcome his stupor and so remains rooted to the spot – as if he was a tree. One thing is certain, however – he has no affinities with Great Burnam Wood. So, to justify his cowardly attitude towards the forthcoming murder, Macbeth says that he is quite satisfied with the present state of affairs which allows him to be a man, nothing more. But his wife explains to him that he'll be 'so much more the man', if he plays his part to the very end, not stopping in the middle of nowhere. She seems to suggest that he is indeed nowhere – not even in his castle, to tell the truth. 'More the man.' What she seems to be driving at is the fundamental superiority of women. More the man means a woman because there is no other solution to this problem. In those times animals were not taken into account, I am sorry to say. Of course you are supposed to do the right thing at the right place, and that is what our lady enlarges upon to make her husband understand the truth: many elements should be living in concord to produce one murder. Let us return to the image of the dagger which was an image, in the final analysis. But we live in the midst of images and we are duty bound to put two and two together – to create a worthy puzzle of these images. We find a cube here, a triangle

there. Suppose the Weird Sisters were a triangle, and their triangle dropped an allusion to the future, to the composition of the night to come. Duncan is in the bed, Macbeth struggles with his nerves and the dagger, instead of killing Duncan then and there. And Lady Macbeth is the last part of this triangle. First she makes love to Duncan in the bed, for she firmly believes she can further the accomplishment of their cause. At some point – as I already pointed out there are points everywhere and we take stands on these points – she says to Macbeth, ‘You have probably done more to further the cause of international harmony than any other person.’ This point can be found two days after the murder. Lady Macbeth thinks big and her ambitions cross the frontiers with eagerness and speed, conquering the whole world. One might even affirm she discovered America for the establishment of the peace she has in mind and the international harmony which enables us to live in the fashion demonstrated by brothers and sisters. She is the woman she always has in mind, when speaking about the superman. ‘To adhere’ is the verb she uses on this occasion. You take two countries: Russia and Ukraine. They are at war today, and no one can achieve their reconciliation. But if we take heed of Lady Macbeth’s words, we can realise that Macbeth is capable of making both sides adhere. Nor time, nor place, did then adhere. Political commentators said we needed several years to bring these two countries together. Of course Ukraine and Russia do not give birth to the same nation, but at least they are capable of living in peace and prosperity, renouncing the mutual destruction. The Russians are stubborn: they are determined to conquer the whole of Ukraine. They are not yet ripe for the peaceful, harmonious solution. As for their imperial ambitions, Lady Macbeth should repeat in their presence, ‘Don’t you realise you can’t conquer anything now, except a few kilometres. To conquer the whole of Ukraine you’ll need several years, if not several decades. There’s no place for you in Ukraine, no place for you and your troops. And you won’t be able to make your notion of place adhere to the harmony over which I preside with my husband. You counted on a speedy conquest of Ukraine, but nor time nor place did then adhere. Do you understand what I’m talking about? Why? Because you didn’t take Ukraine into consideration. You thought Ukraine and Russia adhered because they were the same nation urged on and on by the same aspirations. You were wrong, and your mistake originates in the verb “to adhere”. We should adhere, all of us. The sleeping body of Duncan should adhere to the blade of my husband’s dagger. The grooms, their stomachs and brains should adhere to the alcohol I administered to them. And the others should adhere as well. In the first place they should adhere to the tale we’ll concoct for their ears and understanding. We told our tale, we washed our hands, we got rid of the witnesses, and I told my husband, “They have made themselves and that their fitness now.” What I meant boils down to this, ‘Everything happened in accordance with the universal harmony announced by the Weird Sisters. They come from distant planets and stars. Their field of vision is much larger than ours. They saw a possibility of establishing harmony in our world, and you established it, using the verb “to adhere”.’ ‘And my wife helped me tremendously,’ said Macbeth, addressing the crowd gathered in the biggest hall of the United Nations, of their gigantic building. ‘We brought the war in Ukraine to its justifiable, harmonious conclusion. As my wife pointed out, we made luxurious use of the verb “to adhere”, which made things easier for us.’

The customary mess ensues, and one wonders whether this mess disappears from our lives, from time to time. Or does it adhere to it completely, unconditionally? You wish to harmonise Russia’s relationship with Ukraine. After all, it is the first major conflict on European soil since the Second World War. But how do you go about it? Macbeth can interfere: he has a lot of experience in the domain of adhering. He has practised a lot, making use of daggers, sisters and even of his own wife. He writes a letter to her, saying he will be king one of these days. And his wife begins to construct the future which relies chiefly upon her own initiative and

inexhaustible energy. In Verdi's opera she not only reads and recites the letter, but she also sings a difficult, strenuous aria after that. And then she greets her husband – in the opera, in reality and also in the tragedy. At once she realises what kind of problems she will face during the hours that lie in front of her and also behind her back – all around her, to be precise. There is the banquet during which she must play the part of a cheerful hostess. On no account is she supposed to let the cat out of the bag. This time the cat represents the murder, and if you let it out of the bag, everyone will see the blood on Macbeth's and his wife's hands. Actually, they are unaware of what is going on: the movement of the cat escaped their notice. Such things often happen in the course of murders: you overlook a detail and suddenly this detail pops out of bags, attaché cases and so on. The guests see the blood on all these hands, but Macbeth is still unconscious of the catastrophe or drama. 'A drum! a drum! Macbeth doth come.' A drama, a drama, Macbeth doth comma; or something along these lines. The Weird Sisters come onto the stage and you put a comma in your manuscript. They deliver their message, and you put another comma in your manuscript, allowing Macbeth and Banquo to enter the stage. And then the process of adhering starts as if nothing had ever happened. No wars, no murders. Haven't you learnt the lesson given to you by our history? The same question may be put to the Russian generals and soldiers; and also to the Russian citizens who seem to approve the action of their government and president. Of course you might ask them, all of them, to take a seat in front of a measureless screen on which you should project the images of wars and war-related disasters. Well, they will watch these images and nothing will ever prove that they adhere to the meaning of these realities. They might say after the séance, 'Yes, all this is rather impressive. So what?' 'But do you adhere to these images, to the message they deliver?' 'I don't like the word "message",' one of the spectators might say. 'In literature there should be no messages. Only poetry and linguistic texture.' 'All right, all right, but we're not discussing the arts. This is life, real life – can't you see the difference?' 'There's no difference between art and reality, except that art is richer, more profound, more intricate and consequently more interesting. I adhere to the arts with all my heart, whereas reality leaves me cold.' 'But many people die during wars.' 'I'm sure you'll touch upon children – in the same breath. When talking about wars you put so many things within the same breath. I've got the feeling the air possessed by the Earth, by its atmosphere, is not voluminous enough for your breath, for its requirements.'

That is how they proceed. A few representatives of both countries meet somewhere and unfold their plans, maps and other ingredients of conferences or mere conversations. The Russian delegation points to the map, to one particular area of the map, and utters this verdict, 'This region should belong to Russian. Anyway, it's already part of our constitution.' And the chief of the Ukrainian delegation answers as follows, 'Nor time, nor place.' 'All right, we can postpone the land offensive. Let's say we'll invade the region in three weeks.' 'Nor place,' answers the chief of the Ukrainian delegation. And then the Ukrainians begin to advance steadily through a forest. And the Russians contemplate the trees which march towards them, without being assisted by legs and other implements of movement. The chief of the Russian delegation lodges a formal protest against this march, but the chief of the Ukrainian administration shrugs his shoulders, saying, 'Since the other side had taken offensive action, we had no choice but to defend ourselves.' Sometimes we analyse a text and get embroiled in its linguistics successes and narrative imbroglios. And we overlook, unintentionally, quite unintentionally, the murders committed within the text and also outside – in real life. An American president endeavours to reconcile the Ukrainians and the Russians, and he is certain he will achieve tangible results in the twinkling of an eye. A journalist asks him, 'How many times do you intend to twinkle your eyes?' 'Once, I'll twinkle them only once. That'll be quite enough, you know.' 'I don't know,' says the journalist. 'Let's wait and see. I'll watch your eyes

and I'll also keep an eye on the situation.' The situation is getting worse and worse, and both the soldiers and civilians are dying – in the twinkling of an eye and every day, every blessed day. 'Why do you apply the adjective "blessed" to the days which are awful, not to say abysmal?' asks another journalist. 'Because we're blessed,' says the American president. 'Do you intend to say, "Everything we look upon is blessed"?' 'More or less,' answers the president. And the Russian president says, 'We're guided by God. That's why every day is blessed.' 'In spite of the blood of the victims?' asks one of the journalists. 'What blood? What victims? Are you talking about Duncan and Macbeth? They've been in their graves for centuries, if not for millennia. And tombs don't share their occupants with us.'

Macbeth hesitates, but his wife pushes him on and on as if she had nothing else to do. Actually she has no other occupations, given that two cooks take care of the meals and three servants clean the castle daily and nightly. Yes, in Macbeth's household servants work even at night, for many things happen during the night, in their bosoms and black holes. And the servants are duty bound to wash their masters' and mistresses' bodies and hands which, from time to time, acquire an unpleasant colour associated in our minds with blood and death. Macbeth continues to hesitate – he is in two minds about everything – whereas the American president is full of determination. 'Off we go,' he says to his aides, and they all go somewhere – to the place where the Russians and the Ukrainians are likely to meet and discuss urgent matters. The president arrives and says to everybody, 'You should adhere! This is an order.' 'Adhere to what?' ask the members of both delegations. 'You should adhere to my thoughts.' 'What are your thoughts?' ask the same members of the same delegations. 'Adhere. This is my thought. And this thought of mine contains only one word, which makes things easier for you.' 'With all due respect, we're convinced that this thought of yours, for all its unquestionable value and worth should reach towards an explanation, an addition, a verbal and psychological and military addition.' 'Are you aware of the fact that I'm bent on receiving the Nobel Peace?' 'Yes, we've heard something to this effect.' 'The effect is bound to be overwhelming, spectacular and epoch-making. So you ought to adhere to my future Nobel Prize.' One of the president's aides suggests they should steal the medal from 'their safes', as he puts it. 'To use your own words, Mr President, we should adhere to their safes – that's all.' 'Perhaps we should first adhere to peace?' someone suggests. 'It's easier to steal the medal and the documents than to adhere to peace which may be likened to the dagger upon which we have enlarged bountifully in our work.'

'Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse the curtain'd sleep,' says Macbeth. Actually it is an excerpt from his interior monologue. Shakespeare seems to have outstripped Joyce in this respect: there are a lot of interior monologues in his works. Or call them 'the flow of consciousness', if you wish. (Flow or stream?) And consciousness is always interior unless you voice your grievances or kill someone, not necessarily a king. Our consciousness flows further and further, and we see a body on a bed. And we realise we have seen this body many times, on various occasions. Macbeth believes that Duncan will do his utmost to promote him to the title of generalissimo. On the other hand, he is almost certain that Duncan is prey to wicked dreams. He is asleep and our sleep swarms with the wicked thoughts and murders we hide from ourselves. And these murders are either already committed or forthcoming. And our vigil hours teem with wicked thoughts as well, so we cannot distinguish between nights and days, and Lady Macbeth – if I am not mistaken – touches upon this phenomenon. Is it the day? Is it the night? These questions swarm and teem in her head. (Or is it Macbeth's head? Their heads look alike – like nights and days, so that one is often at pains to tell them apart. And if you are too violent during the process, an observer might say to you, 'Be careful! After all, you're dealing with a woman.' 'I thought it was Macbeth I

was dealing with,' you answer.) But let us go back – we go in circles, in point of fact – to the Russians whose president is congratulated on his origins. Sure enough, one of the Russian citizens says she thanks the president for being a human being. One is invited to go back to the passage in which Lady Macbeth insists upon the origins of her husband, saying, 'You're a man all right, but you should be more than a man. And if you are much more than a mere man, you'll become a real man.' I said some time ago that what our lady had in mind was the image of a woman and the advantages one has by adopting this feminine stance. Today, you can easily become a woman, after being operated on, but unfortunately I have no knowledge of such operations. All I know about them boils down to the fact that many people do not leave the hospitals where these metamorphoses are carried out. They – the victims – do not leave those hospitals unharmed, in spite of the publicity which enlarges upon these hospitals' hospitality. A group of propagandists assures you that your departure from these buildings will be triumphant: full of flowers and praises heaped upon the surgeons. 'Beautiful, beautiful! My God – you're so beautiful! Of course you've always been beautiful, but you've overleaped yourself, if I may say so.'

So the president of Russia is fêted by audiences in his own country. His citizens shout, 'You're a man, more than a man. You're as superhuman as Macbeth.' Oddly enough, even Lady Macbeth touches upon the Russian president, saying, 'My dear husband, you should follow the example of the Russian president who drops bombs on civilians, without taking heed of their inborn meekness and gentle character.' 'My dear wife,' answers Macbeth, 'you should pay less attention to our citizens' looks, for some of them have many affinities with your father. And you prevent me from killing them. Is this resemblance a sufficient reason, as Kant used to say? Our daggers are of no use in such predicaments. (This resemblance is a predicament in the context of our struggle for higher life.) That's why our daggers are reluctant to fulfil their tasks and balk at the prospect of penetrating the chest of yet another king, as if agreeing with you, as if saying to you and to me, "This king is the spitting image of our lady's father." Actually I'm allergic to spitting images. Do you know why? Because the Weird Sisters showed me a series of kings who looked exactly like Banquo. Can you guess why I didn't kill them? You think I didn't perform the deed because they were living in the future. Not at all, my dear wife. I didn't dispose of their bodies and images because they looked exactly like their ancestor. Any resemblance puts me off nowadays. You must have poisoned my mind, my dear spouse. What did you do that for? What's the purpose of such action? If you murder a king, you accede to his throne. But if you back out of the stratagem on account of a mere resemblance, you're a coward and a traitor to your own cause.' Incidentally, if you heap abuse and accusations upon the Russian president, his servants – the citizens of Russia – will answer as follows, 'We applaud him round the clock for the simple reason that he is a human being. And that's quite something, as the Americans say from time to time.'

'Thou sure and firm-set earth, hear not my steps, which way they walk.' Our Mother Earth knows everything about us because she is our mother. On the other hand, she does not listen to our steps and intentions, and we must admit that, on this and other occasions, she acts like our real mother. Does our mother watch our steps and thoughts? We share with her some of them, but a huge part of our mental life remains hidden from our mother. The same goes for the Earth so that if we have every intention to commit a murder, the Earth will not erect an impassable barrier in our way. She will not even put a spoke in our wheels and so our wheels will roll and roll – as long as is necessary. Macbeth's wheels rolled towards Duncan's body and the Earth did not decrease the intensity of his impetus – not in the least. It is not the Earth that put the dagger in the air and made it move in accordance with her whims. And the Earth did not contradict Macbeth who went on discussing his future, his

prospect of success in the country deprived of its lawful king. Actually these discussions were limited in scope: Macbeth was a man of action and was loath to waste his time on what was pretty obvious. It was enough to mention the Weird Sisters, and his wife understood both his purpose and prospects. In the first half of the play Macbeth was convinced that the mere fact of the Sisters' interference in his life was a sort of eternal guarantee: a success followed by a series of successes. And Macbeth was sure he would never fail – until Fleance's escape from his clutches. 'How come?' he would ask himself over and over again. 'Why haven't they kept their word?' 'Which word do you have in mind?' he would hear once in a while, but he thought his ears were mistaken, supplying him with a piece of false information – with fake news, to adopt the modern idiom. Oddly enough, when Macduff announced to him the artificial manner of his coming into this world, of his birth, in other words, he did not attribute this piece of news to the falsity of the world, of the cosmos. He said, 'Accursed be that tongue that tells me so.' This time he did not blame the Weird Sisters for their duplicity, for their allusions and the delusions to which they always give birth. 'The bottom has fallen out of the market,' he said upon hearing about the approach of Great Burnam Wood. (Or something along these lines.) What he meant can be translated thus, 'I'll no longer buy your predictions.' And what about Banquo's descendants? Why didn't he say something about their falsity, their fake appearance in the mirror shown in some film devoted to the tragedy? (One might even say they are *dedicated* to Shakespeare's tragedy.) He might have spoken about dogs or cats or frogs, 'They're just frogs one can eat in a French restaurant. Your cameraman is magnificent and, if I were you, I would increase his salary. I would double, nay – triple it. A frog looking like Banquo's grandson. Of course I'm aware of the fact that the sexual life-instinct which governs the reproductive cells guarantees biological survival, but why should our descendants be regarded as human beings? Because some Russian citizens cheer their president for this particular achievement? After all, he's not a frog, they seem to say to the world. Do they wish to impart to us the truth about how humans are exchanged for frogs?'

As a matter of fact, what counts is not the direction taken by your steps. For instance, if the Earth had accused Macbeth of going towards Duncan's body, he might have answered as follows, 'I just wished to put an additional blanket on his frail, decrepit body. Old people often freeze to death, and I was determined to protect my king under my roof. Anyway, I would have shielded his body anywhere, in any country, in any part of the globe, but under my roof he was entitled to an additional protective measure.' By the way, the Earth could not have got wind of Macbeth's intention by listening to his footsteps, for the dagger he was carrying did not represent a burden which might change the rhythm of his gait, its character, its music. On the other hand, his intention was surely either to slow down his approach or accelerate it; a sort of *accelerando*, if you see what I mean. At the beginning of the scene, Macbeth was addicted to *adagio* or *lento*. One must observe that he switched to *presto* only at the beginning of his trip to the Weird Sisters' nest.

But what about other ingredients of the plot? What counts in this tragedy and other tragedies of our times is the plot, the number of people who point towards a man or a woman and say, 'This is the murderer or murderess. And we have nothing else to do – I mean we should take part in all this disorder which will become order in time.' Yes, these people wreak havoc in the wings or in the crowd whose members vociferate and carry placards. In *The Brothers Karamazov* one of the heroes says to another hero, 'You should remember this – it's not you, the murderer.' And the other answers, 'I know it isn't. Why are you telling me all this? Do we have enough time for such jokes? Bad jokes at that.' When you talk about Macbeth, you realise that the space occupied by what sounds like a joke is immense, and so everything sounds like a joke, to some extent. But what is this extent? Is it really a

huge joke, starting with those hails, hails and troubles? All right, it *is* a huge joke except that, in the course of this joke, a wood is cut down, its trees being uprooted, *déroutées*, and all this takes place because of the three crazy women who say whatever comes into their heads. Their stream of consciousness is pernicious to the point of becoming the Absolute Truth, in the long run. In this case, it is better not to run at all. You say to someone, 'Let's not use this verb at all – it is pernicious, isn't it? Of course we can run innocently – that's what we do most of the time. We're late for an appointment, and we begin to run in the hope of catching up with time. Of course we can't catch up with time which runs faster than Olympic champions, but at least we congratulate ourselves on the fact that we're not late for our appointment, and our boss is pleased with our activities, our celerity, our devotion to our work and duty. But when time runs, when it takes the trouble to run, the situation grows so serious we can't disengage from our worries for quite a while. According to physicists, the universe obeys our consciousness and so time is the servant of our thoughts. Let us be more precise – it's influenced by our vocabulary, by the words, by Heidegger's adoration of them. So time listens to our words, and the verb "to run" is pleasurable to its hearing. But the expression "in the long run" belongs to what might be called "bad, pernicious, violent use of verbs".' And if we follow this interior monologue of ours to the end, we shall discover the following truth, 'Time should not make use of long runs, for anything can happen in the long run.' Indeed, what starts as an innocent joke – hail, hail and so on – turns out to be a tragic event in which princes and kings are involved, wreaking havoc on the whole world. You live in a peaceful world and enjoy your life to the utmost. Suddenly, some sister or other says 'hail' and you are literally demolished, both physically and psychologically. All your nerves and sinews are torn to pieces on account of one insignificant 'hail'. You are so angry with the world that you cannot help repeating this hail day and night as if you were capable of de-demonising it. And if your neighbour happens to attend one of your performances, you explain to her that this 'hail' was uttered by a demon so that you just have to add at least one 'de' to the verb 'to demonise' as you strive to relieve the tension and liberate yourself from your yoke. In the long run. Macbeth rides his horse, and he may devote a lot of time to this occupation, if no one interferes with the movement of his horse and with the action of his feet which supply a necessary impetus to the movement of the horse. But someone does interfere, and this time we encounter three sisters determined to spoil the fun and destroy our lives; and uproot a number of trees, into the bargain. We should say to them, 'Please, uproot the trees and carry them to Dunsinane, if such is your pleasure. But leave me alone, I beg of you.' Oddly enough, the Weird Sisters leave Macbeth alone – in the company of his wife, to be precise. But Macbeth does not – he does not leave the Weird Sisters alone. I wonder if they are really alone in the world where so many people believe in witchcraft and listen to weirdness – in any shape or form. Another weirdness looms on the horizon and they prick up their ears. And their eyes are already cocked, in a manner of speaking. I repeat – we live in a peaceful world; at least that is what we think about the world in our happiest, most deluded moments. Everything is all right. What is more, we are going in the right direction. But at this particular point, the long run smashes our happiness and all we see in front of us and even behind our back amounts now to a few pieces of the world we liked so much. To pieces, to smithereens. Well, we had better not use the word 'smithereens' either, and on account of our prudence and wisdom the world will grow as peaceful as some distant stars. In this respect it is more advisable to opt for invisible stars, as a matter of fact. Sometimes these long runs enable their recipients to move away from the Earth, from its misfortunes and plots. Sure enough – it is the best plot we can think of; the best plot we can imagine for our comedy. Not for *human* comedy, though – you cannot count on humanity in these and many other matters –

but just for comedy, our private, expensive comedy. We pay for this comedy gigantic sums of something – of nerves, of cells, of dollars – but this is worth our while and also our eternity.

Well, in the long run, the whole thing grows complicated, bitter, embroiled – and you have no wish to embroil yourself in lengthy lawsuits with the Weird Sisters – and once again we remember that what we should aim at in our lives is called ‘the divine simplicity’. You write a symphony and perform it for the sake of two or three listeners – they are your friends, your dearest friends – and they say to you quite frankly, ‘This symphony of yours is too intricate. We can’t make head nor tail of it.’ You are offended and disappointed and one might add ‘no wonder’ at the beginning of the sentence. Yes, one should not wonder at your reaction: you have worked on this symphony all your life; at least a huge part of it. You have forgone many pleasures in the course of your work. Now you ask yourself a few simple, divinely simple questions, ‘How often did I go to fancy restaurants last month? Twice, only twice – I was so engrossed in my work that no restaurant appealed to my senses. How many funfairs did I visit in the course of the same month? To none, I’m sorry to say. And I’m doubly sorry for that unhappy occurrence because the result of my labours is extremely poor. What have I achieved in the course of my life? Nothing, nothing, nothing at all.’ Thus you reason, and your friends look at you, their eyes expressing a sort of compassion which wounds you tragically. The whole thing resembles *Macbeth* to some extent. (Perhaps I overuse this expression, but I must point out – at this particular point – that everything happens in our lives or rather whatever happens in them exists only to some extent; with the exception of death, I’m sorry to say. I also overuse this expression, but I am really sorry to say all this. And I am also sorry for Lady Macbeth – just look at her fingers. Actually – and this is logical enough – she rubs not only her hands, but also her fingers, her poor fragile fingers.) One might even go so far as to affirm that your friends’ compassionate looks wound you more than Macbeth’s dagger might do under the circumstances. And you embark upon yet another interior monologue during which you weigh up a few possibilities, a few more or less improbable occurrences. If given a choice – a feat accessible to your free will – what would you prefer? The thrust of Macbeth’s dagger or your friends’ sorry looks? Sorry looks, sour looks – take your pick. Our lives teach us some partial truths and among these questionable truths psychology has the upper hand. I mean that psychological wounds are far more tangible than whatever a dagger can do within your body. Such a look pierces your psyche, your self-assurance, your ego, your superego. In short, this dagger crosses *everything* on its way to your death. Please note that a compassionate look is never satisfied with merely *touching* your skin – it should really damage your psyche as if it could not live without this damage. So you compose your symphony and hear your friends’ uncomplimentary judgement. And you ponder over your sorry plight, and at the end of this pondering you decide to re-write your work, making it pure and simple. You are not aware of your basic purity, but simplicity is easy to achieve; at least this is what you say to yourself. Is *Macbeth* simple? We have already talked about its ‘long run’, and whatever runs long cannot be very simple, for the simple reason that it is long. (Is this reason really simple?) You walk up the street, turning one corner after another. At first everything looks simple – the same street, the same passers-by. The inhabitants of the Earth do not look alike – this goes without saying. Some wear trousers, others avail themselves of mink coats. But basically they are all alike, considering the contents of their thoughts. ‘What do your thoughts look like?’ you ask a pedestrian. ‘My thoughts look like a pyramid,’ he answers without hesitation. ‘So you don’t hesitate, when announcing to the world that your thoughts are pyramidal.’ ‘No. I’m standing at the top of this pyramid.’ ‘This goes without saying, I suppose?’ ‘Yes,’ he answers. I suppose a ‘she’ might be in his shoes on this occasion; and probably on some other occasions as well. But this becomes too complicated, and this

complexity does not make things easier for us. Actually, when people require so-called ‘divine simplicity’ they think about their own comfort first and foremost. ‘We have other fish to fry,’ they say, ‘and consequently have no time to disentangle your enigmas. To tell the truth, we don’t really care about them.’ So that is why they force you to be as simple as all that, and when saying that, they have no idea what they are talking about. In other words, they have no idea what ‘as all that’ means on this occasion. (Fortunately, there are no other occasions of this sort. Life is too troublesome without these additions. Troublesome and hailsome.) So, on second thoughts, we decide that *Macbeth* is not divinely simple. Nor is it *divinely* pure, considering the impurity of the blood shed in the course of the action or plot. In a way, all these people plot against purity, simplicity and divinity. Let us say a few words about the plot, the story or whatever word you are longing to use on this occasion. (There are only occasions in our life. Please, do not confuse them with opportunities.) What *could* we say about it? It takes a fair amount of concentration to follow the tragedy’s labyrinthine plot. There are so many different strands to the plot that it is quite hard to follow. These two sentences depict the problem nicely, and actually, in a way, they sentence the work to death: people are reluctant to follow something which is hard to follow. As for a fair amount of concentration, it is quite out of the question: our concentration is so precious we are loath to waste it on a mere plot, on a mere tragedy performed on some stage or other. Or on our computer screens – for a change, I might add. First we are put in the picture about a battle which features knights and thanes; and what not, one is tempted to add. What don’t they feature? may I ask. They feature everything, reply the idolisers whose aim in life is limited to Shakespeare and their adoration of the bard. Well, we know something about the battle in the context of which Macbeth, Banquo and other thanes, other Cawders or Condors, fight rather bravely; to some extent, in my opinion. After all, they do not face ‘serious’ weapons, such as drones, rockets of all kinds. And even Siegfried’s favourite sword does not take part in this toil. (Life without toil and trouble – is that what we are looking for?) There are victors at the end of this special toil, and Macbeth is of their number. Isn’t that enough? Why make things serious, intricate, unthinkable, abominable? If you fight and die in a battle, no one will accuse you of the murders you commit in the course of your engagement. The matter stands differently with daggers and kings lying in one of your chambers. In the first place, these kings are under your roof and, according to various codes of conduct, you are supposed to care for them to the best of your abilities. Even if they do not ask you to bring a cup of coffee to their beds, you should do so, faithfully following your instincts, your duty related to the rules of hospitality. So you bring them several cups of coffee and three or four croissants.

But you start with something else – with the banquet during which you must look like the innocent flower. Of course you have to examine a dozen flowers before following your wife’s order because you have never studied this kind of innocence. Perhaps you have not studied innocence at all, considering that in our world you should be decent and acceptable, whereas innocence belongs to a different category – to a different kettle of fish. While looking for this kettle, for the innocence hinted at by Lady Macbeth, you examine various kettles and a multitude of fish. Is that what they call ‘structuralism’? Never mind – let us not make things even harder for our brains and senses. And we should always keep in mind the experience, the bloody experience to which our senses are submitted during these toils and troubles, as I put it. So the whole tragedy starts with the banquet, and the host and hostess are duty bound to be as hospitable as the ideals depicted in books of honour or of good conduct, of exemplary behaviour. The point is, it is not enough to follow the letters of the law: there are contents beyond these letters. This reminds me of *The French Laundry* – the famous Californian restaurant regarded by some specialists as the best restaurant in the world. There are pearls and oysters and caviar on their menu, but you should not stick

to your guns within the context of this new story, devoted to *The French Laundry*. We know that Macbeth was sticking to his guns – throughout his personal tragedy. At the beginning he was literally in two minds about the whole business. (And we have the privilege of being able to judge this business in its entirety – thanks to the book lying in front of us, under our very eyes.) One mind drew him towards the dagger and murder linked to the dagger. (We should not confuse Macbeth with Othello and his bare hands.) The other mind of his was pushing him towards what is commonly called ‘peace and quiet’ or ‘laissez-faire’. What was it? What had to remain as it was? Duncan and his royalty, Macbeth and his reputation, based on his intrepidity and loyalty. At the beginning of the tragedy, Duncan says about a traitor, ‘He was a gentleman on whom I built an absolute trust.’ And we know that he is speaking about a traitor. Furthermore, he knows it himself, but his kindness and meekness do not allow him to speak up, to unpack his mind, laying its scriptures before his kinsmen and spectators among whom there are millions of Shakespeare admirers. The same happens to Macbeth or rather to the judgment emitted by Duncan. (No, Duncan is not a machine and consequently he does not emit words or signals. To some extent, however, all these characters are machines. At least Gurdgieff or Gourdgiev thought so. By the way, I have a friend whose name is Gourdjy. Or Gourdgy.) ‘There’s no art to find the mind’s construction in the face,’ says the king. He is bitterly mistaken, and he pays dearly for this mistake. His life is at stake and he loses it because of his numerous misjudgements. That is what Duncan says (or emits) on his way to Macbeth’s castle, ‘It is a peerless kinsman.’ In what respect, pray? It is true that Macbeth departed, eager to join his wife and castle before the king’s arrival. Why? To ensure his servants cook a delicious meal? Let us return to the restaurant I touched upon recently. It is a restaurant situated in California. As I pointed out earlier, in the Nineties of the previous century, this restaurant was regarded as the best restaurant in the world. And then something happened. Frankly speaking, nothing really happened, and that is what casts a shadow upon the quality and renown of this place, this culinary spot. In our world you are said to be efficient and perfect if you do not stick to your guns and are not rooted to the spot. (Once again we are tempted to evoke Great Burnam Wood.) And the restaurant under discussion failed to imitate the proverbial wood, trusting its past achievements. Pearls and oysters, or something along these lines, words and delicacies. The clients say it is efficient – when speaking about its service. But this service (or its absence to some degree) lacks human warmth and tenderness. It is short and sweet, as the Germans put it. But it is not really sweet, to tell the truth. The staff, the people working in the restaurant, do not care, so to speak. To some extent, if you wish. As long as they remain on the staff, they are happy or relatively happy: I am not sure if you can be really happy when working as a sous-chef in a restaurant. Of course if you create dishes, it is another kettle of fish, as I usually say, but if you just execute orders, you must be bored, and I cannot figure out to what extent you are bored. Anyway, the clients say they are partly disappointed because they expect to be blown away. And if they are more or less blown, they are not blown *away* – that is what you expect if you pay more than 1,000 dollars for your meal. ‘The meal was beautiful, but not unforgettable,’ complained one of these more or less fortunate clients. Of course Duncan did not think in these terms about the meal served at the banquet to which he was invited by our murderous, murder-inspired Macbeth. ‘Being unprepar’d, our will became the servant to defect.’ ‘Servant and defect’ – it is in these terms that Macbeth thought about his vulnerable enterprise. Why was it vulnerable and to what degree? Once again we come across the dagger that continues to float somewhere – out of our reach. But Macbeth had to worry about several things only partly related to the dagger. (A dangerous relationship.) His very will became the servant to defect. It is quite clear that, when talking to Banquo, our thane betrayed himself most lamentably. But, carried away by the prospect of what is called ‘the royal lineage’, Banquo was not in the mood

to decipher the hidden aspects of his friend's and foe's words. He just took them for granted. 'All right – I agree with you. Whatever you say. All's well, all's perfectly well.' This reminds me of Donald Trump's habitual commentaries upon the meetings with presidents, prime ministers and so forth. 'Very good meeting. Wonderful, superb. Very promising, you know.' I am not sure, however, that he ever uses the word 'superb'.

So nobody suspected foul play. Foul is fair, but no one suspected fair play either: everybody just enjoyed themselves. (Were there any woman present at the feast? Except Lady Macbeth?) Well, the guests had the time of their lives; at least they thought so. At least they uttered a lot of words to this effect as they replied to the doubts aired by the host and hostess. 'I think that our pearls and oysters weren't up to the mark.' 'They exceeded the mark,' said the guests in unison. 'To what extent did they exceed the mark?' asked the hostess. 'They were as high as the sky, as high as the seventh heaven.' 'Frankly speaking, I thought I would reach the ninth heaven' said the hostess. 'Ninth heaven, eleventh heaven – whatever you say,' said the guests in unison. It is true that the guests saw only the innocent flower, and the serpent escaped their attention and judgement. If someone asked them the innocent question, 'Did you see a serpent somewhere?' they would reply 'What serpent? What are you talking about?' 'According to your account, you saw a flower which looked innocent and divine. But did you see a serpent under it?' 'The flower was so innocent-looking we couldn't suspect foul play. Or serpents, as you put it.' 'Don't you know that there are always a number of serpents under every flower?' 'No, unless the flower you have in mind has a multitude of thorns. Usually, they talk in this fashion about roses. Incidentally, I wonder whether other flowers have thorns.' So we must admit that Macbeth followed his wife's instructions to the letter. Was there any other instructions he had to pay heed to? Here is a mysterious line which gives rise to a multitude of comments. 'Art thou afeard to be the same in thine own act and valour, as thou art in desire?' Of course most spectators and commentators understand this bit as follows, 'You wrote a letter to me, and on the pages of this letter – or rather on the page of this letter – you expressed your unquenchable desire linked to the supreme step on the social ladder that we are acquainted with. But what about practicing your own receipts? Or carrying them out, if you wish? I know you're slow on the uptake. The time allotted to this uptake is over, if you must know. It is high time you proceeded towards the action you described so beautifully in your letter. At least I saw this description on your face, in your eyes. Do you remember what I said to you upon your arrival? "I'm reading a story in your countenance." Don't tell me you're not privy to this story.'

Among the clients of *The French Laundry* there were men and women who complained about the immobility of the restaurant. 'If you go to a restaurant and prepare yourself for a tremendous, outrageous bill, you expect not only traditions, but also innovations.' The story we come across, when ploughing through *Macbeth*, is probably traditional, but not from *our* point of view, given an exotic, untraditional angle we seldom experience in our modern life. Of course this world of ours is teeming with extramundane creatures, such as Hobbits or whatever their real name may be and really is – on the pages of books I have not read. But the Weird Sisters are in a class of their own – not only because of their prophetic knowledge and statements. And even if we encounter such sisters in our novels, on our screens and also in our lives, they do not speak like Shakespeare's Sisters. And they do not speak to us triumphantly, sarcastically about our rivals – for fear of being killed on the spot: we do not like malignant prophets. We are fed up with the people who govern us and make mistake after mistake, contradicting our votes or their absences. (As a matter of fact, in Russia they disregard the truth during their elections, and put down the figures that suit them from every point of view; from *their* point of view.) Anyway, our presidents, prime ministers and other ministers of note seldom come up to our expectations which are not great, frankly

speaking. What expectations can you have in our world? What are the sizes of these expectations? (Assuming, we disregard the bizarre appearance of the Sisters, being engaged elsewhere – within the narrative or plot we have to exploit thoroughly and unswervingly.) Today, we may invite some people to our feasts, but if we are determined to murder them, we do it but not at huge expense. Of course Macbeth could have said, ‘Murdering the king has proved to be well worth the expense’ – two or three days after the banquet. But today our expenses are so abnormally high that we hesitate before organising a party, as a result of which one of our biggest rivals gets killed and almost buried. We just offer him a drink and he gets poisoned through this drink’s agency; and our agency, to tell the truth. So the banquet itself is an unusual feature in our world – except when we wish to enjoy ourselves in the presence of those we tolerate either permanently or temporarily. After all, there are people who can serve our interests, if only imperfectly, partially and not truly.

So the story we are dealing with is quite unusual – from our point of view centred upon the conditions we face in our modern world. Let us take Banquo for a change; after all, I have already touched upon the importance of secondary characters. This is perfectly true and this truth is all the more impeccable since Banquo is not really a secondary character, considering that his son and his son’s son will be the kings – the honour from which Macbeth’s children are exempt; for the simple reason that they are not born, either in an untimely or timely fashion. What can you rip from a mother’s womb, if there is nothing in this womb except the womb itself? Incidentally, Macbeth would have uttered yet another monologue, had his wife survived his last and lost battle. Lost, lost, lost, lost – not won. He might have said to his wife, ‘What a pity you haven’t given birth to a son. Never mind the manner of his birth. I wouldn’t have prevented a midwife from ripping him from your body. Is it called a caesarean birth? Why Caesar? Was he born like that, being literally ripped from his mother’s womb? Was he like Macduff? Is that why he triumphed over me in this battle? Macduff was no adversary – far from it. But Julius Caesar was quite different. How could you vanquish such a rival? Even Hamlet wouldn’t have resisted his might, for all the exercises he was accustomed to, bent on killing Polonius’s only son. And what about Othello? He would certainly have strangled him. What a pity I wasn’t acquainted with Othello in my lifetime. After my death we’ve adorned so many libraries and bookshops that I feel truly immortal – and much more famous than Macduff who is remembered only thanks to my eternal reputation. My literary, artistic reputation.’ Lady Macbeth is also famous and eternal; not only her hands, mind you. Füssli devoted (and dedicated) to her a canvas the title of which sounds bizarre, *Lady Macbeth seizing the daggers*. There are two daggers in her hands, and her eyes are doubly open; or frightfully open. Anyway, they are open – no question about it. And they are wide-open, in addition to whatever can be imagined in this context. The context is rich, as we know, and features the Weird Sisters and the dagger one cannot forget. And this unforgetfulness is so poignant, not to say extreme and unbelievable, that even Füssli enlarges upon it in his picture. What daggers does he have in mind? So let us recapitulate: such attitude and its meticulousness count a lot in this narrative and analysis. In Act II our lady says to her husband, ‘Infirm of purpose!’ And she goes on unpredictably, ‘Give me the daggers.’ Actually, it is not really unpredictable because someone whose knowledge of the tragedy is limited to the title can think that this woman yearns to commit the murder on her own, single-handedly. Macbeth is incapable of action: in his opinion, his words – his letter, among other things – speak louder than his daggers. Disgusted with his slow-handedness, his wife whose resolution does not waver decides to pierce the king’s decrepit, fragile body with two daggers, instead of one. By the way, I am not sure Macbeth used one dagger during the murder which unfolded at the beginning of the tragedy, of the eternal tragedy. Perhaps he used two daggers, hoping that one dagger might help the other, if the latter hesitates too much

– to the point of becoming incapable not only of the murder, but also of flying through the air. Of course one might admit that this flight is vital to the development of the plot: it exhibits Macbeth's weakness and proves its efficiency. Sure enough: if a dagger can fly through the air and possibly around the Earth, it can also end the life of a king, especially if this king is unable to oppose it, being old and powerless. And sleepy into the bargain. (The king is not only sleepy: he is fast asleep. And yet there are films which show him wide-awake at the beginning of the murder. He must have been awakened by Macbeth's steps and his quasi-audible fear.) To cut a long story short, our lady does not get hold of the daggers: she receives them from her husband. Of course she has every right to open her eyes as widely as she likes, which is not dangerous: no one looks at her at this moment. Even Macbeth does not seem to appreciate his wife's beauty during this scene, and his indifference to her looks must have started on the day of his encounter with the Weird Sisters. Of course this does not mean that the Sisters were more beautiful than his wife, but his mind was wholly preoccupied by the imagery which had nothing to do with his wife's profile and legs. So Lady Macbeth opens her eyes, reopens them and goes to the chamber where the king lies dead. She stops on the threshold of this chamber, of this makeshift tomb, and makes use of the daggers. How? We know that the grooms or guardians were killed by Macbeth himself. His wife just gilded their faces. This was an essential manoeuvre, for it enabled Macbeth to explain his second crime if not in a plausible way, at least in a probable fashion. According to him, the grooms were 'steep'd in the colours of their trade'. In the colours of their profession? In a way – yes, for they are supposed to defend their master and king from daggers of all kinds. Even the weapons carried by his peerless kinsmen were to be wrenched from their hands – at least by precaution. If you carry a dagger, your motives are on the negative side; to put it mildly. The most negative side is perhaps a murder, especially if your victim is a king or an emperor. But Macbeth had in mind another trade – his own obsession with murders and other ways of obtaining and keeping the sovereignty of the land. If questioned by the Supreme Judge, he would probably answer, 'Yes, I murdered King Duncan and many other people because such was my trade and wont.' He *will* answer thus, being peerless and honest, at least to some degree; otherwise Duncan may appear to us as a boundless, limitless fool. Or as a saint, why not? Sometimes we are driven to this ridiculous thought: there are only angels and devils in this world of ours.

Let us return to Füssli's picture. (We are going in circles, and there is nothing I can do about it.) I was looking at it for some minutes, and my conviction grew, in spite of questioning itself. I was convinced that Lady Macbeth was before my eyes, holding two daggers, her eyes wide-open. And another character was leaning towards her, and I took, mistook this character for God; or at least for a guardian angel. This angel's index finger was closing his mouth, and you know this gesture which means, when written down in few letters: tssssssssssssssssss, or something like that. When you feel like being alone, undisturbed, and for this purpose you enter a room, no one is ready to attack you, to question you, unless you are stuck in a anti-democratic country. But as soon as you pick up a dagger, someone – sometimes there are two or three people by your side – questions you to find out what use you are about to make of your dagger. Of course you can say offhandedly, 'This is Macbeth's dagger, and I just wish to add it to my collection of murderous, legendary weapons.' So I touched upon a character standing in front of two daggers held by a man or a woman. Actually I mistook this character for Macbeth: we are so used to him we cannot think of other people who, incidentally, continue to exist on this planet. In the first place, Macbeth has not killed them all, not yet; secondly they just have other things to do, and these things are unconnected with Macbeth and his spouse. They are even far removed from Scotland, from whatever happens in this land, although some great philosophers and writers were born here, and no one can deny it; not

even Macbeth whose murderous instinct is not assuaged yet. Well, there is a creature holding two daggers, and a form stands in front of this creature; and I thought Macbeth was protected, cared for by his guardian angel, taking example from us, in a manner of speaking. According to some rumours, we are all accompanied by angels who, at the right moment, wrench from us daggers and swords, thereby washing our hands, removing the spots of blood that are sure to spoil – perhaps forever – their immaculate whiteness. This time I was mistaken, but luckily for me this mistake did not ruin my life, which can be done at the push of a button – rather easily, in other words. But where is this button, for God’s sake? This button must be vital to my being – on account of its multiple usages. Indeed, it can put a dagger into your hands, but it can also wash your hands, removing some blood from them. What a pity our lady did not use this button: ordinary water is powerless in these matters. Even sanctified, Church-certified water does not work regularly, impeccably, so that some spots remain on your hands, on your fingers, and any pedestrian can question you on the subject. ‘What is it? What is it? Please, explain the presence of these spots on your hands, otherwise I’ll call the police.’

I was mistaken: the creature I took for a guardian angel or for God Himself turned out to be our lady, Macbeth’s faithful and helpful wife. And the character I mistook for Lady Macbeth was Macbeth himself holding two daggers as if one dagger was not enough for the murder of one decrepit king. But Macbeth was not sure of his capacity to carry out the deed so that, to make doubly sure, he doubled the number of daggers. Doubtless he was bent on planting two wounds on Duncan’s body. (Plants, flowers.) One wound was meant for one of the legs: on no account was the king permitted to escape. Anyway, to cut a long story short, we have a picture in front of us, and we realise that Macbeth personifies his wife, his eyes wide-open; whereas Lady Macbeth fulfils her duty, being a guardian to her husband, to his unruly soul. So now we know that Macbeth’s eyes are as big as his lady’s eyes, and we even ask ourselves if Macbeth’s beauty or handsomeness is on a par with his wife’s Aphrodite looks. But in some countries such suppositions are frowned upon and so we refrain from the conclusion to which we might be drawn by our imprudent reflexion.

‘Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?’ At first we are tempted to attribute this remark to Lady Macbeth to whose hand-orientated manipulations we are already accustomed. No way – this sentence is uttered by Macbeth himself, and once again we meditate upon the buttons we lack in our ordinary life. There are so many buttons around us, but for some reason most of these buttons are the wrong buttons: they cannot clean our hands in no time at all. On the other hand, the right button can both wash and clean our hands which should be kept in order, even if there are no murders on our schedule. Wash this blood clean. Isn’t it enough to say ‘wash my hands’? Wash, clean – this order denotes the lack of right buttons in our working and living space. Anyway, Macbeth and his wife are interchangeable – at least in the opening scenes of the tragedy. And then something goes wrong, and our lady and her husband are drawn apart by some force; not by their guardian angels, in my opinion. I think their separation starts at the moment when Macbeth decides to withdraw his plans from his wife’s horizon, and he does that during the preparations undergone by his team in expectation of Banquo’s murder. The following line is the turning point, ‘Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, till thou applaud the deed.’ By the way, some commentators affirm that, when rubbing her hands, our lady applauds the deed thanks to which Banquo disappears from the Earth; from its surface, rather. This does not really matter at this particular point. What we should pay our attention to is the screen installed by Macbeth on the stage, on the scene of his crime. Lady Macbeth is not allowed to glimpse what happens behind the screen, and so she realises that her energy, the impetus she can supply during any attempt, any physical interference into the laws of nature, is no longer needed;

as if she was dead, in a way. Of course she might have said to her husband, 'You're lost in the labyrinth of time. You misjudge my actions and intentions. I'll rub my hands later, in the near or distant future. Between ourselves, I've not yet made up my mind on the subject. For the moment my hands are clean – I can't see any blood on them. And my eyesight is perfect. Recently I paid a visit to an oculist or ophthalmologist, and he assured me that my eyes are in perfect working order. They're good for both tears and blood. What he meant boils down to this: if a spot of blood makes its appearance on my hands, I'll see it immediately, and consequently I'll be able to remove it before the police come and arrest me.' Alas, Macbeth turns a deaf ear to his wife entreaties – 'let me take part in the murder' – and talks to his assistants, to his henchmen without uttering her name. Apparently one of these contract killers asks him honestly and perfidiously, 'Is your wife taking part in it?' 'No,' answers Macbeth. 'But she's very helpful, isn't she?' say the assistants. 'But for her, you would never have demonstrated so much courage, when plunging your daggers through the king's chest. The presence of two daggers betrays you, denoting the lack of audacity we all need, when dealing with kings and their bodies.' 'This time our victim isn't His Royal Highness. Please, don't remind me of the fact that Banquo's son will be king, sooner or later. Your insolence will be rewarded by a death sentence – take my word for it. But if you can't execute my order without my wife's timely assistance, I'll call her immediately.' 'No, no, no – we'll manage somehow.' This 'somehow' was the only right word in the whole scene.

So we see the Sisters and realise it is a bad omen pregnant with murders and betrayals. We say to ourselves and the people sitting next to us, 'There must be at least one king in the tragedy. And this king will be assassinated, otherwise the tickets wouldn't be so expensive.' And our neighbours answer as follows, 'Hopefully there's also at least one dagger, and a beautiful woman nearby, near this dagger.' 'There must be two daggers then. Ladies first, and if a real lady is involved in the process, I mean, in the murder or rather the murders, there must be a second dagger destined for her little hand.' 'And what about her second hand? Don't you think it should be engaged in the same process?' 'Of course, but I think that at the end of the play all murderers, almost all of them, will be committed and so the heroine will be deprived of her dagger.' 'What will she do, in your opinion?' 'She'll just rub her hands. What else could she? Wash the dishes?' 'Of course not, but even a queen can wash her hands before dinner or breakfast.' 'Or because her hands bear a few vestiges of the person she killed.' 'What kind of vestiges?' 'What vestiges do we usually endeavour to remove from our hands? Blood of course, human blood.' 'But not all of us commit murders.' 'Of course not, but there is such a thing as psychological blood, spiritual blood. Don't forget that we kill the thing or the being we're in love with. And given that we are Christian, we love almost everybody, almost automatically.'

'When the battle's lost and won.' Please note that Shakespeare does not use the word (is it a word?) 'or' on this occasion which means the women are perfectly aware of the outcome of the aforementioned battle. Of course we often demonstrate our sixth sense in public, and sometimes this sense concerns the wars our eyes and ears witness; willy-nilly, I must add. From time to time we utter a few words to the effect that someone – some king or other – should win the war; or lose it, as it were. Consequently we are supposed to say, 'When the battle's lost or won,' except that we are not only selfish – we are quite arrogant, as a matter of fact. We think we know everything, not only the past but also the future; in every teeny weeny detail. You say with assurance, 'Tomorrow I'll go to the nearest cinema, right after lunch.' But you are run over by a tram or a bus, and so no cinema is permitted to greet your body on that memorable afternoon. A tram greets you; in its own way. And you do not appreciate the ways of trams, whatever their drivers might think on the subject. But it is easier to prophesy in the

context of the tragedy you are about to see on some stage or other. It is a tragedy – in the first place; so you are likely to see several murders. And of course some of these murders include a king or a prince. But what about the Weird Sisters? If you watch a tragedy, you can expect not only assassinations but also catharsis. In other words, you heave a sigh of relief and say to yourself, ‘Luckily for me, all this doesn’t concern my psyche and body. I’m safe and sound, and kings can die as often as they wish, although they probably don’t wish to die immediately, at the beginning of the play. Anyway, this is none of my business, and so I’ll say to those who might reproach me for being too nonchalant, “This is none of my business. Why do you want me to shed tears upon watching daggers meant for other people living in some distant country? And even if this country is close to our frontiers, it’s another country, and I’ve nothing to do with it. I’ll never kill their kings and presidents because I just do not care – that’s all I can say about the whole story.”’

But the Weird Sisters belong to a different story: they can pay you a visit anywhere. And such meetings are ominous, to say the least about what can be said in this domain, in this horrifying area. You just walk up or down your favourite street and suddenly three women appear in your field of vision. They are obviously walking along the same street, but their appearance means something else. They are extramundane creatures, and therefore you can expect some outlandish actions on their part. They play their part consciously, and the more they amaze you, the more professional they look. You are just a casual stroller who thinks in terms of shops, restaurants and fine, inimitable food. But these women are carrying a message that is bound to change your life, putting it in a sort of reverse, opposite order. The life they are preparing for you is just the opposite of what you are accustomed to, and you shudder at the thought that your very existence is questioned by the vision at the centre of which three women walk inexorably towards your body and mind. What do they hide behind and beyond their looks and grimaces? They salute you ceremoniously, saying politely and triumphantly, ‘Hail, hail, hail. Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.’ Let us analyse the situation meticulously and without any restraint. You are walking up or down the street you love to some extent. Why are you in love with this street? Because there are trees in it; and also some buildings created by a great architect. You can find these buildings in the books devoted to modern architecture, and you are proud of being able to walk along such a street, at this particular moment, which does not deprive you of its beauties. All these beauties are intact: the building we are talking about have not been demolished, destroyed or submitted to unfair treatment. So you can enjoy them to your heart’s content. And you do enjoy them to your heart’s content, to your soul’s content. (We should never omit the soul from the list of the subjects to which we pay homage in the course of our meditations. Of course we have no idea what it is and where it is located, but never mind, never mind. Hail to thee, our soul!) Let us treat the contents of what can be found within two brackets conscientiously and seriously. We are currently looking for some sort of catharsis. Isn’t it enough to say ‘hello’ to our soul, greeting it and underlying its importance? You say ‘hail’ and feel how your chest responds to this hail of yours. Your chest grows bigger and bigger as if receiving an extra influx of air. You touch your chest or breathe and smile because you realise you are not only alive and kicking. You are proud of your existence, and if there was a throne within your field of vision, within the area occupied, sounded out by your senses, you would take a seat on this throne. Well, you would just sit on it: using extra words in your simple and logical narrative is ludicrous and quite unnecessary.

Generally speaking, you are fond of surprises, but you cannot bear unpleasant surprises which spoil the fun to which you devote and dedicate your life. Unpleasant surprises are spoilsports and you do your best to avoid them. In other words, you avoid them at all costs. And meeting the Weird Sisters in your native city is an

unpleasant, fearful surprise which casts a shadow over sisters and the number or digit 'three'. Whenever you see three women walking side by side, you cross the street and go as far as possible, determined to avoid any contact with these weird women. And yet they are not weird at all: they are kind, beautiful and hospitable. If you get closer to them and start a conversation, they will immediately invite you for a cup of tea. And this cup will be accompanied by pastries of all kinds. But the Weird Sisters cannot be destroyed, annihilated by this charming and fruitful meeting. (There were a few apples on the table on which the pastries exhibited their beauties and charms.) So the Weird Sisters cast aspersions on everything and everybody. You meet two men and one woman, and your guardian angel – that is how you protect yourself from outside interference: you just invent a guardian angel – murmurs into your ear, 'This combination, this human ensemble bodes no good and a lot of bad.' You continue to walk along the same street, and you trip over cobblestones, over leaves and branches. You fall and your face is already distorted by a lot of pain and contortions. And you reflect upon the situation in these terms, 'I was so happy before this meeting. I had a beautiful wife and a lot of money in three banks. But now the number "three" is cursed by these bloody sisters. I curse it on my own initiative as I try to avert several disasters.' Of course you live through a delirium, but you do not realise it; not completely, anyway. You fall, rub your hands, speak about blood to innocent passers-by and say to yourself that the show must go on. At all costs, as usual. And it is a real show, one must admit. Your falls are spectacular, and the three sisters or rather the three women you imagine – they exist in your imagination and in the tragedy under scrutiny – continue their walk through the city and the cosmos, wreaking havoc on peaceful and pure lives. And they say 'hail' from time to time. But let us get rid of this 'hail', at least of this verbal appendix. Perhaps we shall be fortunate enough to achieve some sort of plain sailing as a result of our manoeuvre. And we blissfully return to Macbeth and Banquo who are in festive mood: they have finally got rid of the Weird Sisters. Macbeth puts the following question to Banquo, 'Do you remember the Sisters?' 'I remember the capital "S". Nothing else.' 'Wonderful, wonderful,' says Macbeth and they continue their walk. Incidentally, everyone continues his or her walk and so the whole city moves in some undetermined direction. All directions are determined only through magical interference, and our three Sisters are part of this intervention. And Duncan is known for a timeless reign: no one murders him. Without the Sisters no one is tempted to kill anyone, and the world grows happier and happier, and there are no malignant stars above this world of ours. We prosper in every sense of the term, and our bank accounts grow magnificently – to such an extent that they are naturally, logically compared to a wood, Great Burnam Wood. (There are no other woods within our field of vision.) But this time, our wood goes in the innocent and pure direction: no murders, no threats, no blood, no rolling heads. After all, peace and quiet are achievable, and life is beautiful; at least that is what we say to ourselves. And we are always right, there is no denying it. If we were not always right, we would be unhappy, and unhappiness is not our cup of tea, not our platter of pastries.

But somewhere and somehow a traitor is being hanged, and a new set of problems gets under way. That is what our life looks like: a platter of pastries and a platter of problems. We eat a few pastries and the problems begin to assail us, our bodies and brains, our nerves; mainly our nerves. What could we do about it? We have already eliminated the Weird Sisters, but we cannot obliterate the whole world in which there are prime ministers and presidents. Among these presidents there is the Russian president whose crimes are so visible we do not even have to use a microscope; or a telescope, come to think of it. There is also the American president, and someone – probably our guardian angel – says to us, 'You thought you'd got rid of your problems by removing the Weird Sisters from the surface of the Earth. But look around you! Just have a look at the world where you live and

prosper, according to your own account. And if you take a close look at this world, you'll understand the truth of Macbeth, the truth of the character created by Shakespeare or by one of his predecessors. Before embarking upon the murder ritual centred upon Duncan and his crown, he killed many people in battles. And he found it normal, logical because the world in which he lived – in which we live as well – was abominable. And he thought it was normal to remove a few elements from this world. The point is he did it more or less lawfully, legally, whereas a murder, a wilful murder – not *all* murders are wilful – is something out of the ordinary. The customary procedure unfolds as follows: you declare war and kill your adversaries, the people you regard as the enemies of humankind. But Duncan was not an enemy of humanity; on the contrary – even his enemies were his priceless kinsmen. Of course he had them decapitated, and he would say upon receiving the news, 'Well, just another head rolling in the aisles.' Why did he use the words 'in the aisles'? Were they not rolling up and down the thoroughfare? What is more – and this is really disgusting – many people applauded the deeds. Actually, I am not sure our lady applauded the murder of Banquo, but she rubbed her hands; and no one knows why these hands came together in the first place. Perhaps she was applauding the deed, and suddenly the applause turned into the ritual I called 'the rubbing of hands'. Of course you can rub your hands in expectation of a treat, of a delicious meal, and when doing so on this occasion, you do not usually talk about blood, even if your steak is rare or bloody. Habitually you avoid such subject matters, and if you say something about blood, you add hastily, 'I can't bear the sight of it.' If you do not use this stratagem or addition, you are likely to be accused of potential, virtual murders. 'This man doesn't seem to be repulsed by the view or panorama where blood plays an important part.' 'The centrepiece of the shopping centre is a giant fountain.,' you read in a guide, and you can be sure that this fountain does not display a huge quantity of blood: the streams you admire are crystal clear and you can even drink from some of them, especially if you are thirsty. And what about drinking blood? Of course some of us are thirsty for the blood of others; for power, in a way. And how can you get this power? Only by killing those who hold high offices: low-ranking positions are of no interest to you. You are already pretty low – in every sense of the term. You are probably lying on some floor – not for the sake of yet another exercise. You were knocked down by someone, most probably by a man. Of course a woman can perform this trick, but women are elegant and kind, with the exception of the Weird Sisters. Actually they were kind as well, for they spoke about our hero's glorious future, which made him quite happy, although this happiness did not last. I do not think he was preoccupied by his wife's madness, but her hands and their movements made him feel uneasy, otherwise he would not have spoken about tomorrows.

You mention tomorrows in your diaries and agendas, but even your secret diaries do not speak about your hidden intentions – about murders, among other things. You keep murders to yourself – at least until the beginning of the process. And even at this moment you do not declare, 'The murder begins. And now it's under way.' Usually you do not comment upon your deed, and if someone asks you an uneasy question, you can always reply as follows, 'Just read *The Tragedy of Macbeth*– you'll find everything in it.' But I am not sure you will be able to convince the jury of your innocence if you say, 'But for the Weird Sisters and their participation in my ritual, the murder wouldn't have seen the light of day.' And even if the members of the jury know the play by heart, they will not release you, and consequently your handcuffs will remain on your hands. By the way, they do not prevent you from rubbing your hands. And consequently it is quite useless to complain about this state of affairs, because even the most tender-hearted people will say to you, 'You can rub your hands to your heart's content. Or to your hands' content, if you prefer.' But if you follow this piece of advice, they are sure to accuse you of several murders, for Lady Macbeth's ghost is very influential – even more influential than Banquo's ghost. What did this ghost

accomplish? Macbeth stared at the chair on which he was sitting and uttered a few words to the effect that the dead cannot be alive. They cannot leave their tombs, in Macbeth's opinion. And what about Christianity and the Resurrection on which we still pin our hopes? Of course you need a hope for this manoeuvre, otherwise there will be nothing to pin. You are not supposed to pin this pin – or whatever it is – on the void: it does not work this way. But what hope can you have in this world of ours?

It is high time we proceeded with our task which is not limited to the Russian and American presidents. So the Weird Sisters rule not only the waves, but also the whole world; at least those who read Shakespeare. Upon hearing the word 'weird' – and this word is very popular in the English-speaking countries – they take to their heels as if the famous sisters were unable to run and catch up with their intended victims in no time at all. Of course these sisters of ours can fly, and that is what they do, when pursuing their victims, all these Macbeths and others. The point is, Macbeth did not even *attempt* to fly. On the contrary – he went to the Weird Sisters' nest and questioned them on the subject. On what subject, pray? On the subject of his death, apparently. That is why they spoke about the man who was not born of a woman. All right – Macduff was untimely ripped from his mother's womb, but he spent some time in this womb and so one cannot say he had nothing in common with women. And Macbeth ought to have drawn Macduff's attention to this detail which is even more important than the fact itself. 'I wish you could show me what would have become of you, if you had not spent eight or nine months in your mother's body. Were you born by the instrument which removed you from it? And what do you call this instrument? Caesar? Brutus?'

We are all born from human beings, otherwise we would not be human. And the beings from whose wombs we are drawn either by instruments or by our destinies are called women. Say what you wish on the subject – this truth is undeniable, incontrovertible. It is true that the Sisters whom we shall capitalise from now on, on a regular basis, ought to have said, 'You won't be killed by someone whose birth was natural and consequently required no instrument.' But suppose they extract your body from a woman's body. Suppose that shortly afterwards you examine the instrument which enabled you to leave this body and see the light of day, as they say. You may admire its shape and efficiency, but you are unlikely to say, 'I was born from this instrument, be it Caesar or Brutus.' If you do say such nonsense, they will observe that you do not look like this instrument. 'And humans mostly resemble their parents,' they are sure to add, making their meaning crystal clear. 'But there are exceptions to this rule,' you may point out in your endeavour to redeem your honour and show your knowledge in the domain of births and instruments. You may add that you are the spitting image of your father, whereas the instrument you are talking about is your mother. But does this nuance or detail really matter? You were born and at the present moment you are standing in front of us. And as long as you leave us in peace, instead of murdering or torturing us, of tearing our bodies apart, you will be spared by our sense of justice. Why should we murder those who do not murder us, mutilating our bodies? But they can murder us in the future, which is more than plausible, if they read Shakespeare's tragedy and get inspired in the course of their labours. So we are allowed to kill the people who say to us, 'We've read *Macbeth* several times in a row. This tragedy is a great work of art.' 'As great as Burnham Wood?' you ask them. And you take advantage of their hesitation – they just stare at you, saying nothing – and murder them to prevent their forthcoming murder; the murder they are bound to commit, after reading the tragedy several times. You study every move of the hero and imitate him perfectly so that several people collapse within your field of vision, within the distance that your dagger covers nonchalantly and with resolution.

You are often drawn to the conclusion: we are all alike. And you must start your reasoning, your explanation of this phenomenon by joining Macduff to Macbeth. Their names begin with Mac which must mean Scotland, in your opinion. And then something vague, uncertain happens. Beth may be translated as 'bes', if you undertake the Russian translation of this bit. And *besi* means 'possessed', whence the title of the famous Dostoevsky novel. As for 'duff', it is just 'gaff, gaff' – the way our dogs bark at each other and at us. We find this normal, although some of us try to protest by shouting at the barking animal and threatening his or her life as if he was Macbeth and she his wife. The whole world consists of duffs and beths, and we are more or less used to this state of affair. (Do I use this expression too often? But what else can I say about the current situation, for example? The American president, the Russian president. These are the states of affairs; or the affairs of states.) So you walk through the hostile world, hearing duffs and making digs at different persons. You stop in your tracks and say to a pedestrian, 'You're Macbeth, aren't you?' 'I'm not, I'm Macduff,' answers the pedestrian. 'Anyway, you're about to kill someone, probably your wife, your private Lady Macbeth.' 'My wife has a different name,' answers the pedestrian. 'Does she rub her hands, from time to time?' 'No, as far as I know.' 'Look at her closely next time, tonight, for instance. If you see a tiny movement of her hands, you may be sure she's killed someone. Or rather she assisted you during this ritual because of which so many kings and ordinary knights and citizens perish at the push of a button; in our pernicious world.' You continue your walk during which you study passing faces and see a few daggers in the air. When speaking about weapons – and you speak about them in connection with your forthcoming murders – you should not lavish too much praise on daggers; on account of their unreliability. You want to grasp a dagger, and suddenly you see it in midair. You explain to the dagger that you feel quite comfortable where you are and consequently have no need to use an airplane to move to another continent. 'Anyway, you don't look like an airplane, and so I wonder why you fly instead of obeying my orders, my grasp.' Incidentally, in our modern world where they talk a lot about artificial intelligence, you may expect a dagger to become clever. And this cleverness may advise it against killing Duncan and other representatives of human species. Of course this dagger and any other dagger should not kill animals either, but this is another matter. Actually it is the same matter, for we are all animals, but this issue is questionable and many questions and problems arise in this (in its) connection. Do we have enough time for uncovering its secrets, for revealing them to the conscious, intelligent world?

So, if you see a flying dagger somewhere, you must say to yourself, 'I've got used to flying saucers, and I can handle this problem easily. A saucer lands by my side and I greet its occupant by kissing it on both cheeks – instead of hitting them. And if this creature doesn't have a pair of cheeks, I'll manifest my joy and hospitality by touching its feet with my toes. If the creature doesn't respond to my caresses, I'll just say "Hello" and let it go where it longs to go. If it needs to go to the lavatory, I'll open the door of my biggest lavatory to welcome it heartily, to show it to what extent I'm prepared to tolerate its whims, putting up with them. And if it yearns for a bath, I'll open the taps, letting a lot of water fill the bath – I wrote 'kill the bath' – and some moments later I shall hear a soothing splash, splash and other sounds associated with games engaged by water streams which indulge in their inborn playfulness as soon as we leave them alone. I leave alone my extraterrestrial guest and watch his conduct on a small, portable screen. You never know what these extraterrestrials are capable of.'

Some of them might be the Weird Sisters in disguise. And sometimes they do not disguise themselves: you see an apparatus which comes from nowhere and takes a seat by your feet. First you see the seat coming out of some aperture, and then your outlandish creature sits down and begins to study your appearance. But, frankly

speaking, you are more used to daggers, even if you have never used some of these weapons in your life. Of course you may resort to them for a different purpose: not only murders flourish in our midst which is quite complex, to tell the truth. There are also benefactors of humanity, which may seem strange, given the number of crimes committed in the name of our future prosperity or just for the heck of it. You pick up a dagger, look at somebody, at an individual walking in the same street – let us stick to our guns, to our familiar street – and you say to yourself, ‘Just for the heck,’ and you hack this individual to death. ‘Three villagers were hacked to death in a savage attack,’ you read in a newspaper. Why do you read newspapers? Don’t you realise they tell you a lot of untruths? Well, that is how the operation started. A villager saw three villagers in the distance and touched his knife or dagger; and for once this dagger did not fly off at the approach of its victim. So the first villager says to himself, ‘My mother says I shouldn’t kill my brothers and sisters, meaning I don’t have to hack the representatives of my race to death, but what the heck!’ And the dagger plunges into the chest of the villagers whose breasts got too close to the first villager and his wrath. Actually there is no wrath in his chest, heart or soul, but he does what he does for the heck of it. And the heck of it is hacking others to death. It is not for nothing that these two words sound alike – there is nothing accidental in the domain of our mother or father tongues. So the villager in whose chest there is the dagger described in *Macbeth* – this dagger is sticking out of the chest – collapses and dies on the spot. Incidentally, everybody dies on the spot. Where can our brothers and sisters die? Only on the spot, exclusively on the spot. Then the turn of yet another villager comes and the second dagger – we also described it somewhere – comes out and fulfils its obligation, duty or whatever, and the chest of the second villager – I am talking about the group I touched upon earlier – displays the same panorama: the panorama of death. The second dagger looks exactly like the first, sticking out of the chest in the same fashion as if taking part in a fashion parade. As one French singer put it in the twentieth century, ‘Why should I change my repertoire? My worshippers like it.’ So daggers and geniuses like Shakespeare do not change their minds, their manners of speaking and their daggers. Instead of planting kisses on some actors’ foreheads, they plant daggers, and these new plants flourish and grow to their roots’ content. Where are their roots? In various chests, human chests – not in chests of drawers, as someone might presume.

Human life is so simple – come to think of it. You wake up, see a knife on your blanket and think either in terms of murders or in terms of dinners. That is how you choose your destiny, directing your steps either to dinner tables or to human bodies into which you are about to plunge something you saw on your blanket. Is it as easy as all that? Of course the chest you are thinking about is not inactive, inert: it can rebel at your approach. (Ah, these approaches of yours!) Suddenly something begins to move in front of you, and your dagger flies off – not on its own initiative. You can easily dominate a dagger. After all, it is just a dagger, an object that has no will of its own. And if it attempts to elude your grasp and devotes a few seconds to a sort of flight, you just catch it and punish it – by thrusting it into someone’s chest. (Daggers do not like this manoeuvre: the milk of human kindness is not foreign to their nature.) But what to do with the chests that move towards you, brandishing their fists? At some point you are drawn to this conclusion: chests have a lot of fists and they can defend themselves against onslaughts, against other fists and daggers. Another quarrel ensues, another body collapses, and this time it is neither Macbeth nor Macduff; nor Banquo, for that matter. There are other targets in our midst, and sometimes we decide to take the earliest opportunity destined to annihilate all these targets once and for all. All, all, all, all resounds in the air. And either trees or humans collapse and some daggers continue to fly, even if there are no Macbeths behind them. As a matter of fact, daggers like flying, and even if there are no murders on our agenda, they fly to their hearts’

content, I was going to add. But I was stopped in my tracks – yet another expression I resort to very often; there are tracks and stops, nothing doing – by a simple thought related to hearts and daggers, needless to say. (One should concentrate on the thing one is doing, otherwise everything will be lost; not only this thing.) Daggers have wings and this is beyond any doubt, otherwise Macbeth would not have been written and performed all over the world. What a loss it would have been for humanity! But daggers have no hearts, for the simple reason that they do not need them. (I wrote ‘for the simple reason that *we* do not need them’, and once again I was stopped in my tracks. Hopefully my tracks are multiple, dense and so can resist stoppages and spokes.) In short, we should never overdo it, even when speaking about mere daggers. They are not so ‘mere’ as all that, judging from the play under discussion. They do many things on their own, and you often hear in the courts of justice, ‘I didn’t commit this murder – my dagger did.’ ‘But you must have directed its impulse, if any. You must have guided its trajectory.’ ‘I didn’t, I swear I didn’t.’ To cut a long story short, we cannot discard our daggers’ free wills, and this piece of knowledge is sure to reduce the number of crimes committed either for the sake of justice or for some other sakes. There are so many sakes – not sakes, not the legendary Japanese alcoholic drink – for the sake of which we are ready to commit whatever we feel like committing. Fortunately, the grammar to which I have already devoted a few paragraphs, interferes and we realise we cannot say whatever goes through our minds. A thought goes through your mind, but you mitigate the impact of this thought by putting a spoke in its wheels. (Let us assume that thoughts have wheels, otherwise it would be impossible to explain our mental mechanism, to elucidate its mysteries.) If this thought is dinner-orientated, you should not stop it; on the contrary – you had better accelerate its movement, enabling it to reach the dinner table in no time at all. But you might wish to have a drink before allowing your dinner to reach your mouth and ultimately your stomach. Of course its itinerary does not stop at your stomach, but let us forgo the second half of this journey. What do we have on our agenda right now? No murders, please, even if our hatred crosses all borders and limits. If it does, you just remember the saying, ‘From love to hate there is but a step.’ This is a Russian saying, but it must exist in other countries, in the bosom of other languages. So you take this step and arrive in the land of love; and you make yourself comfortable in this land, kingdom and universe. You just say to your judges (the Last Judgement is permanent, you know): ‘I always put the word “universe” by love’s side. So you can see to what extreme I carry this notion, its dominion, its power over humans and animals and insects. Our universal love will save the cosmos from destruction which is imminent, according to our scientists.’

Let us proceed point by point. Our first point concerns the Weird Sisters, and they enter our or their dominion. God has dominion over all his creatures and we are created in His image, beyond any doubt. So we have a lot of dominions, and all these dominions are under our control. And in some of these dominions there are no sisters, either weird or not. But these dominions grow envious – to the point of asking us to let the Weird Sisters accommodate themselves on their territories. ‘We can’t prosper without them. Nobody will ever pay attention to us, if there are no Weird Sisters in our bosom. So you know now that a dark jealousy stirred in our bosom some time ago, and to eliminate this darkness from this bosom of ours we need the presence of the Weird Sisters.’ You explain to these dominions that the Weird Sisters are as dark as the darkest hour – for the simple reason that they symbolise this hour. But the dominions are stubborn and so they go on talking about the Weird Sisters. They go so far as to quote them extensively. Of course they start with ‘Hail’, and you are terrified upon hearing this word which reminds you of Hitler. And you immediately put them in the picture about the Second World War and even imitate some of Hitler’s speeches. You imitate them in German – not in English, as Charlie Chaplin did, but you

are meticulous in this and other domains, and that is why the dominions listen to you attentively and respectfully. What is your supreme, almost global, aim? You are determined to expatiate on the Sisters – I am not sure I have to capitalise these obnoxious women: they are not really important after all – because you think the whole world is their native country where they were born and where they prosper, even today, at this very moment. Of course they do not sing, ‘O patria, my patria,’ but this does not really matter, given that they hide their hideousness beneath a courteous exterior: to some extent this exterior is courteous. In the first place they greet you very politely, and then they talk to you about your forthcoming reign. In point of fact, they do not say it is forthcoming, its coming is immediate, but your wife deciphers the hint and inspires your actions. That is why we speak about daggers so generously. What would you do without them? At least Füssli thought there were convenient – to such a point that they fascinate all onlookers, all visitors to the Tate Gallery – I hope I am not mistaken: geography is not my forte – to the detriment of Macbeth; and that in spite of his wide-open eyes. By the way, Shakespeare forgot to mention this fact: our lady ought to have spoken to her husband about the size of his eyes. ‘Don’t open your eyes exuberantly,’ she should have said, instead of saying, ‘These deeds must not be thought after these ways: so, it will make us mad.’ You are supposed to be more tangible, more precise in such cases. Didn’t our lady see Füssli’s picture? How uneducated she was, my God. She should have said, ‘You look like a wide-eyed criminal – instead of hiding your deed you seem to invite people inside, as it were. You literally force them to examine it closely, to scrutinise it. With your eyes wide-shut, as one of film directors put it. So try and close them – not to the point of shutting them altogether. Shut eyes denote the presence of a guilty conscience, and your conscience shouldn’t feel guilty. On no account – can you hear me? What did you do in the final analysis? There was a dagger within your field of vision, and this dagger was flying in the air, under the sky. I’m sorry – I can’t remember whether the sky was starry or not. I think it was not. Naturally enough, Shakespeare wished to show us horrors, their omnipresence and omniscience. Horror, horror, toil and trouble, if you wish. Forget all this nonsense – no horrors, no troubles, only hail, hail, hail. And forget about Hitler – this is another sort of hail, divorced from Hitler and his stooges. Incidentally, today’s politicians – the Russian president, the American president – seem to be divorced from reality. And what is reality, pray? Democracy, freedom of speech. Not quite, not quite. Well, let’s get down to brass tacks. Do you still remember what these tacks mean and to what they are intimately related? To your eyes, my dear husband and king. Sorry – you’re not a king yet, but this future, the one in which you’re crowned and gloriously respected, is imminent. But to achieve this tangible result, you should control your eyes, their wideness, their openness. So let’s devote some time to a few exercises, meant for you own good.’ ‘I’m also thinking about *your* good,’ says Macbeth. ‘All right, all right. I know you’re my faithful and irreproachable husband. So do all this for my own good – after all I’ll profit immensely from your crown, might and relevance. Kings are relevant – don’t you think so? But for them, the world would already have gone down the drain. And it’s still *up* the drain, in my opinion.’ ‘Aren’t you too optimistic?’ asks Macbeth. ‘On the optimistic side, I would say. On the side of optimism and happiness, if you prefer. And for the sake of this happiness, I’m asking you to manipulate your eyes in accordance with our code of behaviour. If you’re wide-eyed, some people will declare you’re terrified to some extent. By what, may I ask? Do you know what they’re likely to answer? By his own deed. Of course you’ll say, “I’m not so good with my hands and with my daggers. Actually, I have no daggers, come to think of it. I think I forgot them at the Tate Gallery.”’

But what is advantageous in all this rigmarole? What advantage can you draw from Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets? Now you know that daggers are unreliable because you can forget to put them in the right place, and

their right place is by the side of those you wish to accuse of the murders you commit. And even your wife may betray herself by murmuring, ‘Yes, this was done and can’t be undone. What is done can’t be undone – such is the truth I’m not prepared to deny. Why undo these murders and suchlike? I still profit from them, from their accomplishments. And all this was done for Banquo’s posterity. I took hold of the daggers and put them in the right place, but the place wasn’t right because everyone suspected my husband of the murder committed by both of us. Of course they said to themselves, “His wife is innocent because women aren’t capable of such atrocities.” You don’t know Shakespeare by heart, I’m afraid. Didn’t I say in the course of the action, “I would have dashed my baby’s brains out”? Even a man isn’t courageous enough to say such a thing about his own son. I wonder, incidentally, to whom I offered my breasts on this occasion? Did I have a son or a daughter? Where are they at the present moment? Did I dash their brains out? Where are these brains? At least I might have kept them as a keepsake. What am I talking about? Am I already mad? Why am I not rubbing my hands, which is the sign they’re all waiting for? They come to our theatre and say to each other, “I’ve come for the sake of this particular scene during which our lady rubs her hands and whines. Did I whine during the scene I’m trying to imitate to the best of my abilities? After all, I’m an actress and so my talent must demonstrate its scope on every occasion, in every scene. Well, rubbing one’s hands isn’t very difficult, is it? I remember seeing a documentary about Laurence Olivier in which he told a nice story. He was directing a film based on one of Shakespeare’s plays. I think it was *Henry V*, but I may be mistaken – my memory isn’t as realistic as it used to be. In the second act, for instance. He said to the actors, “I’ll do whatever I ask you to do. Quite willingly, you know.” And then he jumped from the top of a tree on a horse. Can you imagine this feat? And this wasn’t a feat of his imagination. This was a corporeal feat, as a matter of fact. But rubbing one’s hands is nothing in comparison to this jump and the saddle of the horse.’

But we should obliterate all the traces of our crimes, and the daggers are on our list. So we remove the daggers, the blood that paints our hands red and then we say to the judges, ‘Everything is all right.’ At this particular moment – this moment is quite particular – Sigmund Freud interferes, saying, ‘Did you remove the daggers to protect the king or rather to repress the wish to harm him?’ And you answer as follows, ‘I don’t intend to protect the king. Of course I’m not duty bound to murder him, but protection is another kettle of fish, another angle from which the situation looks different. First I’d rather examine all the angles, and then I’ll answer your question and protect myself from your accusation, if any. Do you really accuse me or what? Always talking about repressed wishes. I’ve nothing to repress, to suppress. All my wishes are stark naked, and you can admire them from where you are standing right now. I’m not trying to hide anything from you because my wishes are legal and beautiful. Here’s my wish number one: I dream about this kingdom and I’ll have it, come hell or high water. Actually both will come – I’m sure of this future occurrence. But I don’t care, if you must know. If you’re determined to hang me, go ahead. That’s what the governor of California said to the American president, “Put me in prison, if you wish, if this is your dearest wish. I just don’t give a damn.” Allow me to say to you the same words because I’ve no time for pretexts and *faux-fuyants*. You don’t speak French, do you? When trying to understand the meaning of my remark, you may use the verb “to prevaricate”. Hopefully you know this word. Stop dodging, evading the issue – that’s what they say in similar circumstances. You stop, but you don’t evade the issue. Nor do you renounce committing your murders and other actions directed against the world of which you disapprove most heartily. Why? Because this world includes you only *partially*, and this partiality of the world doesn’t agree with your constitution and hopes. And your repressed desires don’t agree with your desires,

to put it bluntly and without any ambiguities. Why did you repress your desires? In the first place, you must know that your repressed desires are still desires, and you can't squash them here and there because you won't have any desires at the end of this operation. What Freud means is the repression, not the outright suppression. You just mitigate your desires, putting them under a weight, as they might say, when preparing some dish or other. There's a dish called 'Repressed Chicken' or something along these lines. They kill or murder a chicken and put it under a weighty piece of metal, and then they cook it in some way or other. Doesn't this remind you of our common fate? Aren't we chicken and nothing, nobody else? And that's what Freud meant, when speaking about our repressed something. You can repress a member which plays an important part in your bodily constitution. Of course it concerns your penis, as Freud declared, pointing to your private organ with his stick. During his walks, he used to point with his walking stick to various objects, and these objects would begin making love to each other almost instantly, without waiting for a prelude. That's how life goes on, according to Freud. But what about repressed wishes and the death instincts which might result in your death, if you pay too much attention to it? Well, you'd better not pay too much attention to Freud's stick and his definitions which annihilate your father in the twinkling of an eye. Your father deprives you of your mother; or the other way round. Anyway, someone deprives you of something vital, and that's why you touch the dagger you always keep in your pocket, thinking you can't prosper without it. And you don't repress anything, contrary to what Freud announced in his books and lectures. "I'm not ashamed of what I feel, and so nothing should be forbidden, as far as my constitution is concerned."

So why did you put your daggers back, with the aid of your wife? Because I did not want to continue my ritual at that particular moment. But life is full of moments, even if you die in your childhood. You die in your childhood, but before dying you bite your mother, preventing her from dashing your brains out. Your mother is Lady Macbeth in disguise, and at some point in your life you may decide that there are no other mothers in the world. You have not heard about Mother Teresa: you talk only about Mother Macbeth who wishes to dash your brains out. And you implore her not to do that – not on the spot, not without letting you live for a few days. You promise to make up your mind at the end of these days, saying, 'I'll die in the midst of the hate I'll nourish towards the world. I'll be happy to leave it, separating myself from its ingredients. What do Taoists say on the subject? I am invisible, I do not exist. That's the way – the way of Tao, as they say.' But, according to Freud, your wishes are repressed but not suppressed, and so you see a wish, standing in front of you. And you say to it, 'Don't worry your pretty little head – I'm not going to kill you, as I killed Duncan and Banquo. I'm just repressing you a little bit. And I'll perform my duty, while caressing your body, the body of my dearest wish. You *are* my dearest wish, and that's why I'm repressing you. If you were just a wish of mine, I would water you, as I water the plants and flowers in my garden. But you're too obtrusive, too beautiful, and so I have to repress you, according to Freud. Shall we approve of Freud's methods at every step we take? I'm not sure that modern science legitimises his moves and decisions, but let's follow the trend, taking no notice of its age and relevancy.' And once again, we begin to rub our hands, revealing our hidden truth. 'In fact, we're rubbing two penises. As a result of this rubbing we get excited and violate many conventions, prescribed and described by our ridiculous world.'

The repressed wish is still standing in front of us. Even if it was standing *behind* us, we would take notice of it, considering that it is our wish and not just an impulse, some foreign impulse. So we have to deal with it appropriately, with our pernicious wish which may destroy us ultimately and entirely. And to guard against this eventuality, we have to repress it in some way or other. And we repress it by hacking off a large chunk of its meat.

All wishes consist of meat, otherwise there would be no wishes – the tangible substances that control our life, regulating its movements, gestures and thoughts. So one wonders how we go about it? We hack off its hand because we remember the Scriptures which advise us to get rid of the members, of those members of our body we find obtrusive and uncontrollable. We want to grab a woman by her thighs, or just to grab her thighs and other parts of her body that appeals to us to the extent of making us paralysed in its presence. This body comes into our view and we contemplate it for a few seconds, knowing perfectly well that at the end of these seconds we shall grab whatever we are infatuated with, including the very soul of the object of our desire. We know that, in order to possess a woman or a man we have to seduce her or him – to the utmost, leaving no part of his or her or its body unaware of our presence. We seduce this object, and that is actually prohibited by our religion and also by Freud whose indulgence in these matters has its limits. Why, then, does he speak of repressed wishes, given that he is so indulgent, so generous in the domain of our abundant, limitless will? Just because he has or had to write about something, leaving his name behind or before – in the centuries to come. You talk about people's wishes, and the same people nod their heads or shake them. Sure enough, they are willing to deny whatever is connected with their hidden schemes and far-going projects. 'No, I've no wishes at all. I would be happy with a cup of tea, and if you're able to furnish me with this cup, I'll be quite happy.' It is not true, to put it mildly. It is a vociferous lie which proclaims its horror from treetops and from the roofs of the houses inhabited by peaceful representatives of our race whose desires are under lock and key. 'The key is in the door,' they tell you, when you complain about their inaccessibility. 'We're open to any experience, and our heart is in various displays in a multitude of institutions,' they point out. And then you ask them politely about this proverbial key of theirs, and they say to you, 'Well, it's up to you to find the key. Do you know the Russian tale about a wooden boy who spends his life, searching for the golden key? Actually, we think it's an Italian tale called *Pinocchio*, or something like that. Never mind the names you're acquainted with. The name of the key we're talking about is "golden". Just look for this key, concentrate your attention on it, and you'll find everything down to your happiness, personal happiness.' In the course of your search you find many keys, and some of these keys are quite irrelevant, according to your final judgement. But your happiness lies beyond these keys, and you recognise this fact in the long run. And that is why, now and then, you have to run for hours and hours to discover the truth you are looking for. Of course you do not have to *look* for this truth – for any truth, as a matter of fact. Just live your life and accept whatever comes along and happens by chance or by anything else. And pay no attention to Freud who is an authentic spoilsport. You enjoy your life to the utmost, but he comes along and speaks to you about your death instinct. You say you are not aware of such a thing – in connection with my life, you point out. 'Beyond my life it certainly exists, for your authority is almost absolute in the modern world. But I'm not really modern, you know. I like old furniture, among other old things. I like Dante and Shakespeare, disregarding contemporary writers and their so-called achievements. So your death instinct is none of my concern.'

But your wishes continue to torment you, and you consider the method proposed and advertised by Freud, namely the repression exercised against your wishes. And you begin to hack their members, depriving them of the instruments of your doom. What is your doom? You wish to possess the most beautiful women of the world, and your sex organ is well prepared for this task. Over and over again you check its military capacity, and it salutes you, saying more or less audibly, 'I'm ready for the purpose you consider during your mental exercises.' Christianity comes into your room, and you recall not only Jesus Christ, but also his advice which is now arrayed in front of your mental eye. And so you continue to hack off whatever gets in your way – in your way to Paradise.

‘I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent,’ says Macbeth, and he decides to leave this spur alone. ‘There’s no spur to speak off,’ he points out, when questioned by the members of the jury or by the judges, by a number of supreme judges. There are no spurs, no intents – nothing to write home about. But Macbeth did write a letter to his wife who was at home, and so everything went wrong – from the very start, mind you. Besides, the French say, ‘Your intent is as good as its accomplishment,’ so Macbeth should be judged in accordance with this saying and principle. ‘Letting “I dare not” wait upon “I would,” as our lady puts it.’ ‘I would’ stands in the middle of the room where Macbeth drinks some wine, a very good wine to which he pays no attention, turning it into a bad wine. That is quantum mechanics for you: your presence creates the world you step into at some point or other. ‘I dare not’ is waiting behind the door, as the custom dictated by Macbeth’s monologue wants the whole thing – what about the grammar in this particular case? – and I would say to it, ‘What kind of nonsense is this? It is “I dare” that should wait upon “I would”, and I’m well placed to know the truth about it, as the French say very often. Why “I dare not”, for what purpose? What is the rhyme and reason of this statement? I dare not is irrelevant anyway. When I say “I dare” is waiting behind the door, it means I have to get my arse in gear. This is awful, by the way – I shouldn’t use such language, considering that I’ll be a king in the near future. And kings don’t utter such obscenities, being content with a mere “Let’s go”. Yes, that’s quite enough – after uttering this wish, this unrepressed wish, I’ll go to Duncan’s chamber, getting closer and closer to his sleeping body and perform the deed, whatever happens. Actually I’m quite sure that both hell and high water can’t come at the same time, and I can deal easily with hell, provided high water doesn’t accompany it. And if it does, I’ll send it to hell. After all, everything seems so natural, so harmonious – as if Mozart was taking care of creation in its entirety. And if he’s far away at this particular, present moment, I’ll ask my assistants to call him immediately. And they’ll say, “Sorry, Your Highness, but at this moment, which is present to your eyes and ears, we have another business on our hands.” “What kind of business are you talking about?” (We are always talking about something, meaning something. How tiresome!) “The suppression of Banquo, the repression of all his wishes.” “Forget about Banquo. Go and fetch Mozart – his presence will permit us to carry out all our plans. And they’ll be as harmonious and elevated as his *Jupiter Symphony*. What a pity I haven’t thought about it, about this substitution. You need neither daggers nor your wife to accomplish all the deeds swarming and teeming within your head. What could be better than the status of Jupiter? Isn’t he much more powerful than our Duncan who isn’t a deity, as far I know? Just a mere king, a king of Scotland. And what about the United States of America? Can he rule in that country on the other side of the Atlantic? No – the United States has its own president who’ll never accept anybody’s rules within his dominion.” But Freud reappears and you feel duty bound to repress something within your ego or superego; or to indulge in your death instinct’s caresses. You expose your body and soul to these caresses and your life dwindles to a speck which is far more gorgeous than any power you can dream about in your leisure hours. You fight on and on. Your swords and daggers decimate a dozen populations whose presence annoys you profoundly. And then you stop – a coffee break, if you please; and during this break you dream of kingdoms and thrones. How could you dream about them without inviting Macbeth, Banquo and others to take part in the game?

So Freud comes in once again as if we were pursued by him, as all others are, frankly speaking. ‘The punishment you fear for others is what you fear for yourself, my dearest,’ he says. ‘I know Macbeth will be killed in the final battle, and that is the punishment many people were looking for. As for my own point of view, I feared that his head would be cut from his body in the heat of this epilogue. Why? Because I sympathise with this hero or anti-hero, for the simple reason that he’s courageous, braving the woods and the bearers of the branches. And

also those who were ripped from their mothers' wombs. His courage should be applauded, I believe, but people just rub their hands as if nothing had happened. I mean, they don't seem to notice Macbeth's bravery, the way he defies the world and its laws. "You can move many woods – I just don't care. I move my limbs towards your bodies, souls, psyches and what not, and that's quite satisfactory, given that I'm just a human being and not the Almighty. Of course the Almighty would kill Macduff, if He were in my shoes or boots, but I'm not envious. Yes, for once I'm not envious. I envy Banquo his multiple fate or rather the ramification of this fate predicted by the Weird sisters. I don't remember what I promised once upon a time – I mean, in the domain of capital letters. Never mind, never mind – these sisters of mine will survive both my capitalisation and its absence. Well, I'm aware of your insistence upon my sexual anxiety. (I'm still talking to Freud, if you must know. You seem to forget that I admire Jung even more than you, you, you, my dear Sigmund.) And you declare that this anxiety of mine refers to the past – to Lady Macbeth, in other words. Yes, frankly speaking, I'm in love with this woman – not only with her hands, mind you. Of course the style which one admires, when contemplating these hands in the course of their rubbing ritual, is perfect – one can't rub one's hands more beautifully and elegantly. But I'm also fascinated by her legs, believe it or not. And yet she doesn't rub them, as far as I know. Of course I haven't read Shakespeare's notes pertaining to this text, but I'm pretty sure he didn't want her to rub everything and everyone. By the way, some people – they're certainly influenced by this legendary scene – speak about their lovemaking in these terms, "Rubbing, rubbing, rubbing."

Yes, Freud thought that people did something only in accordance with the past. If they murder someone, they do it only because Macbeth did it many centuries before. But if facing Freud in some room or other – in his office, for instance – I would tell him many home truths, starting with the Rat Man. 'You seem to mistake me for one of your patients, for the Rat Man whose complexes you nursed many years ago. But I'm neither this man nor a rat. Perhaps a cat, but not a rat, certainly not. Between ourselves, I'd kill this rat if I was a cat. Unfortunately I'm not a cat, my dear Sigmund, my dearest doctor. That's why I kill Duncans and other people of this calibre. But when killing them, I don't refer to the past, whatever you may think on the subject. I just kill them, that's all. I don't say to them, "I'm killing you because you remind me of Duncan," for there are no people like that in our times. You think I'm neurotic because I need to *repeat* something in the past, in the present and in the past. It's not enough to remember the past – you have to enact it, so to speak. You may be right in this respect – my memory isn't as excellent as it used to be, so I'm forced to act, instead of reciting the tragedy by heart. By I've got the book by my side and so it's not necessary to act, to rise from my seat, to go to some castle or other and draw my sword or dagger. "Besides, this Duncan hath borne his faculties so meek." I remember the king's meekness and then the rest returns and I enjoy its return – all the more fully, since the book is still in front of my eyes.'

Isn't all this a repetition, an action which repeats itself over and over again? Names do not count: there are as many Macbeths as others – those who are influenced by them and kill their neighbours and get killed by their neighbours. And what about our births? Are we untimely ripped from our mothers' and fathers' wombs? Don't our fathers have an organ which reminds one of a womb about which The Weird sisters or just witches talk in their monologues? These are not monologues, properly speaking, but considering the importance of these words, we are tempted to disregard linguistic and structural niceties, plunging headlong into the turmoil of times and spaces. Not exactly – our space is limited to the womb we are talking about. (We are always talking about something as if there was something to talk about.) So Shakespeare says to us that we may be ripped from our mother's womb – untimely at that or into the bargain. What kind of bargain is it, I wonder? We agree with every

word he utters; we have no choice anyway. These words are in the book and this book is sacred, at least to some extent. (Oh, these extents! They extend, extend, and there is no end to it, to this extension. Is that what they call an 'extension cord'?) We spend some time in our mother's womb, and everybody agrees on this point, except if you wish to speak about your father – in the same breath. After all, he counts in your life, and without his participation in the process you would not have been born at all; either timely or untimely. But what does this mean, this untimely birth? Are we ever born in a *timely* fashion? What do we know about the right time, the right time for our birth? What can we know about it in our mother's womb where we lie, biding our time without toil and trouble? There are some troubles I imagine; from time to time. But mainly we are peaceful and wars do not affect our lives, if any; except if our mothers have nothing to eat. But even in this case – if we have nothing to eat because we depend on our mothers in these and other matters – we are not supposed to manifest our displeasure, to air our grievances. We have no air, in a manner of speaking; and we have no voice, although we begin to cry as soon as we see the light of day, as I usually say in my narratives which witness many births; and also many deaths, to tell the truth. And of course no one asks our opinion about this ripping. There are two main actions in the tragedy under our microscope: ripping and rubbing. In a way, in this royal way, they are more or less identical: you just rip or rub something, be it your hands or your womb. Or your maternity hospital, to be exact and exhaustive. What all this rubbing and ripping amount to? To a few tragedies, even if someone exposes and demonstrates a few comedies among which there are nights and errors; many errors and nights. Anyway, you have no idea what the right time means – wherever you can find yourself at the present moment. You may be inside your mother's womb, for all I know. Do *I* know anything about the right time? When all is said and done, I think I can maintain I know everything about the wrong time because it is everywhere: for once time and space coincide. Wherever you come across space, you can say that the time of your coming is definitely wrong. And whatever happens after your first or second coming is wrong as well, logically enough. We should not, however, yield to the obvious temptation and say that everything is wrong; everything and everywhere. Everywhere; probably – but not everything. For instance, it is not wrong to say that our birth is a big, monumental mistake; an irreparable mistake. How could you repair it? By bringing your life to a close? No way, no way, as they say in the United States of America. Or in Australia; or everywhere. But everywhere – not only in Australia – our human birth is wrong, and it is better not to be born, either in a timely or untimely fashion. In a manner of speaking – and it is the *right* manner of speaking – there is nothing timely in this world of ours which is not really ours, considering the role played by the Almighty in this earthly ritual. What kind of ritual is it? First there are waters, and then a piece of land comes into existence. Or the other way round. And then constellations adorn the canopy of heaven, and we heave a sigh of relief as if we were really determined to be born at all costs.

La Fontaine says something about it – there are many somethings in this world – and we are almost duty bound to turn a healthy ear to what he announces, declares and lets us know. Of course he speaks about death, as everybody does with the exception of those who believe in life in spite of everything. He says that a sage not only anticipates death – he or she greets its coming and makes a sign, when he feels this is the right moment for the first and last coming of death. What kind of sign, pray? He just says something to death that he calls by his name, uttering also a few names associated with him or it or her. 'This is the right moment for your coming. I've opened the door and consequently you won't have to search for the key. Everything is ready for your arrival. Actually, I prepared a few sandwiches for you, if you feel like eating. Of course I'm aware of the fact that you eat all the time, and so you're never thirsty or hungry – you drink our blood and eat our meat. If I'm not mistaken, they

speaking about cannon-fodder, or whatever they call it, when enlarging upon wars and suchlike. Well, I'm ready and in this way I make this long story short, quite short.' But what about our birth, Macduff's birth? This story about being born of an instrument is quite inconsistent with what we know about life. And one wonders why Macduff was *ripped* from his mother's womb. By the way, RIP is an abbreviation for 'rest in peace'. This also calls for a number of comments, for no peace awaits us anywhere, not even beyond the threshold of death. Let us not omit the monsters depicted in the Book of Death composed by the Tibetans. You die and meet such a demon to whom you speak in the following way, 'My nephews and friends said I would rest in peace, and I want you to answer my simple question, "What kind of peace is this?"' I might also add, "I wonder" to the whole thing, considering that I really wonder why you're destroying the peace of my mind and of my body.'"

This is ludicrous and should not be done – if you wish to preserve your dignity and common sense. What can your arguments and reflexions achieve in the presence of demons, witches and other representatives of witchcraft and nonsense? By the way, I am haunted by the following question I am longing to ask in the context, and even out of it, 'Why was Macduff ripped from his mother's womb?' I suppose I have already asked this question, but I am sure the answer is still beyond the horizon. And I cannot even see the horizon, to be honest and truthful, so you realise what problems I am facing at this particular moment. And I am duty bound to add that Shakespeare might have been influenced by Virgil: '*Inde Lichan ferit*,' and so on and so forth. But I am influenced by Shakespeare, otherwise I would not devote so many lines to this questionable question. So what have I already said on the subject? I said that, according to La Fontaine and probably some other writers whose lives were sanctified by fables, we can influence both death and his intrusion in our lives. We say to him, 'Welcome, my dear death! I salute your arrival, and I'm immensely pleased to realise you've come on time, respecting my agenda and the timing I suggested in this agenda of mine. In this particular agenda I also described my other prophecies, such as my falling in love several times in a row. Can you hear me? Are you paying attention? You're *my* death, as far as I know, so you'd better show respect to your owner. That's right – I own you, and you're not at liberty to play tricks on me. The matter stood differently with my birth which I could neither foresee nor direct, govern and control. You see, our birth depends solely on our mothers and some instruments of which we might have heard at some point of our lives. But we've no idea what they look like and how they act under the circumstances. All we know on the subject concerns the motherhood to which we pay homage. We also pay homage to fatherhood, although we habitually underestimate its importance. After all, Macbeth is concerned with mothers and those who aren't born in this fashion – in maternity hospitals, in the presence of nurses and other members of the staff. La Fontaine says nothing on the subject because death is more important than birth; at least we are worried about the arrival of our death, whereas our birth leaves us cold.'

It is strange we are not worried about the arrival of birth: we are not at all conscious about what awaits us outside, beyond the doors of our mother-created house. They say we can hear music inside this house, and some of us knock on its walls, if the piece of music performed in the vicinity of our ears appeals to our tastes and general (genital) orientation. Once again I am tempted to cut a long story short, going back to Macduff and the confusion promulgated by the witches. They wished us to believe that only those who leave their mothers' wombs in an untimely fashion, at the wrong moment, are in a position to harm Macbeth. Why? Because our mothers are too tender. They pamper us with sweets and salmon which they like very much – solely for our sake. And our fathers talk to us about battles, swords and daggers. And our mothers protect us, saying to our fathers, 'Salmon is better than swords. Let us postpone our son's departure, otherwise he might be killed in the first battle.' 'I think we

should remove The Weird sisters from his trajectory. Ah, these women. They always come up with crazy ideas. Actually I overheard one of their conversations. They decided to crown Macbeth and therefore to murder Duncan.’ ‘Who is supposed to murder Duncan?’ ‘I hoped this murder was written into our son’s biography, but destiny decided otherwise, and so I’m holding a grudge against these witches.’ ‘What do you intend to do with this grudge? Do you think it can remain within your bosom without undergoing any changes? Do you intend to leave it to rot in your bosom?’ ‘When it’s completely rotten, I’ll replace it with a fresh, brand-new grudge.’ ‘Where will you find it?’ ‘It’s enough to look at the world for several minutes to engender yet another grudge in your bosom. The world is so hateful, you know.’ ‘I know, I know.’ ‘Lady Macbeth was ordered to nurse only males in her womb. Neither her husband nor her brains are in a position to realise to what extent procreation is harmful. I think that in the bosom of Christianity there was born a sect which was doomed for the simple reason that newborns were destroyed without further ado. They weren’t allowed to get used to daggers and swords. And if one of them was puzzled by a dagger, his father would explain the following truth to him, “It’s pointless to get used to this instrument of doom. Anyway, you’ll die the day after-tomorrow.”’ ‘But what am I supposed to do without my son, without my Macduff?’ ‘Do you really want him to kill Macbeth whose beauty conquered not only Lady Macbeth’s generous and aesthetical heart, but also many other men and women? Do you want to deprive our poor, ridiculous world of its most brilliant specimen? If asked about its life and destiny, the world would reply, ‘I wouldn’t mind perishing as a result of a volcano and its eruption. But to the very last I’ll defend Macbeth from flames and high waters. Let him be as immortal as Beethoven without whom the world is unthinkable.’

You ask a newcomer how your family is faring in your native land which you left because you feared they might kill you. And the newcomer says to you, ‘Everything is perfectly all right. Everybody’s happy and rich, as a matter of fact. Your wife and children are so rich they can allow themselves almost half of the cemetery, your favourite, family cemetery.’ Of course you are surprised to some extent – to all extents, to be frank – and you continue your interrogation, asking if the newcomer is absolutely sure that everything is going perfectly well, that the family you left behind is faring splendidly, in spite of the animosity manifested by your numerous foes. And once again you are told that everything is all right to such an extent that nothing could be better – no other variety of solutions will ever suit you and your family better. Of course you declare that there is no way of stopping your progress towards what is called ‘our absolute happiness’. And you repeat the word ‘absolute’ many times to make sure you are understood completely and absolutely. And then (only then) you are told that everything is *not* perfectly all right. And the newcomer reminds you he has never uttered the word ‘everything’. Of course he is lying through his teeth, and he probably knows it; but actually you do not give a damn about this last nuance: ‘Whether you’re conscious of your lie or not is none of my concern.’ And yet another dialogue ensues as if you had nothing else to do; as if there were no other kettles of fish within your reach. The newcomer points out that he said, ‘Almost everything,’ putting the emphasis on the word ‘almost’. Naturally enough, you ask him what contains this word, and how much bad news it can hold within its bosom. ‘Your children,’ he says. ‘What about them?’ you ask. ‘All of them.’ ‘What? What?’ ‘They’re dead, if you must know.’ ‘I must know, I must know.’ ‘Well, if you must know, your wife’s dead as well, murdered by Macbeth’s faithful assistants. You might also call them “stooges”, if you wish.’ ‘My wishes don’t count this particular wish in their midst,’ you say or think to this effect. ‘Your mansion has been burnt down.’ ‘All my little ones? My pretty, wonderful ones?’ Of course you care more about your children than about your castles and country houses; for the simple reason that your castles are not your little ones. They are big and consequently deserve another adjective. But do you care about your

vocabulary at such moments? According to many witnesses of human miseries and disasters, you cannot even shed a few tears on such occasions. You remain dumb, mute and paralysed; for quite a while, as the case may be. ‘Are you hard of hearing?’ you are asked now and then. You do not answer this question and many other questions because you are frozen, literally frozen. Sure enough, you resemble a morsel of frozen food, and no one can say what kind of food you represent at such moments of utter stupor, amazement and unhappiness. ‘Yes, I’m amazed, stupefied and paralysed. Do you need any comment upon the situation you’re witnessing?’

Here is another truth we pay too much attention to, although we do not have enough time for everything, for every detail we come across in our lives. ‘We are normal when our quest for knowledge is uninhibited.’ Who said that? Well, it is just the truth, another piece of what we call ‘our absolute truth’; and nothing but the truth. Was Macbeth seeking to augment his scope of knowledge, his awareness of the outside world? And of the future? No, he was just riding his horse and his thoughts were not focused on the future. I am not even sure he was dreaming about the crown he finally obtained; not without trials and errors, frankly speaking. And suddenly he found himself in the company of this truth and of the future – of almost everything, as far as his own personality is concerned. ‘If I stand here, I saw him,’ he said after noticing Banquo whose insolence knew no limits. He took the royal seat and made himself comfortable in it, disregarding the venerable custom which dictates its laws to all and sundry. As a matter of fact, I do not think he was disturbed by the mere fact of Banquo’s presence: the dead often visit us, and there is nothing exceptional in their otherworldly appearances. (Or hereworldly appearance: they just take part in our lives. Nothing to write home about. We should be grateful to them for their assistance which often gets us off the hook.) Macbeth was outraged by Banquo’s behaviour. Taking his seat in the middle of the banquet during which his guest of honour (Banquo) does not seem to speak or otherwise confirm his presence. He just sits in the royal chair and stares at the king as if he had not seen his face for a long time, under various circumstances. Indeed, Banquo saw his royal master not only at battlefields, but also in ballrooms and dining rooms. They even breakfasted together, now and then. So Macbeth was deeply offended by Banquo’s theatrical attitude. He was supposedly dead, and suddenly he made up his mind and decided to contradict not only some physical laws, but also our laws of logic. And yet, as I have already pointed out, the dead are our dearest guests, considering that they can give us a lot of precious information about the other world. We know that the dead are capable of coming back, of resuming their bodily forms; of sitting in our seats, unexpectedly enough. ‘What are you doing here?’ we are tempted to ask, but then we realise the absurdity of such a question: they are dead, all these people. Of course the dead can stare at us – to their eyes’ content, as it were; but they cannot speak. Whatever we may say about Banquo’s ghost, we cannot attribute anything related to human speech to him. ‘Avaunt! And quit my sight!’ That is what Macbeth says to Banquo, instead of shouting, ‘Shut up!’ Why? Because Banquo is deprived of human speech through his close, intimate acquaintance with death. He is not buried yet, but you do not have to be buried to be dead. ‘No big deal!’ you can say, if you feel like it. What counts in this episode is your capacity to utter a few words – to no purpose, as it were. But you seem to have proved your ability to speak, and this is a matter of the utmost importance. Macbeth, however, does not leave Banquo in peace, and continues to scold him for his insolent stare. ‘Thou hast no speculation in those eyes, which thou dost glare with.’ Speculation? Macbeth seems to upbraid the ghost of Banquo – or Banquo himself – for his lack of philosophical knowledge. It is true that we have no information about the extent of Banquo’s knowledge in the domain of philosophy which is the touchstone of our intelligence’s reputation. We can be pretty certain that Banquo read neither Kant nor Hegel. But did he have any idea of what Plato speaks about in his dialogues? Was he at least

acquainted with the titles of these dialogues? We are all eager to heap accusations on our hero, saying, ‘Murderer! Son of a bitch!’ But we do not touch the ghost of Banquo – for the simple reason that he is a mere ghost. Nor do we offend and mishandle this victim of Macbeth’s treachery because he is a victim, after all. And we are both passionate and compassionate, showing our pity towards those who are humiliated and offended, following in Dostoevsky’s footsteps.

What else is there in the play? I think I have analysed it thoroughly, omitting no detail, no nuance. What are these nuances about? Macbeth sends a letter and his wife reads it – in Verdi’s opera and in the text written by Shakespeare. I have commented upon many monologues and exclamations, but I do not think I have said anything about the following remark, ‘What beast was’t then that made you break this enterprise to me?’ Macbeth thinks a murder is necessary, and he opens his mind and heart to his wife in the letter I have touched upon many times. This letter has been handled so abundantly, so generously, that it is nothing but a number of shreds; at the present moment. Well, Macbeth is a writer, and his urge to write a story is so majestic, has such urgency, that he sees many things in front of his horse, and one wonders if the horse is not a figment of his imagination as well. He just walks somewhere, and then an idea comes into his head. He says to himself, ‘Why should I walk, instead of riding a horse? A horse was born for this purpose – carrying warriors from one battlefield to another. ‘ And Macbeth directs his steps – or rather his horse’s hoofs – towards the development of the play, towards the denouement of the story. Of course he must occupy the throne and add a few ‘thanes’ to his biography: the more titles you bear on your chest, the better. Yes, every title, every victory should be celebrated by the addition of a medal – for everybody to see and appreciate the gold on your body. People stop their horses or their legs and begin to count the medals, the triumph shamelessly put on display on a uniform which must have seen and felt a great deal of bullets, of cannons; and of medals, logically enough. There are two horsemen in the field where you are waiting for another victory. The first rider gets closer and closer to your sword, and you strike two or three times whereupon the body on which you inflicted several mortal wounds, starts reeling, rolling, tottering, wobbling. You hit him so hard that he reels backwards. Then you hit him again and he reels forwards. He moves unsteadily or with difficulty –both, to tell the truth. He walks with unsteadiness and difficulty, and all these things happen together, deflecting the body from its right trajectory. Steady is unsteady – The Weird sisters were right. That is how you manage to remember these creatures without whom your plot will not be able to thicken. And if your plot is not thick enough, no one will believe you; nobody will cry at the end of the story. Why does it have to end? you ask the nearest divinity. The divinity says something to the effect that there must be a sort of *deus ex machina*. ‘I could do without any machine. Nor do I need any *ex*. As for *deus*, He is always with me. Do you know what the Russians usually say? “We’re always right because God is with us.” So they never say, “On the other side,” because there’s only one side, their side.’

Macbeth knows, however, that his story should be intricate – after all, its author is Shakespeare whose complex works continue to bother specialists and non-specialists, depriving them of sleep. ‘I’m writing a commentary on *Macbeth* who murdered sleep. Actually, I’ll never pardon him for this particular crime. Banquo, Duncan – I don’t give a damn. But sleep? What’s wrong with our sleep? Isn’t it just another flower, the one put on our eyes, on our heart, on our unruly soul? Why murder flowers? One should water them, for God’s sake. Whenever I take a shower I talk to my flowers, asking them if my water is cold enough, refreshing enough; if everything goes alright. “Is this the right way to the throne?” And the flowers answer thus, “Yes, you’re on the right path to the throne, but you seem to have used too many flowers on your way, to your glory. Stop squandering

your flowery treasure, otherwise you'll have no flower within your reach, within your throne's reach. What would you put on your bare throne, in this case? A throne without flowers is like a male face lacking a gorgeous moustache. By the way, where's your moustache? Have you left it at home?" "I wear it no longer, for fear of being compared to Hitler." "Hitler wasn't born yet. We're in another century." "But they confuse everything with everything. And if you point out they're in another century, within another portion of space, they answer, "Hurly-burly, topsy-turvy – we have the Weird Sisters to thank for it."

But contrary to what you can imagine, these Sisters are not at your beck and call. You think it is enough to thank them from time to time, and you thank them abundantly, lavishing upon them your praises, saying, 'You're my gods, my divinities, goddesses.' Recently the Russian president sent his American counterpart a portrait of this counterpart or colleague or rival, and this second President was very pleased – to such an extent, that he called the Russian President and kissed him on the phone. "Can you hear my kiss?" "No," answers the Russian President. "And now?" "No." "Perhaps I should fly to your wonderful country and kiss you on both cheeks. In this way, I'll make you feel and hear my kiss simultaneously. Are you sure you're not hard of hearing?" "I'm not." "You're probably hard of feeling." Lady Macbeth said to her husband at some point, 'You should use earplugs and ear-drops. As you must know, there is bad and good news in the world. To hear good news perfectly and completely, you should pick up the ear-drops. And to put a spoke in bad news' wheels, just block your ears with plugs.' 'But how to know well beforehand if the news is bad or good or mediocre?' 'I think the whole system is rotten,' said Lady Macbeth. 'Let us go back to Duncan.' 'Why should we go back to him? Don't you have enough blood on your guilty conscience?' 'It's not his *blood* I'm interested in – for once.' And our royal couple dissects the rite presiding over the announcement of the news. Instead of going straight to the point, Rosse says, 'Norway himself, with terrible numbers,' and Duncan shudders as he listens to this outspoken messenger and his report. Wouldn't it be enough to shout, 'Victory, victory, victory!' I am pretty certain that Duncan would not begin to question the messenger, asking for more and more details. He would just open a bottle of champagne or ask the same messenger to open two bottles. Instead of such expediency, Duncan is forced to listen to the whole discourse or speech or monologue at the end of which he hears at last the word 'victory', but by this time he is utterly exhausted and grows weak, dumb and more or less indifferent. Of course he knows his manners and consequently does not maltreat the messenger, by saying, 'All right – we've been victorious after all. After so many words and unnecessary explanations. I'm too tired and so I suggest you buy a bottle of champagne and drink it alone. No caviar, this time. I'm disgusted, and even our notorious victory fails to gladden my heart.'

'I've heard about the rapidity of many electronic devices,' says Macbeth. 'You just program them and they inform you of the approach of bad or good news. Warned well beforehand, you can cancel the bad news and concentrate your life solely on triumphs.' 'And what about surprises?' asks his wife. 'I adore good surprises.' 'And what about bad surprises? Sometimes I'm led to believe there are only bad surprises in the world. Do you remember Fleance? His flight was a bad surprise. And Banquo's ghost? Another bad surprise. And the trees, walking towards my castle?' 'It wasn't a surprise,' said Lady Macbeth. 'You were forewarned about their march.' 'There are legs everywhere. Trees walk, ghosts walk. I wonder who and what isn't walking at this hour of day or night. Are you still aware of time, of hours, of their passage?' 'Yes – I'm quite aware of time, of its approach, thanks to the blood that flows towards my hands. Habitually it happens around three 3 p.m.; and also at 3 a.m.' 'Last night I saw you rub your hands at 1 a.m.' 'I was rubbing them to keep my hand in. What are you supposed to do if blood literally engulfs your hands, your very being?' 'Perhaps you should swim in this blood of yours.'

‘It’s not *my* blood – it’s *his* blood.’ ‘Who are you talking about? Duncan, Banquo, the future victims?’ ‘It’s true that the quantity of blood surpassed my predictions and intentions. Perhaps it was Banquo’s blood and also the blood of his descendants. How many descendants did you see in the Sisters’ nest? One litter per person. Or one gallon. An imperial gallon, used in Britain, is equal to 4,546 cubic centimetres. Are we in Britain or in Scotland?’ ‘We’re in Scotland, our foes are in England. They’ll come to our castle accompanied by Great Burnam Wood.’ ‘The trees will be as big as the capital letters, I presume?’ said Lady Macbeth. ‘From now on we’ll relinquish the use of capital letters. On the other hand, Polonius was also capital, but Hamlet killed him.’

And then we come across yet another remark made by the Witches: ‘Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.’ How could one be lesser than Macbeth? He is a murderer, a serial killer, and he betrayed many people in the course of his journey through the valley of death. (Or through the mountain of death.) You just wake up, eat your breakfast and begin to play cards with yourself. In other words, you are doing nothing in particular; and there is no greatness around, no aura, no beauty. You are just nothing, nobody and zero; and yet you are greater than Macbeth, for you do not murder or betray anybody. You have no sinister thoughts in your head. At least Banquo is still alive and kicking. And so are his descendants about whom you just do not care. Thrones and crowns do not bother you, and you merely leave them alone. The point is, they are never left alone, except if you find yourself in a republic where there are no crowns and no thrones, except on stadiums.

But let us not omit this important detail: it is vital to a healthy democracy. Macbeth is a neurotic stuck in a painful sort of ignorance. The information he gets from his spies is exhaustive, but he believes neither these spies nor their information. The whole world is against him; even the woods are against his presence on the Earth. ‘What did I do to you?’ he asks Great Burnam Wood as he strolls through it; just a customary morning stroll. ‘For a breath of fresh air,’ as he used to say to his wife. ‘Another stroll? Do you have enough time for strolling? Have you forgotten your numerous appointments with other people’s deaths?’ ‘I’m taking this stroll for the sake of my energy which has been weakened of late. Besides, I’d like to talk to the wood. We’re still on friendly terms, and I don’t understand where its animosity comes from. Hopefully it will open its heart to me, lulled into a false sense of security by my tenderness.’

Macbeth was not only tender-hearted, but also tender-mouthed; at the moments when his life was at stake. He was willing to talk to the wood, and at some point he was also prepared to meet all those who were not born of women. At first, upon hearing this part of the death verdict, he thought that such creatures could come only from other planets. On those distant planets people might be born of butterflies, of cats and so on. He was afraid of being attacked by a lion: for all his bravery and intrepid character he felt powerless in the company of lions, especially if his hands were bare. He could say now and then, ‘I’ll strangle this individual with my bare hands,’ but he never said anything along these lines about lions. After all, he was not Samson, and even Julius Caesar was beyond his ken; I mean, Caesar’s triumphs and intelligence. His neurasthenics created an ominous atmosphere in his mind, in his ignorant mind. Of course his ignorance in the domain of literature was obvious, and no critics have attempted to defend his lack of knowledge, his lack of interest in mathematics and other sciences. That is why he fell in love with the Witches whose broad horizons were in a position to shed light on many aspects of life, on many enigmas and kingdoms. I think his wife was bent on dissuading him from any further visit to the Witches: the knowledge he had was so positive and profitable that, from the point of view of sheer logic, no additional happiness was to materialise in the course of his life. Oddly enough, instead of hoping against hope, he would say to his wife, ‘Should any harm befall me on my journey, you may open this letter.’ Yes, he often left the castle for various

reasons: not only when seeking fresh, unpolluted air. (In his castle the air was polluted by blood.) Once upon a time, he wrote a letter in which he admitted his faults and repented his crimes. Why did he do that? Because he was a firm believer in God, and his belief in the Witches did not interfere with his adoration of the Almighty. In this letter he devoted one entire paragraph to this apparent contradiction, 'My dear wife, I think you should know that my veneration of the Almighty is on a par with the need I feel for the Witches, as we have come to call them. Their double presence in my life seems to cover the entire ground of my interests and necessities. I'm absolutely certain that God would never have put a crown on my head. What God does may be reduced to the famous formula, "Fair play." But you must realise that we are badly in need of *unfair* plays – now and then, or rather always. What could you do, without the unfair play's assistance, without its underhand help? Suppose you are perfect from every point of view, but you are poor, and there are no crowns on your head. It is true that you can boast about your innocence, declaring to all and sundry, "Fair play is my personal motto." But what to do with this motto, pray? Can you sell it? Can you build several castles through its agency? What kind of agency is this, by the way? A travel agency which helps you to reach paradise in no time at all? Instead of relying on this magnificent motto, you commit several crimes and people disregard them in the long run. "Let bygones be bygones," they say in unison. But for Shakespeare and his genius, no one would ever have learnt anything about the atrocities I participated in. I maintain, proclaiming loudly, thunderously, 'This is the Witches' fault. But for them, I would have remained blissfully unaware of my triumphs, of my trump cards. As the American president puts it, "You have no cards." Well, throughout my life I have been honoured with a multitude of trump cards; with the exception of the very last days, when I engaged in a foolish battle with a wood and unborn people. Are you aware of the following truths? Unborn people are much more dangerous than those who are born. In the first place, you cannot murder them. In the second place they may appear at your feast, defying you glaringly and unjustly. They sit down on your chair – nay, on your throne – and stare at you obnoxiously, most impolitely. What is more, they do not even answer your questions. You ask them, 'How come you've come? What are you doing here? Do you think I'm afraid of you? Do you believe I'm scared out of my wits on account of your gory locks? Why? Because I've asked you not to shake them at me?'

Well, let bygones be bygones. These gory locks are no longer shaken, except in theatres and on television and computer screens. Banquo comes in and shakes his gory locks and looks, but we do not shudder, although we must feel something upon seeing this tragedy. We see a tragedy, and we are quite aware of the fact, which is obvious, considering the number of corpses we are surrounded with. Our field of vision speaks to us about Macbeth and the pretty ones who are probably buried, but not utterly forgotten. There are some photographs, and prayers are said in their memory, in their honour. We honour the dead for many reasons. We hope that, upon their deaths, they were conveyed to Paradise, but a doubt lingers on the outskirts of our minds. We think in terms of Purgatory: the whole of life is a sort of purgatory where we purge our former faults and lives and purify our karmas. Once in a while, we see our karma in front of us, and we start polishing it, in the hope of improving upon our future lives. How many karmas do we have in front of us, behind us, on the right-hand side? And how many sisters? Of course we might exchange Shakespeare's sisters for Chekhov's. Thrice, as a matter of fact. Incidentally – do we know *everything* about our miseries? We surmise there are some miseries in store for us – even if the Weird sisters are dead and gone. There are other sisters in the world, and Chekhov proved it brilliantly. There are also brothers by their side, not only Ivan Karamazov. He was scrupulous and meticulous to the utmost, which did not prevent him from wishing his father's death. Which combination is better: three brothers or three sisters? Hail,

hail, hail. Do I mind their visits and nightmarish appearances? (Ivan Karamazov was certainly akin to the Devil to whom he talked for half an hour or so. You talk to the Devil, and it suddenly dawns upon you that you are the Devil himself.) Not in parentheses, mind you. You are the Devil, I am the Devil. All we have to do is find a third Devil.

The three Witches are everywhere; nevertheless we go towards them as if inspired by some tragedy or other. A painting can inspire us as well, and we carry our inspiration through the world, stroking a little boy, striking a young man whose hostility is unbearable. What can we bear, I wonder? The Weird sisters are out of the question: they are too hideous, too sure of themselves. Show, show, show – and they show you everything as if they had absolute knowledge within their field of vision. And this knowledge shows you now a king, now a ghost. Which is which, you wonder? They look not like the inhabitants of the Earth. So they are our extraterrestrial foes or friends. Apparently they erected pyramids in Egypt, a long time ago. And we erected some barricades in our endeavour to protect our souls and tendons from their claws. And yet everything and everybody goes towards weirdness, and three, four and five sisters emerge from the sea, from the ocean. They are also silhouetted against the sky. Actually the sky is against these apparitions, but what can it do against our sisters and brothers? Nothing. Whatever you do, you go somewhere; even if you have been paralysed for many years. And you hear, ‘Hail, hail, hail.’ ‘You should be women, and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so.’ So you should not interpret anything: accept what comes and does not come. There are always some trees at your service. But you go on living – for the heck of it, as usual. This heck disappears, another heck appears. And you say ‘hark’, opening a new book on your writing desk. The book is closed, and you are closed too; shut, shut, shut forever. Here I have a pilot’s thumb. What shall I do with it?

EPILOGUE

There is yet another problem that should be dealt with immediately; or in the near future, for our notion of fair play requires it. ‘Bring forth male-children only’ says Macbeth before setting upon his journey – it is a long journey – towards Duncan’s bed. What piece of machismo-permeated nonsense is this? Of course we are used to associating murders and other crimes with men and their so-called masculinity. But the play where this remark is casually dropped proves the contrary, and in spite of the weakness I have already enlarged upon when discussing at length the way our lady rubs her hands, our lady’s high reputation is established once and for all; and in the domain quite opposite to that of rubbing hands. You see, you can rub hands in anticipation of an advantageous deal – thanks to the American president, the reputation of the word ‘deal’ grows daily – and that is what our lady’s children should inherit from their mother, instead of worrying about a few stains. Just call your charwoman and say to her in sharp tones, ‘If I see these spots on my hands and furniture tomorrow morning, there’ll be no more tomorrows for you.’ You cannot exclude the feminine element from nature and history, otherwise you will be lacking grace and resoluteness. What do male children display, if lacking the features abundantly manifested by Lady Macbeth during the prelude to the fugue of Duncan’s passing? She upbraids her husband several times in a row, and this procedure takes a lot of time and compromises the forthcoming action; whereas a girl, a young woman, would just indulge in a short interior monologue to summon her courage and put it in a triumphant array. Even a certain amount of lipstick would be in order – to put a finishing touch to the operation. What would a male candidate do under the circumstances? Even if you put some lipstick on his mouth, he would not turn into an

intrepid woman prepared to vie with Lady Macbeth in the domain of fitness (psychological fitness) and carelessness. What would this carelessness amount to? Just another stain of blood – never mind. Did Duncan suffer during the murder? What do I care? At the same time – let us suppose all this happens simultaneously – a male candidate for the title of exemplary murderer continues to care about everything, down to his reputation. ‘Of late I’ve been fêted so gloriously. Some people were kissing my feet in spite of my efforts directed against this custom. What will happen in the future if I murder the king? People will probably kiss my hands, but they’ll never stoop so low as to kiss my toes. At best, they will kiss my ankles, but that’s not enough. It’s definitely not enough. When they kiss your toes, they also tickle your fancy.’

Why does Macbeth allow himself to slip at the crucial moment? You do not achieve anything by talking rubbish. Male children indeed! Only males. Well, let us imagine the outcome of this request. A group of male children moon around a stage or a castle or both. Now and then they promise the moon to someone who keeps them company – a nurse, in all probability. (Lady Macbeth is not always available: she arranges so many murders!) They look around, see a few floating daggers, but hardly pay any attention to them. When asked by the nurse about this indifference towards the flying objects, they answer as follows, ‘We couldn’t care less about flying daggers. On the other hand, flying saucers are worthy of our energy and games.’ But for the timely return of Lady Macbeth, these daggers would have continued to float till doomsday. We might have seen some of them, but we are not up to Lady Macbeth’s standards and so a dozen of them are still turning around our heads. And we say to each other, ‘What do you think of these daggers? Shall we catch them?’ ‘What for?’ ‘To cut a chunk of meat.’ ‘We’ve got enough kitchen knives for this chore.’ ‘And what if some of these daggers cut our throats?’ ‘We’re not succulent enough – not as delicious as Duncan or any other king. Daggers are interested only in kings.’ ‘And in Othellos.’ ‘There might be some Othellos in our midst.’ ‘I wouldn’t mind putting an end to my wife’s existence. Last night she slept once again with my lieutenant.’ ‘Let it be. What the hell? Let us listen instead to the Beatles’ song.’ And this group where there are some young men discard their own energy: they count on the dagger – or on Desdemona’s hands. After all she can strangle herself, even if she does not feel the guilt she is accused of; nor does she understand the insults heaped upon her by her faithful husband. In the context, let it be means, ‘Let the daggers fly.’

And what about Macbeth’s explanations? He does owe us an explanation which should follow his injunction directed to both the future and his wife. I am talking about the males she is supposed to bring forth, to give birth to – in preference to women. Why? ‘For thy undaunted mettle should compose nothing but males.’ But the same mettle or metal is able to put all its strength into the body of a little girl, which would be far more wholesome, considering the affinities of their natures – that of Lady Macbeth and that of her daughter. Of course you can say about a male body, ‘He’s the spitting image of his mother.’ But in this case someone is likely to unbutton the boy’s trousers and show the world the male attributes which have nothing in common with vaginas and so on. So why does Macbeth insist upon the appearance of male descendants? After all, he knows his own irresoluteness, and he would be frightened, appalled and sickened by the same show performed within his son’s anatomy. Imagine his son before the murder of a king. He stumbles, looks at his watch, saying, ‘What a pity it shows the time *before* the murder, not *after* it.’ Then he begins to fiddle with the watch in his endeavour to change the flight of time, to reverse its movement, to advance it outrageously. In short, he is as lost as his father, and his mother is unable to inspire him because she is already mad, and consequently rubbing her hands consumes a lot of time, the whole of it. (It is about *her* time I am writing now. Luckily for us, there is also *our* time wholly

divorced from murders and other crimes.) So Macbeth says to his wife, 'Every time you give birth to a child of ours, I'll make sure he contains a piece of your metal, of your precious metal for which many nations will fight in the centuries to come. Uranium, for instance. They'll construct atom bombs with your metal. If we adopt this perspective, it doesn't really matter whether you bring forth males or females – bombs have no sex organs. Even sex maniacs don't sleep with bombs, especially if these bombs are composed of atoms.' I wonder why Lady Macbeth did not join the feminist movement which might have enabled her to take care of female embryos only. No explanations are needed. And if reminded of her husband's dearest wish, yearning and longing, she might have alluded to his machismo, to which I have already alluded at the beginning of this chapter; of this imaginary chapter. From this point of view, the advantage underlined by an ever-growing number of females would be fully justified by Lady Macbeth's desire to prove to the whole world to what extent 'our female warriors are superior to their male nonentities'.

Of course she would have touched upon the Amazons, going so far as to publish books in which their exploits would have been related with gusto – to the detriment of Achilles, Hector and other so-called counterparts. By the way, these Amazons of ours would have borrowed from the Russians their methods of education, of upbringing focused upon their children's military spirit. Today, Russian children play only with tanks, bombs and other atomic devices. And during their mothers' pregnancies they regularly hear explosions and screams. And their mothers' voices say to them, 'Now I'm killing a million foes. Now I'm destroying a million of their houses. Can you hear all these annihilations, my dear girl? Are you enjoying them? Don't worry your pretty little head – soon you'll be able to perform such feats of valour yourself.'