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“A Deed Without a Name”:

a Wittgensteinian Approach to Shakespeare’s Macbeth and the Singularity of Meaning

’A Deed Without a Name’:

a Wittgensteinian Approach to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*

and the Singularity of Meaning

by Géza Kállay ©

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“All hail, Macbeth! that shalt be King hereafter.” (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 1.3.50)

“And yet there is something right about this ‘disinte­gra­tion of the sense’. You get it in the following example: one might tell someone: if you want to pronounce the salutation ‘Hail!’ expressively, you had better not think of hailstones as you say it.” (Wittgenstein, *Philosophi­cal Investigations* Part II, 175)

“As quick as hail,   
Came post with post; and everyone did bear  
Thy praises in his kingdom’s great defence,   
And pour’d them down before him.”  
(Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 1.3.97-100)

“The question of style is always the examination, the weighing-in of a pointed object. Sometimes it is only a feather, a quill, but it may also be a stylet, or even a dag­ger.” (Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles,* Derrida 1991: 355)

“But so you can use a screw-driver as a dagger; that won’t make a screw-driver a dagger.” (Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell 1979:71)

“Make an analysis of literature in this sense:

as *inscription* of Being”.

(Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 197)

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### Preface and Acknowledgements

This book – officially an “educational resource document” [oktatási segédanyag] – was completed (as the fulfilment of my contract with ELTE: BTK/971/1/[2014]) while I was on Sabbatical leave between 1 September 2014 and 30 June 2015. Without the courtesy of the Faculty of Humanities of ELTE, and especially of the Dean of the Faculty, Dr. Tamás Dezső, this project would never have been completed. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Dezső, just as much as to my colleagues at the Department of English Studies, who allowed me an undisturbed year of reading, writing, and research and have substituted for me over my leave of absence.

There are, of course, many more friends and colleagues I am grateful to for advice, encouragement, and help as regards content. To enlist them all by name would need a separate chapter; when they are reading this book, I hope that each and every one of them will recognize for which lines I am a grateful.

Most of all, as always I am grateful to my Family: my wife, Katalin G. Kállay, and our three daughters, Zsuzsanna, Eszter and Mária, who have become full intellectual companions to see these pages grow. To the four of them this book is dedicated.

As a “supplementary volume” to this book, I would like to call the Reader’s attention to my translation of *Macbeth*, which was published as an e-book on the 13th of December 2014. This text formed the basis of the performance of the play in Pesti Magyar Színház [The Hungarian Theatre of Pest], Budapest, having the premiere on the same day (dir. by Ádám Horgas). The translation, with an Introduction, notes and commentary is freely downloadable at

<http://www.grafium.hu/liget/ebook/kallay_macbeth/Macbeth-KallayG-Liget.pdf>

(ISBN 978-615-5419-11-9). I was very grateful for the opportunity to translate the play (my first full-length Shakespeare-translation) because, having to account for, and to ‘weigh’ the significance of each-and-every word, I had to realize that I had never read *Macbeth* so thoroughly before. Since a considerable amount of this book was written simultaneously with the translation, much of the necessarily conceptual, analytic reading that unfolds on the present pages in English went into my Hungarian rendering ‘directly’. And vice versa: I am convinced that without the passion to translate, I would not have noticed some formulations which I took to be special challenges and subtleties of the English text. Ideally, Shakespeare’s ‘original’, as tradition has handed it down to us in printed forms, one of the possible interpretations of this ‘original’ as ‘analysis’, and an attempt at its translation (which, in Shakespeare’s time, could mean both ‘transformation’ and ‘interpretation’ [Crystal and Crystal 457]) might be looked at as three surfaces of three mirrors turned so that they may face one another.

1. June 2015

### Introduction

A “happy prologue to the swelling act / of the imperial theme” (1.3.130-131)

“This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill; cannot be good”[[1]](#footnote-1) – Macbeth starts his first monologue in his play. He is reflecting – in a moment of solitude and standing apart from the other characters on stage – on both the Weïrd Sisters’ “strange intelligence” (‘surprising information of dubious origin’; 1.3.76) and on the news delivered by Ross that King Duncan had granted him the title of “Thane of Cawdor”. These two pieces of news seem to coincide as one otherworldly, perhaps divine or fiendish but surely ‘out-of the-course-of nature’, extra-ordinary, “urging, importuning”[[2]](#footnote-2) (cf. Crystal and Crystal 408) message. Yet straight judgement about this is suspended because its meaning is equivocal: it cannot be decided whether it is good or bad, so Macbeth is in two minds about it and finds that it is neither: by implication, it is of a third quality.

It is one of the commonplaces of *Macbeth*-criticism, especially after the post-modern – or now perhaps: *meta-modern*[[3]](#footnote-3)– turn that the title-hero of the drama is himself a ‘reader’, an ‘interpreter’ of the tragedy of his own. He must decipher and unravel enigmatic messages coded into all kinds of linguistic forms, from names (‘singular terms’ or ‘definite descriptions’) delivered as greetings (“All hail Macbeth, that shall be king hereafter”; 1.3.50) to signs and emblems, such as “a show of eight kings” (4.1.110): a “horrible sight” (4.1.121).[[4]](#footnote-4)

Macbeth concludes the above speech with a description of the effect his mind has on his innermost feelings and his body:

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,

Shakes so my single state of man

That function is smothered in surmise,

And nothing is, but what is not. (1.3.141-144)

The idea of murder has already taken shape in Macbeth’s imagination. It is still an obscure conception, more like a feeble fancy one cannot properly grasp. The peculiar syntax (“my thought, whose murder”) makes the thought appear as an active agent; it is *it* that commits an imaginary crime. The speaker ascribes the power of action to an *idea*, a *mental act* instead of a persona, an individual, a ‘subject’, the human being as a ‘whole’. One of the most foregrounded topics of *Macbeth* is the difficulty of distinguishing between what is *fantastical* (‘imaginary, unreal, illusory’; Crystal and Crystal 169) and what is *real.* This includes the question whether the *real* should be talked about as a *real* opposite of the *fantastical* at all: what is possible, believable, conceivable, and imaginable may have a ‘fantastically real’ effect on reality, at least if *the real* is in the sense of ‘actuality’, i.e. of the ‘actually present, in front of somebody’.

Another “imperial theme” is that the majority of one’s thoughts and images come uninvited, often unwelcome to one’s mind. An idea, a metaphor, a ‘picture’ popping up – at least at first sight – from ‘nowhere’ is involuntary. These ‘pictures’ may contain a ‘surplus’ of meaning which surprises the thinking agent most: she was the last to suppose that these may somehow be ‘contained’ in her mind. They simply ‘occur’, ‘happen’, make their appearance ‘by themselves’, ‘medially’, as it were: they “*make themselves*” (1.7.53), as Lady Macbeth later claims about the right “time” and “place” (1.7.57) to kill Duncan: “Nor time nor place / Did then adhere [fit together] then [we do not know, when: sometime in the past?], and you would make them both: / They have made themselves [probably: now], and that their fitness [that fitness of theirs] / Does unmake [undo, destroy] you” (1.7.51-54)[[5]](#footnote-5). Lady Macbeth contrasts activity: “you would make [create] them both” and mediality,[[6]](#footnote-6) as I would like to use this term. Medial processes are characteristically associated with events and transitions from one state into another. A medial sentence (e.g. *This wound hurts*) is ‘half-way’ between a sentence describing purposeful action (*He hurt his boss*) and a sentence in the passive voice (*His boss was hurt (by him)*). A medial proposition represents what is happening as a process that is ‘enough for itself’; the process that has taken place terminates with the very event that has taken place; the event stops as if it knew its limits.

In Macbeth’s monologue here, his “thought” has an exceptionally strong impact on his emotions. This impact, in turn, affects the whole body directly: it quakes the speaker’s very ‘structure of being’, drowning “the ability to act” (“function”: another major theme of the paly) in imagination (Clark and Mason 148), or suppressing it in “suppositions and conjectures” (speculation, “surmise”) (cf. Crystal and Crystal 432). Doing, agency and handling affairs, in terms of literal physical movement, and closely connected to the *hand* as a part of the body, will be in conflict with horrifying mental pictures and appalling thoughts throughout *Macbeth*, each physical element simultaneously giving rise to metaphysical implications.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Especially because of the reference to the “happy prologues to the swelling act / of the imperial theme” (1.3.130-131) at the beginning of the soliloquy, this conflict also has implications for the actor on the stage: how can the ‘outer self’, the bodily movements of the ‘player’, his performance, be expressive of the ‘inner self’? A meta-theatrical interest, i.e. the theatre reflecting on itself, questioning its own stage as to what acting and performance consists in, is also prevalent in the play, although not with the same force one may find it, for example, in *Hamlet*, a play often seen as an ‘inverse’ of *Macbeth* .[[8]](#footnote-8) *Single* in “single state of man” may have several meanings: ‘particular’, ‘solitary’, ‘poor’, ‘feeble’, ‘undivided’, ‘full of integrity’[[9]](#footnote-9), but I agree most with A. R. Braunmuller’s gloss: “ ‘unitary condition’, ‘singular existence’ ” (133)[[10]](#footnote-10). It is in the possible, Macbethian sense of *single* as ‘singular’ that I will be engaged with the ‘singularity of meaning’, which is in the sub-title of this book. Meaning, as I am using it, is also *singular* in the sense that I will often be concerned with *personal* meaning; a unit of significance which has so overwhelming an effect on the persona, the individual that it – as Macbeth previously detected it – “doth unfix” one’s “hair” and “make[s]” one’s “seated heart knock at” one’s “ribs” (Cf. 1.3.137-138); it shakes the core of one’s very being.

“And nothing is, but what is not” is not only the most enigmatic sentence of the soliloquy but also one of the most puzzling locutions of the whole play. It may mean, as Dr. Johnson suggested, that “nothing is present to me but that which is really future”, I am “intent wholly on what has no existence” (qtd. by Muir 21), because both the power to act and the images of the mind are paralyzed by concentrating on what is *not* yet here. A kindred interpretation could be that the sentence is expressive of Macbeth’s attitude, his modality, his disposition to what is going on in him: ‘I am concerned now with nothing else but what is imaginary, conceivable, possible, and therefore, *unreal* in the ordinary sense’. This attitude is very close to one of the eight ways in which the actors’ acting, as a “vehicle for truth” (Zamir 2014: 217)[[11]](#footnote-11) may enhance the creation of the identity and the reality of the self, both for the actors and for those watching them, in order “to fully be who one is” (218), as Tzachi Zamir convincingly argues in his recent book. He further says: “first, we have the reality of one’s possibilities, the manner whereby these can grow and diminish, and the way in which acting forms a bridge into a momentary realization of that which is unavailable” (217). Seen in this light, it is at this point that Macbeth, within his own play, starts to take up the ‘real’ role he is supposed (destined?) to act out: to get, together with his wife, the crown, even at the cost of the “yet fantastical murder.” This way, the possibilities Macbeth projects into the future become ‘realities’ in the *subjunctive* mood: he is still far from the realisation and the very thought is shrouded in uncertainties but he wishes it so much that he gets a foretaste of ‘being the king hereafter’ as if were really there, now, in the instant. Macbeth borrows this subjunctive mood from The Weïrd Sisters’ “shalt”: “All hail Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter” (1.3.50). This finds articulate expression in the first words Lady Macbeth addresses to her husband upon his arrival:

Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor,

Greater than both, by all-hail hereafter,

Thy letters have transported me beyond

This ignorant present, and I feel now

The future in the instant (1.5.54-58)

Lady Macbeth experiences the future “instantly”, “as if it were happening now” (cf. Clark and Mason: 158) but, in a sense, she experiences the past this way, too, since she echoes the Sisters’ “Thane of Glamis” (1.3.48) and “Thane of Cawdor” (1.3.49) faultlessly, not to mention “All hail…….hereafter”, where the missing part is just the expression: “Macbeth, that shalt be king” (cf. 1.3.50). This is even more surprising and, indeed, looks like the result of a “transportation” because that part of the letter we heard from the Lady’s mouth at the beginning of Act I, Scene 5, did not contain any verbatim quotes from the Sisters’ greetings.

S. T. Coleridge thought that “And nothing is, but what is not” underscores that “the guilt in its germ [is] anterior to the supposed cause” (Coleridge 234), i.e. Macbeth has practically ‘committed the murder’ in his imagination before he has found ‘reasons’ or ‘motivation’ for it, so *nothing* may denote the directly absent cause. G. Wilson Knight, in an expressively metaphysical reading of *Macbeth* says about “Nothing is but what is not”: “that is the text of the play. Reality and unreality change places.” (Knight 174).[[12]](#footnote-12) For Knight, Macbeth’s words indicate an existential shift: here Macbeth opts for being preoccupied with the ‘unreal’, which will be deceiving him all the time. The ambiguity of the sentence primarily arises from the notoriously elusive meaning of *nothing. Nothing* is sometimes taken as a Noun, *the nothing*, as, occasionally, in metaphysics. Sometimes it is an ‘innocent’ Pronoun, as in everyday language, negating that there would be anything at a particular place (at a particular time): *there is nothing in this room/chamber/refrigerator,* etc. *(now).* The interpretation depends on the scope attributed to *nothing*: how large is the ‘part’, ‘bit’, ‘slice’ ‘chunk’ of the world which Macbeth ‘covers’ with *nothing*, as if the word *nothing* were a net? (A logician would most probably put it this way: ‘over how large a set does the negation contained in *nothing* quantify?’) How large is the ‘group comprising things, facts, etc.’, with the label of *nothing* on it? In both cases, n*othing* is negation, denial, the expression of absence, yet if it refers to something particular (and *in* particular), it may mean something like this: ‘it is not the case that there is this or that thing/fact, etc. here (and now)’ (*There is nothing in the fridge [right now]*)*.* It is when nothing is applied to *everything*, when, precisely because *nothingness* is disseminated, when it is used generally, that it conveys condensed vacuity, compact absence, massive lack: then it is menacing, grave, suffocating. Indeed, Macbeth’s sentence may be taken as referring to something in particular, something which is not yet there in reality but is to be expected, or is even craved for. Yet his line can also be read as a quasi-definition of *nothing*, communicating a general sense of absence: “And nothing is = but what is not”, i.e. ‘*nothing* equals *all that which is not*, everything which does not exist’. After all, what else should *nothing* be than the non-existent, with the ancient paradox that then even *nothing* should be ‘something’ because otherwise *what* is it that ‘it is not’? The deceptive nature, the very status of the *real* and the various meanings of *being* and *nothingness*, in various – also metaphysical – senses is also a major topic in *Macbeth*.

“The subject of our watch” (3.3.8)

Thus, in this book, I will be, through reading Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, engaged with meaning as a *singular* phenomenon in the sense of ‘unique’: *single*, as Macbeth may be using the word in his first soliloquy. *Singularity* is not meant as the opposite of “plurality” or “multiplicity.” On the contrary: as it will unfold below, I believe that it is only by putting a rich array of phenomena on display simultaneously, through various means of presentation and representation, and allowing them to play themselves out (even: up) simultaneously that meaning can be appreciated. *Meaning* is here taken in a most general sense: what we may say, and what we may not say, when, where, and how as ‘significant’, either as ordinarily, or extraordinarily so.

Yet why has my choice fallen on *Macbeth* of all the thirty-seven (or so)[[13]](#footnote-13) plays by William Shakespeare? And why is it Shakespeare, and why not, for example, Shelley, or Coleridge, or E. T. A Hoffmann, or Dostoyevsky, or Thomas Mann, etc. in the first place? Shakespeare in general and *Macbeth* in particular have kept me pre-occupied (though of course not exclusively) in my teaching and research ever since my PhD dissertation, which I defended at KU Leuven, Belgium in 1996, with Professor Stanley Cavell as my external examiner. Looking through my essays and notes to build on something while writing this book, I had to realize that I have written – without a specific ‘original plan’ to do so – the most on *Macbeth*. Almost twenty years ago, in my PhD, I was offering a Wittgensteienian-Cavellian approach to *Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*, knowing, of course, far less about any of the ‘characters’ I still care so much about in this ‘drama’. The present book is meant to be a synthesis of a considerable portion of my research in the past twenty years, involving, as my publications have grown in Hungarian and in English, more and more the broad topic of literature and philosophy. *Literature* concerned with “literature and philosophy”/”philosophy and literature” has been growing enormously – as I will briefly be trying to explain – in the past two decades (and, within this concern,, ‘Shakespeare and philosophy’ as well). Similarly, new vistas have been opened on Wittgenstein (especially on his *Tractatus*, often called the “Tractatus-wars”) and, sometime after 1995, the silence surrounding the philosophy of Stanley Cavell has been broken. In his most recent autobiographical book, *Little Did I Know* (Cavell 2010), he is happy to note that

it from time to time appears that I have outslept Rip Van Winkle, and, reversing his experience, have awakened to discover that a surprising number recognize me and know where I have been. There are roughly as many books about my work as there are books of my work. I am glad for this change, and for having lived to see it, but I find I do not know how to take it for granted. (304)

Cavell was eighty-one when he put down these lines. I started reading him, in the late 1980s, for his work on Shakespeare. When I was making my first attempts at making acquaintance with Wittgenstein, Cavell’s – I dare say – greatest and life-long source of inspiration, I took it for granted that I would find the ‘secondary literature’ on Wittgenstein ‘full of Cavell’, hailing my American master as one who had started a new era in Wittgenstein-interpretation. (I remember reading *The Claim of Reason* (1979), which ends with passages (481-496) that later became Cavell’s essay on *Othello* (Cavell 1987: 125-142)*,* so much impressed that I felt the urge to read some sentences out to my family immediately.) I was bitterly disappointed: Cavell was not even argued with; he was simply ignored. (I also recall a conversation of ours when I first had the privilege and pleasure of meeting him at a conference organised on his work, in the March of 1992, at The University of Warwick. I told him, among other things, of course, that ‘ten pages of *The Claim of Reason* are worth more than four bulky volumes of commentary on Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*’. ‘I’m glad’, he replied smiling. If there was a tiny bit of bitterness in this smile, it was addressed to the fact that at that time there were very few serious Wittgenstein-scholars in the world who would have shared my conviction – something I did not know then, but, in all honesty, could not even imagine. This, of course, does not make me a ‘serious Wittgenstein-scholar’, neither now, nor then). That a similar silence surrounded Cavell’s studies on Shakespeare (and on Emerson, Thoreau, Kierkegaard, film, music, Beckett, etc.) was less surprising: then – in spite of the stardom at that time of especially Jacques Derrida – philosophers to a greater extent, people in literary studies perhaps to a lesser extent, felt that literature had little to offer to philosophy, and *vice versa*. Moreover, the early 1990s were the years when – if my perception is correct – what has become known as New Historicism and/or Cultural Materialism emerged as winning paradigms in Shakespeare studies, leaving rival approaches – Psychoanalytic Criticism, Deconstruction, but especially the ‘old Humanist approach’ – behind. This process was aided by Feminism and also emerging Post-Colonial Studies and flourishing Cultural Studies, often overlapping. Although these labels are far from being unequivocal, and the topic would well deserve another book, Cavell’s approach to Shakespeare those days looked like ‘Deconstruction’ or ‘Psychoanalysis’ in the best case, and a return to the ‘old Humanism’ in the worst. (At the second ESSE Conference in Bordeaux in the September of 1993, I remember a still leading and excellent Shakespeare-scholar telling me, in answering my question whether she had read Cavell: ‘I have: he is a humanist’. At that time, a ‘freshman’ to ‘Western literary criticism’, just three years after the changes in Hungary, I first thought this was a judgement of appreciation. Yet the conference itself convinced me soon that ‘humanist’ in those days was part of opprobrious language in most literary, and, thus, Shakespearean circles). Now Cavell is in vogue[[14]](#footnote-14), also because that kind of “close reading” is coming back he has been practicing and has remained faithful to from the time he started to publish (from the early 1960s). In a recent book, Marjorie Garber prefers the term “reading in slow motion” (also called “slow reading”). As Garber explains, this phrase was coined by

Reuben Brower, a professor of English at Harvard in the fifties and sixties and, before that, professor of Greek and English at Amherst College. Brower was the legendary teacher of an equally legendary Harvard course, Humanities 6, almost always referred to as Hum 6. Perhaps the clearest and most eloquent demonstration of how close reading works was offered by one of Brower’s former assistants in the course, Paul de Man. […]: [one has to read a text first examining] ‘the structure of language prior to the meaning it produces, ’[without jumping] at once into the general context of human experience or history’ (Garber 2011, 165-166).

Garber – among many other things – makes a powerful case for bringing this kind of “reading in slow motion” back into the appreciation of literature, a project always close to Cavellian practice.

It is hard to tell why someone remains – stubbornly – faithful to a topic, often in the face of fashion, cult, or career-seeking, and especially to certain authors and their work. Perhaps the answer is simple: one feels one may rely on these texts as an equipment for living a meaningful life; he or she feels compelled to remain in conversation with certain books and return to them to understand something about him- or herself, the Other, and the world surrounding him. In the past twenty odd years, I have remained faithful to the texts of Shakespeare, Wittgenstein and Cavell, by far not exclusively, of course, but they predominate. Sometimes I ask myself why, especially in an academic piece of work it does not belong to the ‘paradigm’, the ‘accepted mode of discourse’ to say, for example: ‘I am reading and re-reading *Macbeth*, I often talk about it in my classes, I am writing about it, I am going to the theatre to watch it *because I like it*. I think it talks to me, and more so than, say, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, or *Titus Andronicus*, or Goethe’s *Faust*, or Aristotle’s *Physics*, Leibnitz’s *Monadology*, or Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverly*, or Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Derrida’s *Of Grammatology,* and lots of other culturally important pieces of work. But, of course, I very much respect those who draw their wisdom and vision from these, latter pieces.’ Should we not admit and confess that? Especially when *this* is the truth (*that* kind of truth: the truth one feels *within*) behind much of academic shyness or officiousness. Thus, I would like to say that my ultimate reason for putting *Macbeth* into focus is that this is the play – I think – I know best (I like *King Lear* more; with three daughters, that is more educational for me, but that play is for another study). As I mentioned in the “Preface and Acknowledgements,” last year I was even given the exceptional chance and privilege to give a literary translation of *Macbeth* into Hungarian, my mother tongue, and I saw the production of it unfold before my very eyes (the premiere was on the 13th of December 2014). The director, Mr. Ádám Horgas had, of course, his own reasons for picking the play but what for the outsider looked like an accident, was, for me, a very happy coincidence. (Indeed, from the above line of reasoning, I have as yet left out accident: it is often – at least so it seems – a coincidence, a matter of chance, of contingency that we come across certain texts that talk to us).

The reading of the four lines above – starting “My thought, whose murder…” (1.3.141) – give a sound overview of most of the topics I will be concerned with while interpreting *Macbeth*: the supernatural; equivocation; strange knowledge; the good and the bad; reading and interpreting; linguistic forms; welcome or unwelcome image and thought; imagination; fancy and thinking; the imaginary and the real; fiction and fantasy; activity, mediality and passivity; the impact of action and thinking on the physical and the metaphysical; acting on the stage and the actor’s status in the theatre. Of course, even the selection of Macbeth’s lines above and putting these particular topics in focus presuppose a point of interest, a particular approach to the text. I would like to call the way of reading I am proposing here a philosophical reading of literature in the broad sense, and, in the more narrow sense, a metaphysical reading. This way, the book would like to follow a two-way traffic: it wishes to contribute to Shakespeare-studies just as much as to perhaps add something to the question of the relationship between philosophy and literature.

“…and metaphysical aid…” (1.5.29)

The meaning neither of “philosophical,” nor of “metaphysical” is self-explanatory. How I see the possibilities of literature and philosophy informing each other, and – because this is the usual question when one says ‘I am interested in their relationship’ – *which* philosophies and *what kind of* literature are within my scope, will be the subject matter of a separate chapter. *Metaphysics* and the derived adjectival form: *metaphysical* have already been mentioned in the paragraphs above: e.g., Knight’s approach was called ‘metaphysical’ because his reading concentrates on Macbeth’s existential crisis and his encounter with nothingness. Indeed, the problem of ‘nothing’ *versus* ‘being’ is a traditionally metaphysical issue. Yet there have been so many ways to define – or, at least, to circumscribe – *metaphysics* in the history of thinking that this term needs more elucidation, especially because my dominant use of it will not comply with the traditional sense.

When metaphysics is defined broadly, and it is claimed that it is “the philosophical investigation of the nature, construction, and structure of reality” (Audi 563), it looks as if ‘metaphysical’ were synonymous with ‘philosophical’. After all, is there anything that would not be a part of reality, from chairs to thoughts, from desires to ghosts, from actions to the unconscious, from unicorns to the golden mountain, from Robin Hood and Macbeth, to Sherlock Holmes and Santa Claus, from free will to God? Yet this is itself a metaphysical question, with serious metaphysical presuppositions and commitments. My question itself always already represents some ‘touchy issues’, since the existential ‘status’ of ghosts, free will, the unconscious, and, especially, of God has been hotly debated in the history of thinking. The golden mountain and unicorns are great favourites of philosophers as examples of ‘non-existent’ objects; Robin Hood and Macbeth are fictitious characters with some historical ‘reality’ behind them (there are several candidates for the ‘historical’ Robin Hood, e.g. Robin of Loxley; Macbeth, according to Holinshed’s *Chronicle*, Shakespeare’s main source of his play, was King of Scotland between 1040 and 1057, see further in Chapter 3: “Source”). Sherlock Holmes – a favourite example of logicians interested in the metaphysics of fictional characters[[15]](#footnote-15) – is of course, the product of Conan Doyle’s imagination, and Santa Claus is a curiously fictitious ‘cultural phenomenon’. It is as if these phenomena (the very word ‘phenomenon’ implying another metaphysical commitment, when the term is applied to these ‘entities’) were existent by virtue of at least language, while the history of thinking has witnessed great debates concerning at least the *senses* of reality we may attribute to them. We could define ‘existent phenomenon’ as ‘anything about which debates as regards their reality has ever arisen’. Such a ‘definition’, however, does not only presuppose that a clear notion of ‘reality’ is at our disposal, and thus threatens with an empty, tautologous, circular explanation (‘real things exist’, ‘whatever exists, is real’, ‘reality is reality’, like, under one reading, Macbeth’s “And noting is, but what is not” [1.3.144] may be tautologous) but is also too broad. A ‘clarification’ like that puts language idle, into ‘neutral gear’: we have achieved nothing with our words. Such an elucidation would include everything under the sun in one, homogenous category, ‘class’, ‘set’, whereas it seems to be a legitimate demand that metaphysics tell us what exists and what does not; what the nature of that which exists is, and how it exists.

Yet the question concerning the reality of the phenomena enlisted also presupposes that words and sentence structures in English make sense and you know what I am writing about here. Language, in one form or another, has always been, indeed, a chief issue in metaphysics because in the language we first learn we must harmonize with a community (‘society’) who simply impose their meanings on us. We may acknowledge this but still have the feeling that ‘language is ours’ (we have few other means to express ourselves), and we are free to use it, while we are never sure (especially if we imagine meanings to be ‘concepts’, ‘inhabiting’ the Other’s head) whether we have properly understood the Other, and whether the Other has comprehended what we have meant; for example, whether we have successfully referred to something. (Do we know what the ‘full’ comprehension of the Other would amount to?) That things ‘come to us’, from early childhood, in and through language also poses the age-old question whether we should suppose a reality ‘beyond’, and ‘independent of’, language, a reality we can get to know through our senses or through or reason, using language only as a medium to communicate what we sense (perceive), or think about. Is language only a ‘boat’ we put our ideas on and send it to the Other, who ‘downloads’ our stuff? Should we even suppose a (kind of) reality which we know *of* (at least we can talk about) but we will never *get to know*, a reality in which things are ‘in themselves’, in their ‘true reality’? Why should we hypothesise an ideal world if we know it is, at least here and now, unknowable? Why to create a Paradise from which we immediately exclude ourselves? Should we (are we allowed to), therefore, talk about things (Nature, physical processes) as if they were unrelated to us and our language, assuming that the World would *be*, and processes would be going on, even if there were nobody to experience, or talk about, them? Or should we rather say that everything we may get to know as reality comes through the ‘filter’ of our language, our experiencing, perceiving (sensory) ‘instruments’, our reasoning ‘apparatus’, therefore we ‘take things in’ as always already shaped, formed, moulded, or even: misshapen, deformed, deceptively moulded? Yet with respect to, and based on, *what* can we say that something is misshapen, deformed, deceptively moulded? How do we know things through other means than our language, than our perception (sensation) and reason (thinking)? And how do we ‘compare’? Should we say that it is on the basis of a ‘collective consciousness’, or a ‘Spirit’ which is at work independently of us, or as a great machinery, containing, always already, our individual minds (‘instances’ of consciousness) that we have hope to see things ‘correctly’? But how does ‘the Spirit’, the ‘collective consciousness’ come about? And *when*, and exactly *how* do we see things ‘correctly’? *Who* decides, ultimately, that *that* picture of reality is correct?

What I am doing now is “making propositional sense of things” (Moore 2012: 228). I am moving from a phenomenon (‘thing’), properly speaking, a statement about a phenomenon (since I am making statements in English, with this very sentence, too) to the underlying presuppositions ‘behind’ or ‘under’ the phenomenon; then from these presuppositions I go to the presuppositions of the presuppositions (hidden assumptions, commitments, even prejudices, many of them surely ideological). We often hate these presuppositions, we are ashamed of (but sometimes also proud of) them, yet we know they exist and often disturbingly motivate us; they catch us unawares, as “fantastical thoughts” attack Macbeth. We always feel that we can only move on if we take certain things (thoughts, statements, etc.) for granted. But how can we justify the ‘content’ we take for granted and how can we justify the method, the moves we make? Yet could not, then, metaphysics be precisely an investigation of the presuppositions of the presuppositions? Could metaphysics be the scrutiny on what something rests, and what we take (or have to take) for granted to formulate a statement about that something, and then immediately question the ‘ground’ we have been standing on while formulating our statement… and so on?

Indeed, one of the possible – and often taken – roads of metaphysics has been to orient itself not only horizontally (‘metaphysics contains the scrutiny of anything and everything under the sun’) but vertically as well, as an ongoing attempt at ‘digging deeper and deeper’, and/or ‘going higher and higher’, towards some kind of a ‘transcendental realm’. The main aim of such an endeavour, as far as I can see, is to try to make an overview of our dependencies: where the limits, the conditions of our thinking, being, actions, and so on, are, what their ‘nature’ is, how these limits can be overcome, if they can be overcome at all. The ‘vertical approach’, using metaphors of ‘depth’ and ‘height’ to valorise physical space, purports to emphasise – very much in line with the Western theological tradition – that metaphysical enquiry is (or, at least, it should be) in a certain sense, ‘other-worldly’ (“supernatural”, in Macbeth’s vocabulary. Does it disturb us that in *Macbeth*, the expression “supernatural soliciting” comes, after all, from the mouth of a fictitious character, somebody in a sense ‘un-real’? And Shakespeare’s Macbeth has little to do with the ‘historical’ Macbeth in Shakespeare’s main source, Holinshed’s *Chronicle*, as I have already noted*.*) Metaphysics will surely recognise, and be engaged with, particular things (‘this chair in front of me, here and now’, ‘that fat man in the doorway coming in while I’m speaking’). Yet it will not be able to do without various degrees of ‘generality’, either; have we not started out with the possibly ‘most general’: ‘everything under the sun’? We should not forget about the ‘horizontal’ aspect of metaphysics, either. Indeed, one way of approaching metaphysics is to say that we are trying to give an account of ‘horizontally spreading’ phenomena in terms of ‘vertical’ insights; metaphysics might be placed in the ‘point of intersection’ of the horizontal and the vertical.

In metaphysics, the absolute need for generalities is often acknowledged by talking about ‘transcendental’ phenomena, including the enquirer, the one that does the investigation, who is called in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, ‘transcendental subject’ (more on this below). Who the ‘transcendental subject’ is has to do with a crucial question in philosophy: *in whose name* does the investigator speak (about the world, about people)? (In whose name does e.g. a detective speak? In his own, as e.g. Colombo seems to be doing? Or in the name of the law? Of society?) In whose name does the enquirer in metaphysics speak? Only in *her* name? In the name of an (interest) group? But how large is this group? Is it ‘society’? But which society? Or does the philosopher (should she, at all?) ‘voice’ the whole world, or ‘humankind’? The transcendental subject is surely not just the flesh-and-blood ‘I’ now writing these lines: that would really be purely a ‘subjective’ subject, too particular to speak on behalf of more people than – in this case – himself.

Yet do we *ever* speak only in our own name? Even when we, e.g., confess our love to someone, a highly personal matter, do we not participate, by the sheer fact that we are using a language used by others, too, in the grand tradition of language-users, which automatically aligns us with them? Do we not participate, with our gesture of confessing our love, in the great tradition (in the ‘grand institution’) of love-confession, in spite of the fact that when one is in love, she strongly believes she is the one who has invented love; she believes that what is happening is happening for the first time in history. In many ways, there is a lot of truth in this. But would ‘confessing our love’ make sense at all, if the tradition of language and the tradition of confessing one’s love were not there? I am inclined to say: when we confess our love, we re-live, re-animate the ‘institution’ and it is our particular, very much earth-bound dynamics, the energy released in the moment, then and there, that supresses the ‘institutional’ character of our activity, on which we – willy-nilly – have to rely, in order to be intelligible.

In philosophy, when we try to say something about ‘the World’, about ‘all there is’, the ‘status’ of the speaking position (‘where a voice is coming from’) can surely not be circumvented. In metaphysics, it seems that we automatically switch into a ‘transcendental’ mode of speech. By ‘transcendental’, I precisely do not mean anything ‘otherworldly’, or ‘supernatural’. By *transcendental*, I mean acknowledging that we make ourselves aware of the *conditions* (and, thus, of the limits, too) of what makes things and our perception of them (our thinking, talking about them, etc.) *possible* not only as they exist as particulars but also as they are in general. And, simultaneously, and as a corollary of that, we ask ourselves in whose name we are talking. When I am interested in, for whatever reason, a dagger, this is not only an affair between me and the particular dagger in front of me. I also have to acknowledge that I could not even *identify* it as a dagger, if my enquiry did not include a certain amount of generality, which I will here call ‘dagger-ness’. In other words, without a ‘general picture of the dagger’, which is traditionally called ‘the concept (the class, the set) of dagger(s)’, I could not talk about the particular dagger, either. The concept has conditions and limits precisely to be, to count as, the concept of dagger. These limits include e.g. that it is not a table, not a bowl of cherries, a human being, a knife, a cauldron, etc. It is in this sense of ‘conditions’ that metaphysics is interested in conditions, it is in this sense that conditions are transcendental, it is in this sense that the transcendental rises ‘above’, ‘surmounts’ the particular, it is in this sense that I am using the word ‘transcendental’; here it is *not* ‘unearthly’, or ‘para-normal’, or ‘mystical’, or ‘otherworldly’. And, similarly, if I talk about myself as a ‘transcendental subject’, I only acknowledge that now I am not talking as someone who was born in Budapest, Hungary, is 55 years old, is married with three daughters, teaches at ELTE university, etc. I talk as I assume *everyone* would talk on the level of generality the word ‘every’ characterises; I consider myself to be the example, the representative of human beings, and although I am of course bound by all sorts of particulars as conditions, I assume that *everyone* has *some* conditions of their own that tie them down (and, of course, liberate them as well). On the particular level, no one will ever have exactly the same conditions as I have, either genetically, or contextually (in terms of geographical locality, time, upbringing, education, circumstances). The pre-requisite of this, of course, is that I can know of differences between the Other and myself at all. (Being able to make differences is one of the most remarkable capabilities of ours. From M. Drury we also know that, for some time, Wittgenstein was entertaining the idea of giving Kent’s words to Oswald in Act One of *King Lear* as a motto to *Philosophical Investigations*: “I’ll teach you differences” [1.4.86]).[[16]](#footnote-16) On the transcendental level, I take myself to be an example of a ‘human being with some conditions’ and I am interested in the conditions of living, perception, thinking, talking, etc., any human being I assume may have. This is very close to the way Immanuel Kant uses *transcendental*[[17]](#footnote-17), and, as it will hopefully be clearer below, this is the sense of transcendental that, in my reading, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy implies.[[18]](#footnote-18) And in the Cavellian interpretation of Wittgenstein, *transcendental* means, as a first step, “the use of myself as the source of evidence or the measure of its effect” (Cavell 2010: 323). My relation to the Other, my relative distance from her, my position and my link to her language and mine, the degree of my intimacy to her become one of the key conditions to assess my relation to and my perspective on the world, on reality. The second step is that I am ready to acknowledge the uniqueness of the personality of the Other and of my own while, simultaneously, taking the Other and myself as a ‘sample’ of humankind. If we only concentrate on the deeply unique, we become ‘disturbingly personal’, our personal features become idiosyncrasies, and our language describing these idiosyncrasies will be on the level mostly resembling gossip. If we only focus on character-types and ‘universal’ features, we will be connected with Others on a level of generality that will appear to us as neutral, indifferent, even trite and boring. We become (our positions become) ‘common places’. Rather, our uniqueness must be taken into consideration as well, and should be taken upon ourselves in order to preserve the intensity and excitement of the particular, lived experience. The more ‘general’, ‘transcendental I’ (*self*), talks about herself and the Other in a language that is loaded with an acknowledged concern for, and with, *our lives*: how a human life is lived, may be lived, should be lived. In such discourse, a certain amount of generalisation, even of dogmatism (‘crystallized opinion’, ‘taking a firm stand’) is inevitable but generalisation does not aim at the loss of lived meaning, the emptying out of differences. It is motivated by the desire to share thoughts and sentiments and to seek agreement (as we, as a matter of course, agree in certain forms of life, as we are mutually attuned, often without making ourselves conscious of this, in obeying the rules of our language (cf. Cavell 1976: 86-96 and Cavell 1979 65-85). The ‘ontological status’ of the Transcendental Subject, in this sense, is very close to fictive characters in literature, who must be unique to be – precisely – *characters,* but they personify features that lay claim to a wider interest. Macbeth would hardly be convincing if he were just a particular soldier of the Scottish army, with strange images we could attribute to madness, perhaps the most private matter of a mind. But we would equally lose interest in him if he were only the type of the ambitious man who wishes to eliminate his boss: we also need the uniqueness of the images of his language to interest us.

Thus, in my interpretation, metaphysics is a mode, a method of enquiry, trying to give, in a transcendental framework, a systematic account of the at least provisional bases on which any kind of human activity, including thinking, speaking, etc. rests. According to this interpretation, metaphysics contains the traditional ‘metaphysical questions’, which comprise methodological issues just as much as problems to be solved: being and non-being; time and space; reality and non-reality (including appearance); realism and anti-realism; foundationalism and anti-foundationalism; cause and effect; the one and the many; general terms (classes) and particular entities; permanence and transition, compositionality and relations; nominalism and universalism (‘realism’, in a special sense); modality and possible worlds; cosmology and human existence; free will and determinism; the relationship between the human mind and the body; identity and the self. Several traditions would add (I am still talking about the Western cultural tradition) God (especially the existence of God) to the list. Yet it cannot be emphasized enough that according to my conception of metaphysics, metaphysics is not primarily there to teach us some particular piece of ‘wisdom’ about the world (although what the metaphysician will say surely forms our opinion on, and, especially, our attitude to, the world). According to my conception, metaphysics is first and foremost an activity, and thus anything can be made the subject-matter of metaphysical enquiry; even the most ‘innocent’ everyday sentences will rest on certain metaphysical assumptions that can be scrutinised. Interpreted this way, metaphysics – in the words of Spencer Golub – “is not for knowledge’s body, nor even for knowing, but for learning how we know” (Golub 2014: 22).[[19]](#footnote-19)

If we describe metaphysics as giving a systematic account of the at least provisional bases on which any kind of human activity rests, we may claim, as Bruce Wilshire does, that

[m]etaphysics attempts to expose and clarify the interconnected presuppositions of meaning upon which and within which all the rest of our knowledge is structured, no matter how sophisticated, technical and specialized the rest of that knowledge becomes, and no matter if it should be true that these presuppositions shift somewhat under the weight of discoveries in special fields. (Wilshire 18)

This definition, concentrating on knowledge, but extendable to any kind of human activity, including the activity called ‘metaphysics’ (metaphysical enquiry) as well, comes from a book which was published in 1969 in the United States. Then and there the term *metaphysics* was still suspect, and the author, in his chapters, takes both the so-called Analytic (or Anglo-Saxon) and the Continental (German-French) traditions into consideration (Bertrand Russell and P. F. Strawson are just as much in it as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger). Starting out, as Wilshire does, with meaning puts us, however, more on the Analytic side, which is traditionally ‘nominalist’, i.e. it first grants ‘entities’ only ‘linguistic existence’: certain words occur in sentences which undoubtedly refer to certain objects but that is by far not enough to tell us what exists ‘in reality’. This is so because, according to the Analytic conviction, there is no logical contradiction in talking about something which later on proves to be non-existent ‘outside of language’, i.e. ‘in the world’: linguistic existence (that I can name something, I can talk about it) is very far from guaranteeing what there is (in reality).[[20]](#footnote-20) Apart from working out other means than language to decide about existence (such as a theory of perception, ‘sensation’), the Analytic tradition for a long time hoped that the logical relations between sentences (propositions) and within propositions, will show us what has real and what has only nominal (linguistic) existence (or ‘pseudo-existence’). For example, a sentence like ‘The Eiffel Tower exists’ is logically ill-formed because existence is not a predicate: it is not among the ‘qualities’, the ‘features’ of a person or thing that it exists. I can say that the Eiffel tower is tall, is beautiful, etc. but if I add that ‘it exists’, this will not add to its characterisation. It was precisely *presupposed* that it exists, if I am characterising it). That the Eiffel Tower exists can be justifiably derived only from such sentences which state (‘predicate’) some such quality about the Eiffel Tower (‘The Eiffel Tower *is in Paris*’) which we are in a position to sufficiently verify (we are able to check, usually with our senses)[[21]](#footnote-21). But it is important that we verify the stated *quality* of the Tower (that it is in Paris, it is tall, beautiful, etc.), we do not verify *that* it exists, directly.

These principles, of course, presuppose a host of others: that one can check, independently of language, the qualities of things with one’s senses; that the “law of non-contradiction” (that a sentence cannot be true and false at the same time) is a universally accepted law; that there is a referential relation (a one-to-one correspondence) between words and objects, between sentences and states-of-affairs-in-the-world, i.e. the main task of words is to pick out objects in the world unambiguously, and sentences have the power of describing facts of reality; that we have at least an intuitive notion of what ‘truth’ is, and lots of others. In the section on philosophy and literature, it will be inevitable – as has been inevitable now, too – to speak about the differences between the Analytic and the Continental traditions in philosophy.

Here I am using the terms ‘Analytic’ and ‘Continental’ as short-hands for far-reaching and highly complicated debates, effecting the interpretation of metaphysics directly. Suffice is to say here that the Analytic tradition, its apostles being Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, and, – in many ways one-sidedly, as it will turn out – Ludwig Wittgenstein, with lots of others, has always started its investigations from human language (and often form the ‘underlying logic’, or the ‘common, ordinary meaning’ of sentences). In turn, in the Continental tradition, highlighted by such founding-fathers as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, enquiry starts with human experience in the broad sense, so experience precisely *not* in the – for them – narrow sense of empirical knowledge (knowledge through the five human senses). An example could be one’s (life-) experience as a teacher, or what a soldier ‘goes through’ in the battlefield, or even in a particular battle, as opposed to one’s sensory experience (sight) of a glass of water in front of her, or a dagger or cauldron appearing (and disappearing) under her very nose, here and now. Language for the ‘Continentals’ becomes a problem later in their investigation but not so much as something whose task is to ‘describe’ the world but as a device which always already contains ‘coded’ messages about the particular human experience in question. This means that what a phenomenon is, can be, at least provisionally, grasped first in the name (in its etymology, the ‘metaphor’ as the ‘core’ of the meaning) a language puts at our disposal.[[22]](#footnote-22) The Continental tradition has always been more interested in traditional metaphysics, which dates back to the ‘dawn’ of Western philosophy, to Pre-Socratic times and thus has always been more open to ‘mixing literature with philosophy’. The first major, acknowledged critics of traditional metaphysics (in this case mostly the metaphysics of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz and Christian Wolff) are David Hume and Immanuel Kant; for this reason, Kant is curiously a starting point for both the Continental and the Analytic traditions. Why Kant cannot be circumvented is that he was the first in so-called “Modern Western Philosophy” (philosophy after Descartes) who became interested not only in the problem of reality but also in the several ways in which one’s *relation* to existence is constructed, and created a systematic account of the consequences of this relation, these consequences assessed first and foremost from the perspective of human freedom.

The ‘Analytics’ and the ‘Continentals’ had open conflicts and expressively fell out with each other in the late 1920s, early 1930s, precisely over the interpretation of the significance and the justification of metaphysics. The Vienna Circle, and especially one of their most prominent members, Rudolf Carnap started a campaign against Heideggerian and Hegelian metaphysics with the claim that this metaphysics was not wrong (or ‘false’) but simply (sheer) *nonsense*, so it is not worth even arguing with it, and it cannot be tolerated even as poetry.[[23]](#footnote-23) Thus, in the Analytic tradition a militant anti-metaphysical conviction prevailed, rendering such questions as ‘what is reality?’ or ‘what constitutes human existence?’ unanswerable (in principle insoluble), or trivial, or nonsensical. The scenario changed parallel with the emergence of modal logic and the application of formal, two-value logic to the semantic description of natural languages. Problems posed by theories of knowledge (epistemology) inevitably led to ontological questions; theories of reference, investigating e.g. the relationship between names and individuals, the riddle of what constitutes a ‘self’ inescapably led to questions of existence. When Saul Kripke (see especially Kripke 1963 and Kripke (1980) and David Lewis (cf. Lewis 1973 and Lewis 1999) started to theorise, from the 1960s and 1970s, about what it means that we relate to individuals, situation, ‘entities’, etc. as being possible or necessary, their modal logic brought in the notion of possible worlds and also heated up the ‘fiction *versus* reality’ theme again. This way, a new, Analytic metaphysics emerged, giving credence and respect to the term again, and today there are plenty of proud Analytic metaphysicians (A. E. Moore (2012), Kit Fine (2005), Peter van Inwagen (2009), etc.) as well.

It has often been pointed out that to apply the terms ‘Analytic’ *versus* ‘Continental’ to these respective approaches to philosophy – and, of course, to metaphysics –, highly diverse in themselves, is simplifying, undifferentiating and, therefore, deceptive. The distinction can, especially from the point of view of Shakespeare-studies, be seriously charged even with being a highly unsatisfactory juxtaposition because while what we usually mean by ‘Analytic’ and ‘Continental’ has touched Early Modern Literary and Cultural Studies only slightly, they have massively been influenced by social-historical philosophy, especially Michel Foucault.[[24]](#footnote-24) Foucault spent a life examining (giving, as he said a “*critique*”) of the effect of power on the *self* and the self’s freedom, especially from the point of view of punishment, (in)sanity and sexuality. But where does this approach fit in the ‘Analytic’-‘Continental’ divide? It is a genuinely historical approach, it is against traditional metaphysics, and it favours a common sense explanation, while it remains sensitive to the relativity of contexts, just as the Analytic tradition does. And where should the highly influential social and historical philosophy of the ‘Frankfurt school’ (e.g. Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer; today Habermas, and often György Lukács but also, for various reasons, Walter Benjamin) go, with principal roots in Marxism?[[25]](#footnote-25) The question is further complicated by the fact that, for example, ‘Continental’ Jean Paul Sartre, especially the ‘late’ Sartre, was heavily influenced by Marxism; equally ‘Continental’ Maurice Merleau-Ponty by Saussure and, thus, by structuralism, and so on.

This problem is of crucial importance from the present point of view precisely because New Historicism and Cultural Studies have – as, after all, every line of thought, argumentation, etc. does have one – a metaphysics of their own as well (or even several versions of it), even if they seldom make this their explicit subject-matter. Yet neither New Historicism, nor Cultural Materialism fits either into the Analytic, or into the typically Continental line of philosophising.[[26]](#footnote-26) Where I see the fundamental difference is that in New Historicism and Cultural Materialism (both kaleidoscope-like ‘sets’ of ideas themselves, of course) one of the chief categories is historical-social situatedness. This is a kind of contextualisation where the context itself is a product of economic (material) and social change (often ‘subversion’) in history, giving rise to further and instantaneous creations of meanings, to the formation of social and gender roles, types and stereotypes, and so on. Time (and, thus, history) plays a key role in the Continental tradition, too: it can be an existential category, in the face of death, gaining its significance as the process itself in which an authentic (meaningful) life may unfold, as opposed to annihilation and nothingness, as in, for example, Heidegger’s early philosophy (see Heidegger 1996). A piece of human creation (e.g. a text, a work of art, etc.) is not primarily seen as a product of society in a particular historical period by e.g. Heidegger-inspired, textually oriented Gadamerian hermeneutics (cf. Gadamer 2006), either. There the task of a historical perspective is to detect and to make one aware of precisely the presuppositions, hidden assumptions, amounting to prejudices, individuals and communities have when reading, and passing judgements as evaluative activities of understanding. The goal is to liberate language and opinion from received practices, from rules of thumb, from frames of fixated mentalities that hold thinking and speaking captive. In New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, meaning will be relative: relative to a specific socio-historical context; it is the factual, even merciless reality of economic and social relations, in a *particular* historical situation – tying action and thought down, or urging one to go on, to be free – that are in the centre of attention. In Hermeneutics, the typical and generalizable proprieties that arrest genuine and authentic human understanding in various periods of the history of thinking that are in focus. Since, as we saw, the Analytic tradition started out with the study of the logical basis of sentences (propositions), and logic (having its roots in mathematics), it traditionally has a ‘timeless’, ‘universal’ character: no historical interpretation of phenomena is given (unless a philosophy of history is at stake, as e.g. in the works of Arthur C. Danto, especially Danto 1965). When Analytic Philosophy revived logic, at the turn of the nineteenth-twentieth centuries, inspired chiefly by the work of Leibnitz and Kant, it was, among other things, used as a semantic tool to set ontological questions (‘what there is’) right. However, precisely because of the ‘timeless’ nature of logic, an entity was not looked at as the product of a historical process but as something that exits in ‘logical space and time’. Thus, on the basis of what has been said above, instead of the Analytic-Continental divide, we could also make a division between those kinds of metaphysical enquires that do not take time into consideration for philosophical explanation, and those that do. Within the latter, a further differentiation can be made between trends that look at time as a (chief) factor in human existence or human understanding, and those who claim that, at least in a certain sense, time *is* that social-cultural history itself. This mode of differentiation would align the metaphysics of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism more with that of the Continental tradition. During the ‘theory boom’ in the 1980s, New Historicism and Cultural Materialism emerged as the winning paradigm in Shakespeare-studies hand in hand with the Postmodern turn in literary studies, the latter involving – as it has already been mentioned – so-called ‘Post-Colonial Criticism’, Psychoanalysis, Semiotics and Iconology and Deconstruction as well. Gender Studies have put specific issues into focus – gender-boundaries, cross-dressing, the confinement and the liberation of the body, sexual practices, the dynamics of social and ideological change, etc. – often combining their social-historical enquiry with approaches which typically started out with the interpretation of texts (such as Psychoanalysis and Deconstruction).

The relationship between what has become “New Textualism” (a typically New Historicist approach) and textually-oriented Deconstruction can be illustrated by a quotation taken from a key-essay on old and new attitudes to Shakespeare’s dramas, including the types of editorial work that should be done when the plays are presented to the general public. This essay is “The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text” by Margareta de Gratia and Peter Stallybrass. They write: “ ‘The thing itself’, the authentic Shakespeare, is itself a problematic category, based on metaphysics of origin and presence that poststructuralism [e.g. Deconstruction] has taught us to suspect. (Indeed, it was the search for such a chimera that vexed the editorial project in the first place)” (de Grazia-Stallybrass 1993: 256). The labels Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, New Historicism, and Cultural Materialism, are, needless to say, highly general and, therefore, simplifying and reductive – just like all the other labels – for several diverse phenomena, and are connected in complicated ways. However, the word *metaphysics* does occur in “The Materiality” essay, as a pejorative term for an old philosophical principle which idealised the text into an ‘original and an authentic one’, coming from (the metaphysics of origin) an ‘autonomous and omnipotent author’ behind this text. The author is an indisputable genius, the ‘divine Shakespeare’, standing ‘above all times and historical and *real* particularities’. To show that this is a highly reductive and, therefore, a deceptive and unhelpful frame of thinking is insightful and revealing. Yet – while lashing the old ways, using strong Nouns like “chimera” – to supress and not to acknowledge that the principles exorcising the “metaphysics of presence and origin” have – another – metaphysics of their own, which cannot do without a certain amount of generalisation and idealisation either, can prove to be just as deceptive as the metaphysics it is combatting. If the new (‘good’) metaphysics, replacing the old (‘bad’ metaphysics of presence and origin) – as this approach, I think, would wish to see it – were not generalising and idealising in a sense as well, then the authors behind ‘the new’ simply could not, for example, recommend it as the ‘right’ (or at least the ‘better’) attitude to the Shakespearean text, worthy of imitation.

Then is there a ‘right’ (good) metaphysics? This is a very sketchy ‘history’, but perhaps it explains why I think that metaphysics is inevitable, for all traditions. The inevitability of metaphysics will not make all approaches the same; for example, as we saw, the Analytic tradition will start out with sentences, the Continental one with attitudes and dispositions being indicative of, and shaping, experience. However, if, thus, metaphysics is the transcendental tracking down of our presuppositions, and then the presuppositions of presuppositions, does it not lead to infinite regress? Where should we put an end to this process? Infinite regress has always been a great threat to thinking (just like ‘paradox’, especially in logic), because we are running the risk of never finding a ‘final’ explanation, an ‘absolutely stable base’ for anything.

Questioning answers systematically, and then their presuppositions, and so on is only frightening if we stick to ‘universal’ categories and look for definitions and ‘solutions’ that would cover ‘all’ cases, would apply to ‘everybody’, at All Times; this is precisely the (old) metaphysical attitude (learned from logic) post-structuralism so forcefully and helpfully criticised. However, it is equally the other extreme to claim that phenomena are so much context-bound, so much embedded in particular (historical) situations and particular linguistic contexts, *difference* prevails to such an extent, meanings run in so many directions and they can be fixed to so small an extent that no generalisation (concept-formation) is possible at all. It is thinking and stating anything in a meaningful way that would be impossible if we did not stop and consider certain ideas and sentences – even if for a short while, provisionally – as intelligible, true and definitive (meaningful): as items we may build on.

How long this ‘short while’ is, and when we have to break camp and move on is a different question. The first step to answer this is, I think, to ask ourselves when and why we feel the need to go on, and, equally, to stop, because we are also aware that our movements work both ways: while we are moving, we *have to* rely on something but we may easily find that on which we lean highly unsatisfactory. The second step is to realise that we are talking about steps, movement, stopping: we are performing the practice we wish to understand; we are applying the very method we are trying to search the depth, the bottom of. The acknowledgement of all these – instead of staring to combat rival positions right away – may be the third step.

All this is so because it seems to be a peculiar feature of our thinking that it doubles back on itself, but not only once but twice. Once it doubles backs on itself when it reflects, i.e. it thinks about thinking. Then, as the second move, it doubles back on itself when it recognises itself in itself. Yet the second ‘doubling back’ is reflection in the sense that it is not just the mind’s eye turning itself on the mind (as if we were looking at ourselves in a mirror). The second doubling back is the *mirror* recognizing itself *in the mirror*; as if the mind were coming to, and getting to know itself *in performance*, while *performing* the very thing it wishes to understand. The mind in reflection, as a first step asks itself: ‘what am I actually doing?’ This might be called simple *awareness*: I am aware of what I am doing as the first kind of reflection. As the second step, the mind cries out: ‘but that is me, so *this* is what I am doing when I am thinking, including the very thing I am doing now, i.e. reflecting!’). This might be called *reflection* in the full sense. The doubling is what, especially in film-theory, is called *mise-èn-scene*: ‘placing on stage’; consciousness ‘storyboards’ itself to have a look at itself. The second doubling is the *mise-en abyme*, literally: ‘placed into the abyss’; when consciousness reflects (on) consciousness in such a way that it takes out a ‘sample’ from itself, and re-enacts itself *in* and *through* this sample. As, for example Hamlet’s “The Murder of Gonzago” or “The Mousetrap” shows up, puts on display the play *Hamlet* in a miniature; it tries to catch, this way, *itself*, although directly it wants to trap “the conscience [‘conscience’ and ‘consciousness’ of the King [i.e. Claudius]” (*Hamlet*, 2.2.601, cf. also Golub 2014: 21-22). It does not make much sense to ask if even the attempt is at the ‘whole’ of the play, or of Claudius’ conscience; we could hardly formulate what this ‘whole’ would mean here. The point is that the ‘sample’ is smaller than what it wishes to re-enact, and it is an organic part of the larger unit it wishes to stage.

Here is another theatrical simile to illustrate this ‘drama of the mind’: let us imagine that in the theatre there is only one possible way for the audience to understand an action on stage: they perform something, simultaneously, in the auditorium. They do not respond with watching, listening, and applause but with a parallel performance (turning the auditorium into a stage as well), while paying full attention to the actors on stage. Or, to use another well-known simile: we have to rebuild the boat while travelling on it.[[27]](#footnote-27) It looks as if any general, theoretical problem did not take us any further than the limits of our consciousness and all we are doing, on the level of generalities, is creating another, and another, and still another mirror image of our consciousness: we retell the story of the way we think again and again in different words, in different ways. This is speaking for many voices but this is perhaps one of the reasons why we are in th inevitable need of metaphysics.

Below I will try to show how and where Wittgensteinian and Cavellian metaphysics can be located on the sketchy map outlined above. I will try to show that they both conceive of metaphysical enquiry as the never-ending scrutiny of assumptions, while neither of them subscribes to a ‘firm, absolute foundation’, nor to a ‘baseless relativism’ where a text (an endless chain of signifiers) would only refer to itself. Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*[[28]](#footnote-28) contains – ironically, right at the beginning of the book, in the very first paragraph[[29]](#footnote-29) – “Explanations come to an end somewhere” (*PI,* §1). And later he also says: “Do not say: ‘There isn’t a ‘last’ definition’. That is just as if you chose to say: ‘There isn’t a last house in this road; one can always build an additional one” (§ 29). But Wittgenstein also asks:

“But how many kinds of sentences are there? Say assertion, question, and command? —There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use [*Verwendung*] of what we call ‘symbols’, ‘words’, ‘sentences’. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once and for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten (*PI*, § 23).

Both Wittgenstein and Cavell start out with how language – and not how society, or history, or politics, or the natural sciences – works under everyday circumstances. And they start out with the individual (the ‘I’, the *self*) as ‘transcendental subject’ (in the above sense of transcendental). Both of them refuse to get rid of the ‘self’ and language’s referring capacity to the world (while the referential relation of word-to-world is of course not the sole function they ascribe to language, as it is clear from Wittgenstein’s paragraph quoted above) because of the *responsibility* we owe to the Other while using our language.[[30]](#footnote-30) To sum up, as a kind of thesis, one of their most important insights concerning language: both Wittgenstein and Cavell think that the question of one’s relation to the world, to Others and to oneself is a question about one’s relation to language. They both think that language is so close to us, we are so much ‘one with it’, it is so much ‘us’, we are so intimate with it that it has often ‘slipped out’ from the relation we think ourselves to be with the world (language stole itself stealthily away for Kant as well, as this was famously pointed out by Johann Georg Hamann already in Kant’s lifetime, cf. Hamann 2007). Therefore, we can just as easily convince ourselves that the linguistic-logical order of things is identical with the order of ‘reality’ as we find it, as we are able to convince ourselves that our language creates the world: we do construct, ‘invent’ reality, we bring it into existence. There have been powerful schools of thought in the Analytic tradition insisting that the primary function of language is to describe the world (somewhat similarly to the discourse used in the natural sciences) and to convey our thoughts, which are ‘true reports’ informing the Other how the world (really) is. And there have been highly significant trends in Romanticism and in the Continental tradition of philosophy, arguing, and also demonstrating (Analytic prose is traditionally puritan and matter-of-fact, Continental philosophical language is often picturesque, with long and complicated sentences) that language does not ‘mirror’ the world as a kind of neutral representation but constructs it: language brings it (calls it) into being. I think that both Wittgenstein’s and Cavell’s work evince that both functions (‘roles’, ‘uses’) of language should be acknowledged, which neither means that language does not have other functions, nor that those further functions should not be acknowledged. As Cavell puts it: “language is not fully or exactly referential, and not perfectly or transparently expressive” (Cavell 2005:35), where I take “expressive” to be another term for the ‘inventive’, ‘creative’, ‘constructive’ possibilities we find in language.

“And you whose places are the nearest…” (1.4.36)

I perceive Cavell’s philosophy as a genuine and original extension of Wittgenstein’s, also in the awareness that Cavell has already done a great amount of highly original work on Shakespearean drama[[31]](#footnote-31), including, for example, the dramatic texts of *King Lear* and *Othello* (Cavell 1987: 39-123; 125-142) to shape and inform such key-terms of his as *acknowledgement* and *scepticism*. ‘Metaphysical’, in a Wittgensteinian framework, does not go without saying, because, for example, in § 116 of *Philosophical Investigations,* the book which, besides the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*[[32]](#footnote-32), will play a crucial role in the present study, Wittgenstein famously says: “What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use”. Indeed, especially because the Vienna Circle devoted singular interest to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein has become known as a zealous ‘anti-metaphysician’. So what does bringing words back from their metaphysical uses to their everyday (ordinary) uses mean as a philosophical program? Let us start with Cavell as far as philosophy and metaphysics are concerned.

Cavell has several answers not so much as to *what* philosophy contains but rather *how* it contains – most generally put – ‘human issues and the world’. His *magnum opus*, *The Claim of Reason* (Cavell 1979) says, on the first page of the first chapter, “Criteria and Judgement,” that he wishes to understand philosophy “not as a set of problems but as a set of texts” (3). As I interpret this, the philosopher is not, first and foremost, reacting to a certain amount of difficulties as *givens*, as the alleged tradition, or a school of thought, or a certain (fashionable) “trend” suggests, or even dictates. Rather, the philosopher responds to (more or less) organised, composed units of speech and writing; not only to their content but also to their particular mode of presentation, their very composition, their “style” as well. The philosopher writes (or murmurs to herself) while she reads, in dialogue with the text, using a certain mode of presentation herself as a kind of genuine acknowledgement of the personality – from agreements to disagreements – of the (implied) author. Not so much in order to ‘solve problems’ but to engage herself in the *ways* the problems have been presented and, of course, have been attempted to be solved. The philosopher’s attitude to a text is like the director’s attitude to her actor on stage: she wants to hear the voice, see the particular stance of the person in front of her, at least as a first step, before she offers some ideas herself. In sum – as Cavell says in his essay, “Philosophy and the Arrogance of Voice” – it is “the way,” “the journey to the answer, or path, or tread, or the *trades for it*” (Cavell 1994: 10, emphasis mine) that matters for the philosopher most, not the answer, which may easily be a by-passing, or belittling, or down-playing of the problem: a mere deception. The “trades” for it is the price we have to pay (sometimes before the game is over), having played for the highest stakes we know of: for those thoughts, ideas, feelings, passions we believe to matter most; this is the ‘obol’ we have to give for both knowing and not knowing our way about. As we shall see, for Cavell this price is also the germ of tragedy. Tragedy is tragedy in the Shakespearean sense when the ‘obol’ is no longer hidden; when the “trades” cannot be denied and fended off any more; when the “price” cannot be looked at from the outside, comically, but it erupts as a spectacle, from the inside; when it can be well seen and heard; when it is full of “sound and the fury” (5.5.26).

In “Philosophy and the Arrogance of Voice” Cavell also claims that the Other’s journey (where the Other may mean, e.g., somebody’s text, or the words of a close family-member, or of a trusted friend, or the face of a person-in-the-street, the Stranger) forms, shapes, informs, dis-informs, to varying degrees, mine. And certain lives (texts) of Others will be (the positive or negative) conditions of mine, when philosophy is a condition of my life. And philosophy is a condition of my life, if my life can take such a philosophical interest also in itself (cf. 10). In other words, philosophy (my philosophy, as my personal equipment for living) will get to know itself within my life, as both the subject-matter (the topic) and the instrument (the tool-kit) of my enquiry. It is the ‘tool-kit’ part of philosophy that I call *metaphysics* in the sense above. And this is why much of Cavell’s essay is a plea for regarding philosophy as autobiography (cf. 3-11). Metaphysics, containing the transcendental element, is inescapable because that is the perspective from which I speak when I consciously try to say something on behalf, and in the name, of Others than solely myself: when I consider my life as an example of the life of the Other and vice versa. Cavell is well aware that we are inside (and outside) of the unique “me”, and inside (and outside) of the general “the Other”, the common at the same time:

… when Wittgenstein finds the task of philosophy to be the bringing of our words back to (everyday) life, he in effect discerns two grades of quotation, imitation, repetition. In one we imitatively declare our uniqueness (the theme of scepticism); in the other, we originally declare our commonness (the theme of acknowledgement) (Cavell 1988: 132).

Scepticism and acknowledgement are two intense and life-long Cavellian themes. For Cavell, scepticism arises because of our existential separateness from the Other; one of our favourite scenarios to experience (act out) and justify our scepticism is our claim that since we cannot look into the Other’s head, we will never be able to know what she *really* thinks, feels, etc. Consequently, we shall never know what she really means when she says something, as if meaning was a genuinely private phenomenon (to each person her own meaning), as if the semantic content of words and sentences were not, precisely, *public* property. As the famous example goes: we will never know what the Other means by ‘I am in pain’ because *pain*, the physical sensation is viewed here as if it was the Other’s ‘personal property’ to which the word “pain” in her sentence refers. Thus, we will never be able to feel *her* pain; thus, it is also possible that she is not in pain at all – she is not telling the truth, for whatever reason. The point is that until I do not *acknowledge* she is in pain, she will never be able to *prove* she is really in pain. This is because she cannot offer any further criteria than her behaviour, but she may be yelling and wriggling on the floor, or can be repeating the sentence a hundred times, I can still say that this is pretence, playacting: she is a good actress but she has not convinced me of her *real* pain. In fact, she has no *means* to offer further proof, she is incapable of convincing me, I can remain ‘outside’ of her as long as I wish, I can remain a sceptic forever. The important point to see is that *all* the criteria for me to *identify* pain are there: present and can be seen, heard, etc. I am not in need of *further* criteria. But criteria are only enough to satisfy my acknowledgement but not knowledge with certainty.

With gestures of shrinking away and withdrawing into ourselves, (scepticism), and with reaching out towards the Other (acknowledgement), we keep repeating what Others say, we keep quoting, imitating one another (cf. Cavell 1979: 341-352; 461-462). Actors, imitating people and our forms of lives, go through the same process on stage: they lend their *unique* personality to another person to make him or her live, be animated: to make him or her *be*.[[33]](#footnote-33) The extreme form of scepticism is madness (‘what I perceive is so private that it has meaning only for myself’), the extreme form of acknowledgement is uniformity (‘I so much would like to be part of a community that I lose all my differences and uniqueness and get dissolved in the mass of people).

It is precisely autobiography that links Cavell to Wittgenstein’s above quoted famous ‘anti-metaphysical’ sentence:

After some years of graduate study in which philosophy interested me but seemed unlikely to be moved by anything I had to say, or by the way in which I seemed fated to say it, I began finding my intellectual voice in the work of the so-called philosophers of ordinary language, J. L. Austin at Oxford and the later Wittgenstein; and, as it turns out, but took me years to recognise usefully, importantly because their philosophical methods demand a systematic engagement with the autobiographical. This should have been reasonably evident in Wittgenstein’s motto: “What we do is lead words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use (*Philosophical Investigations*, § 116)”. (Cavell 1994: 8)

In Wittgenstein’s sentence, “doing” is very much in line with his life-long conviction that philosophy is not a body of doctrines or theses but an activity (as we will soon see in more detail below). That this is an activity of ours, in the sense that it is our responsibility, so it is us who have to make decisions and take stands is emphasised – in my reading – by the fact that in the original German text of the *Investigations*, the First Person Plural Personal Pronoun [*we*]: *Wir* is italicized: “*Wir* führen die Wörter von ihrer metaphysischen, wieder auf ihere alltägliche Verwendung zurück”. We are answerable to how *we* use language, where *we* lead a word. This looks rather obvious but in fact we often go out of our way to put the responsibility on something or somebody else. including authority, scholarly jargon, theories, borrowed or invented by us, etc. Leading words back from a use to another appears here as if we were showing the (right) way to animate creatures who have lost their way. As if we were e.g. ushering wild animals, after they have been healed, back into their natural habitat. As if we were leading former prisoners back to society from jail; as if we were re-familiarising hospital- or asylum-patients, after a long rehabilitation process, with everyday, ‘normal’ life; the life most beings of the same kind live ordinarily, and, thus, naturally, because that is the “common course”. That this life is “natural” does not mean that it would be any better than, say, an ‘extraordinary’ life; there is no moral or ontological valorisation. Surely, the ‘ordinary’ may be just as unbearable for many as extreme circumstances, and there is a long tradition – especially in Romanticism – to point out the vulgar side of everydayness, associated with the faceless crowd, with grey rut and dull, ‘soul-killing’ routine, often also with nameless fear: anxiety (*Angst*), dread. It is enough here to remind ourselves of e.g. the stories of E. T. A Hoffmann (especially “The Sandman”), or Heidegger’s analysis of the way of life the “Das Man” (the “they” in the English translation: a kind of ‘It’) leads (cf. Heidegger 1996: 118-122; 156-168). Das Man’s language is “idle”, superficial and superfluous “talk” (*Gerede*); ‘It’ shows mere “curiosity” towards matters instead of genuine interest, and what ‘It’ says is full of “ambiguity”, in the place of true understanding. In fact, few thinkers have praised the everyday. One important exception is Søren Kierkegaard, for whom the form of life with the highest value is the life of the “knight of faith”. The “knight of faith” “constantly makes the movements of infinity” (Kierkegaard 1994: 32), i.e. he has dared to become himself and to lead an authentic life, yet he is by no means ‘special’ in outward appearance, habits or attitudes; he rather looks like a “tax-collector” (30); “he takes delight in everything, and whenever one sees him taking part in a particular pleasure, he does it with the persistence which is the mark of the earthly man whose soul is absorbed in such things” (30). But – although Wittgenstein knew and liked Kierkegaard[[34]](#footnote-34) – there is no evidence that he would have had a typically Kierkegaardian enthusiasm for the everyday. Rather, the everyday – here and elsewhere in the *Investigations* – is important in contrast with a kind of *metaphysical*; Wittgenstein contrasts the use of words in everyday parlance and the use of the *same* words put into the service of a certain kind of philosophy.

Before the quoted sentence, § 116 says: “When philosophers use a word – ‘knowledge’, ‘being’, ‘object’, ‘I’, ‘proposition’, ‘name’ – and try to grasp the *essence* of things[das *Wesen* des Dings] one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language which is its original home?” We – as noted above – are supposed to be leading words that ‘have lost their way’, which ‘do not know their way about’ back where they are ‘at home most’[[35]](#footnote-35). But where is a word ‘most at home’? From e.g. § 23 of *PI* we know that words always already have a place (a function, a role) in a “language-game”, which is a dynamic micro-system within the equally dynamic macro-system of language. A language-game is “part of an activity” we call “the *speaking* of language,” i.e. the use of language, which is part of “life-from”. A form of life includes lots of everyday activities in a specific cultural environment: walking, eating, sleeping, getting on the bus, driving a car, doing the washing-up, etc., and a significant part of it is listening to Others, talking, describing objects, reporting, telling a story, instructing, etc., i.e. activities related to language-use. It is not easy to tell where these particular words, overused by philosophy – *know, be(ing), object, I, proposition, name*, and we could easily make a much longer list –, belong as their ‘primary, permanent place of abode’, in which language-game they are at home most. To face this problem, should we be able to tell where we use such words as *know* most frequently? Or should we start guessing in which situation *know* was used for the first time? The latter path would lead us, most probably, back to etymologies. This is like the age-old problem of giving the ‘first’ or ‘primary’ (‘literal’) meaning of a word. The quoted paragraphs do not contain the actual process of a step-by-step analysis of *know*, *be*, or any of the other terms enlisted. These paragraphs are reminders, warnings, the setting of tasks, assuming that we know how language may become ‘metaphysical’ and how it may become ‘ordinary’ (cf. Cavell 1994: 6-7). Yet the meaning of ‘metaphysical use’ may be reconstructed as follows: it is a language-game played mostly by (certain) philosophers, and, precisely as *philosophers* we should make ourselves aware that the meaning of such overloaded words as *knowledge, be*, etc. are very far from being straightforward. “Metaphysical,” thus, here means, roughly: ‘an attitude marked by certain words which occur in certain philosophical vocabularies in order to generalize them to such an extent that they would fit every (or: most of the) particular case(s) so that we arrive at essences’, or, in another philosophical vocabulary, ‘universals’. This should not suggest that in philosophy we are always using everyday words for ‘bad purposes’, or certain philosophical uses are illegitimate. But I think it does imply that certain philosophical uses of ordinary words may lead us astray, may deceive us, if we treat the meaning of overloaded terms (*know*, *be(in)g*, etc.) as ‘naturally’, ‘seamlessly’ belonging to philosophy, as ‘a matter of course’. Consequently, a first step towards the clarification of precisely *philosophical* problems could be to have a look at how these words are actually used in everyday speech. This does not mean more than paying attention to *what* we say *when, where* and *how* in our everyday life. And I claim that comparing what Wittgenstein calls “metaphysical” use with “everyday” use, and leading words back from the former to the latter is precisely looking for the presuppositions of a philosophical language in the medium of everyday language. And this activity is the kind of *metaphysics* I have been trying to circumscribe above. Thus, Wittgenstein is only an anti-metaphysician, if one means by *metaphysics* the conviction that in philosophy the use of some words is superior to the use of words in everyday language, that the philosopher is in a privileged position and may take it for granted that her words are ‘naturally at home’ in her *philosophical*  language when, for example – as § 116 points out – the philosopher is (immediately) looking for the *essence* of knowing, being, etc. Wittgenstein neither says that it is impossible that certain words *are* at home in philosophy, nor does he say that knowing, being, etc. surely do not have essences. He says the first step is to remind ourselves that the words in question have everyday uses as well, and we do well if we first clarify what their relationship is to the philosophical (metaphysical) uses. We are surely allowed to draw the implication: otherwise we *may* deceive ourselves and get into unnecessary mysteries, obscurities, and muddles because to find ‘essences’ ‘behind’ these words requires us to assume more than we are willing to. We may be demanding of words more than they can bear (carry the weight of). So we should face the challenge and take our steps towards the everyday first. The admittance that the “leading back” of words from the metaphysical to the everyday is a *metaphysical* activity (process) itself, is not an inconsequential, or self-defeating move. It is not self-repudiating not only because any battle against metaphysics cannot but be metaphysical itself but also because metaphysics is one of those kinds of enquiries which wishes to check and revise itself in and through other disciplines (e.g. the natural or social sciences) in vain; it can only await ‘correction’ (redemption?) only from itself.

Wittgenstein’s approach in more detail – his still being outside, in many ways, of academic philosophy, how his views changed and how some of his ideas continued and how these are related to his published and unpublished works – will be the topic of Chapter 2. Now with the methodological considerations above, I turn to the introduction of the problem which is a subject-matter of this book as well: the relationship between philosophy and literature.

### Chapter 1: Philosophy and Literature

Preliminary remarks

One way of starting out on the topic still keeping our minds on Wittgenstein is to ask why it is that in spite of the incredibly large (and extremely varied) amount of writing on him, he has not become a source of inspiration for any mainstream “school” of aesthetics, literary theory and/or literary criticism. This is all the more surprising because Wittgenstein even gave some lectures on aesthetics (cf. Wittgenstein 1970) and practically all the formative and influential philosophers of the 20th century have given rise to well-identifiable trends; as it was alluded to in the “Introduction”, we find e.g. Husserl behind phenomenological approaches to literature, Heidegger (especially *via* Gadamer) behind literary Hermeneutics, Derrida behind Deconstruction, Foucault (and others) behind New Historicism, Austin, Searle and Grice behind speech-act- and conversational implicature-oriented approaches to literary texts, Freud and/or Lacan behind Psychoanalytic and so-called Sexual-Textual Criticism, Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School behind the “New Aestheticism”. There have been serious attempts at assessing “Wittgenstein’s views on aesthetics and/or literature”[[36]](#footnote-36), yet this is not the same as one of the most important thinkers of the 20th century providing a widely appealing framework for thinking about literature and aesthetics.[[37]](#footnote-37) As it will become hopefully clearer below, in this book I am not attempting either a comprehensive account of Wittgenstein’s aesthetics, or of the relationship between philosophy and literature. As I tried to explain in the “Introduction”, I am rather trying to adopt Wittgenstein’s metaphysics, as it is interpreted and extended by Cavell, to approach *Macbeth*. Still, this calls for, by way of introducing now Wittgenstein and Shakespeare, a brief overview of the “quarrel” that dates back to, as practically all books on the subject will note[[38]](#footnote-38), to Plato.

The ancient quarrel

Was the “ancient quarrel” between philosophy and poetry – as Plato calls it in the 10th Book of the *Republic* – bound to happen? Is it not possible for philosophy and poetry (or, as we today tend to call what was then ‘poetry’: ‘literature’) to live peacefully together, like sister and brother, under the respective names Sophia and Poietes? After all, *poietes* in Greek comes from *poiein*: to ‘make’, to ‘create’, an activity befitting a god(ess), a truly dynamic trait. *Philo* and *sophia* are – through the combination – a passion directed at ‘(theoretical) wisdom’, and although *philo* comes from *philein*, which has a more general meaning than *eros* (‘sexual desire’), and *philein* may semantically include ‘love for the parents’ or ‘love between two youths’, *philein* and *eros* are much closer than bashful philologists of especially the 19th century had tried to claim (cf. Grube 1980: 87-119, esp. 92). A philosopher (who is of course not taken by Plato in the sense we today talk of ‘a philosopher’, either) loves wisdom, but does that exclude loving poetry? And why not to suppose a scenario in which someone *creates* wisdom (is this not the aim of philosophy?) and *makes* wisdom *happen*?[[39]](#footnote-39) It is so that the thinker loves something which is already there (wisdom), while the poet must create something which has never existed?

Quarrels (especially intellectual ones) tend to emerge when two or more parties (people, fields, activities, etc.) lay claim to the cultivation of the same (or at least of partially overlapping) terrains and disagree about how the cultivation should be carried out. They usually disagree *principally,* following – more or less – clear principles, both parties being armed with goal-oriented, bent-up arguments and deep-seated convictions, referring to the ‘common good’ they wish to spread, for the benefit of those who they feel responsible for. The stakes are high, involving a community, a social context, and the rivalry is not just a matter of pride or prestige: it becomes a moral and, thus, a politicalquestion, as well as an ontological and epistemological one. The quarrel becomes a matter of instruction as to (a) way(s) of life; a matter of teaching *what*, and of teaching *how*, a matter of *influence* on the younger generations, so, ultimately – as we could learn especially from Michel Foucault – a matter of power and domination inscribed into discourses trying to foreground themselves in various intellectual ‘showcases’ and disciplinary ‘shop-windows’. For – to return to our particular case here – at least *some* poetry may also claim to be wise and it is also driven by all sorts of passions, while philosophy, of course, does create something as well, but it seems that neither creation, nor love, nor wisdom in itself is unequivocal enough to prevent quarrel, even grudge.

In Book 10 of the *Republic,* Socrates warns Glaucon, his interlocutor that poetry is seductive: it entices us to extreme forms of “pleasures, and pains (*pathos*, ’suffering’)” if it comes to “sex, anger, and all the desires that we say accompany all our actions” (Plato 1997: 606e [1211]). “And so, Glaucon” – Socrates concludes

when you happen to meet those who praise Homer and say that he’s the poet who educated Greece, that it’s worth taking up his works in order to learn how to manage and educate people, and that one should arrange one’s whole life in accordance with his teachings, you should welcome these people and treat them as friends, since they’re as good as they’re capable of being, and you should agree that Homer is the most poetic of the tragedians and the first among them. But you should also know that hymns to the gods and eulogies to good people are the only poetry we can admit into our city. If you admit the pleasure-giving Muse, whether in lyric or epic poetry, pleasure and pain will be kings in your city instead of law or the thing that everyone has always believed to be best, namely, reason (607a-b).

Glaucon, as usual, could not agree more: “That’s absolutely true”. “Then” – Socrates goes on

let this be our defense – now that we’ve returned to the topic of – that, in view of its nature, we had reason to banish it from the city earlier, for our argument compelled us to do so. But in case we are charged with a certain harshness and lack of sophistication, let’s also tell poetry that there is an ancient quarrel between it and philosophy, which is evidenced by such expressions as “the dog yelping and shrieking at its master,” “great in the empty eloquence of fools,” “the mob of wise men that has mastered Zeus,” and “the subtle thinkers, beggars all.”[[40]](#footnote-40) (607b-c)

The disagreement clearly concerns education, a ‘battle for the soul’ of the human being; Homer, undoubtedly, has great poetic merits (although this is to his – epistemological – discredit, since he is thus even more seductive), and not all forms of poetry are banished: hymns to the Gods and eulogies to good people are allowed. Still, it is clear that Socrates has an ‘uneasy conscience’ (“but in case we are charged with a certain harshness and lack of sophistication”); he is on the defensive. He evokes the tradition, the “ancient quarrel” to justify his decision, which was made in the name of sobriety, the ability to be a master of one’s passions, and, first and foremost, in the name of reason. Nietzsche rightly pointed out that the “birth of tragedy” should be attributed to two gods: one is Apollo, the god of “all image-making energies”, of “prophecy”, of “delicate” “phantasy” (Nietzsche 1999 :15) but the other is Dionysius: the god of wine, “intoxication”, “complete self-forgetting” and “lust for life”, even of orgies (17). Socrates is charitable enough – as he goes on – to say that “if the poetry that aims at pleasure and imitation has any argument to bring forward that proves it ought to have a place in a well-governed city, we at least would be glad to admit it, for we are well aware of the charm it exercises” (607c-d). For Socrates, poetry should make itself useful, bringing about social order based on wisdom, which, in turn, is erected on reason.

Yet it is to be noted that it is philosophy who right now disowns poetry, and not the other way round. Poetry might still be heard, it may pierce the ear-drums of the philosopher, it may charm him, he may consider some forms of it to be useful, yet, on the whole it must be banished because it leads astray: it mixes extreme forms of emotion into knowledge, the latter aiming at something reliable, something certain. But is there not at least *some* kind of satisfaction, any kind of relief in poetry? The problem precisely is that there is but it is all the more dangerous: I am (I may feel) relived, the final result is undoubtedly there but I do not know the exact route I have travelled through. I do not know the precise steps I have taken (as in reasoning, when, say, I have applied syllogisms), the relief has ‘come about’, it ‘came to pass that...’, inchoately, somehow ‘by and in itself’, including and enveloping me but I do not precisely know *how*. Or: I do not *know*, I cannot *cognitively check*, how; poetry is dangerous (it is misleading, it leads one astray) because it is epistemologically flawed and thus it is even more dangerous when philosophy gets mixed, when philosophy is coquetting with, the poetic effect.

From my present and especially form my future point of view, this momentum is highly important in the reasoning of Socrates-Plato because one of Wittgenstein’s and Cavell’s most favoured moves in working out strategic methods to fight against the “bewitchments” of our ways of thinking is to call attention to cases when we flatter ourselves with having found a ‘solution’. We indulge in the false conviction or hope that our thinking may come to a halt. From Plato’s point of view, we may see the other, related danger even more clearly: the danger that we cannot ‘slow down’ the process of reaching an understanding (as say, we can slow down a film to be able to apprehend more and more details); everything happens ‘at once’, like a flash of lightning. Poetic understanding is closer to something ‘dawning on me’ (to an insight, to being enlightened because a ray of the sun has illuminated my problem) than to something happening over ‘a period of time’; I cannot ‘reconstruct’ the process of understanding. I might be where I have always wished to be but may and should I say: ‘all’s well that ends well’? No, I am still suspicious and sceptical because I do not know to whom, or to what, I might be indebted: do I remember having met anything or anyone on my way? Being sensitive to this second worry here is not alien to Wittgenstein, either (as it is not alien to any philosophy I can think of); I will return to that. Right now we should see the ‘content’ of the Platonic worry, one of the most ‘ancient worries’: unchecked understanding, epistemological (knowledge) content of dubious origin.

As Thomas Gould – who has devoted a whole and very thorough book to the problem of the Ancient relationship between poetry and philosophy (Gould 1990) – explains, the key to a – historical – understanding of the “ancient grudge” is the Ancient Greek meaning of the word *pathos*, which originally meant ‘excessive, catastrophic suffering’ which a man or god undergoes. Thus this meaning has nothing to do with today’s “pathos” used in English which is something like ‘tenderness and sympathy’, and ‘agreeable sadness’. “Excess” in the original meaning has a moral implication: the violent suffering is out of proportion with respect to the amount an observer (external viewer) would find justifiable: who goes through *pathos* in the Ancient Greek sense is also suffering a kind of moral injustice (Gould 1990: ix-xi).. The word, as we learn, does not appear before the 5th century B. C., but when it gains currency, it refers to “the operative event in stories essential to popular religion and to tragedy” (ix), not only complicating the meaning with religious overtones, but also testifying to the religious roots of tragedy.

When Socrates appeared on the scene, Gould argues, a palpable conflict arose because it was Sophocles who “brought the thrilling *pathé* [which is the plural of *pathos*] of hero religion right into the theatre and evidently felt that no explanation or apology was needed”, while Socrates was going around Athens insisting that his fellow citizens reject “as dangerously false any story that moves men with depictions of Divine Injustice” (xvi). According to Gould, Socrates’ devoted disciple, Plato “accepted” his master’s “evaluation of *pathos* religion”: “the gods are always good” and thus men should make themselves good so that they could be rewarded” (xvii). Consequently, suffering brought about by deep misery cannot be in the educational toolkit of either a god, or a divine teacher. The playwrights (the ‘tragic poets’) and the lovers of wisdom are in a clear conflict because it might even be claimed that one of the most important features of wisdom is precisely the insight into this conflict and the rejection of teaching through *pathé*. The first attack from Plato on advocates on *pathé* comes in Book 2 of the *Republic* (380a-c), where “Socrates” claims that even if e.g. “the *pathé* of Niobe” is shown, it should be made clear by the playwright (Aeschylus) that the real reason for her suffering is not the gods but herself, since gods do not bring about undeserved pain which would be “therapeutic” either for the sufferer, or for the audience (Gould 1990: xvii-xviii ).

Several factors should be considered here. The first is, how to read Plato. My impression is that it is genuinely anti-Platonic (and, thus anti-Socratic) to suggest that Plato would have rested satisfied with such a simplified religious doctrine as ‘the gods are good, and therefore the human being must be good, in order to be rewarded, and whoever teaches otherwise, through whatever means, should be banished’[[41]](#footnote-41). It is true that “Socrates” – not only here, but many other times in the dialogues – presents claims that look like doctrines and it is also true that “the Good” – with Beauty and Knowledge – is one of the divine principles of the Universe (Jaeger 1944: 203). But – as Thomas A. Szlezák’s admirable book, *Reading Plato* has convinced me – the dialogic form is an integral part of the *content* of Platonic dialogues, bringing them much closer to dramas[[42]](#footnote-42) than to lectures or treatises. Szlezák does not belong to the “relativist’ readers of Plato; he admits Platonic/Socratic irony (cf. Szlezák 1999: 71-72) but he does not accept the view that Plato’s ‘literary style’ would seriously undermine an ultimately solid ‘content’[[43]](#footnote-43) to the extent that Plato acting out (maybe mimicking? imitating?) Socrates would, with a tongue in cheek, be implying the opposite of what he actually sates.[[44]](#footnote-44) Szlezák takes something like a balanced middle position: “Plato does not use the possibilities of the genre of drama to produce maximal ambivalence, but as a rule he leads the reader by means of frequently ambivalent steps to a clear final result and to the equally clear assurance that further substantiation and tracing back to ‘even higher principles’ is as yet forthcoming, but is necessary and possible.” (Szlezák 1999: 81).

Plato versus Aristotle on poetry and drama (tragedy)

Plato knows that the only enemy and the only ally of the intellect (reason) is the intellect itself. He tries to put the blame on the emotions, on enormous suffering brought to light (brought into limelight) in tragedy. But someone for whom philosophy brings erotic pleasure and for whom philosophizing is being in love with a question and with someone who simultaneously embodies the problem, reason is never free of emotion: passion is the fuel of thinking, it is the energy which brings about the bold leaps of the intellect. For Aristotle, tragedy is the embodiment of a balanced treatment of mournful human predicament, in which someone is dazzled by himself. He knows it is himself to be blamed, his lack of insight, he being “too much in the sun”, i.e. I cannot see clearly. But it fits into an overall plan of putting everything (the whole world) into its proper place, whereas in Plato the putting things where they belong starts with the realization that nothing is there where it belongs and the only thing we know is that we have a craving for order (which most probably comes from the desire to be able to live together peacefully, one of the prerequisites of which is to be *just*) but we do not have *a priori* principles to tell what these principles could or should be.

As Murray Krieger points out in his remarkable book, *Ekhphrasis*, Plato works with two definitions of “imitation” in *The Republic*: a broader and a narrower one (cf. Krieger 1992: 34-41). The broader definition, as we have partly already witnessed to it, comes from Book Ten, where Plato blames the representational arts for being, as Stephen Halliwell puts it “crudely parasitic on reality”, the artist’s aim, according to Plato, being

to produce the effect of a mirror held up to the world of the senses. Mimetic works are fake or pseudo-reality; they deceive, or are intended to deceive; their credentials are false, since they purport to be, what in fact they are not. (Plato 1979: 596d-e)

However, in Book Three, Socrates-Plato restricts “imitation” to dramatic “imitation”, in the sense of ‘impersonation’, in the meaning of ‘direct miming or speech’ (cf. Krieger 1992: 35-37 and Larson 1979: 62). We have an instance of “impersonation” when – while reciting a Homeric poem or acting out a tragedy or simply narrating like a “moderate gentleman” (Plato 1979: 393d-394d) – a person is not telling *about* another person’s deeds, and he is not quoting the other’s speech but starts *acting out* what the other has been or was doing, and begins speaking in the other person’s name – he acts as if he *were* the other person, he becomes ‘one’ with the other. It is precisely when Plato deals with the not “well-regulated” or “enchanting” features of dramatic representation and when he narrows it down to “impersonation”, pointing out its serious dangers, that he acknowledges the tremendous power and challenge of drama for the human being. Hence the paradox also in the later puritanical attempts at closing the theatres. “The Southern yokel who rushes to the stage to save Desdemona from the black man” (Cavell 1987: 98) also takes the transformation in the theatre for ‘reality’, yet he is much better: he wishes to participate. In Plato’s analysis, impersonation takes a person totally in, it impinges upon the person, it changes and transforms his identity. This, of course, is the source of the danger of the theatre. Yet the poetic (or even ‘dramatic’) terms in which Plato depicts this danger are dangerous in themselves:

“Or haven’t you noticed how imitation, if practiced from childhood, settles into natural habits in speech, body and mind?”

“I certainly have.”

“Then,” I said, “we mustn’t let our children, if we want them to grow into good men, imitate a woman – nagging her husband, boasting and challenging the gods, wallowing in seeming happiness or noisy grief – much less one who’s sick, in love or in labour.”

“Absolutely not,” he said.

[........]  
“Nor evil, cowardly men doing the opposite of what we just said: ridiculing and abusing each other, drunk or sober, with disgusting words, and debasing themselves and others with the kind of speech and acts used by that sort of person. Nor should they get into the habit of imitating maniacs.”   
.......  
“But a worthless fellow will use more imitation in proportion to his own worthlessness: he’ll consider nothing beneath him and stoop to imitating anything seriously even in public – thunder, howling winds, hail, squeaky wheels and pulleys, blaring trumpets, flutes, bugles, and every other instrument, as well as barking dogs, mooing cows, and chirping birds. His style will be all imitation of sounds and gestures with little or no narration.” (Plato 1979: 325d-396a; 397a-b)

While reading the above lines certain scenes from Shakespeare might flash to mind: Kate from *The Taming of the Shrew* (“nagging her husband”, etc.), Falstaff from *Henry IV*, Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew from *Twelfth Night* (“ridiculing and abusing each other, drunk or sober, with disgusting words”, etc.), Hamlet (“imitating maniacs”), or King Lear (“challenging the gods”, imitating “thunder, howling winds, hail”, etc. in storm and tempest). This is not the time either to point out Shakespeare’s silent quarrel with Plato and with Sir Philip Sidney’s *A Defence of Poetry* (cf. Sidney 1979: 59-122), or to refer to those passages in Plato where he responds to imitation more favourably (For example, *Laws*, Book 2 and Book 7.) Here I wish to emphasise how clearly Plato saw and how vividly he could depict the power and challenge of drama in the theatre. If we further consider how his dialogistic practice – as I tried to show above – undercuts the very principles he is putting forward (cf. Larson 1979: 64), thereby practically banishing himself from his own Republic, we seem to have good grounds to argue that Plato, condemning drama with all the other imitative arts as categorically as he did, still remained, with his fascinating insights into the power of drama, a ‘dramatic philosopher’.

Aristotle works out a detailed, balanced and coherent – though by no means easily digestible (cf. Else 1967: vii) – theory of drama, nevertheless remaining, especially in *The Poetics*, a predominantly ‘narrative philosopher’. It is widely known that Aristotle’s basic disagreement with Plato – in full knowledge of his teacher’s works (cf. Halliwell 1986: 2; 331-336; Else 1967: 97-101) – is over the concept of mimesis (imitation): Aristotle – as Stephen Halliwell argues – also works with two concepts of imitation: “a general notion of mimesis as a fictional representation of the material of human life, and also a more technical sense of mimesis as the enactive or dramatic mode of poetry” (Halliwell 1986: 21-22). The mimetic representation of action as *muthos* (plot-struture) becomes – as it has already been mentioned – a key-term in *The Poetics*. Mimesis ceases to be a vehicle of falsehood precisely through the *muthos*, the plot of drama;

And since tragedy is an imitation of an action, and is enacted by certain people through action, who must necessarily have certain qualities of thought and character [...] and since it is the plot which is the imitation of action (for by ‘plot’ I mean here the arrangement of the events), and the ‘characters’ are those indications by virtue of which we say that the persons performing the action have certain moral qualities, and ‘thought’ the passages in which by means of speech they try to prove some argument or else state a general view – it follows necessarily that the constituent elements of the tragic art as a whole are six in number, in so far as tragedy is a special kind of art (they are plot and characters, speech-composition and thought, visual appearance and song-composition). (Aristotle 1967: 49b36-50a11)

As Else comments:

For the plot is the structure of the play, around which the material ‘parts’ are laid, just as the soul is the structure of a man [...]. It is well known that in Aristotle’s biology the soul – i.e., the form – is ‘prior’ to the body and [...] he thinks of the plot as prior to the poem in exactly the same way. [...] For Aristotle the plot precedes the poem, but it is essentially ‘made’ by the poet, even if he is using traditional material. (Else 1967: 242-243)

The plot-structure is the result of a dynamic activity, an en-plotment – art or *poiésis* is a mak*ing*, and even a discovery (cf. Else 1967: 320). It is through the selecting of the events with respect to their weight and importance, it is through the connecting of them with one another while condensing them into a unity, that

the writing of poetry is a more philosophical activity, and one to be taken more seriously, than the writing of history; for poetry tells us rather the universals, history the particulars. ‘Universal’ means what kinds of thing a certain kind of person will say or do in accordance with probability or necessity, which is what poetic composition aims at. (Aristotle 1967: 51b7-11.

It follows that Aristotle will praise Homer precisely for a trait Plato condemns him for: Aristotle points out Homer’s exceptional talent for plot-making and his rare ability of hiding behind his characters, himself “doing as little talking [i.e. connecting-narration] as possible” (Aristotle 1967: 60a8), and allowing his characters to speak for themselves. By contrast Plato – as it has been hinted at – goes to great lengths to complain that Homer gives full licence to impersonation and presents too little detached narration (cf. Plato: 1979: 387b-395a.)

Aristotle does rescue the concept of mimesis from his master’s hands for a more ‘philosophical’ appreciation, claiming that the plot – and, thus, imitation – is able to capture some dimensions of the “universal”. However, what Aristotle achieves, considered at least from the Platonic point of view, is, on the one hand, too little: Aristotle’s universals are not Plato’s ideas. As Else explains:

Plato’s indictment had come to this: poetry cannot represent truth because it cannot penetrate to the Ideas but stops short at the veil of Appearance (particulars). So stated, the case of poetry is hopeless; for no one can argue seriously that she has either the method or the will to reach the abstract plane of the Ideas. Aristotle’s defense (which is implicit, not explicit) does not attempt that gambit. In his scheme, metaphysics, the science of Being, and its congeners physics and mathematics (also to some extent astronomy), are a special group of ‘theoretical’ sciences; and the theoretical sciences have theoretical objects only. Human life and action belong to the ‘practical’ sphere and have nothing to do with metaphysics.[...] That, in fact, is why Aristotle so carefully uses the double formula “according to probability or necessity” throughout the *Poetics*; for necessity can never be absolute in the sublunar world. [...] What it [the poetic] can offer us is a view of the *typology* *of human nature*, freed from the accidents that encumber our vision in real life. [...] [In Aristotle’s theory] the poet is released from Plato’s requirement that he must go to school to philosophy to learn the truth (the Ideas). But he is also condemned to the ‘practical’ realm and must not claim that he understands the ultimate things. There is in fact not a word in the *Poetics* about the ultimate “secrets of life”, about why mankind should suffer or be happy, about Fate, or man’s relation to God, or any such metaphysical matters. These omissions are not accidental.[...] [Aristotle] has solved Plato’s insistent question about the metaphysical justification by begging the question: that is, by assuming tacitly that poetry has no metaphysical dimension. (Else 1967: 305-306)

Considered now from the point of view of drama, what Aristotle achieves demands a high price there as well: imitation primarily goes to the poet, to the act or operation of making poetry and the more Aristotle insists that poetry, in this sense, is an activity, the more he loses sight of the other activity, the activity of imitation on the actor’s and the audience’s part. Although Aristotle’s *opsis* ‘visual appearance’ (Aristotle 1967: 50a11, quoted earlier as well), or ‘spectacle’ (cf. Halliwell 1986: 337) may semantically also comprise “the whole visible apparatus of the theatre” (*ibid*) and there indeed are scattered references to drama-in-performance in *The* *Poetics* (e.g. Aristotle 1967: 47a22, 48b23, 49a9-13), Aristotle talks very little about drama as it is embodied in the theatre, in the actual presentation of ‘impersonators’. Drama has become, in a sense, ‘tamed’: activity and dynamism is, to the largest extent, on the poet’s side, whose ‘making’ will result in a structured and unified ‘artefact’, a kind of ‘object’ or ‘thing’. *Muthos*, and, therefore, mimesis, are no longer dependent – as far as their ‘essence’ is concerned – on the senses of the actors, and even very little on the senses of the audience: “the process is one increasing objectification [...] of the mimetic impulse” (Else 1967: 101). *The* *Poetics* strives at fitting the problem of imitation and drama into the great, encyclopaedic philosophical system as further specimens in Aristotle’s grand and overall ‘butterfly-collection’: instead of *theatron* we mostly get *theoria*.

To sum up the whole of my argument concerning Aristotle in Else’s apt formulation: “philosophy in itself is not dramatic in Aristotle’s eyes – but rather its opposite; though the drama is the drama of a philosopher” (Else 1967: 44). Aristotle does save mimesis and drama from the severe judgement of his master but at the price of remaining a predominantly ‘narrative philosopher’. This is not meant as a ‘charge’ against Aristotle – or, more precisely, this can be meant as a charge against him coming from a *certain* type of philosophy (and maybe from drama itself). Yet drama, though admittedly in a paradoxical and roundabout way, has fewer reasons to bring charges against Plato – and this is the gist of my argument.

Plato and Aristotle had to be dwelt upon this long because both Plato’s disowning poetry (literature, drama, tragedy) and Aristotle’s ‘rescue operation’, coming from undoubtedly the most influential philosopher until the time of Descartes and Hobbes, as well as their ‘silent dispute’, put on display the most typical features of later controversies, the turns and swerves in the relationship between philosophy and literature. The remainder of this chapter presents a brief overview of this, approaching the topic from the perspective of possible combinations.

How we may (not) tie them together

Whether such new words as “philosopture” and “literophy” are legitimate terms to be coined or not remains to be seen, yet while one goes through the mazes of how many uses “philosophy”, “literature”, “literary theory/criticism/analysis” occur, one is inclined to feel like the fallen angles in Pandemonium, who, as Milton tells us in *Paradise Lost*

*…*reason’d high

Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate –

Fied fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,

And found no end, in wand’ring mazes lost. (Book II, lines 558-561, Milton 2008: 217)

The text gives us, with great precision, the topics for speculation fallen angels seem to be interested in. Although none of these terms, from “providence” to “foreknowledge absolute”, is unproblematic (as this is already implied by the text itself, by “wandering mazes lost”), these are at least “designating labels” a person educated in (“Renaissance”) philosophy will be able to – more or less – identify as some of the most significant questions of “early modern (moral) philosophy and theology”. Yet the problem as regards “philosophy and literature (poetry)” has always been: *which* philosophy and *which* literature? As opposed to the previous section, we now start from poetry and arrive at philosophy, making the reverse path of Plato.

The renewed interest in philosophy and literature in the 20th and 21st centuries may partly have to do with a general dissatisfaction with philosophy, which, especially in its version which tried to bring it close to the paradigms of the natural sciences, was unable to solve the great riddles of humankind, even after the great philosophical revolutions in the early and mid-20th century. Thus philosophy – as it was mentioned in the “Introduction” – soon found itself without agreement as to what its task could or should be, both in the Continental (German-French) and the Analytic (Anglo-American) tradition, and there was a time when both traditions were blaming the other for leading philosophy astray. Even today, Analytics, usually charge Continentals with ‘talking nonsense’, Continentals claim that Analytics get bogged down with trivial matters, such as ‘how can I know through my senses that there is a dagger in front of me?’ and they leave the ‘big questions’ – such as *death*, *being*, *why is life worth living?*, *is there an absolute good?, the reasons for aesthetic pleasure*, etc. – largely untouched. Although today they seem to be more patient with one another, trying to follow the policy of ‘living peacefully side by side’, there is by far no total disarmament.

As far as literature is concerned, we surely, as a first step, have to distinguish between “primary” literature (poems, novels, dramas, etc.) and literary criticism. In primary literature, like in all branches of the activity we call, for better or for worse, art, there has been, as Arthur C. Danto has shown, an overwhelming worry about its own status and boundaries, inscribed, in many cases, into the work of art itself: as if, from the time of Modernism or even from Romanticism, poems, novels, dramas, etc. were constantly asking, with their very texts themselves: ‘Am I still a poem, a novel, a drama? What is the particular realm, ground, I can, I am entitled to occupy, what may I lay claim to?’. This has, undoubtedly made literature highly problematic: its definition, the consensus around it, its genres, its role or function in society, in history, in the life of the individual and so on (cf. e.g. Danto 1998: 127-143).. Since the questions raised were largely ontological, piercing to the very heart of literature, literature has become this way more ‘philosophical’, constantly ‘worrying’ about itself, taking its own temperature and temperament, carrying this concern, in the form of an imprint from philosophy, on its own body. This ‘intensive-internal’ anxiety was, especially from the 1960s, supplemented by an ‘extensive-external’ worry, brought about social movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement, Feminism, the Student- and Sexual-revolutions, Gay Liberation: with the growing concern with “minorities”, in the broadest possible sense. All of a sudden the very term *literature* seemed to be unsatisfactory: if all peoples in the world have some sort of a literature, then publishing, teaching, and even the very activity we wish to call ‘literary’ has to be reconsidered. One of the indices of the turmoil was the re-writing of the canon, and if one recalls the Ancient Greek meaning of this word – ‘measuring rod, standard’ – then one may see that the ontological anxieties were coupled with worries about values and value-judgements, the *Urteil* with which Kant started his aesthetic investigations some two hundred years ago. On what grounds could anyone decide today that a detective novel, or the lyrics of a popular song, etc., are ‘literature’, or not?

Whether the boom in literary theory coming into full swing especially in the late 1970s and 1980s was to solve or to avoid these problems, would need a separate ‘measuring rod’, yet as far as I can see, philosophy, primary literature and literary theory met, from the late 1960s on, in a triple embrace: the dissatisfaction with philosophy, especially dissatisfaction with those trends which were pushing philosophy towards the paradigms of the natural sciences, inevitably shepherded philosophy towards art and literature, while boundary-seeking of primary literature (novels, dramas, pomes, etc.) sought ‘theoreticians’, those whose main duty was supposed to be the clarification of boundaries. Out of this triple embrace, several off-springs were born and various prepositions and adverbial conjunctions (*of, as, in*) carry the distinguishing marks of the children:

1. philosophy of literature
2. philosophy as literature
3. philosophy in literature
4. literature in philosophy
5. literature as philosophy

More combinations are welcome, if one can give meaning to them.

The*philosophy of literature*is usually understood as *literary theory* (or, even more traditionally, as a branch of good old *aesthetics*) itself, so some kind of theorising about literature. It can take two main forms: either a poet reflects on literature (poetry, etc.) within the very medium of an art-work (this is not new, either, please see, for example Horace in his *Ars Poetica,* or Pope in his *Essay on Criticism*), or the author writes something like a prose-treatise, such as Aristotle’s *The Poetics* or Jonathan Culler’s *Deconstruction*. I think that literary theory is different form the philosophy of literature only in the second being perhaps more conscious of the source of authority it relies on, and thus we have more or less professional philosophers made to line up behind various schools of literary theory (as it was briefly noted above in connection with Wittgenstein) Heidegger behind Gadamerian Hermeneutics; a different Heidegger behind Existentialist Criticism; again a different Heidegger, supplemented by Husserl behind Phenomenological Criticism and Jauss’s and Iser’s Reader-Response Criticism; Ricoeur behind Phenomenological Hermeneutics; Nietzsche and Derrida behind Deconstruction; Foucault (and some Marx, with or without some Frankfurt-school influence) behind New Historicism and Cultural Materialism; Freud and/or Lacan behind Psychoanalytic and so-called Sexual-Textual Criticism; Adorno, Croce and Benjamin behind what is now beginning to be called the New Aestheticism. Sometimes all these, together with some old-time French Structuralism (even Russian Formalism) can be found behind the various branches of Feminism, Gender Studies and Post-Colonial Criticism, and the list could be continued, depending on the desire of further divisions and sub-divisions, or, to the contrary, a wish for lumping smaller units into larger ones, and of course the line of philosophers or theoreticians is not exhaustive, either. It further complicates the picture that our present notion of ‘literature’ was forged sometime in Romanticism: in a way, the very ‘birth of literature as we apply the term today’ happened then. This birth of literature did not only go, as it has been pointed out many times by theoreticians, hand in hand with the rise of the so-called European nation-states, but seems to be inseparable from the birth of our present understanding of ‘theory’ as well: literature and its theory, the latter, though of course not exclusively, in the form of philosophical aesthetics in the works of Lessing, Baumgarten, Kant, Schelling and Hegel, were born together. And since these thinkers made an overwhelming impact on the Continental tradition of philosophy, and had very little, or even a negative effect, if any, on the Analytic tradition, it has always been easier, or even more ‘natural’ to mix philosophy with literature in the German and French schools of philosophy and literary theory. (With respect to the Analytic tradition, Kant seems to be an exception, but the Kant that had made an impact on Anglo-Saxon philosophy is not the aesthetic Kant). Schelling or Hegel never had to justify why they wrote on, for example, Shakespearean tragedy, while from the point of view of the Analytic tradition, Hume’s work on tragedy and Coleridge’s interest in (German) philosophy are the exceptions.

Thus, one could justifiably claim that the above picture of the philosophy of literature is valid, if it is valid at all, only with respect to the past two hundred or so years, first and foremost because previous ages were obviously not worried about the exact genres or branches of study their texts were coming from. Was Montaigne concerned whether the endless sources he was relying on were Biblical, historical, poetic (‘literary’), philosophical, psychological or some other? Even the question seems to carry serious anachronisms, containing telling signs of typical ‘back-reading’. Even further, it happened only recently, precisely in the age of re-canonisation, that so-called ‘classical learning’ disappeared from the curricula of the so-called ‘educated people’, and one could plausibly argue, I think, that up to even the Second World War, the influence of Plato or Aristotle had somehow always been ‘behind’ any kind of literary activity. Not that everyone was consciously relying on them all the time, but they had created a kind of point of reference, a kind of *Grund*, a certain ‘foundation’ German philosophers like to talk about. And it was partly noticing our anachronisms and back-readings that has brought about the next possible assessment of the relationship between philosophy and literature:*philosophy as literature*. It was especially Deconstruction that has made it doubtful whether the separation of, or even the opposition between, philosophy and literature is as easy and self-evident as it was earlier suggested.

Traditionally, two constitutive features, two ontological qualities were attributed to literature to distinguish it from other products of language: the first one is usually called the “fictionality” of literature, its tendency to create a world of its own instead approaching reality with a factual truth-claim; the second one is its aptitude of using a highly intensive language, the most distinctive marks of this intensity being the frequent occurrence of images (“figures of speech”: metaphor, metonymy, etc.) and the presence of certain acoustic features (metrics, rhythm, alliteration, etc.), cf. Poszler 1983: 268-311, and Szondi 1979: 5-26.

Once, however, images and even sound-effects are tracked down in the discourse of philosophy as well – as it has become quite a common practice in deconstruction (cf., for example, Derrida 1973: 32-47; 70-87 and Derrida 1993: 117-171) – and at best it is only the quantity of the above constitutive features which remain as a possible means of differentiation, one’s confidence, at least in a self-evident borderline, becomes shaken to the extent Macbeth’s “single state of man” (1.3.142) is “shaken”. Again, once language is regarded – not only when it serves literary aims but also when it is a medium of the philosopher – as not so much “mirroring” reality but rather as “creating” it, the line of division between the “plain” and the “poetic”, the “conceptual” and the “metaphorical”, or the “fictional” and the “factually true’’, gets more and more blurred. The most severe blow at a neat separation has proved precisely to be the view that linguistic signs (‘words’ in a very broad sense) create and, therefore, “absorb” their referents (the ‘things’ they denote): if the opposition between sign and referent (signifier and signified) crumbles, the question as to the relationship between language and the world (be this world ‘real’ or the product of fancy) does not even make sense to be asked.

For example, Jonathan Culler, one of the leading experts on literary theory today writes the following in his book, *On Deconstruction*, a widely-used introductory work to this field:

Theories grounded on presence – whether of meaning as a significant intention present to the consciousness at the moment of utterance or of an ideal norm that subsists behind all appearances – undo themselves, as the supposed foundation or ground proves to be the product of a differential system, or rather, of difference, differentiation and deferral. But the operation of deconstruction or the self-deconstruction of logocentric theories does not lead to a new theory that sets everything straight. [...] [In literary theory] deconstruction does not elucidate texts in the traditional sense of attempting to grasp a unifying content or theme; it investigates the work of metaphysical oppositions in their arguments and the ways in which textual figures and relations [...] produce a double, aporetic logic. (Culler 1983: 109)

Culler operates here with *différance*, which – in a ‘non-essentialist’ sense, of course – is at the heart of Jacques Derrida’s whole enterprise. At one place Derrida portrays the force of *différance* as follows:

Nothing – no present and in-*different* being – thus precedes *différance* and spacing. There is no subject who is agent, author, and master of *différance*, who eventually and empirically would be overtaken by *différance*. Subjectivity – like objectivity – is an effect of *différance*, an effect inscribed in a system of *différance*. This is why the *a* of *différance* also recalls that spacing is temporalization, the detour and postponement by means of which intuition, perception, consummation – in a word, the relationship to the present, the reference to a present reality, to a *being* – are always *deferred*. Deferred by virtue of the very principle of difference which holds that an element functions and signifies, takes on or conveys meaning, only by referring to another past or future element in an economy of traces. This economic aspect of *différance*, which brings into play a certain non-conscious calculation in a field of forces, is inseparable from the more narrowly semiotic aspect of *différance*. It confirms that the subject, and first of all the conscious and speaking subject, depends upon the system of differences and the movement of *différance*, that the subject is constituted only in being divided from itself, in becoming space, in temporizing, in deferral; and it confirms that, as Saussure said, “language [which consists only of differences] is not a function of the speaking subject”. At the point at which the concept of *différance*, and the chain attached to it, intervenes, all the conceptual oppositions of metaphysics (signifier/signified; sensible/intelligible; writing/speech; passivity/activity; etc.) – to the extent that they ultimately refer to the presence of something present (for example, in the form of the identity of the subject who is present for all his operations, present beneath every accident or event, self-present in its “living speech”, in its enunciations, in the present objects and acts of its language, etc.) – become non-pertinent. They all amount, at one moment or another, to the subordination of the movement of *différance* in favor of the presence of a value or a *meaning* supposedly antecedent to *différance*, more original than it, exceeding and governing it in the last analysis. (Derrida 1981: 28-29)

This is not the place to develop a response to deconstruction: not even Cavell’s earlier and recent reflections on this highly significant trend in literary analysis and on Derrida (whose figure does not exhaust what Deconstruction is, of course) – will be treated here in detail. I only quote one paragraph from Cavell’s reflections which, I think, succinctly characterises the direction his evaluation takes. Here Cavell formulates his position by juxtaposing the Derridian and the Wittgensteinian stances:

The philosophical interest in a philosophical search for a connection between language and mind, and between mind and world, so far as I recognize an intellectual enterprise not taking its bearings from the current institutions of science, is to determine what keeps such a search going (without, as it were, moving). Wittgenstein’s answer, as I read it, has something to do with what I understand as skepticism, and what I might call skeptical attempts to defeat scepticism. [...] Derrida’s answer has something to do with Heidegger’s interpretation of Western metaphysics as a metaphysics of presence. I might say that, so far as I have seen, the question “Why does philosophy persist in the search of substances in which understanding, intention, reference, etc. consist?” cannot be satisfied by the answer “because of the metaphysics of presence”. That answer seems to repeat, or reformulate, the question itself. Say that Wittgenstein shows us that we maintain unsatisfiable pictures of how things must happen. The idea of presence is one of these pictures, no doubt a convincing one. But the question seems to be why we are, who we are that we are, possessed of this picture. (Cavell 1985: 152)[[45]](#footnote-45)

Since it was largely because of Deconstruction (and other post-structuralist approaches) that the affair between literature and philosophy was brought up anew, one no longer feels one could argue from the comfortable position which takes the difference between the two for granted. But one thing seems to be certain: the school which has come closest to reading*philosophy as literature* is undoubtedly Deconstruction. This is not the same as *philosophy in literature*. Philosophy *in* literature, as it is often understood today, is, I think, a dead end, since it usually takes the form of arguing that there is, a ‘lot of philosophy’ in, for example, Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*, or Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. But cannot that be true, if we want, of any literature? Is there less ‘philosophy’ in, say, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, or in Wordsworth’s *Prelude*? And how could one measure the ‘more’ philosophy that supposedly resides in Coleridge’s *Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, in comparison with, say, Wordsworth’s *We Are Seven*? And how about science, or the *Barbie Magazine*, or even our shopping lists? ‘Some philosophy’ (or, in the sense I am using the term in this book: metaphysics – see the “Introduction”) will ‘live’ in everything, thus the whole enterprise becomes unwarrantable and empty. When I read interpretations claiming that they are looking for philosophy in literature, I often find that either the literary piece is a mere illustration of an otherwise well or badly exposed philosophical problem, or that the philosophy in question is hovering so far away from the literary interpretation that both could very well do without the other: they are unable to become the figure of each another. Philosophy in literature, the *in* becoming more a marker of distance than proximity, may also give way to what we may even take to be its subtype: *philosophy through literature*, when undoubtedly well-meaning editors put what they call ‘philosophical’ literary pieces together, to make thorny philosophical problems ‘easier to digest’ or to trigger mostly ‘ethical’ discussions and thereby get closer to ‘moral philosophy’.

Reading *philosophy as literature***,** at least in its deconstructivist understanding, is a totally different enterprise, often concentrating on the rhetorical organisation of a text traditionally called ‘philosophical’. When, for example, Derrida was not looking for arguments in the texts of Plato but was rather demonstrating how the various meanings of the word *pharmakon* destabilises even the very possibility of looking for such arguments (cf. Derrida 1983: 61-119), or when Paul de Man, in his essay on the “ontology of metaphor” showed how certain metaphors disrupt the philosophical text of even such a “dry” author as John Locke (cf. De Man 1979: 11-28), they were questioning, first and foremost, the truth-claim philosophy has traditionally laid on the ‘nature’ of the world and the human being. What New Criticism carefully distinguished as images, figures or tropes turned out to be subversive metaphors, making deconstructionalists infer that the most fallacious assumption of especially some Analytical philosophical schools was that there would be a common ‘content’ behind various verbal formulations. Some Analytic schools of the philosophy of language – if they paid attention to Deconstruction at all – objected: if there is no – though undoubtedly vague – common content ‘behind’ two formulations, how is translation possible, why do we accept something as a paraphrase of something else, how is interpretation possible as being ‘about’ some other text? Should we go as far as to claiming that, say, an interpretation of a poem has nothing to do with the ‘content’ of the poem under consideration? It was especially those imagining Analytic philosophy on the basis of logic who objected most vehemently, since the deconstructive claim shook their philosophy’s very foundations: without the ability to re-formulate a sentence in some kind of a formal logical system, without the justifiability of ‘translating’ a proposition into the symbols of logic, logic, at best, is about itself; it is a past-time, and it is an illusion that it says anything about the world.

The only work about logic I know which is conscious of this problem, not only on the level of reflections in the text, but also as something put into display everywhere on the text’s very body, is Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, although, paradoxically, Wittgenstein’s book could also be read, for example by the Vienna Circle, as precisely strengthening the positions of logic and providing useful tools for the logical analysis of sentences. As this will unfold in detail below, in the chapter on Wittgenstein, the difference and the clarity of the relationship between the signifier and the signified (e.g. the word ‘dagger’ and the *thing* *called* ‘dagger’ in the external world, ‘out there’) is, indeed, an absolute demand in the *Tractatus*, yet Wittgenstein could show how the consequential adherence to this demand also annihilates, at the same time, and with the self-same gesture, the presuppositions which have created that demand; in other words he demonstrated, how the medium designed to formulate and solve problems will fall victim to the very principles it has been able to establish. The *Tractatus* displays a figuration one could even call tragic: the very condition of the success of the *Tractatus* coincides with its absolute failure, and of course it will long remain a matter of debate whether Wittgenstein, by exposing the limits of a logic-based language to the utmost, could this way transcend precisely the limits of that language, and thus, of the world, but not by remaining in the medium of language and logic but rather by pointing towards, and putting on display something that can be *seen* but not talked about, something he wished to call the *transcendental*. To connect that which can only be seen with traditional *phantasy*, reminding ourselves that Greek *phantazein* originally simply means ‘to make visible’, is just as tempting as to connect the Wittgensteinian ineffable with the ‘unutterable residue’ especially romantic aesthetics found in a work of art after its interpretation. After all, Wittgenstein himself says in the *Tractatus* that ethics and aesthetics are one (*TLP* 6.421), and here ethics is to be understood not as anything normative, ordering or prompting people to do or not to do something, but as an attitudinal-ontological spontaneous response to the limits of the world, a stance pertaining to the innermost core of a unique individual.

As opposed to the starting point of the *Tractatus*, Deconstruction based its stance on the distrust between the correspondence between the signifier and the signified. Although admitting that the signifier and the signified can – or even have to – be momentarily distinguished, it was claimed that there is simply no authority to fix either of them, and thus to identify one as either. Once it is admitted that the signifier may not ‘come to’ the signified from the ‘outside’ (it is not so that first we have an e.g. cognitive relation to a dagger, which we then, secondarily, label with a name), and thus the signified is not something which would have earlier been fixed so that the signifier my appear to ‘refer’ to it, then the only alternative that seems to remain is that the signifier signifies itself, it becomes its own signified. Please note that this is a very old idea in the European tradition, form the Sceptics onward, but it was revived and gained popularity in European thinking again largely through the work of Hume and Kant, who tried to limit reason the way Wittgenstein tried to limit language. Kant famously denied that we would have any direct or indirect access to a supposedly fixed ‘thing’, to the “thing in itself” (cf. Kant 1933: Bxx, Bxxvi), and thus the road was open toward watching the ‘hovering’ of the signifier around the unknowable signified, the idea being that there are signifiers which will never even ‘touch’ the signified. Encouraged by Kant, Schelling even concluded that this makes poetry, and poetry precisely as a special *epistemological* medium, higher-ranking than philosophy (cf. Schelling 1978: 219-232). Schelling did no longer look at philosophy as literature but rather at literature as philosophy, claiming that poetry was the epistemological and ontological medium of the highest intensity, which had not only acknowledged and wholeheartedly embraced the unfixedness of the signifier but could even be looked at as having, from time immemorial, invented it. Therefore poetry, and especially tragedy, is able to disclose a dialectic philosophy will never be able to do, philosophy bound by the paradox of the object (of experience) turning into the subject (experiencing), and the subject (experiencing) turning into the object (of experience).[[46]](#footnote-46)

Deconstruction is undoubtedly a new landmark in the history of philosophy[[47]](#footnote-47) and literature, yet I cannot celebrate it without some serious reservations. Though Deconstruction has often insisted that it does not turn philosophy into literature, and that they were only allowing the rhetoric of a text to do what it does anyway, it has tried to bring a kind of philosophy surely to an end: the philosophy which insists on referential relations between language and world. One could also say that while talking about signifier and signified, Deconstruction forgot that not only the linguistic sign is a signifier, but we, human beings are signifiers as well, with wills, desires, and so on, and these cannot all be dissolved in language. Deconstructionists, at least in some circles, thought that they only have to let language loose and run wild, and it will do the job it would do anyway. But however true it is that this way language ‘makes truth happen’ rather than seeking something external to it on which it can rely, rather than looking for a norm in the outside-world to be ‘true’, our everyday practice and circumstances tell us that we do use language referentially as well, and we may use it referentially even when we ‘produce’ literature. I think the wrong assumption has been that the creational and referential aspects or ‘functions’ of language were excluding each other. But – as this has been alluded to above, in connection with Cavell and Wittgenstein – without the referential aspect we could hardly talk about anything already mentioned, remembered, etc. at all; we also need a certain amount of fixedness to establish our identities and the identities of the objects around us, we simply cannot create the world and ourselves anew and “let truth happen” all the time. And opposing the creational and referential uses of language also created the false impression that these two were the only alternatives as far as the functions of language were concerned, thus making it seem superfluous to look for others. Is “speaking fiction”, for example, one or the other? And can it not be something different than them? Below I will try to show, relying on the work of Brett Bourbon that fiction might be thought of as another kind of function of language.

Yet reading philosophy as literature, in less competent hands than Derrida or de Man, lead to further trivial understandings of their possible relationships. As a first step, this trivial understanding did not make Dostoyevsky or Shakespeare a great philosopher, as the above scolded *philosophy in literature*tried to do but was rather looking for *literature in philosophy***.** For example, Plato’s dialogic form or allegories of caves and other matters, were taken as clear instances of ‘literature in philosophy’, to the extent that Plato became a dramatic poet. Or the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations,* strikingly different in style and approach from the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, was seen, with his strangely conversational tone and various interlocutors as not only employing literary devices in the *Investigations,* but as a lyrical or also dramatic poet. Thus, paradoxically, confusingly, but not surprisingly, literature in philosophy indeed turned into *philosophy as literature***:** the texts of Wittgenstein or Plato were read as poems. This, in itself was not the problem, but in many cases these moves aimed at deflating the weight and seriousness of the texts; the adherents of this position silently assumed that a poem was a far less serious business than a philosophical discussion. Deconstruction cannot be charged with this kind of deflationary or reductive desire precisely because it did not wish to commit itself to what it was reading; since it did not mind whether what it was dismantling was a philosophical treatise or a poem, it never could claim that e.g. a poem might be less ‘serious’ than a piece of philosophy or anything else. Yet the trivial understanding of philosophy in literature and philosophy as literature became more complicated, but no less trivial when it started to read such ‘poetic’ philosophers as Kierkegaard or Nietzsche. In their case, it was first carefully established that they were precisely philosophers and not poets, and then triumphantly held up as positive examples: ‘you see, not all philosophy is dry’, as if the question of whether the ‘boring Kant’ could, for example, be danced to the lively tune of Nietzsche would only be a matter of the technique of writing. And the old problem returned: can we transform the ‘content’ of Kant into a ‘livelier livery’ without any loss or addition of meaning? Is a philosopher’s (of anyone’s) language and style external to the ‘purport’ he manages to get across?

The only branch or subdivision of the Analytic school I know of which paid any attention to the creational aspects of language, so important in the *philosophy as literature* of deconstruction, is speech-act theory. The point can be illustrated easily and it is now pretty well-known: if I name a ship ‘Tyger’, I am not producing a statement which could be examined along the lines of truth or falsity, but I am crating in and with language, which can be successful or not, valid or invalid, felicitous or non-felicitous, and this involves also some institutions which are not linguistic: I have to be authorised to name the ship (e.g. I am the major of the city), there has to be a cheering crowd in a harbour, a bottle of champagne to be broken on the side of the ship, it has to be launched from the dry dock onto the water for the first time. Speech-act theory was undoubtedly a very important move towards understanding various uses into which language can be put, yet it soon ceased to be the cure-all many people thought it to be, namely to provide the analysis of various cognitive-mental states through some more or less tangible linguistic phenomena. Separating the linguistic and the non-linguistic or ‘pragmatic’ aspects of meaning was a small problem compared to some others. First, speech-act theory tried to capture meaning primarily through the intention, the so-called “illocution” of the speaker. It was of course acknowledged that a speech-act makes some effect on the listener: this was called the perlocutionary act, for example a warning or even a promise can threaten or intimidate me.[[48]](#footnote-48) Yet perlocution seemed so complicated, uncertain, ‘subjective’ and context-dependent that nobody dared to approach meaning form the perlocutionary side. Even further, it turned out that pin-pointing the meaning of a sentence, even form the illocutionary point of view, is hopeless, too: any sentence might be intended by me to be a promise, a warning, an expression of desire, an oath, a curse, a joke, or even conveying the piece of news that the Weïrd Sisters are coming to visit us today, only the necessary circumstances and some previous agreements (some specific ‘stage settings’) have to obtain (often called ‘pragmatic presuppositions’). So it turned out that there is no necessary logical relation between the meaning of a sentence and the many uses it might be put to; the meaning of a sentence does not predestine it to ‘fulfil’ or even ‘favour’ a particular function in communication. Thus to understand the ‘creational’ aspect of literature through speech acts soon proved to be a dead-end as well.

But speech-act theory at least raised the problem of language as creation. Until then, the Analytic tradition had always tried to maintain the greatest possible distance between philosophy and literature. If there has ever been a philosophical school thinking that any kind of literature was – as Plato put it – “a dog yelping at its master” or “great in the empty talk of fools”, then it was the Anglo-Saxon one. Since they were mostly concerned with the analysis of language, and the medium of literature is language, too, analytic philosophers often thought of literature as a contagious decease, spreading misleading and seductive tropes and figures of speech, and unnecessarily disturbing the clarity of conceptual, logical analysis. It was especially metaphor which proved to be the arch-enemy. When Max Black, the serious – and brilliant – scholar of the *Tractatus*, started to write in the early 1960s on metaphor (Black 1962: 25-47) , when Stanley Cavell, though a professor of aesthetics, did not follow, also in the early 1960s, in the footsteps of the analytic aesthetics worked out by Nelson Goodman, but rather ‘mixed’ his analysis concerning, for instance, the difference between *knowing* and *acknowledging* with the interpretation of *King Lear*, even the most benevolent Analytic colleagues thought that they were at best wasting their time. The farthest some Anglo-Saxon thinkers ventured was comparing the ‘literary styles’ of some classics of philosophy, the *way* they presented an argument, but analysts here did not come up with more surprising results than finding that, for example, Berkeley or Hume wrote more entertainingly and ‘easily’ than Locke or Kant. We should be aware that in philosophy a ‘light-handed style’ as opposed to a ‘heavy-handed’ one may not necessarily be an advantage: a thinker whose style is witty and easy-flowing, might far more easily gloss a problem over with a clever rhetorical device and put an oratorical shroud over it than the one who struggles with each word and constructs phrases and sentences clumsily and laboriously. And this is so precisely because Analytic philosophy is quite right in claiming that many – though of course not all – philosophical problems have arisen from the unclear and imprecise use of language, when philosophers were selling accuracy and exactness for rhetoric or – as Wittgenstein puts it in *Philosophical Investigations –* language went on holiday (cf. *PI,* §38).

The perhaps never absolutely self-conscious program of philosophy as literature in the Continental tradition and especially in Deconstruction, however, called attention to a seemingly trivial but often neglected aspect of even Analytic Philosophy. This went beyond the endeavours of, for example, the above mentioned Paul de Man finding subversive metaphors in the texts of Locke, Condillac or Kant. Suddenly it was realised that not even the most rigorous philosophical analysis can remain totally devoid of, and immune to, some examples, some descriptions, ‘pictures’ of concrete situations, concrete and realistic and commonsensical, or imaginary, or hypothetical. Even a commonsensical, ‘everyday’ example like Kant’s sun and rain, or the 13 thalers, or the marble on a cushion in *The Critique of Pure Reason* might be read not as mere illustrations of a theoretical point, but as perhaps even ‘subversive’ mini-narratives, and if one opens a book today especially on epistemology or the ‘mind-body’ problem in Analytic philosophy, she will read so many hypothetical examples and ‘thought-experiments’ concerning Doppelgängers, Twin-Earth examples, split brains, Chines rooms and possible worlds that perhaps she will think she is reading science-fiction rather than philosophy. For example, the Scott Sturgeon, in a serious philosophical handbook, introduces his chapter on epistemology with the thought-experiment that the reader should suppose that one day somebody wakes up to the strange belief that Plato and Aristotle were in fact the same person. And the reader is further asked to suppose that this idea was implanted in this unfortunate man by a friend, with the help of hypnosis, just for fun. And it should also be supposed that Plato and Aristotle were the same person in reality as well, but the friend performing the hypnosis was not aware of this. And so on. One is inclined to write a short-story about this (cf. Grayling 1995: 22-25).

Yet before philosophers start to write fiction – which is not without example, either, we may think of George Henry Lewes, Mary Evan’s (*alias* George Eliot’s) partner, or of Umberto Ecco – let us have a look, finally at *literature as philosophy*, already mentioned with respect to Schelling. Schelling may well represents the temptation, or even the seduction to think that the human being should not wait for his salvation through epistemology but through aesthetics; in Schelling the tenet can surely be found that we are not, or even should not primarily be, in a knowing relationship with the world but in an aesthetic one, or, to be more precise, it is the ‘knowledge’ or understanding provided by aesthetics that guides us best in our understanding of the world and ourselves; in other words our ontology is, or should be grounded in aesthetics and not in the theory of knowledge. As Stanley Cavell has argued, this is a conviction that runs through, in various forms, in the philosophy of Wittgenstein, too, from the *Tractatus* to *On Certainty* (cf. Cavell 1996: 369-389). How much we are able to follow Schelling and Wittgenstein in that is another question. This much at least seems to be true: we fare best if we keep the relationship between literature (novels, poems, dramas, etc.) and philosophy in this ***and*-**position, leaving them what they are, whatever they might be, precisely to enable both to bite into each other, like perhaps Plato’s dogs, through occasional and respective ‘***as***’-es. And we definitely fare better if literature is taken neither as a mere illustration of philosophy, nor as a ‘laxer’ way of saying ‘the *samei’*as what philosophy says but it is acknowledged that literature, with its own means, might heuristically contribute to philosophical problems: when it is acknowledged that literature, and any kind of literature, does have an epistemological relevance, an ontological understanding or an ethical expository power. But these are interesting for philosophy because literature, in and through its rhetorical, structural and other means *as* precisely *different* from those of philosophy, may reveal something philosophy cannot, and *vice versa*, because one is just as much bound by its own and peculiar traditions as the other.

Let us take, almost as a fore-taste of what is coming, Stanley Cavell as a positive example of the **and**-relation: when he, in his investigation of the problem of philosophical scepticism, turned to Shakespeare’s *Othello*, he did not only identify tragedy as figuring, as ‘acting out’ and ‘animating’, in the form of insane jealousy, the pattern inhering in scepticism, but also showed that the problem of human separateness, identified by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* as the main reason for, or even as a condition of, scepticism, makes the pattern of tragedy, and especially a tragedy of marriage, more understandable, aesthetically more relevant and more enjoyable (cf. Cavell 1987: 125-142). So not only literature was made use of for philosophical purposes but philosophy was turned back on literature as well. This does not make Shakespeare a philosopher, nor does it make Wittgenstein a playwright, as it does not make philosophy become literature, or literature become philosophy, nor does it make one ‘better’ or ‘higher-ranking’ than the other. It is another question, which philosophical problem is to be tackled together with which piece of literature, or which piece of literature is to be recalled, when it comes to making a question of philosophy more dynamic or revitalised in the medium of literature. This will, needless to say, depend on the tradition and interests one has; sometimes one stumbles on combinations that prove to be helpful rather than consciously looking out for them.

Or take another positive example, Brett Bourbon, who, in his book *Finding a Replacement for the Soul* (Bourbon 2004: 50-79) picks up, among other things, a quarrel about fiction primarily with Searle (Searle 1979: 58-75), Lamarque and Olsen (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, esp. 159-252). Bourbon shows that solving the ‘riddle’ of fiction has taken three basic ways. One is the well-known idea that ‘fiction opens up a new, possible world’, but ‘possible world’ hardly means more than ‘fiction’ itself, so thus we remain with the good old tautology that fiction is fiction. The second way is to insist that the status of fiction could be decided with respect to the intention of the author, precisely with the help of speech-act theory. Lamarque and Olsen do not think that here we would be concerned with the intention of a flesh-and-blood person, but rather somehow with the ‘intention of the text’, the ‘implied author’, as it/he/she is ‘inscribed’ into it, perhaps in the form of ‘clues’ or ‘winks’ of the text: ‘yes, yes, come on, take me to be fiction’. But even granted that these clues can be correctly identified (correctly with respect to what?) “the cues”, as Bourbon puts it, “say nothing about what it means *to take* something as fictional” (66), or again: the correct identification of cues “does not enable us to understand what it means *for it* to be fictional” (76, italics in both cases mine). The third possible way is to claim that everything, including ourselves and the world as we ordinarily know it, has been fictional (perhaps ‘unreal’) from the start, but this clearly begs the question, because even to understand this requires the very notion of fiction itself, rather than ‘explaining’ what this fiction might be. In other words, this approach ‘solves’ the problem by eliminating the very notion of fiction itself: if everything is fiction, then there is no way to distinguish between fiction and our ordinary world, which is very much at odds with our everyday practice and experience.

Instead of the above solutions, Bourbon suggests that the real problem has all along been to think that when someone ‘speaks fiction’, when she, for example, tells a tale, she is talking from a first person standpoint, performing a kind of ‘speech-act’. Bourbon rather claims that “What anyone would understand as a fiction are sentences that are not a part of any kind of speech-act” (61), if, of course, we understand speech-acts to be tied by definition to a first-person speaker. Bourbon says: “No one can speak or mean fiction in his or her own voice. What we understand as a fiction we understand as framed by implicit quotation marks” (61). Of course, fiction, e.g. a tale would be heard by the other in my voice but I rather ‘lend my voice’ to this tale (somehow the way actors lend their voices to cartoon-characters, or after all, each actress and actor lends their voices (and lots of other ‘things’ of theirs) to roles like ‘Lady Macbeth’ or ‘Macbeth’). Fiction is in my voice, if I tell it but my listener will understand it as lacking my authority, my *meaning* it; some Hungarian fairy tales nicely thematise this situation by often starting the narrative by, instead “Once upon a time, there was …”: “Where (there) was, where (there) wasn’t, there was once… [Hol volt, hol nem volt, volt egyszer…], and ending the tale by: “This was so, or was not so…” [Így volt, nem így volt…].

This takes us back to Wittgensteinian aesthetics and attitudes to language.

### Chapter 2 Wittgenstein:

### The *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*:

### attitudes to language

Reading (with) Wittgenstein

When ‘Wittgensteinian aesthetics’, or an ‘aesthetics of Wittgenstein’, and, thus, ‘reading literature in a Wittgensteinian way’ is in focus, interpreters, be them philosophers or literary critics, tend to focus on his *Lectures on Aesthetics,* or his remarks collected under the misleading title *Culture and Value*, or his other notes (first in notebooks and then in various collections and editions) on music, painting and literary pieces, the latter including his reactions to Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Klopstock, and so on. I do not doubt that some (or, for that matter, all) of these ideas, scattered all over the oeuvre may be useful and inspiring for a ‘reconstruction of Wittgenstein’s aesthetic principles’ but I find these meditations and confessions neither too original (‘ground-breaking’), nor systematic enough to provide a basis for a reading method I am in pursuit of. It is an uneasy but not unjustifiable question, I find, whether we would care about these remarks and lectures at all if it would not have been Wittgenstein who seems to have held the positions contained in them. I think where we have dead squares and where we can open new and – most importantly – liberating vistas lie in the reconstruction of the various conceptions of language Wittgenstein held. His central topics throughout his career were – as it was already mentioned in the “Introduction” – to understand more and more about how language works: how it represents ‘reality’; what kind of a relationship there is between language and what it ‘describes’, ‘the world’; how we, human beings use language when we interact; how we are related to one another in and through language and, *via* spoken and written language, again to ‘the world’. Since the primary medium of ‘literature’ (a highly problematic term, of course) is language, my working hypothesis is that if one possible reconstruction of Wittgenstein’s ‘philosophy of language’ is achieved, this may provide us with a reading method which is both insightful and innovative for the reading of texts that wish to regard as ‘literary’.

However, in the spirit of Wittgenstein, who usually asked about the limits of an investigation first, we should ask what the limits within which a reconstruction of Wittgenstein’s ‘philosophy of language’ is going to be carried out are. One of the most serious limits of this undertaking will be that I will concentrate only on the two “main works” of Wittgenstein: the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*. I have several reasons for that. The most important one is that the *Tractatus* was published by Wittgenstein and although – with lots of other texts – the *Investigations* was published by his “literary executors” (G. E. M. Anscombe, Georg Henrik von Wright, and Rush Rhees) posthumously (first two years after Wittgenstein’s death, in 1953), what has become known as Part I of the book was a more or less publishable volume of remarks edited by Wittgenstein himself (for the publication of Part II the “executors” take personal responsibility already in the first edition). This indicates one of the main problems of Wittgenstein’s whole oeuvre: he did not publish, apart from the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and two short articles, nothing in his lifetime and the main bulk of his work (usually called the ‘Nachlass’) has become known successively from the early 1950s to the time when the Bergen-Oxford edition finally made all his known writings available for reading and research in 2000. The achievement of the Bergen-edition, on CD ROMs, is admirable and indispensable: they had to handle more than twenty thousand pages. Yet it is still – fertile – chaos. This follows from Wittgenstein’s working-method and from the fact that after the *Tractatus,* he only made – truly very serious – efforts to edit and prepare at least some of his notes but these never completely materialized. The ultimate reason for this in many ways awkward situation seems to be that the thinker so much concerned with the everyday and the ordinary in human life was a very extra-ordinary human being and, thus, philosopher: he is a researcher and, later in his life, a professor of philosophy at one of the most prestigious universities of the world, Cambridge University, while his teaching method – as it is widely known also from anecdotes – is anything but what students were accustomed to even at that time (from 1930 until his retirement in 1947); he deliberately avoided conferences and colloquia, his ideas spread through ‘oral transmission’ or mimeographed manuscripts until 1953. I take it to be one of the miracles of the history of philosophy that he was tolerated – and, of course, even loved by many – in Cambridge (and Vienna, his town of birth, where he often returned as a visitor). It amounts to a miracle, too that most of his hand-written and typed up manuscripts survived and saw print, generating interest, even great popularity in several circles; the reception of his writings indicates that he has become part of the history of ‘Western’ philosophy. To read Wittgenstein requires patience and many people seem to have had this patience but it was realized only slowly – and it is still not accepted by many – that this ‘style’ of doing philosophy is not an idiosyncrasy, a kind of odd ‘ornament’ upon an otherwise customary system of philosophy, one among the many systems. Rather, it is the very ‘flesh and blood’ of a novel philosophical stance and attitude, which is inseparable from the very content it wishes to communicate, including the unorthodox (declarative, non-argumentative) presentation of ideas one finds in the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein’s ‘style’: his way of stating or asking something, his declarations, argumentation, demonstration, persuasion, example-giving, his ‘dramatic narration’ *is* his philosophy and, most of all, himself, often displaying a personality in such close, startling intimacy with his readers which few philosophers ever dared to afford and practice. By ‘intimacy’ I mean that philosophers seldom initiate the reader into, and share with her, their failures, false starts and wrong paths to the extent Wittgenstein does.[[49]](#footnote-49) Wittgenstein’s philosophy is ‘performative’ (in many ways: ‘dramatic’) through and through: it is doing, in its very coming into being, what it wishes to say, and this is characteristic of his thinking and writing all through his career, from his first notes on logic he showed to his professor, Bertrand Russell in 1912[[50]](#footnote-50) to the last entries of what later became known as *On Certainty* (entries he made a few days before his death in Cambridge on the 29th of April of 1951[[51]](#footnote-51)). For all these reasons, the well-known labels we use in philosophy to designate its “branches” (right now with a vocabulary used mostly in Analytic philosophy), such as philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, philosophy of mathematics (a very important concern for Wittgenstein) etc., are to be taken with great precaution when it comes to the discussion of his views. Because of the heterogeneous nature of his oeuvre, these terms, in his case, simply do not work in the way they usually do with other thinkers, and they are largely “back-projections” and reconstructions always already, from more traditional philosophical standpoints in wider circulation.

Still, Wittgenstein’s ‘philosophy of language’ is undoubtedly central with respect to other main areas of philosophy he contributed to. This is because language was not only one of the most important subject matters of his inquiries but also the very instrument of these investigations: analysing problems while paying close attention to how various layers and phenomena of language work, to the “mechanisms”, deceptions, and revelations language is capable of. Indeed, this is one of the main reasons why Wittgenstein, throughout his life, “remained open”, as Stanley Cavell puts it, to the “threat of scepticism” (Cavell 1994: 5).[[52]](#footnote-52)

There are plenty of anecdotes about Wittgenstein (26 April, 1889-29 April, 1951). For example, during his classes in Cambridge, England his students had to sit in deck-chairs to listen to his lectures in a relaxed bodily position; he swept his floor with the old tea-leaves from his tea-pot to make his very puritanically furnished room completely dust-free; in movies he sat in the front row totally absorbed in the Westerns he liked very much etc. It is true that Wittgenstein resisted, as much as he could, all institutionalised forms of an ‘academic career’. It is also true that unlike with lots of other thinkers, his life is an *integral part* of fulfilling his philosophy: one cannot understand his life without his philosophy and his philosophy cannot be appreciated without knowing at least something about his life.

He was born in Vienna as the youngest of eight children, his father was one of the wealthiest businessmen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, his mother had great artistic – especially musical – talents. He studied in a secondary-school emphasising maths and the sciences (“Realschule”) in Linz where a school-mate of his was Adolf Hitler but they did not have any contact. Wittgenstein decided to study aeronautics, i.e. the ideal flight of aeroplanes in Manchester, England; he wished to become an engineer but, being also interested in the philosophical foundations of mathematics and logic – he had read Frege earlier – started to study Russell’s and Whitehead’s *Principa Mathematica* (first volume in 1910), as it has already been noted. He went down to Cambridge to see Russell in 1911, and Russell, deeply impressed by Wittgenstein’s exceptional talents, offered him to stay. Wittgenstein started to work on the philosophical foundations of logic but, in 1914, he had to go home and became a soldier in the ‘K und K’, the army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, fighting the First World War through. Once in a deserted town he found a bookshop the owner of which did not escape and there were three books in the whole store; one of them was Tolstoy’s *Tales*, which made a deep impression on Wittgenstein – from that time on he had a strong belief in God. Besides Tolstoy, his favourite authors were St Augustine (especially the *Confessions*), the Danish philosopher and theologian, Søren Kierkegaard, and Dostoyevsky, especially *The Brothers Karamazov.* Wittgenstein became a prisoner of war in Italy in 1918 but by the time he was released he had completed the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (Logische-Philosophische Abhandlung)*, one of the most curious philosophical works ever written. Nobody wished to publish it, finally it came out in German in 1921, and in English in 1922 in C. K. Ogden’s translation but with Russell’s Introduction (which Wittgenstein thought was a total misinterpretation of his work; quite soon their friendship came to an end.). After attending a teacher-training college, Wittgenstein became, in 1922, a village schoolteacher in Lower Austria (Otterthal, Trattenbach, etc.) but he tried to teach higher mathematics to ten-year olds; the parents complained and he quit in 1926. He worked as a gardener in a monastery, then, with Paul Engelmann, he built a house for one of his sisters, Margaret (it is known as the Stonborough-house, in the Kundmanngasse, Vienna) and finally returned to do research and teach in Cambridge (Trinity College) from the January of 1929. He got the PhD degree for the *Tractatus* but afterwards he published practically nothing, yet kept on writing, mostly in German, leaving thousands of pages of manuscripts and typescripts behind and he gave his very unusual philosophical classes every quarter (of course, in English). From Research Fellow he became, in 1938, Professor of Philosophy in Cambridge and, as a consequence of that, a British subject, largely to help his sisters out of Austria after the “Anschluss”, the German occupation of Austria (the family was three-quarters Jewish). He never lost contact with Vienna: he spent all his holidays there and in the 1930s he had regular conversations with some members of the Vienna Circle, especially with Moritz Schlick. During the Second World War he kept teaching in Cambridge but also did voluntary work in a hospital. He made an attempt at publishing some of his notes under the title *Philosophical Investigations (Philosophische Untersuchungen)* in 1946 but the book, finally edited by his students, as it was not before, came out (in German and English) posthumously in 1953, not receiving much attention until its second edition in 1958. It is also a very unusual book: it is a series of numbered remarks, notes and observations and lots of philosophers – including Russell, Karl Popper, Rudolf Carnap, Whitehead – thought (as we shall see) that it was totally useless. In 1947 Wittgenstein quit his professorship and spent long months in Ireland and Norway; near Bergen he had earlier built a hut for himself in the mountains and from 1913 he regularly visited Norway in the summers to write in complete solitude. In 1948 he spent some time in the United States (at Cornell University, on the invitation of his former student, Norman Malcolm). In that year he was diagnosed with cancer but kept on writing practically until his last day. After his premature death at the age of 62, his students and literary executors, Elizabeth Anscombe, Rush Rhees and Georg Henrik von Wright published all the material he had left behind in German and English. Since the early 1950s some 40 000 pieces have been published on Wittgenstein[[53]](#footnote-53); it is generally agreed that, besides Martin Heidegger, he was the most influential thinker of the 20th century, and although he has mostly been referred to as an “analytic philosopher”, it is very hard to name a “school” where he belongs.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Wittgenstein’s most important philosophical principles (as far as I can see) were: (1) that one has to be genuinely interested and dedicated to a problem (*any* problem one is fascinated by) in order to attempt a solution: no question is interesting unless it is a ‘matter of life and death’, and it has no use unless it has some bearing on the person’s personal life, i.e. unless one learns something also about him- or herself (2) that one often has to start from scratch, and look at a problem as if she were looking at it for the first time (3) that to understand another position (or even one’s own), one first has to ask why the person sticks to it with such stubbornness.

This also means that the ‘Wittegensteinians’ are more interested in the *problems*, the difficulties raised or implied by any theory rather than clinging to a theory with the help of which they would describe meaning. This does not mean that one cannot appreciate and respect the results of approaches with a theory; it rather means that one is more interested in the philosophical background (the overt or covert assumptions of a theory) than in the practical applications of the theory.

Now we are going to look deeper into his attitudes to language, first through the *Tractatus*, and then through *Philosophical Investigations.*

Tractatus

When Wittgenstein published the *Tractatus*, he thought that he had found the solution to *all* important philosophical questions (and added that this also indicates how little had thus been achieved). The *Tractatus*, like all complex works, has lots of interpretations (more on this below) and since the 1990s we have been witnessing to a ‘*Tractatus-*Renaissance’. What follows is, of course, my interpretation.[[55]](#footnote-55)

The *Tractatus* is concerned with the relationship between language (treating language as a manifestation of thought) and the world, i.e. reality. One of the disturbing things about the book is that it starts with a description of the world (the Universe) and it is hard to identify any ‘speaking voice’ behind this description: it is as if a god, or at least an oracle were talking, announcing pieces of wisdom about the logical structure of the world and what follows from such a world-view. The whole book ‘announces’ in fact only *seven* statements (central theses); those, quoted form the *Tractatus*, are in **bold type** below**,**and after that my attempted explanation follows. Yet Wittgenstein, apart from the 7th statement, gave an interpretation to each of his main thesis himself (often even more enigmatic than the theses themselves), attaching the interpretation, in a series of remarks, to the respective main thesis using a decimal numbering which indicates the relative importance of this interpretation with respect to the main thesis. So e.g. 1. is the main thesis, 1.1. is the most important interpretation of 1.; 1.11 is an interpretation (explanation) of 1.1 but, this way, also an interpretation of 1. and so on. The seven statements also show the crystal-clear structure of the *Tractatus*: it goes from the world to sentences (propositions) and then back to the world in front of which we stand in silence.

**The world is all that is the case.**

Whatever happens to obtain in the world as a kind of situation is a ‘case’ in the world (the Universe in the sense of ‘logical space’).

**What is the case – a fact – is the existence [Bestehen] of states of affairs.**

A fact is a state of affairs, a certain situation, which obtains or does not obtain. Therefore, when I say e.g. ‘There is no beer in the fridge’ this is a negative fact: a state of affairs is denied to obtain but this is still a fact. However, *no* does not stand for a ‘thing’, it expresses a relation to the state of affairs, to the situation which we are describing.

Facts are composed of objects in a *certain* relation. Objects (represented in sentences by words) are always already in a certain relation with other objects *within* facts: there are no objects ‘floating alone’, or ‘hanging in thin air’ in the World. There are no *a priori* facts, i.e. nothing tells an object with which other object(s) it should enter into a certain relation (in *which* fact it should participate) but an object must necessarily be in a *certain* relation with *some* other objects in *one* fact or the *other*. In fact, objects are joined together by logical structure (form).

**3. A logical picture of a fact is a thought.**

We picture facts to ourselves in our heads, in the form of thoughts. Please imagine a thought as a snapshot, a photograph, with various ‘participants’ (objects): people, trees, houses, etc., they are in a certain configuration, relation to one another. ‘A thought (a picture) is totally expressed by a sentence (proposition, ‘Satz’= ‘sentence’ in the original text). A sentence is composed of words; each word corresponds to an object in the world (reality) except for logical constants (*no/not* [symbolised in logic as ‘~’], *if…then* [often symbolised as ‘­–>’ or with the ‘horse-shoe’,], ‘*or*’[symbolised as ‘v’] etc. Remember: logical constants are our *relation* to the world, they do not stand *for* ‘things’/objects). The meaning of a proposition is *what* it represents: namely a possible state of affairs or situation, an arrangement of objects, which may or may not obtain, depending on whether the proposition is true or false. *This is often called the ‘picture theory’ of meaning*.

Facts in the world, thoughts (pictures) in the mind representing these facts and sentences expressing thoughts (pictures) in language *share* the *same* logical structure, called *logical form* by Wittgenstein. It cannot be emphasized enough that there is not only isomorphism between fact, thought and sentence, it is their logical form (their logical order) which is the *same*. Thus, the logical form itself cannot be expressed, it cannot be put into language (there is no ‘further’ language to do that, i.e. there is no language with which we could step ‘between’ language and world to compare their structures), yet logical structure puts itself on display, it shows itself, it makes itself *manifest*. One only has to look at a sentence or a fact or a thought and she will *see* that logical order (structure). In other words, we can ‘mirror’ the structure of, say, a thought *in* a sentence, or the order of the sentence *in* a fact, but we cannot express that order (structure) *itself* in language or in thought or in anything (we cannot “whistle it”, either): we will *see it* (*in* the representations) but we will not be able to express it (an idea several logicians contested, especially Rudolf Carnap; Carnap tried to argue that there is a meta-language in which we are able to talk about logical structures).

**4. A thought is a proposition (sentence) with a sense.**

There will be three types of propositions in language: propositions about the facts of the world; these propositions can be true or false (they can describe states of affairs, i.e. cases that obtain or do not obtain).

The second type of possible propositions is *tautology* (analytic truth, *a priori* proposition) (e.g. ‘It is either raining, or not raining’, ‘Shakespeare is Shakespeare’, ‘The brown table is brown’, ‘A=A’, for some logicians: ‘Bachelors are unmarried men’). Tautologies are true under all circumstances, they admit all possible situations in the world, and they do not say anything about the world. From a tautology’s mere constituents and its internal logical relations (= its structure) it can be seen that what tautology says is true under all circumstances.

The third type of possible propositions is *contradiction* (‘It is raining and not raining’, ‘A = A and A ≠ A are true at the same time’, etc.), it is true on *no* condition, it admits no possible situations in the world, it does not, therefore, represent any possible situation, it does not say anything about the world, either. From its mere constituents and its internal logical relations (structure) it can be seen that it is false under all circumstances.

Tautologies and contradictions *lack sense* (they are, in German, ‘sinnlos’) but not *nonsensical* (in German: ‘unsinnig’): they do not communicate any valuable piece of information about the world (about ‘what the case is’) but we can understand them in themselves, without reference to the world.

**5. A proposition is a truth-function of elementary propositions.**

From elementary (atomic) propositions we can build more complex ones with the help of logical operations such as conjunction (‘and’, symbolised by ’&’ in logic), disjunction (‘or’, symbolised by ‘v’ in logic, the conditional (also called ‘material implication’: ‘if *p*, then *q*’) symbolised as —> or the ‘horse-shoe’, ), etc., and we can give the truth of these operations in truth tables (truth tables are Wittgenstein’s invention in the *Tractatus*, later widely used in logic), e.g. the truth-table of conjunction will be:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **p** | **q** | **&** |
| T | T | T |
| T | F | F |
| F | T | F |
| F | F | F |

which means that a conjunction (the joining of two sentences by ‘and’=’&’) will be true if and only if both *p* and *q* are True, otherwise False. So the truth of the proposition ‘It is raining, and the clouds are grey’ will be a truth-function of the elementary propositions in the conjunction: ‘It is raining’ + ‘the clouds are grey’.

**Thesis 6. gives the general form of a truth-function** (the logical notation is unimportant for our purposes), wishing to say that we have to apply the various logical operations like conjunction, disjunction, the conditional, and negation to elementary (simple, atomic) propositions to get more complex ones as a result. To analyse a sentence is to apply these operations in the opposite direction: we cut up a complex proposition into elementary ones and tell whether what they describe in the world (what they ‘say’) obtains in the world or not (are true or not). If the proposition does not correspond to anything in the world (it is neither true, no false), and it is neither a tautology, nor a contradiction, it is nonsensical and should be discarded (it does not refer to anything in the world, it is not about a fact of the world).

**7. What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.**

No explanation, further interpretation is given to thesis 7 (of course, the very last one) in the *Tractatus*. The above 6 points imply that all ethical or aesthetic propositions (involving value-judgements) are nonsensical. The problem with them, Wittgenstein implies, is that they appear in the ‘form’ of ‘normal’ propositions (i.e. as if they were about facts of the world) but what they record are not facts that could obtain, or do obtain, in the world. Moreover, it follows (and Wittgenstein himself draws this conclusion) that *all the propositions in the* Tractatus *itself are nonsensical, too* since they are not tautologies or contradictions, and they do not state possible facts of the world. The sentences of the *Tractatus* make an attempt at the impossible: they try to talk about the shared logical structure (form) of world, of thoughts and propositions.

Traditional and resolute readers

As David Stern’s helpful summary informs us, there have been five basic approaches to the *Tractatus,* some of them often appearing side-by-side even within a single work on Wittgenstein’s book. These are the respective logical atomist, the logical positivist, the metaphysical, the ethical-religious, and the therapeutic readings; here I will concentrate chiefly on the version of the therapeutic reading as represented by Cora Diamond, also called the “resolute”, the *non-*“chickening out”, or “austere” reading (Stern 2003: 134-35), especially as it is put forward in her “Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*” (Diamond 2000; the title abbreviated in this section of the chapter as *EIM,* 149-173). Thus, far from doing full justice even to the tradition of the therapeutic reading, I will mention, selectively, a few, I think highly original features of Diamond’s reading, as well as some of the criticism – chiefly, but also selectively, by Peter Hacker and Meredith Williams – levelled against Diamond’s standpoint, and then try to argue that both the Diamond- and the Hacker-fronts of interpretations have significant points worthy of serious consideration, and perhaps it is not hopeless to reconcile them: this will serve as an opportunity to suggest some points of interpretation of my own.

As it is well known, one of Diamond’s major claims was that the penultimate paragraph of the *Tractatus* should be taken very seriously:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical [unsinnig], when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. [Diamond’ translation is more precise: “when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them” (EIM, 150): “wenn er durch sie – auf ihnen – über sie hinausgestiegen ist”]. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it [er auf ihr hinaufgestiegen ist]).

He must transcend [überwinden] these propositions, and then he will see the world aright. (*TLP* 6.54)

Diamond makes much out of these words, of course together with other passages of the *Tractatus*. The first item she calls special attention to is “*me*”, i.e. the appearance of the First Person Singular. Diamond insists that we should draw a sharp distinction between trying to understand the text of the *Tractatus*, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, the person, functioning here, I take it, in Diamond’s reading as the ‘implied author’, i.e. the persona we construct in our reading-process ‘behind’ the text, rather than the flesh-and-blood man (cf. *EIM* 150-1), this implied author being already there in the “Author’s Preface” of the *Tractatus* (3-5). Wolfgang Iser describes the implied author as one “whose attitudes shape the book” (Iser 1974: 103), and on the same page he quotes Wayne Booth’s classic study, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, according to which “The ‘implied author’ chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; … he is the sum of his own choices… This implied author is always distinct from the ‘real man’ – whatever we may take him to be – who creates a superior version of himself, a ‘second self’, as he creates his work”.

There is, indeed, even in everyday practice a significant difference between understanding a *person* on the one hand, and *what* he or she says on the other. I may not understand what the Other actually, perhaps incoherently, utters but I can understand her, and I may, in turn, understand the very words that leave her mouth but I may be unable to tell what she is driving at. According to Diamond, we should understand Wittgenstein’s gesture of qualifying all the sentences of the *Tractatus* to be nonsense as an invitation to understand *him*, what *he* wishes, intends to say, not so much ‘beyond’ the sentences of his work but both with a nonsensical text as a whole, and with the very gesture of holding, considering his text to be nonsense himself. Indeed, Wittgenstein, at the end of the *Tractatus*, seems to *sentence* his sentences to nonsense.

We have already been led to the second item Diamond carefully analyses, namely the problem of *nonsense* (*unsinn*), re-opening one of the most hotly debated issues concerning the *Tractatus*, necessarily involving the question of *saying* versus *showing* (one of the favourite topics of the metaphysical reading), the question of the ‘unsayable’ or the ‘ineffable’, and – the most important issue for Diamond – the ethical standpoint implied by the *Tractatus*. This is chiefly the question whether, imaginatively or otherwise, we are entitled to, or it is possible at all, to ‘reconstruct’, and especially attribute any ethical ‘views’ to Wittgenstein when he clearly says in 6.421: “It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words [Es ist klar, daß sich die Ethik nicht aussprechen läßt”: ‘it is clear that ethics does not let itself/allow itself to be spoken out/expressed’] and: “Ethics is transcendental”. Of course, in Diamond’s reading, the previous sentences saying something about ethics directly, must be nonsense, too.

Diamond encounters this problem by insisting that we should take, as a first step, the sentences of the *Tractatus* as *plain* (austere, sheer, stark, real, utter) nonsense, as opposed to e.g. Elizabeth Anscombe’s metaphysical reading. For Diamond, Anscombe claims that there are two types of nonsense in the *Tractatus*: one type of nonsense is “useful” (or “illuminating” (Williams 2004: 8), or, as F. P. Ramsey put it, “important” (Braithwaite 1931: 8) nonsense, since ‘behind’ these nonsensical sentences there is a truth we may ‘grasp’ (perhaps intuitively feel) and cannot express only because they are in the realm of the ineffable, so this truth ‘shows itself’. Yet for Anscombe there is another type of nonsense in the *Tractatus*, too, behind which there is nothing, so those nonsensical sentences are “incoherent and confused” (*EIM*, 158). Therefore, it seems there are sentences which are nonsensical by virtue of the sheer fact that they are unsayable. Yet somehow they do ‘express’ some truth, because in one way or another they ‘show’ this truth, while there are ‘really’ (genuinely) nonsensical sentences which are, trivially, sayable but do not mean anything. This is also called sometimes the “standard” interpretation of the *Tractatus*, of course with several differences between the various authors (cf. Williams 2004: 7-8). Diamond is right in claiming that this approach entitles, or even requires, interpreters to select between the sentences of the *Tractatus* according to their own liking. Not only is this selection likely to be arbitrary, but the interpreters are allowed – to use David Stern’s apt formulation – “enormous exegetical leeway” (Stern 2003: 129) as well, which often results in their putting something substantial where for Wittgenstein silence should prevail. In other words – as Diamond paraphrases James Conant – interpreters may “project something out of their own heads or some combination of thoughts from Schopenhauer, Tolstoy and other writers” (*EIM*, 155) where Wittgenstein is silent.[[56]](#footnote-56) Instead, Diamond offers the following (and this is the next step for her to appreciate the *Tractatus*):

My point is that the *Tractatus* in its understanding of itself as addressed to those who are in the grip of philosophical nonsense, and in its understanding of the kind of demands it makes on its readers, supposes a kind of imaginative activity, an exercise of the capacity to enter into the taking of nonsense for sense, of the capacity to share imaginatively the inclination to think that one is thinking something in it (*EIM*, 157-8).

For Diamond, there is only one ‘type’ of nonsense in the *Tractatus,* and we get out (climb out) of nonsense through – imaginatively – participating in this nonsense, simultaneously acknowledging that we have been in nonsense, and *thus* we are – ‘therapeutically’ – cured of nonsense. More precisely, we are purged of the illusion that ‘we had meaningful thoughts’ while reading the *Tractatus*, and *that* makes sense. Thus, for Diamond, one of Wittgenstein’s chief *ethical* points is precisely this exercise, this philosophical activity: in acknowledging a wrong philosophical attitude, I leave it, in the very gesture of its acknowledgement, behind. This way I understand the *person*, namely (the implied author) Wittgenstein behind the text, or, as Diamond puts it, I may “*find in myself the possibility of meaning*” (*EIM,* 165, emphasis original). For Diamond, to come to *my* meaning, to my very ability to mean something the prerequisite seems to be to be able to participate in the Other’s nonsense and to “enter imaginatively into the seeing of it as sense” (*EIM,* 165), i.e. to be able to see how the Other takes the sentences of his or her own to be meaningful, to see the ways he or she attributes meaning to his or her locutions (thoughts). That seems to be, according to Diamond, the ethical task the *Tractatus* sets for us.

We could, as it were, highlight Diamond’s reading of the *Tractatus* along the three significant prepositions (adverbial particles) Wittgenstein uses in 6.54. We could say that she pays very careful attention to *auf* (*on*) and *über* (*over*), and although finds *durch* (*through*) significant, too, her critics sound as if they were thinking that she does not take the *through-*aspect seriously, namely: she neglects that one should very carefully and thoroughly work one’s way through *all* the paragraphs of the *Tractatus* (even in order to see them as nonsensical) and that these paragraphs, or some of them, or many of them, has proved very meaningful for a great number of readers.

Peter Hacker’s objections to Diamond’s reading (the ‘metaphysical view’)

Among the critics of Diamond, Peter Hacker claims that Diamond’s reading dismisses the main body of the text at a single stroke: she considers only the “framework”, the ending, i.e. 6.54 and the “Author’s Preface” of the *Tractatus*, and she sounds as if Wittgenstein could have written anything “in between” (Hacker 2000: 357 and 361-2). So far, I have not mentioned the Preface of the *Tractatus* but the sentences of utmost significance for Diamond are:

Thus the aim of the book is to set a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to set a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought).

It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be set, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense [Unsinn] (*TLP* page 3).

For Diamond the above passage says, in effect, what 6.54 does (*EIM* 149-51). It is debatable to what extent a Preface is part of a work, but 6.54 surely is part of the *Tractatus.* Of course, Diamond never claims that 6.54 would not be just as nonsensical as all the other paragraphs. However, as Hacker points out, she still refers to it (and the Preface) as part of the “frame” of Wittgenstein’s work (Hacker 2000: 363-7) and it is hard to deny that she attaches, as we have seen, great significance to 6.54 over the other paragraphs to the extent that it is from this paragraph that she largely derives precisely the meaningful way, the (right) *method* of reading the *Tractatus*. This very gesture, at least in a certain sense, seems to contradict her claim that the book as a whole is sheer nonsense.

An even more serious charge that can be levelled, on the basis of Hacker’s criticism, against Diamond is that if everything, at least enclosed by the frame, is utter nonsense, then perhaps any other sentences which are nonsensical would do in order to arrive at Diamond’s conclusion, which is, as we may recall, how to allow ourselves, emerging from nonsense, “to find the possibility of meaning” in ourselves. Why is Tractarian nonsense any better (or worse) than any other? Taken Hacker’s charge this way, his argument is a version of that one which I have heard from my students more than once when I tried to explain what might be said positively concerning Wittgenstein’s ethical (and aesthetic) message: whatever the content of that message is, does it *follow* from the ‘great amount of logic’ found in the *Tractatus*? Can we just throw away the ‘logic’ in the *Tractatus*? Is it not exactly this what Diamond is doing? Can we not just throw away the ladder *before* we started climbing up on it? Why to climb at all?

Moreover, as Hacker points out criticising Diamond, the carefully wrought design of the *Tractatus*, which Meredith Williams calls “architectonic” (Williams 2004: 24), the rigour and the systematic treatment of the topics, going from ontology to representing with thought, then to the propositional sign, then to the relationship of thought and sentence to facts, then to the logical relations between propositions – just to mention a few “themes” within the frame – do not show that for Wittgenstein any kind of nonsense one utters would have been able to do the job Diamond attributes to the text of the *Tractatus*. Further, the ‘explanatory’ paragraphs under the six main theses are all arranged according to the relative importance and illuminating power they have with respect to these main theses (after the seventh, the last one, there is of course ‘nothing’, just silence), and Wittgenstein uses a highly complex but very significant digital numbering to show their respective degree of relevance. This does not indicate, either, that for Wittgenstein all that falls within the frame would not make – at least in a certain sense – *sense* (cf. Hacker 2000: 353-5). Why to bother with construction, numbering, and all, once the *Tractatus* is utter nonsense anyway? So, although Diamond insists that the *Tractatus* is nonsense, she still has to, willy-nilly, get involved with a *type* of nonsense – call it for a moment **‘**the nonsense *about* logic’ – because she should substantiate why it is the kind of nonsense found enclosed by the “frame” that may trigger finding “the possibility of meaning” in myself, or why Wittgenstein chose *this* (type of) nonsense to evoke it. So is this nonsense special, and would any other kind of nonsense produce the same effect?

What Hacker calls “internal” evidence to prove that Diamond (and Conant, and Peter Winch, and other “resolute” readers) are wrong is far from being exhausted by the above sketch, and an even longer part of Hacker’s paper puts several pieces of ‘external’ evidence together (from Wittgenstein’s lectures, discussions with friends, his type- and manuscripts, so also from the *Nachlass*, etc., cf. Hacker 2000: 372-82) to bring his positive thesis home, the gist of which is that, after reading the *Tractatus*, “one is [still] left holding on to some ineffable truths about reality, after one has thrown away the ladder” (357). Or, as Meredith Williams formulates it: “though meaningless, these philosophical propositions [in the *Tractatus*] are illuminating in that they lead us to a proper understanding of the conditions of meaningfulness” (Williams 2004: 7-8). This takes us to Williams’ reading of Diamond, which is not as negative as Hacker’s is, yet critical enough.

Meredith Williams’s objections to Diamond’s reading (the ‘standard view’)

One of Williams’s main points starts from the seemingly trivial but, from Diamond’s point of view, crucial fact that although of course the *Tractatus* is not bed-time reading, i.e. the understanding of the work has always been considered to be notoriously difficult, its sentences do not *strike* the reader as nonsense. We find sentences like “The world is all that is the case” (*TLP* 1), “The world divides into facts” (1.2), “Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death” (6.4311). The famous sentences I have randomly selected are not like – as Williams’s example goes – the nonsense: “what those view Paradise 5 between of”, yet Diamond does insist that they *are* on the same level as the previous syntactic gibberish. Diamond is of course aware of this problem, so she has to say that *seemingly*, *apparently*, the Tractarian sentences do make sense (Williams 2004: 13-21) but Wittgenstein precisely wanted to teach us to see, at least in the end, his sentences in the *Tractatus* as syntactic gibberish and thus to cure us from taking them to be meaningful. But once *seemingly* is introduced, Diamond has to introduce some criterion to distinguish *seeming* nonsense from *obvious* nonsense and thus, Williams points out, we are no better off than standard interpreters like Anscombe or Hacker, because the paradox Wittgenstein introduced into his work by calling his own sentences nonsense is only “relocated”, shifted, but “not eliminated” (Williams 2004: 20). Thus, Diamond reproduces the same paradox which led the “standard” interpreters to the saying-showing distinction, and the standard readers at least start out from, and rely on, the picture-theory of meaning as put forward by the *Tractatus* itself to distinguish between nonsense and sense (Williams 2004: 18), while Diamond fails to supply any theory of meaning in order to buttress her “seemingly-sense–but-in-fact-utter-nonsense” distinction. Williams’s main claim is that one cannot spare the trouble of working out a theory of meaning when approaching the *Tractatus.*[[57]](#footnote-57) Yet Williams also notices that if there is a criterion of meaningfulness for Diamond, then it lies – as it was briefly mentioned above – in our ability to *give* meaning to our words; as Wittgenstein himself puts it in the *Tractatus*:

Frege says that any legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense [Sinn]. And I say that any possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and, if it has no sense, that can only be because we have failed to give a meaning [Bedeutung][[58]](#footnote-58) to some of its constituents.

(Even if we think we have done so.) [emphasis original] (*TLP* 5.4733)

Diamond – herself referring to the above paragraph – builds her “austere” (“resolute”, “non-chickening out”) reading of the *Tractatus* on the thesis that sentences are not meaningful “in themselves”: it is we, speakers and interpreters, who assign meaning to utterances (*EIM* 151). Hence the significance of her insight in an endnote that “a proposition’s being an elucidation is a matter of context of use, not of the content” (*EIM* 172). So, for Diamond – and, as she interprets Wittgenstein, for Wittgenstein – neither the “general form” of propositions [die allgemeine Form des Satzes] (“This is how things are”, *TLP* 4.5), nor the logical form [logische Form] of propositions that propositions have “in common with reality in order to be able to represent it [i.e.: to represent reality]” (*TLP* 4.12) will guarantee that a proposition (sentence) will be meaningful. Logical form, which can be given in a most general way, is a necessary but not sufficient condition of making sense; logical form only provides the *possibility* of meaningfulness. Thus, as Williams points out, although deprecatingly, assigning meaning to sentences for Diamond becomes not a matter of the relationship between sentence and world but looking for the speaker’s intentions. For Diamond, Williams claims, “the aim is to grasp Wittgenstein’s true intentions” (Williams 2004: 22).

The ‘austere’ and the ‘standard’ (‘metaphysical’) readings compared

A possible reconstruction of the difference between the “standard” and the “austere” readings, as regards meaning, would be as follows: the standard reader (Anscombe, Hacker, Williams, etc.) bases his or her account of meaning on the picture-theory in the *Tractatus*, namely that thought and sentence picture reality. In order to see what the meaning of a sentence is, we have to look at the fact, the state-of-affairs the sentence depicts (cf. *TLP* 4.063, 4.1). And facts are in the world, having the same logical form as the sentences corresponding to them, so the question of being meaningful is an affair between language and reality. The resolute reader (Diamond, Conant, etc.), as far as I can see it, does not deny this but insists that for Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, language and reality will take care of each other: until we move on the level of facts, nothing may go wrong; even if someone described a state-of-affairs that does not exist, she still described a fact, although a negative fact (cf. *TLP* 2.06).

Problems arise with *non*-sense. For the resolute reader the declaration that the very sentences of the *Tractatus* (the sentences of the meta-language with which Wittgenstein gives an account of the relationships between language, world, and self) are nonsense must warn us that the problem of meaning (in the sense of *sense*) is decided in us, human beings who assign or do not assign meanings to their words and sentences. Wittgenstein, with his blessing or curse: ‘dear Reader, what I say here is nonsense’ purposefully wants to move us out of (cure us from) an attitude, this attitude being that we think we may justify the talk that ‘theoretically’ and ‘generally’ ‘discusses’ the relationships between world, language and speaker and we often call ‘philosophical’. We think we can establish ‘theses’ concerning these relationships, we treat the sentences about these relationships as if they were depicting (describing) facts, states of affairs. We may speak meaningfully about facts of the world but we cannot speak about relationships *between* fact, language, and self (language-user) because these are relationships which are not facts, so they lie outside of the world, since the world is the “totality of *facts*” (*TLP* 1.1, my emphasis). Factual language, tied to the world through logical form, cannot get between itself and the world, so we resort to another language to ‘describe’ this relationship (and such language is the language of philosophy, including the language of the *Tractatus* itself) but it will by definition be nonsense precisely because it is *not* factual language, yet it may ‘masquerade’ as factual language and hence it is deceptive because it gives us the impression that we have described facts. A possible way, for the resolute reader, to get out of this situation is to appeal to Wittgenstein’s intentions themselves because the only way out is to understand the *person* behind all this. This understanding, however, is not, it cannot be, linguistic, because there is no language, properly speaking, *to be understood at all*, because this language (i.e. the language of the *Tractatus* describing relationships) is doomed to be nonsense, and nonsense is nonsense. It is not hard to see that, for the resolute reader, at least *some* version of the use-theory of meaning, made famous later on the pages of *Philosophical Investigations*, is already there in the *Tractatus*, if in no other form than as a promise. No wonder that Diamond, Conant and others emphasise that there are not ‘two’ (or even ‘three’) ‘Wittgensteins’ but there is a strong continuity as regards the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*.

Two ‘I’-s

I also – ‘resolutely’ – think there is a continuity. What Wittgenstein says about meaning in the *Investigations* cannot of course be ‘exhausted’ by the “use-theory” but this is for another study. Let us rather turn to our readers, standard and resolute again. Both perceive, of course, the limit to thought and language Wittgenstein promises to talk about as early as the Preface of the *Tractatus* but they react to it quite differently because of their respective stances to how they reconstruct the way Wittgenstein accounts for meaning in the *Tractatus*. The standard reader thinks the limit is brought about by language itself; the realm of meaningfulness is very much limited, so the standard reader may conclude Wittgenstein thought that ‘real’ truth is ineffable, it can only be shown, and the limit may liberate me for some action other than speech: I should rather ‘act truth out’ by, for example, going to Lower Austria to become a village school-teacher, as Wittgenstein did after the publication of the *Tractatus*. Of course, such a gesture will and must be an entirely personal matter, so it is more than likely that my vocation is different but whatever it is, I will not be able to put it into words, just *do it* at best. The resolute reader, in turn, will identify *Wittgenstein* himself as the source of drawing the limit, and will argue that there is deep wisdom behind his gesture because he did not bring us into the narrow cage of meaningfulness in vain: through my limits I may experience the conditions of my meaning *anything* and see that if I can be meaningful anywhere at all, it will not be in the language of philosophy, because that is where we are most likely to produce gibberish. Thus, the *Tractatus* cures us of the philosophical superstition that through (philosophical) reflection we might formulate some general ‘truths’ about reality, language, and ourselves. It is noteworthy that, put in the above way, neither reading rules out the possibility that after I have gone through the *Tractatus*, I react to the world, language, myself and the Other rather with a changed *attitude*, a transformed outlook and overall disposition and conduct,rather than a changed opinion or body of thought. This might imply that philosophy is not, and has never been in a privileged (elite, divinely, or otherwise ‘chosen’) position to talk about the human predicament. For me, this is about the Wittgensteinian urge that we should exchange our basically epistemological, ‘knowing’ attitude to the world, language, ourselves, and the Other for an ethical and aesthetic one.

“My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me…”: the great merit of Cora Diamond’s reading, as far as I can see it, is to have discovered *perspective* in the *Tractatus*. It is not that previous interpreters have not seen, and have not attached importance to the appearance of “I” and “me” and “my” on the pages of the *Tractatus*, especially from paragraph 5.6 (“*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world”, emphasis original) to paragraph 5.641, allowing us to talk about the “I” as metaphysical subject. Yet no one, to the best of my knowledge, attached the *kind* of importance Diamond does to the appearance of the I (“my”, “me”) in 6.54, i.e. to the ‘elucidations-passage’, claiming that there it is Wittgenstein as implied author who speaks, so “my” and “me” marks the appearance of the *personal.*

This I take to be of utmost importance because I think there are two ’I’-s in the *Tractatus*: the metaphysical subject and the personal implied author. It is also true that, as noted by several commentators, but brought out most dramatically and powerfully by Eli Friedlander, the text starts on a highly impersonal note, imitating the very voice of metaphysics (Friedlander 2001: 21-2). When we read “The world is all that is the case” (*TLP* 1), it is as if the World itself was ‘emanating’ something of its ‘metaphysical spirit’.

So the arch of the *Tractatus* is from the maximally impersonal to the maximally personal, as if, at the end one should realise that the two coincide at least on the level of the ‘metaphysical subject’, i.e. the ‘metaphysical I’: “The world is *my* world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of *language* (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of *my* world.” (5.62, emphasis original). But how about Diamond’s ‘personal I’, who is to be understood, instead of the text of the *Tractatus*? I think in 5.62 Diamond’s ‘implied author-I’ is the one who has a language only *he/*(*she*)understands, who is an ‘I’ with a kind of ‘private language’. I think the ‘implied author-I’ has access to the understanding of the world as a “limited whole”[[59]](#footnote-59) (6.45) through the ‘metaphysical I’. But, as Wittgenstein is very much aware of it, there is a third ‘I’, *me*, the reader of his book, who makes his (or her) presence in the very first paragraph of the Preface: it is me, the (implied) *reader* to whom, as Wittgenstein identifies his aim, the *Tractatus* should give pleasure: “Its [the book’s] purpose would be achieved if it gave pleasure to one person who read and understood it” (*TLP* page3). Now for the implied reader the implied author *must* speak gibberish, unless, as the very first sentence of the Preface says, he (she) “has” him-or herself “already had the thoughts that are expressed in it” [i.e. in the *Tractatus*]” (*TLP* page 3). This amounts to saying, in my reading, that Wittgenstein cannot expect any of his readers to understand *him*, the implied author because who could guarantee that the words he, the implied author uses on the pages of the *Tractatus*, mean the same (or at least something similar) to what they mean to the implied reader? Or, if the implied reader does understand the implied author, the reader will precisely see that the author is talking nonsense. In this respect, Wittgenstein as the implied *author* stands in the same relationship to the “metaphysical subject” as *I*-as-implied-*reader* stand to the “metaphysical subject”: I can perhaps understand the implied author if he could persuade me in his book to become a metaphysical subject myself. But of course the pre-requisite of the persuasion is that I understand the sentences on the pages of the *Tractatus*, but this is precisely what cannot be guaranteed: the language of the *Tractatus* is just as much a means to understand the author as much as it is an obstacle to do so. I do not think that this would be much more than acknowledging something about the general nature of language: whatever we say opens up a possible way of understanding, as it also blocks our chances up to understand anything. Sometimes we would like (as Russell and the logical positivists wished) to relieve language of its post (to exchange it, for example, for an unambiguous super-language of logic) but we have little else than language, while we know that what we say will only be but partial and especially linear: for example when ‘we bring up a topic’, we will necessarily focus on something but every focussing is also a narrowing down. We cannot say ‘everything at once’, either: we have to say what we wish to say out in successive words and sentences. By saying that we have ‘little else’ than language I mean that we might refer to, and try to find refuge in, feelings, intuitions, signs etc., when we see the impotency of language, yet all these are even more uncertain to be understood, as they are even more ambiguous than language.

To apply what I said above to the respective standard and resolute reader again, the standard reader will say that I understand who (or what) the metaphysical subject is not through explanation but rather through something having been shown to me: something other than linguistic has made itself manifest to me through which I may grasp some metaphysical and ineffable ‘truth’. The resolute reader will say that I simply do not understand the very words “metaphysical” and “subject”, they are utter nonsense, as it was especially gibberish to say, on my part, that the implied author or reader (the truly and most *personal*) may come to an understanding ‘*through*’ the “metaphysical subject”. How *through*? And how to ‘become’ such a ‘subject’? How could these be conceived at all? Yet if I – the resolute reader tells me – acknowledge that I have speculated about, and with, the help of gibberish, I may be cured of a *kind* of talk in philosophy, maybe even philosophy itself, if I had thought that *that* kind of talk *was* philosophy.

The Third and the First Persons: perspectives

Turning to a reading of my own, it would be too easy to say that there are as many ‘*Tractatus*es’ as there are readers (as some literary critics like to say that. e.g., there are ‘as many *Hamlets* as there are readers’ which, I think, is also only true with serious qualifications). Wittgenstein is an exceptional thinker for several reasons, one being, as it has often been observed, that with the rhetorical organisation of his texts he opens an enormous space up for the reader: he allows for an unusually large amount of interpretative ‘leeway’. Yet just to say at this point that ‘everyone has their *Tractatus*’ would not only be too easy but also misleading from the point of view of the appreciation of the book because in my understanding the *Tractatus* on its pages already dramatizes, stages and enacts, and even re-enacts the two ‘rival’ readings: the standard and the resolute. It does, as Cora Diamond has ingeniously noticed this, through the introduction of *perspective*. Yet what I think she does not acknowledge is that the Third Person perspective is just as important in the *Tractatus* as the First Person one. Hacker and the other standard readers, in turn, do not acknowledge the significance of the First Person perspective. I think the two readings rather complement than compete with each other. This should be carefully qualified but can only be done after I have tried to explain what these two perspectives are.

As far as I can see it (playing the role of the implied reader-I, of course)[[60]](#footnote-60), Wittgenstein introduces *degrees* of the *personal* through shifting (changing) the perspectives between the Third and the First Persons on the pages of the *Tractatus*. For example, logical form is well within the range of the Third Person perspective; it is ‘over there’, belonging to language, a “Third Person” – it is not *me,* the First Person. Logical form belongs to pictures, propositions and the world: pictures, propositions and the world all share this form and this ensures their harmony, yet logical form is also very distant from me with respect to my understanding, since logical form itself cannot be represented in order to be comprehended; it can only be shown: it manifests itself (cf. *TLP* 2.172, 2.174, 4.121). Yet logical form is the “firmament” which ensures that there is a tie between sentences, world (facts) and selves. Thus, it measures out the extent to which we can be meaningful in the public domain: in the world of facts we can expect to say what we mean because for both speaker and listener there are facts to fall back on; facts, publicly observable, behind the “pictures” we depict to ourselves and to others serve as a ‘gold cover’ or ‘reserve’ to mean and there what we mean and what the sentence means coincide. If, however, we take the First Person Perspective and talk about inner feelings, values, etc., then we no longer talk about facts of the world. And then how can the Other know what I mean by a word, a sentence when I named an inner feeling of mine? And how can I know what the Other means by *beautiful* or *good* or *right*, when these words do not refer to “objects” or “facts” of the world but a world of values somehow “in” the Other? In a non-factual world we risk nonsense all the time.

From this, referential theory of meaning these doubts, this scepticism will follow. When it will be grammatical rules, including syntactic and semantic rules which ensure harmony between world, language, and selves, as in the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 2001), it will be no less – but no more! – than my expectations that the Other will follow the same, publicly established and acknowledged rules of uses in language and in action that provide the conditions of being meaningful. One of the discoveries of Wittgenstein after the *Tractatus*, I think, is that logical form occupies too narrow a field as our ‘credit’ to be meaningful but I also think that in the *Tractatus* logical form plays the same role as grammatical rules do in the *Investigations*: for language, they provide the conditions, and thus the limit of being meaningful. I am well aware that this needs qualification again: for example, the *Investigations*, as it is well-known, talks about ordinary, everyday language, e.g. § 120: “When I talk about language (word, sentences, etc.) I must speak the language of every day [die Sprache des Alltags]”, whereas in paragraph 5.5563 of the *Tractatus* – to which *Investigations* § 97 explicitly refers back – “everyday language” is *Umgangssprache* (literally something like: ‘the language one gets by with’, ‘the language we use in coming and going’). Are we to say that *die Sprache des Alltags* and *Umgangssprache* are the same (they are synonyms)? Thus, a detailed account should be given, and in the light of the *Investigations*, in what sense we should take what 5.5563 says: “In fact all propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order” and why this “utterly simple thing” is “the truth in its entirety”. In my reading the *Investigations* nowhere denies the existence of logical form in language and world. What it denies is that logical form would be the ‘essence’ of, the regulating force of, and the limiting power behind, meaning.

I would like to interpret logical form as our very *sense* of reality itself: when I encounter tables, chairs, people etc. around me, I have a sense – for Wittgenstein, a very concrete, so *not abstract* sense – even before any interpretation, that they *are* and they are identical with themselves, and that is, in my reading, what logical form consists in. Logical form goes ‘so much without saying’, its ‘understanding comes so much from itself’ (it is so *selbstverständlich*) that it belongs to the realm of the ineffable.

The First Person singular perspective emerges, in my (implied reader’s) reading, not so much out of nonsense, as Diamond thinks, but from the careful survey of the logical scaffolding of both language and world, which scaffolding is the same in both of them.[[61]](#footnote-61)The First Person singular, culminating in the 6.54: “anyone who understands me”, is the other end on the scale of the impersonal *versus* the personal: logical form is the most impersonal, it has most of the tone and pitch: ‘this is how things (persons) are in the world, they stand in this-and-this order, I am *here* and they are *over* *there*, *outside* of me’; here I measure my relative distance, my *stance* *from* the world (of course, this is measured out inand through language, too). That *me* of 6.54, at almost the very end of the *Tractatus*, pleading for understanding, as it were, marks – as Diamond aptly recognises – the most personal at the other end of the impersonal-personal scale. What Diamond does not wish to acknowledge is that the Third Person perspective is not only important in order to be overruled by the First Person one in this drama so as it may be discarded as nonsensical. Getting rid of the Third Person, the chief perspective of the standard reading would be like trying to get rid of my experience and sense of reality. Similarly, getting rid of the First Person, the main perspective of the resolute reading would be like trying to get rid of the sense of myself. Thus, I think it is very significant that the *me* (*I*) of 6.54 is after the experience of having ‘been’, having ‘gone through the phase of being the metaphysical subject’, which metaphysical subject consists in the realisation that it is not *in* the world but the limit of the world (*TLP* 5.632), thus also marking the limits of language (*TLP* 5.6). Yet the metaphysical subject is still impersonal, it is still conceived of in the Third Person perspective: it may be one with the world, but has not been adopted by the intimate *I*, i.e. by the one who is *intimately me*, who is whom I believe, or would like to be “truly” me, who is far from being a ‘general subject’ but who is *uniquely* who *I* am as nobody-else-*but*-me[[62]](#footnote-62) and would like to talk nonsense (perhaps is even liberated to talk nonsense) only this *I* understands, or only a few (or one) who have (has) had the same or similar thoughts to the thoughts of this *I*.

Personal and impersonal perspectives: an example from Camus’ The Plague

To illustrate how the First Person *personal* perspective emerges from the Third Person *impersonal one*, i.e. how in my reading the *I* of 6.54 emerges from logic, let me draw a parallel between the technique of presentation in the *Tractatus* and the special perspectival narrative technique of (of course, the implied author) Albert Camus in his novel, *The Plague*. Through this example I hope to show how the ‘indifferent’ perspective of the Third Person may give rise to the ‘personal-*I*’–perspective, where the – implied, but clearly indicated – *I* has a genuinely *ethical* stance. I am inclined to say that in both Camus’s novel and in the *Tractatus*, the *I* *is* the ethical perspective itself.

After an introductory chapter (Camus 1960: 5-8), in which the author of the novel tries to clarify his task, chapter 2 starts with the following sentence: “When leaving his surgery on the morning of 16 April, Dr. Bernard Rieux felt something soft under his foot” (9). And since the novel’s central hero is Rieux, we of course often read sentences describing his activities, behaviour, what he said etc. For example: “ ‘People always talk’, Rieux replied. “ That’s only to be expected’ “ (53); “When leaving the hospital two days after the gates were closed, Dr. Rieux met Cottard in the street” (68). “ For the first time Rieux found that he could give a name to the family likeness which for several months he had detected in the faces of the streets” (234). Yet this customary, detached, Third Person point of view is further complicated by regular shifts in perspective, for example sometimes still a Third Person Singular voice narrates, yet it can also be taken as a First Person Singular narrator talking about himself in the Third Person: “At this stage of the narrative, with Dr Bernard Rieux standing at the window, the narrator may, perhaps, be allowed to justify the doctor’s uncertainty and surprise” (34). At the same time, presumably the same voice sometimes takes a First Person Plural point of view, e.g. talking of Oran, the Arabic city where the plague is raging, and its inhabitants as belonging to an “us (we)”: “It is noteworthy that our townspeople very quickly desisted, even in public, from a habit one might have expected to form…” (61).

The big surprise comes in the first sentence of the last chapter (Part 5, Chapter 5): “This chronicle is drawing to an end, and this seems to be the moment for Bernard Rieux to confess that he is the narrator” (246). One of the reasons he mentions for resorting to this technique is that he wished to adopt “the tone of the impartial observer” to give a “true account” while keeping “within the limits that seemed desirable”. “For instance”, he tells us, “in a general way he [Rieux, who, let us not forget, has now also become a *kind* of *I-*narrator] has confined himself to describing only such things as he was enabled to see for himself, and refrained from attributing to his fellow-sufferers [in the plague] thoughts that, when all is said and done, they were not bound to have” (246). Thus, he has adopted this stance for ethical purposes, in order not to misrepresent anything. So he rather represented himself *amidst* the people he tried to save as a medical doctor: the implied author is the narrator, but also a character at the same time, *thus* being Third and First Person, simultaneously (this type of narrative technique comes closest to what Gérard Genette called “autodiegetic narration” (cf. Phelan and Rabinowitz 2008: 546). He never utters the personal pronoun ‘I’: even on the remaining seven odd pages of the novel, he will refer to himself as Dr Rieux, i.e. from the Third Person Perspective. Still, in the confession at the beginning of chapter 5 in Part 5, this ‘I’ still makes its indirect appearance, as if one’s right to identify him- or herself as ‘I’ were to be granted when one has suffered with his people, and has done everything to save them. It is as if ‘Dr Rieux’, the ‘he’ were entitled to come to First Person self-identification after he has been willing to represent him- or herself *in* the world, impersonally, as a *part* of the world, as if he were ‘a fact’ (factor?) of it, too, among other fact(or)s. It is as if the ‘I’ was earning his right to call himself ‘I’, to talk in a *personal* voice precisely with telling a story about himself from the Third Person perspective while being a ‘Third Person’ himself. It is as if he were earning his right to be ‘I’ with the impartial and truthful narrative and the Third Person Perspective *itself*. It is as if the Third Person perspective were a necessary condition (perhaps even in the logical sense of ‘necessity’) to find the stance of the personal *I*, which coincides with the genuine ethical perspective.

I perceive a similar gesture in the *Tractatus*: the personal ‘I’ may come when the ‘implied author’ has given a truthful picture of the world (as “he has found it” cf. *TLP* 5.61)[[63]](#footnote-63), has represented himself as a Third Person, but rather as an ‘it’ than a ‘he or she’: as an “it” (a kind of ‘object’) who is part of the world.[[64]](#footnote-64) And this had to be done from a Third Person Perspective; he has, so to speak, ‘passed unnoticed’ as part of the world (he did not ‘stick out’) all through this process, and *then* his voice, as it were, may take a turn, and go from the *impersonal* ‘throat and mouth’ of an ‘it’, into the ‘throat and mouth’ of the *personal* ‘I’. But the Third Person impersonal Perspective is absolutely necessary for this process, because thatwill eject, as a springboard, as it were, the ‘it’ into the ‘I’.

Thus, having taken my cue from *The Plague,* I wish to conclude that one of the most ingenious features of the *Tractatus* is Wittgenstein’s ability to see a strong connection between the utmost impersonality, the utmost Third Person perspective of logical form on the one hand, and the utmost personal in the ‘I’, the utmost First Person perspective, on the other. The important thing to see is that The Third Person is indispensable for finding the First Person: they are interrelated with the force of logical necessity. It is equally significant that going ‘form ‘he-she-it’ to *I*’ is a *process* that cannot be evaded or dodged: it is only working one’s way through the Third Perspective, and precisely *while* working one’s way through it that one may find his voice as ‘I’, the genuinely ethical stance of one’s own, which can be nobody else’s but *that* person’s, and thus *is* the ethical stance itself.

The connection between the Third and the First Person perspectives, I would further like to claim, is established in the *Tractatus* through the force of the word carrying the force of logical necessity: the word *must*.

Must (Muß)

When discussing pictorial form – and, as we will shortly see it, what Wittgenstein says about pictorial form will turn out to be true of, and applicable to, logical form, too – he makes frequent use of the modal auxiliary *must*: “There must be something identical [muß etwas identisch sein] in a picture and what it depicts, to enable the one to be a picture of the other at all” (2.161). What a picture must [muß] have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it – correctly or incorrectly – in the way it does, is its pictorial form” (2.17). “What any picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it – correctly or incorrectly – in any way at all, is logical form, i.e. the form of reality” (2.18). The use of *must* is not accidental: it expresses the acknowledgement that our only way to approach logical form is to take the indirect road, to infer to it, since, as it has already been pointed out, logical from cannot directly be represented: it shows itself but it cannot be put into words, it cannot be ‘known with reason’, it cannot be interpreted and analysed; it shows itself but it cannot be given a shape or form in language. As 4.12. declares:

Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must [muß] have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – logical form.

In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside of logic, that is to say outside the world.

“What expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by means of language” (4.121, emphasis original), yet there *must*, with the force of *logical necessity*, be logical form, otherwise we would not be able to represent at all.

However, *must* does not only re-appear in the most famous, 7th paragraph of the *Tractatus*: “What we cannot speak about we must [muß] pass over in silence” but also when Wittgenstein says something positive about ethics in 6.422:

When an ethical law of the form, ‘Thou shalt…’ [Du sollst…] is laid down, one’s first thought is, ‘And what if I do not do it?’ It is clear, however, that ethics has nothing to do with punishment and reward in the usual sense of the terms. So our question about the consequences of an action must [muß] be unimportant. – At least those consequences should not be events. For there must [muß] be something right about the question posed. There must [muß] indeed be some kind of ethical reward and ethical punishment, but they must [muß] reside in the action itself.

(And it is also clear that the reward must [muß] be something pleasant and the punishment something unpleasant).

I take the significance of the above passages to be that ethical laws “traditionally” put (‘Thou shalt (not)….’ or ‘You should (not)…’. or even ‘You must (not)…’) lack precisely the force of necessity, that of *logical* necessity when we have no other alternative. Wittgenstein is looking for a stance where there is only one thing to do and that is necessarily the *right* way, in a sort of “absolute” sense, as he puts it later in his *Lecture on Ethics* (Wittgenstein 1993: 38-40). However, this ‘only one right thing to do’ will – in my reading – be utterly and thoroughly, i.e. in the absolute sense *personal*: it will apply only to the absolutely *personal* *I*, the most personal First Person Perspective I have found through, and in, the Third Person Perspective. The content of *my* ethical law (‘my’ in the sense that it drives me, and only me, but I *must* live up to it) is not even, properly speaking, ‘known’ to myself, as it cannot be put into words: it can only make itself manifest in my life (of course, there is no guarantee that it does). Yet its force is the force of *logical* necessity, it compels me with the force with which I concluded: ‘there *must* be logical form, though it cannot be put into words, it shows itself, it makes itself manifest’. The *must* of the most impersonal Third Person Perspective and the *must* of the most personal First Person Perspective thus coincide: I think *this* is the ethical stance from which the world *and* my life can, or could, and simultaneously, be seen in the *absolutely* right way, i.e. without any possibility of the ‘wrong’.

Why all this is important for *Macbeth* is because, I find, the play – just like *Hamlet, Othello* and *King Lear* – is a grandiose representation – among other things – of the consciousnesses (the minds) of its protagonist. Macbeth starts out with a Third Person perspective: he has a well-defined, fixed position in the world as the number one soldier (‘killing-machine’) of Scotland. He is re-positioned by the Weïrd Sisters and Lady Macbeth. He gets to know his “I”, his self through treating another human being (Duncan, his King) as an *it*, as a Third Person on the utmost level of indifference in order to be able to kill him. He is no longer killing ‘dummies’ in the battlefield; he has murdered someone with whom he is in a personal, intimate relationship (as he is also with his comrade-in-arms, Banquo). The horrors, the nightmares he finds in himself as his First Person will be in proportion with his ability to identify with the Third Person he murdered in Duncan, Banquo and more and more people. In a miniature – as we will see below – even the famous dagger-monologue (“Is this a dagger which I see before me?” (2.1.33)) contains, as a germ, the shift from the Third to the First Person perspective: it is in relation to the “dagger before him” that the “me”, the ‘I’ is born. The mind starts to ‘work’ and we may look into it: we get initiated (through Macbeth’ words, of course), into the consciousness operating within the ‘head’ of the ‘I’. More will unfold on this below.

Philosophical Investigations

Over the 1930s Wittgenstein realised that what he presented in the *Tractatus* was not wrong but only *one* possible way of looking at language. The *Investigations***[[65]](#footnote-65)** investigates not only the relationship between language and world, but language as an activity, as social interaction, as a personal relationship.

Semanticists usually mention three things about the *Investigations*: 1. that meaning is *use*; 2. that language is seen as consisting of an infinite number of *language-games* 3. that Wittgenstein thinks that no general theory of meaning is possible: the various games in language (seen as more or less independent ‘islands’, sub-systems within the larger system of language) follow rules of their own (more precisely: *speakers* participating in the various games follow the rules of the particular game in question), so no over-arching rules, applicable to ‘language as such’ is possible (as nothing can be given an over-arching definition: sooner or later exceptions will pop up and either the definition which would satisfy potentially *all* cases will be too general and, thus, meaningless, empty, or counter-examples will be artificially suppressed).

These three ‘theses’ are not entirely incorrect yet only with important qualifications. We need qualification concerning the *Investigations* because it *is* a very peculiar philosophical work: it does not contain any ‘doctrines’ and no complete ‘arguments’ with a definitive ‘conclusion’; it is a series of ideas, reflections and even confessions (many about our philosophical failures) in the form of numbered paragraphs (§). There are at least four ‘speaking voices’ discernible on the pages of the *Investigations*: the logician; the one who only uses his ‘natural common sense’: the ‘man-in-the street’; the ‘behaviourist’; and ‘the mentalist’, who thinks that meaning is a thought/concept in the head. The *Investigations* does not finally decide about any of the positions: it is an experimental book, which is especially interested in why a certain position is sometimes so vehemently defended by somebody: why a picture sometimes ‘holds us captive’. The *Investigations* is an invitation to thinking: it contains questions Wittgenstein was preoccupied with all through his life but it is the *method* of approaching and dealing with a problem which is interesting; the book does not so much contain the results but the *process* of thinking and one can learn a great deal from it in that respect, no matter what one wishes to investigate. Therefore to ‘reconstruct’ doctrines from the *Investigations* is, I think, a loss rather than a gain; if the ‘curves’ (the digressions, the desire to hear a plurality of sometimes conflicting voices all the time) are ‘straightened’ out, and attributed solely to Wittgenstein’s peculiar ‘style’, then the spirit of the book will be damaged. Very crudely put: *Philosophical Investigations* is not for learning ‘theses’ but for inspiration. Therefore, it is very difficult to ‘teach it’; the tone, the attitude is very close to Wittgenstein’s ‘style’ as a teacher in Cambridge and lots of members of his audience (including G. E. Moore) complained that it was very hard to see what Wittgenstein was ‘driving at’, what he wished to get across. Nevertheless, below I have to present some of the ideas of the *Investigations* in a rather dogmatic fashion; its *method* will rather be utilized in the textual analysis of *Macbeth.*

Meaning and use

Quite precisely Wittgenstein says in §43: “For a *large* number of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word ‘meaning’ it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (emphasis original). Meaning is, for instance, not use when meaning is in the ‘foretell, portend’ sense: e.g. *Dark clouds mean rain.* Further qualifications occur in *PI*, where Wittgenstein shows that meaning and use do not always coincide.

* *use* might be taken in a broader sense than *meaning*: if we use the word ‘use’ in a broad sense, then it will include e.g. how frequently an individual or a group of people use an expression, e.g. a person might frequently use in Hungarian the exclamation ‘Nocsak!’ (roughly: ‘What the heck!’) but that is not part of the meaning of the expression.
* *meaning* might be taken in a broader sense than *use*: the *intention* of the speaker, various *private* (pleasant or unpleasant, etc.) *associations* of the speaker with a linguistic expression (often called ‘connotation’), and the *effect* the linguistic expression makes on the hearer (called perlocutionary act in speech-act theory) may be included in the description of the meaning of an expression. Here one wishes to make a distinction between semantics and pragmatics, claiming that intention (the illocutionary act in speech-act theory) and the perlocutionary act are already part of pragmatics. Perlocution is especially difficult to grasp: suppose I repeatedly tell somebody: ‘Kill your boss!’. Even if he, each time he hears this utterance, regularly stands and gapes at me, this does not mean that the meaning of my utterance was ‘Stand there and gape!’.

The criterion is how *general* the description of the meaning of the expression is supposed to be: the more I take the *particular*  situation and the context into consideration (the more I ‘tie’ the expression to the actual, concrete circumstances), the more I will take ‘pragmatic’ (actual, tangible contextual) factors into consideration. The more I wish to describe how large groups of people use the expression, the more I will describe ‘general use’ and the closer I will get to semantics. ‘Use’ may include even idiosyncratic uses (e.g. that for a while I choose to use the word ‘table’ for the object *chair*) but nobody wishes to include that into the description of linguistic meaning (in a dictionary, for instance). Yet the idiosyncratic uses of expressions gain great importance in theories of metaphor: a so-called ‘poetic’ metaphor (e.g. “The smokes are briar’ – T. S. Eliot, i.e. ‘smoke is a rose with long, thorny stems’) should remain comprehensible for at least *some* people (though for many it may remain nonsense), yet it is clearly a deviation from normal uses, from general rules governing the uses of expressions in language. (Because of the idiosyncrasies, some semanticists exclude metaphor from the description of meaning proper).

In the *Investigations* at certain places Wittgenstein insists that a sign becomes meaningful not through being associated with an object (either with the reference, the ‘real object’ of the expression in the external world, or with a mental object, a ‘concept’ in the mind) but through having a *rule-governed use.* Linguistic expressions should be thought of as we think of tools in a tool-box: we apply what seems to us to be the best for our purposes but there will be rules, shared by a community prescribing which expression is the most suitable for which purpose.

Language-games

The large system called language, at the same time, consists of larger and smaller sub-systems and certain expressions will be ‘at home’ more in one system than in another. A subsystem is called by Wittgenstein a language-game, such as: giving orders and obeying them; describing appearances of an object, giving its measurements; constructing an object from a description; reporting an event; making up a story; play-acting; making a joke, telling it; translating from one language into the other; lying to somebody, and many more (cf. § 23). (A language game is not what later philosophers such as Austin or Searle call a ‘speech-act’ but some *typical* speech-acts occur in various language-games.) In fact for Wittgenstein the potential number of language-games is infinite. Certain problems (misunderstandings) may occur when we use an expression in a language-game where it is not really ‘at home’. E. g. I may wonder how I can ever know whether the Other is *really* in pain – as I outlined that in the “Introduction” – when she says ‘I have pain’. But I have to realise that in this game *have* is not in the same use as in, e.g. *I have a house*, *I have a car.* *Have*, in the game about pain, is not present in the sense of ‘ownership’: I cannot sell pain, but I can sell my house to you, I cannot lend my pain, though I can lend my car to you. *Feelings* such as pain can be talked about in terms of *having* (in German or in English) but the riddle occurs when I keep thinking about the feeling of *pain* in terms of an *object* like *car* or *house*: then I may wish to *know* your pain and then I wonder how I can ever do that. We will never get to *know* the Other’s pain (we should *acknowledge* it, instead), as it is also odd to say about my own pain: ‘I know I am in pain’. I am *in* pain but this is a far ‘closer’ relationship than one which could be described as a ‘knowing’ relationship (pain is far closer to me: it *is* in a certain sense, *me*, identical with me). But if I am not aware of the language game in which I use *have* in this or that sense, all sorts of riddles (even philosophical ones) may occur, such as: ‘how can I know the Other’s pain?’ Is the word *pain* part of the ‘private language’ of the Other? (See the problem of ‘private language below: “(s)he certainly knows what the word *pain* refers to ‘inside’ of him- or herself, but I can never know it, so for a person the meaning of *pain* is forever a private meaning.” This position is contested by Wittgenstein).

Rule-following

Uses of signs, of linguistic expressions are like uses of everyday objects such as the use of tools, objects (see above, so: spoons, chairs, hammers, whatever). I learn the rules of language as a child together with learning all sorts of biological-physical and social activities, such as eating, walking, talking to people, behaving at a party, etc.; using language is part of my other social activities. Learning a language is not like learning history, physics, etc.. Learning a language is learning a *skill* like learning to ride a bike, drive a car, etc., things I cannot ‘forget’. In learning language, I do not learn ‘pieces of information’ but ‘ways in which I employ movements, postures, gestures, activities, etc.’ In learning my first language (mother-tongue), I also learn ‘the world’, ‘in practice’, so to speak. E. g. a child falls in the street, bruises her knee. Adults run up to her, help her to stand up, the child is crying, the adults ask: ‘Does it hurt?’ ‘Oh, my poor little girl!’ ‘Are you in pain?’ etc. The child learns the use of the words *hurts*, *pain* and others within this ‘dramatic’ situation, together with other modes and ways of reacting in such a situation. Speech, and thus the use of language is always a *part* of a larger system of rule-governed activities. For a time, the child may apply certain words strictly bound to certain situations, then, by analogy, she may extend the uses to other situations, and for a time, obviously, she might be right or wrong (she may call, e.g. all things covering the head a ‘cap’ instead of differentiating between hat, hood, kerchief, etc.). Learning a language for Wittgenstein does not presuppose anything ‘innate’; it is done on a trial-and-error basis and especially the scope (the ‘largeness’) of the meanings of expressions is far less certain and fixed for Wittgenstein than for e.g. semanticists working in a generative linguists’ framework. Meanings for Wittgenstein are constantly ‘in the making’, their boundaries are ‘negotiated’ by the users in constant practice.

Rules (the rules governing the uses of linguistic expressions but also the rules governing our other (social) activities, e.g. walking, eating, etc.) become so much ‘part of us’ that we follow the rules ‘blindly’; we seldom reflect on them. We just follow them. So if I am asked: ‘how do you know that the meaning of the Hungarian word *kés* is ‘knife’ in English?’ I can say: ‘well, I speak Hungarian (and English)’, i.e. I know the rules not only I but also others follow, when using the words *kés* and *knife* in Hungarian and in English, respectively. But the paradox is that if I can (and I do) obey a rule, I can also disobey it, I can deviate from it (cf. idiosyncratic metaphors, for example). The ‘certainty’ of meanings for Wittgenstein is based *solely* on my expectations that others will react in and to situations the way I and others *normally* do, that you will do what I would do, as part of our common, ordinary practice in handling affairs, doing things etc. We simply *trust* the others in all our activities, including the use of language. But I also trust the bus driver when I get on the bus, the passers-by in the street that they also know how to walk and direct themselves and will not stab me with a knife, etc. Meaning is based on the communal, more or less harmonious way people participate in activities: it is based on social norms, on tradition, on an inherited culture (so, in some sense, it is ‘historical’): on a shared *form of life*. Meaning is of course, in some sense, in the ‘head’: I have recorded lots of situations in which I and others have reacted this or that way to an utterance. But meaning is constructed not inside of me but *outside*: in our everyday practices, interactions, co-operations; meaning is, first and foremost, *external*, not internal. If I want to learn the meaning of an expression I should see how people *react* to an expression but this is still not a behaviouristic approach to meaning because there is *no one-to-one correspondence between a meaning and a person’s behaviour with respect to it*. (If somebody points to the wall, I may think he means ‘wall’ but she may well be pointing to its colour, the cracks of the wall, etc.) I might always be wrong in ‘reading’ his or her reactions and lots of reactions are possible to a particular meaning. Deviations may always occur: no one can guarantee that one will react the way I expect him or her to react. Understanding an expression means: I know how to go on with the expression, misunderstanding is the opposite, or going in another direction than the Other expects me to.

Wittgenstein against mentalism (conceptualism)

Wittgenstein, especially at the beginning of the *Investigations*, describes situations which imply that meaning is *not* identical with the *concept* in one’s head. Suppose, Wittgenstein says, I send someone shopping (§ 1), and I tell her: ‘Bring me five red apples’. Now when in the store she tells this sentence to the shop-keeper, what will happen? Will the shop-keeper open a dictionary ‘in his head’, go to the section called ‘fruit’ and from among pears, plums, apricots, etc. pick out *apple*? Then will he go to the section of numbers ‘in his head’ and, starting from 1, stop at 5? And will he, similarly, from a colour-table containing, besides red, yellow, blue, green, etc., put a ‘mental finger’ to ‘red’ and stop there? This is not likely because the above account misses an important question: *what tells* the ‘mental finger’ to stop at this or that particular colour (fruit, number) rather than at the other? If I say that the mental finger stops where it does because the shopkeeper knows the meaning of ‘apple’, ‘five’ and ‘red’, I have not explained anything because I want to know how and why the finger stopped *there* and not somewhere else. In other words, in the above account we still need to explain the *link* between hearing the word (sign) e.g. *red* and the mental image, the concept of red in the shopkeeper’s mind. The meaning is not the concept itself, it is the *link* (the ‘pointing finger’) *between* the word (sign) and the concept. Talking about meaning we often say: ‘The hearer hears a word and then associates this or that mental image/concept with the word.’ Wittgenstein asks: but what *tells* the hearer to associate this or that with the word rather than something else? The concept itself is not in any kind of ‘natural’ connection with the sign, e.g. there is no natural bond between the sign *red* and the ‘colour red’ in one’s mind (red can be called *rot, rouge, piros, vörös* etc.). Wittgenstein claims that meaning is not the concept: if I explain meaning with the concept, I am trying to explain meaning with itself, or, in other words: I have only pushed the problem of meaning further; now I have to explain how a concept comes about and how the connection, the link is established between concept and sign (word, linguistic expression, etc.). Wittgenstein answer is: look at the use of the sign in everyday life, that will *show* the sign’s (the linguistic expression’s) meaning. That this use gets ‘coded’, ‘recorded’ in the form of something we may even call a concept in the mind is another matter (it is like remembering anything else). But it is the dynamic and flexible rule, the rule-governed use (in fact the ‘us**ing**’ in innumerable possible situations) which gets coded, not an ‘entity’, a fixed (even ‘Platonic’) object.

‘Private-language’

Thinking that meaning is the ‘concept in the head’ may also lead to the position that since everybody’s concept (meaning) is in his or her head, and since that concept might be different with respect to everybody and there is no other way to ‘compare’ our respective concepts in our head than through the meanings themselves, all meanings are private. A good example could be the following. Somebody keeps a diary and whenever he has a certain feeling, e.g. the feeling of pain, he puts a certain sign, e.g. *S* into this diary. Nobody else knows what *S* stands for, so it is his private sign and thus, the meaning of *S* is private, referring here to the person’s pain. But Wittgenstein points out that while of course we can always use any sign for any purposes (so we can put, privately, all signs to the most idiosyncratic uses), our very ability to use a sign (any sign, including *S*) is *not* private: the person using sign *S* is able to use thousands and thousands of other signs and he has learnt this from his speaking-community; he used *S* by analogy, ‘on the basis’ of other signs, so his very ability to use any sign, even the most idiosyncratic one, remains, willy-nilly participating in a communal activity. So the *reference* of *S* may be idiosyncratic, it can remain a ‘secret’ (private) forever but the *use* of the sign (the ability to use a sign, whichever, at all) will remain a non-private, communal (shared) activity, a participation in a form of life. So, in this sense, there is no ‘private language’.

Is Philosophical Investigations itself philosophical?

The title of Wittgenstein’s book: *Philosophical* *Investigations* of course indicates that he, in one way or another, did subscribe to a mode of thinking he was willing to call ‘philosophical’, yet even as his, by now legendary attitude to his Cambridge professorship and to the whole tradition of philosophy, as well as to his teaching practice, indicate, ‘philosophical’ here means anything but a customary or canonical academic discipline. Rather, the adjective might be interpreted as an undertaking which raises doubts about its philosophical nature not only from the ‘outside’ but from the ‘inside’ as well.

A famous piece of criticism from the ‘outside’ is by Bertrand Russell, who was as much baf­fled and disappointed by the work of the “later” Wittgenstein as he admired and thought the early piece, the *Tractatus* to be extremely promising and challenging. Russell found *Philo­sophical Investigations* “completely unintelligible. Its positive doctrines” – Russell wrote –

seem to me trivial and its negative doctrines unfounded. I have not found in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* anything that seems to me interesting and I do not understand why a whole school finds important wisdom in its pages. (Russell 1972: 132)

Another very well-known philosopher of our century, Sir Karl Popper joins Russell in this unsympathetic assessment; my quotation comes from a discussion Bryan Magee initiated on Wittgenstein’s later philosophy between Popper, Geoffrey Warnock and Peter Strawson. Popper says:

Should you force me at gun-point to say what it is I disagree in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* I would have to say: ‘Oh – nothing...’. Indeed, I only disagree with the *enterprise*. I cannot disagree with anything he says, because there is nothing one can disagree with. But I confess that I am bored by it – bored to tears. [...] How can you disagree with things which are so vague and so trivial? I do think the possibility of disagreeing with what a writer writes is of decisive importance. One could regard it almost as a criterion of whether it’s worth reading. If a man writes only signs with which one cannot possibly quarrel, and to which one can only say, ‘Well-maybe-perhaps-well-maybe-maybe, maybe yes, maybe no’, then I should be inclined to say there isn’t much point in the enterprise of this kind. This is how I see the issue. (Magee 1971: 45)

As far as the ‘inside’ (internal) criticism of the *Investigations* is concerned, it is, indeed, a work in which it is the very possibility of philosophy which is constantly at stake, a piece which questions its own philosophical nature exactly by the philosophy it produces. One of the best-known cruces to bring this point home is the following:

The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. – The one that gives philosophy peace so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question. (*PI,* §133, empha­sis original).

Wittgenstein’s investigations are, of course, “philosophical” if by the adjective one means, first and foremost, intensive and original thinking, or an incessant and obsessive energy to return to certain questions, or, even further, the humbleness to start from scratch again and again: this is what I characterised as ‘metaphysical’ in the Introduction. They are also “philosophical” if one is willing to agree, as Cavell pointed out a long time ago (Cavell 1976: 70-72), that the *Investigations* fits well into the tradition of *confessional* philosophy. This is an insight which puts the later Wittgenstein alongside with the philosophical note-, essay-, diary-, and (sham)autobiography-writers, rather than with the system-builders: with Augustine rather than with Aquinas, with Pascal rather than with Descartes, with Montaigne rather than the Bacon of the *Novum Organum*, with Rousseau rather than with Leibnitz, with Emerson rather than with Kant, and with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche rather than with Hegel or Marx. It is, of course, another question how one conceives of the relationship between the “confessional” and the “systematic”, especially from the “canonical” point of view—yet that is not my main concern here. Karl Popper is certainly right in claiming that the *Investigations* is not ‘philosophy’ in the sense that it would contain doctrines, final conclusions or over-arching solutions: its thought-paths invite us to a kind of communal thinking and an urge for increasing the demand to clear up “muddles” of thinking for ourselves, while it declines a claim to a system, to a closed or even disciplined theory. The *Investigations* does as much for the remission and the deployment of a new way of looking at philosophical problems, at one another as human beings, at ourselves and at the world (these ‘looks’ heavily intertwined) as it does for the dismissal and the unemployment of a tradition in Western philosophy. Wittgenstein gives instances of ‘thinking demeanours’ and a reflective mien rather than a ‘cash-and-carry’ body of knowledge. In simpler terms: the later Wittgenstein may teach us *how* to think but he will not tell us *what* to think. Thus it is the peculiar nature or ‘status’ of the philosophy my study will call to its aid which prevents me from drawing a straightforward borderline between philosophy and literature and from relying on that borderline.

I will return to this problem several times, especially at the end of Chapter 6 and in Chapter 7. Now I turn to the interpretation of *Macbeth* in five “metaphysical blocks”: *source, space, time, the identity of objects*  and *self-identity.*

### Chapter 3 *Macbeth*: Source

Where is the problem?

There is nothing wrong with, and nothing special about, the sources of *Macbeth*. All critical editions, as well as handbooks, and so on, will dutifully tell us that the main source of the play is “Holinshed’ *Chronicle*”. To be more precise, Shakespeare used the story of Macbeth, who was King of Scotland between 1040 and 1057, as it is described in the second volume of *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland,* first edition: 1577, second: 1587.[[66]](#footnote-66) The three volume, monumental piece of work in two Folios was, of course, not only used by Shakespeare and Shakespeare did not only use it for *Macbeth*; we have evidence that e.g. Christopher Marlowe took the raw material of *Edward II* from Holinshed and Shakespeare consulted it for all his history plays and even for *King Lear* and *Cymbeline* (of course not exclusively)*.* The *Chronicle* was a very expensive publication, the price had to be around 3 pounds, which was then the whole daily income of a performance in the Globe on a successful day, with 2-3000 spectators. Besides Holinshed, there were four more authors and he was rather the ‘editor’, the ‘trademark’ for the great and very valuable undertaking, a real synthesis of previous Tudor histories, since the second, revised edition came out seven years after his death (cf. Dobson and Wells 2001: 204, also Clark and Mason 2015: 82-97; Braunmuller 2008 13-15). It is also mentioned that there are several other possible sources of various significance, some of the affecting the atmosphere of the play more than its story-line: George Buchanan’s *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* (1582), *De Origine, Moribus, et Rebus Gestis Scotorum* (1578) by John Leslie, Montaigne’s *Essays* in John Florio’s translation (1603), Pierre Le Loyer’s  *A Treatise of Spectres* (1605) and some others (Clark and Mason 87-94). This is only important here because – as it will be commented on also below – the more time has elapsed since the First Folio (1623), the more sources have been dug up, and Shakespeare is becoming a great scholar and especially a very quick reader who had the time – besides his numerous other theatrical duties – to go through ten or more bulky volumes for each play. Here, however, I do not wish to make the list longer and my main goal is not to point out similarities and differences between Shakespeare and Holinshed, the point of which usually is to tell whether Shakespeare was a conformist, even a boot-liker, trying to please the monarch-in-charge (James I or Elizabeth I), or precisely a subversive revolutionary, dangerously putting law and order to risk in Early Modern England. Rather, *via Macbeth*, I would like to give a kind of Wittgensteinian assessment of our attitudes to Shakespearean sources, which will – in the sense of the “Introduction” – be “metaphysical”, since it will deal with issues I find symptomatic in Shakespeare studies.

Baptism and prayer

In Kenneth Muir’s *The Sources of Shakespeare’s Plays* the chapter on the origins of *Macbeth* starts as follows:

It is reasonable to assume that Shakespeare chose the subject of *Macbeth* because James I was reputed to be descended from Banquo, and it is quite possible that Shakespeare had been informed of the King’s interest in Matthew Gwinn’s entertainment performed at Oxford on 27 August 1605, in which three sibyls prophesied to Banquo’s descendants *imperium sine fine,* an empire without end. (Muir 167)

Muir finds it possible that Shakespeare was also physically present in Oxford at the said time. The “evidence” for that is twofold: one—based on Henry Paul’s well-known *The Royal Play of Macbeth*—isthat William Davenant, who later notoriously claimed that his father was William Shakespeare, was baptised on 3 March, 1606. The other piece of “evidence” is a verbal echo of Samuel Daniel’s play, *Arcadia Reformed* (later known as *The Queenes* [sic!] *Arcadia*), found by Muir himself in *Macbeth* (167).

The christening of infant William Davenant in March, 1606 in Oxford hardly proves that Shakespeare was in town in the late August of the previous year. Even if Shakespeare was the father (i.e., one of the “sources”) of Davenant, and thus he wished to be present at the ceremony, the time of baptism—suggesting that Davenant may well have been born on the 1st of March—puts Shakespeare into Oxford (allowing the usual nine months for the pre-natal state) in the early June of 1605. True enough, it cannot be known whether William Davenant was the fruit of premature birth or not; how premature the birth was, and how the infant survived under Jacobean sanitary circumstances. The mere fact that Davenant was baptised in March, 1606, does not, logically speaking, necessarily disprove that Shakespeare was in Oxford in the late August of 1605 (although, strictly speaking, it does not the least prove it, either).

As for Daniel’s play, it can be documented to have been performed on the occasion of King James’s Oxford visit—although the King was in the University Library instead of watching it (cf. Muir 167). However, as Muir’s conjecture goes, Shakespeare “had read it, or seen it” (167). Yet even if Shakespeare remembered the lines of *Arcadia Reformed* when writing *Macbeth*, what if he—as Muir himself allows—had indeed *read* Daniel’s play (in London, for instance) rather than having *seen* and *heard* it in Oxford? Or should we imagine a Shakespeare, deeply moved by Daniel’s lines in Oxford, later putting something similar into Macbeth’s mouth? The lines Muir is referring to run as follows. Macbeth says to the Doctor, inquiring about the possibilities of curing Lady Macbeth: “Canst thou not […] with some sweet oblivious antidote / Cleanse the stuff’d bosom of that perilous stuff / Which weighs upon the heart?” (4.3.40-44)[[67]](#footnote-67). In Daniel’s play, a character called Daphne visits a quack-doctor, Alcon, and asks: “O what / Can Physicke doe to cure that hideous wound / My lusts haue giuen my Conscience? Which I see / […] that is it presents / Those only formes of terror that affright / My broken sleepes, that layes vpon my heart / This heauy loade that weighes it downe with griefe” (qtd. in Muir, *Sources* 167). Daphne speaks of insomnia, one of the major topics of *Macbeth* indeed, as well as about the power of medical art; yet, upon closer scrutiny, the “verbal echo” amounts, ultimately, to the words: “heart” and “weigh down,” and these expressions do not strike the reader as exceedingly unusual or particularly inspirational. Even the presence of the celebrated sibyls in Matthew Gwinn’s entertainment does not prove more—in A. R. Braunmuller’s words—than that “he [Gwinn] could read Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles*” (Braunmuller 5): although the Weïrd Sisters are not in Holinshed, that James is a descendant of Banquo is clearly there (14). Even further, one of the most charming moments of Muir’s reconstruction is when he remarks that “before the purposed departure [from Oxford] the King was at prayers till late into the night (form which Shakespeare may have got the idea of stressing Duncan’s holiness)” (Muir, *Sources* 169). Speculations of this kind have been with us for a long time: for example, Mark H. Lindell, in his 1903 edition of *Macbeth*, arguing that Shakespeare also used George Buchanan’s *Rerum Scoticarum historica* (1585)[[68]](#footnote-68), writes the following: “Shakespeare, in describing Macbeth’s mental torture, employs verbiage that sounds very much like a rough translation of Buchanan’s Latin; *one can almost fancy him* [i.e., Shakespeare] *reading it*” (qtd. in Muir, *Sources* 169, emphasis added).

Attitudes

The instances above indicate, it seems, some of the most typical attitudes to the sources of Shakespeare. If one wishes to perform, as I am proposing to now, a “Wittgensteinian reconstruction” of what a (Shakespearean) source might be, one must realise that it is already in line with Wittgenstein to conduct such an investigation not in general terms, arriving at some sort of ‘essence,’ but taking a concrete—although also a boundless, vast and vexed—example, i.e., the possible sources of Shakespeare, and, furthermore, one tiny segment of it: *some* of the sources of *Macbeth*. By “Wittgensteinian” I here mean *Philosophical Investigations*, rather than the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, taking advantage of the fact that one finds very little “theory” in the *Investigations*, as I pointed out in the previous chapter; one encounters several thinking-exercises and thought-experiments there, which shun from “definitions,” “exhaustive surveys,” or from distilling “essences” of various tangible phenomena. A succinct way of putting Wittgenstein’s method is to say, as he himself does in the second part of the *Investigations*: “Let the use *teach* you the meaning” (181)[[69]](#footnote-69). Or, as § 90 describes the investigator’s proper attitude:

We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena [die Erscheinungen *durchschauen*].[[70]](#footnote-70) Our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the ‘*possibilities*’ of phenomena [*Möglichkeiten* der Erscheinungen]. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kind of statement* [die *Art der Aussagen*] that we make about phenomena.

*Art der Aussagen* can also be translated as *the way*, the *know-how* of expressing ourselves. Thus, I will—in a non-exhaustive manner—look for the various uses to which we put the meanings of the expression “source of Shakespeare,” I will compare various modes of speech concerning Shakespearean sources, certain desires and attitudes concerning their inclusion and evaluation. Consequently, the “what” in the title of the essay will not be concerned with finding a “thing,” or a “monolithic and final meaning,” but I will try to understand what a Shakespearean source is by reminding ourselves of the special conditions, the smaller or larger contexts under which we still feel we are talking about Shakespearean sources, and when we get the impression that we have already left this territory. All in all, I will attempt to give some aspects of the “bourne” of the “country of Shakespearean source”—a country from which we shall hopefully return.

What is, in the first place, characteristic of Muir’s reconstruction as regards some of the sources of *Macbeth*, is the desire to *increase their number*: Holinshed is not enough, Shakespeare may very well have been acquainted also with Daniel, Gwinn, Buchanan, and several others. The bilingual English-Japanese website, “Bard of Avon: Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon”[[71]](#footnote-71) names 83 sources for 38 plays (I have included *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, but not *Edward III* into my count). Yet this seems to be the portrait of a well-read professor of literature rather than a playwright and poet, who was also an actor, a share-holder, a land-owner, money-lender, and the reader of the plays of others (a kind of “dramaturge”), and, even, some sort of a “stage-director” in his company. Generalisations, especially from a Wittgensteinian perspective, are, as I said, always dangerous, but for the sake of sharp characterisation, and not claiming that *everyone* was doing this, it might be stated that when writing about literature went from the literary critic, essayist, and poet also to the college professor of literature in the second half of the 19th century, *he* (unfortunately for a long time invariably *he*) started to create Shakespeare in his own image, the tendency being to increase the background readings of Shakespeare intensively. “Intensive” is here meant in the sense that college professors “split up,” further and further the readings of Shakespeare: they tracked down the “sources of sources,” claiming that Shakespeare read even those as well. The 20th century university professor, in turn, slowly abandoning the role of the traditional “philologist,” and especially with the advent of New Historicism in the 1980s, tended to work extensively: she wished to show, first and foremost, that Shakespeare was not “a universal, torching genius,” standing alone and above all ages, but he was, inevitably, a son of his times, bound by the fundamental presuppositions and power-structures of his milieu like anybody else. One of the consequences of this has been that newer and newer sources were dug up, not so much in terms of direct borrowing but in terms of influences, allusions, inspiration; the emphasis was on what became known as “intertextuality.” It did not matter whether Shakespeare actually sat down and read, from cover to cover, something he later on built into a play. What mattered was the kinship, some “family resemblance” (*PI,* §67) between some concepts, conceptions, characters, events and incidents in “real history,” and concepts, conceptions, characters, events and incidents included in some Shakespearean scenes; emphasis was on ideas in the Early Modern English (and *not* “the Renaissance”) “air” that the receptive mind of Shakespeare—no doubt with a vast, actor-trained memory, storing several thousands of lines written by himself and by others—developed into analogous situations on the stage. In this sense, my main source so far, Kenneth Muir’s book, is a mixture of the two approaches, but with heavy emphasis on the 19th century tradition.

The extreme end-point of the 19th century approach is a huge and select library, and Shakespeare the bookworm. To this picture often some speculation is added about his private books in an age when quality publications were relatively few and rather expensive (cf. e.g., McDonald 2001: 158-62). In turn, the extreme terminal point of the 20th century approach is ending up with the conclusion that Shakespeare’s ultimate source was the Early Modern English language, with all its dialects, and what it expressed in terms of ideas, including possible verbal exchanges he may have heard in inns and at the Stratford and London markets; or, for example, even the laughter that may have struck his ears at the gallows when Roderigo Lopez, charged with having tried to poison Queen Elizabeth I, was executed (cf. Greenblatt 2006: 265-75).

What is remarkable is our frequent dramatization of our relationship with Shakespearean sources: how seldom this is “empirical” and “cool-headed,” how often we get excited (which may be taken as a positive sign), how we tend to project our desires, our relationships with Shakespeare’s works themselves into their sources. As if we wanted him to have written more: we wish he had composed even those books from which he worked. As if we felt that even his casting an eye on his alleged or real sources gives these works more authority and credit, a higher rank than they may possess without Shakespeare having at least looked into them: if Shakespeare liked them, or at least fancied them to be sources, they must surely be at least worthy of note. Some less important works and authors have got preserved in the European literary heritage precisely because Shakespeare may have used them, as for example Anthony Mundy’s *Zelauto*: *the Fountain of Fame Erected in an Orchard of Amorous Adventures* (1580) as a possible source of *The Merchant of Venice* (cf. Drakakis 38-39). Would we otherwise ever even mention *Zelauto*?

Undoubtedly, it has never been suggested that the interpretation of a Shakespearean play would sufficiently be “exhausted” by giving an account of its sources, although the 19th century trust in “historical explanations” is clearly behind the overall source-hunt. From the 1970s, literary criticism had to realise, more than ever, that it is impossible to lay bare an “ultimate generic source”: when a “source” looms up for a moment, it presupposes an originary temporal structure, the “founding moment” turning out to be a moment always already constituted (cf. e.g., Gasché 342). What we might do, as Catherine Belsey reminds us in her *A Future for Criticism*, is paying careful attention to “the links we might find within and between writings themselves” instead of “furnishing a text with a final signified, and explanatory point of origin outside textuality” (Belsey 112). We may conclude that what we find is not sources constituting plays, but rather sources, in a row, which are always already constituted.

It is possible that, among other things, we worry so much about sources because the word “source” does not only mean “the place, the person or thing one gets this or that from”—as in expressions like “great floods have flown / from simple sources” (to quote Helena from *All’s Well That Ends Well* (2.1.139-40; Everett ed. 29), or, as Horatio says, offering an explanation for the war-preparations in Denmark, that the “source” of their “watch” is, ultimately, the one-time duel between old Hamlet and old Fortimbras.[[72]](#footnote-72) “Source” may also mean “the thing that *causes* another,” and this is the way for example Claudius uses the word when he lets Gertrude know that Polonius “hath found // The head and source of all your son’s [i.e. Hamlet’s] distemper” (2.2.55; Jenkins ed. 239), or when Timon, amidst the hailstorm of his curses upon Athens exclaims: “Plague all, / That your activity may defeat and quell [render impotent and destroy] / The source of all erection” (4.3.163-65; Hibbard ed. 116-17). Thus, the meanings of “source” share some family resemblance with the semantic content of “origin,” and, this way, “original,” and, therefore, “innovative,” maybe even “creative” and, furthermore, *creative genius*. At the end of this chapter, I will return to the genius of Shakespeare as source for two reasons. The first is triggered by a pun: the word “source” in Shakespearean texts often occurs together with the word “head,” as e.g., in Claudius’s words to Gertrude, or when Macbeth tells Malcolm and Donalbain that “The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood / Is stopp’d; the very source of it is stopp’d” (2.3.96-7). Here the word “head” of course also means “origin.” Yet in this context it seems to make sense to ask to what extent Shakespeare’s “head,” with the genius “in it” (where else?), is also a source. The second, more serious reason is that Jonathan Bate, in his popular book *The Genius of Shakespeare*, does not only raise the connection between genius and Shakespeare’s achievement, but gives a Wittgensteinian reconstruction of “what it is about the world of Shakespearean drama that has made it continue to live in so many different eras and cultures” (Bate x).

In the survey of some of the sources of *Macbeth* above we may also detect the attitude to make Shakespeare somehow present: in Oxford, watching a Daniel-play, or reading Scottish history in Latin. What is the desire behind this? To give authenticity and (mostly the Romantic sense of) authorship to the plays of his own? Or do we wish to see, in exact detail, the stages in which Shakespeare’s mind processed the “raw material” into something rather more than less different from them, turning mostly—though not invariably—narratives into drama? The main question here is why and how it *matters* to us that we detect a source for a Shakespearean piece. To put it crudely: are we better off, besides gathering (empirical) knowledge for its own sake, when we can document it that e.g., Shakespeare used Holinshed when he wrote *Macbeth*? And how does it matter to us when we might be able to prove, as several scholars have attempted it, that Thomas Middleton is also a “source” behind *Macbeth*? What are the actual consequences? That *Macbeth* is also printed in the 2016 page-long *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton*, monumental even without the reprinting of the “Scottish play”? The editors claim that “Middleton wrote [only] about eleven per cent of the adapted text” (Taylor and Lavagnino 1165) but should I, from now on, when I quote from what is called the “Hecate material” in, for example, Act IV Scene 1 of *Macbeth*, explicitly write in my paper that I am quoting Middleton rather than Shakespeare?

How sources may be relevant

I wish to provide an example when and how I think it matters that we know that Shakespeare (and perhaps Middleton) was working from a narrative source, for example from Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. The very fact, it seems to me, that the drama called *Macbeth* is worked into a play form a narrative, sets a conflict into motion in the text between a narrative and a dramatic attitude to time (this will be the subject matter of Chapter 5). It is not only, as it is well-known, that Shakespeare condensed the ten-year long reign of Holinshed’s Macbeth into a far more succinct, shorter, but never clearly structured period from the temporal point of view. The time-flow in the play also seems to picture the sequence of events in Macbeth’s mind recorded in his soliloquies, underscored by his desperate desire to “stop time” by “stopping consequences”: “If the assassination / Could trammel up the consequence and catch / With his surcease, success, that but this blow / Might be the be-all and end-all…” (1.7.2-5). From this speculation Macbeth arrives, at the end of the play, at the empty, never ending, senseless series of “Tomorrow, tomorrow, and tomorrow” (5.5.18), which, like the “Ewichkeitsuppe” in Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, seems to be a false kind of eternity. What is never given to Macbeth is precisely the relatively comfortable “Auslegung,” the “laying-out,” the “interpretative attitude” of narrative time, basically following the logic of cause-and-effect relationships Holinshed seems to have so much believed in to explain, for instance, the way a murderer’s mind works after the assassination. In Holinshed we read:

Thus might he seeme happie [sic!] to all men, hauing the loue both of the lords and commons; but yet to himselfe he seemed most vnhappie, as he that could not but still liue in continuall feare, least his wicked practice concerning the death of Maclolme Duffe should come to light and knowledge of the world. For so commeth it to pass, that such as are pricked in conscience for anie secret offense committed, haue euer an vnquiet mind.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Macbeth, in Duncan’s words, is always “so far before / That swiftest wing …. is slow / To overtake” (1.4.16-18) him; he—like an overworked academic today—has to do everything hastily, while he is looking for the infinitesimal “point” in time, a true and genuine “be- and end-all”, the moment of dramatic suspension, which violently desires to totalise every event into itself, and which might put an end, once and for all, to time itself, with the same gesture. If dramatic time is not the narrative of the plot, but the almost unbearable suspension of the flow of time, squeezing all events into a single moment, then one of the most genuine dramatic instances of this is when Macbeth can see the “air-drawn dagger” (3.4.61), suspended, as it were, in time and space, the moment when he must decide whether he goes into Duncan’s chamber and kills him, or not: “Is this a dagger, which I see before me…” (2.1.31-48). If “time for such a word,” for such a word as “death,” is seen not as agony but as a moment (the usual end of tragedy), and this moment has been missed, then only the “tomorrows” remain, the “petty pace from day to day,” a long way “to dusty death” on which a “shadow” “walks” and the tale, the narrative, the plot of drama, the story of the tragedy (“the soul of tragedy,” the *muthos* for Aristotle) signifies nothing (cf. 5.5.16-28). Macbeth is denied the alleged explanatory power of time in plots. In *Hamlet*, or in *Othello* it still seems to make sense to ask someone, at the end of the play, to tell the hero’s story; *King Lear* might be envisaged as a long agony of life and love. *Macbeth*, from the temporal point of view, might be envisaged as the tragedy of the tragic plot itself, no longer being able to interpret, to give meaning to the events that happened before.

This insight, through dramatic construction and staging, into the possible working of time in drama—if the account above sounds convincing at all—might be the sign of a dramatic genius working from narratives. I would like to see the technique of totalising all events that would create a plot into a single moment as one of the chief achievements even of plays like *Waiting for Godot*, where the temporal stratum of the play seems to be one prolonged and almost unbearably suspended moment, instead of any kind of “explanatory story laid out in time.”

Genius as source

In the 10th, last chapter of *The Genius of Shakespeare*, the chapter titled “The laws of the Shakespearean universe,” Bate, using what he calls Wittgenstein’s never-ending, “performative method” (323-25), tries to account for why Shakespeare’s works have struck us, to various degrees and for various reasons, yet for a good 400 years, as the achievement of a genius. Making it clear early on that “genius” in Shakespeare’s time meant “particular disposition,” and not what we associate with it since Romanticism (cf. 333), Bate mentions chiefly the following signs of Shakespeare’s exceptional creativity: rich ambiguity (the discovery of which Bate ties primarily to William Empson [302-11]); that Shakespeare cannot be approached with “the traditional criteria of aesthetic judgement” (this is claimed with explicit reference to Wittgenstein’s notorious notes on Shakespeare) (319); that a Shakespeare play has “what we may call a performative truth” (325) (this is later supplemented by emphasising the “aspectuality,” the “duck-rabbit quality” of Shakespearean dramatic truth [327-31]); and that the Shakespearean text achieves “memorability” (i.e., it is easy to remember it [325-26]). Bate also insists that Shakespeare’s practical experience as an actor, and his constant interest in the very medium he was working in (his “theatre-in-the-theatre”) (cf. 331-35) also have had a decisive role in why, in Thomas Carlyle’s words “Indian Empire will go, at any rate, some day; but this Shakespeare does not go” (qtd. in Bate 337).

The position Bate takes is plausible, and, first and foremost, courageous, since, especially in the intellectual climate of the late 1990s (the book first came out in 1997), he, in the full armour of the new and liberal textual scholarship, addressed topics which were considered, in the eyes of many, to be typical themes of the old, “humanist” school. In line with Stanley Cavell, who, to the best of my knowledge, first approached Shakespearean texts from a Wittgensteinian perspective (as early as in the late 1960s), *The Genius of Shakespeare* arrives athighly provoking insights (but Bate, to my surprise, never refers to Cavell). For instance: “By returning thinking to the performative mode, Wittgenstein was bringing to an end the centuries-long battle between philosophy and theatre. Giving up philosophy means acknowledging the superiority of theatre’s way of doing things” (324).

I do not think that Wittgenstein gave up philosophy at any time of his life (if we mean by philosophy neither more, nor less than “reflexive thinking”). He especially did not give up philosophy to do things in the way of the theatre, and I do not believe, either, that the “later” Wittgenstein brought an end to anything: the very consequential performativity of his philosophy, emphasised by Bate so eloquently as well, prevents that in the first place. However, Bate is one of those rare “users” of Wittgenstein for Shakespearean purposes who does not think that Wittgenstein was a “constructivist,” a philosopher who thought that e.g., meaning is purely a matter of “social agreement.” This comes especially sharply out when Bate reflects on Terence Hawkes’s famous dictum (and Hawkes also uses Wittgenstein as an authority): “Like the words of which they are composed, the plays have no essential meanings. It is *we* who mean, *by* them.” (qtd. in Bate 317). Criticising Hawkes, Bate claims that “the correct conclusion to draw from the incommensurability of traditional criteria of aesthetic judgement [….] with demonstrable emotional and cognitive effect […] is not that meaning and value inhere in the reader rather than the work” (319).

I find that neither Bate, nor Hawkes is entirely right here: Bate is unfair to Hawkes because he overlooks the fact that Hawkes talks about “*essential* meanings,” and Wittgenstein was indeed a great anti-essentialist and anti-cognitivist (cf. e.g. “To repeat: don’t think, but look!”, Wittgenstein§ 66). But Bate is right when he points out that Wittgenstein did not adhere to the “constructivist” view which deprives a work of art from all its “intrinsic” values; Wittgenstein did not think, as Hawkes does, that “we *make* truth, value, ‘greatness’ […] in accordance with our various purposes” out of texts which are like “mountain ranges, pieces of scenery,” “natural phenomena” (qtd. in Bate 317). This would make Wittgenstein not only a constructivist but a pragmatist of the John Dewy-type as well. In Wittgenstein’s view, we indeed do things with texts, and these processes should be attended to in their dynamism and always-changing qualities. Yet what we notice is rather that sometimes we want to “make” meanings, truth, value, greatness, while, in turn, sometimes we wish to give ourselves over to the flow of the text, we wish to “discover” what we think is already “in it”; we do not desire to dominate meaning but wish that the meanings of the text might overpower *us*. It is, at least in a certain way, also essentialist to emphasise only one side of the reading (as well as the viewing-listening, theatrical) process and to declare that it is entirely us who create meanings; not so much the individual but a community, or the individual always already in a community, sharing “forms of life” with others. We rather oscillate between the two attitudes, often we even deliberately *want* to do that, and the Wittgensteinian warning is not more than asking us to be *aware* of where we are and what we actually do (otherwise we may do what we want)[[74]](#footnote-74). We need not create taboos and prohibit certain modes of speech initially; we should rather pay close attentions to what we say when, and ask ourselves *why* we actually say that.

Bate, on the whole, argues convincingly that we may also take the genius of Shakespeare as one, and even as perhaps the most important, sources of his works. One of his final conclusions is put wisely: “The genius of Shakespeare is neither the style nor the matter of Shakespeare; it is certainly not the wisdom that can be extracted from Shakespeare. It is the process of Shakespeare, that which is performed by the performance. As with the later Wittgenstein, the working through does not *lead to a conclusion*, it *performs the point*” (336). This cannot only be said of the genius as source but of source itself, too: what a Shakespearean source is, will be our very working through the process of trying to understand what a source is, and the process will not yield a “what”: we rather *perform*, in our practices and utterances, what a source *might* be. Yet if this is true, we will never “completely” get to know, cognitively and rationally, neither what genius, nor what a source, nor what any*thing* is. A performance may act “something out,” it will surely have a “subject matter,” and it may invite us to participate, to have a lived experience; it may also have a mood, a *Stimmung* which might stay with us for a while. Yet a performance is mercilessly bound to the moments of the performance; it is, strictly speaking, unrepeatable; it is for once, for *that* unique moment, and for the next, and so on, which, like Macbeth, we try to stop and arrest in vain. It is the dramatic performativity we detect not only in a play but in our—surely dramatic—quests *as performance*, which is the *source* of our lacking a full grasp on anything, or at best only momentarily. We cannot and should not penetrate phenomena, we should rest satisfied with some—performative but dramatic—shining forth, with what just flares up, momentarily. From this position we may say that nothing matters; or we may, even worse, go back to insisting on a final, monolithic and true definition, a “thing.” But we may also put on new performances, again and again. I suggest we take the third alternative.

### Chapter 4 *Macbeth*: Place

The Weird Sisters: when and where

**1 Witch**: When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

**2 Witch***:* When the hurlyburly’s done,

When the battle’s lost, and won.

**3 Witch**: That will be ere the set of sun. 5

**1 Witch:** Where the place?

**2 Witch**: Upon the heath.

**3 Witch:** There to meet with Macbeth.

**1 Witch:** I come, Graymalkin!

**2 Witch:** Paddock calls.

**3 Witch**: Anon! 10

**ALL:** Fair is foul, and foul is fair:

Hover through the fog and filthy air. [*Exeunt.*]

“When shall we three meet again?” (1.1.1.) – the First Witch (Weïrd Sister) asks, this sentence also being the very first sentence of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.[[75]](#footnote-75) This question (as preparation to say farewell, perhaps) containing two time-adverbials (“when” and “again”), is followed by three options, underscoring the “trinity” of the Weïrd Sisters, the number three, not without mythological significance. The three possibilities are still in the interrogative mood, and they might be read as referring to both space and time: “In thunder, lightning, or in rain?” (2), i.e.: ‘are we going to meet *when* there is thunder, lightning or rain?’ or: ‘are we going to meet *where* there is, or will be, thunder, lightning, or rain?’. The Second Sister answers with an implied statement where only the adverbial clauses of time are explicit: “[we shall meet] When the hurlyburly’s done, / When the battle’s lost and won” (3-4). The “hurly-burly”, as the editor’s gloss indicates, is “uproar, tumult, confusion” (Muir 1964: 5). In my reading, it is a kind of ‘tofu VA boohoo’, a pre-creational, pre-conditional sate where nothing is yet clear or decided. *Tofu VA boohoo* (in fact *tohu va vohu* in the Genesis story), originally means something like ‘without form’, ‘void’, ‘chaos and utter confusion’. Things and persons should have space, place and a stretch of narrated-dramatized time in order to come out of the initial chaos: the Weïrd Sisters are preparing the stage and plot-time, the “where” and “when”, for the drama to be performed. However, from their conversation, it is not clear whether the respective time and place of “thunder, lightning and rain” (i.e. a storm) and the ‘end’ of the “hurly-burly” coincide or not. The terminal point of confusion (“when the hurlyburly’s *done*”) might serve as a kind of corrective alternative to the possibility of meeting in a storm. So the implied answer might be paraphrased as follows: ‘yes, we shall meet in a storm, which is also the end of confusion and void’, or ‘no, we shall not meet in thunder, lightning or in rain; we’ll rather meet when the uproar and tumult, in fact the battle is over’ (the parallel syntactic structures: “When… when…”, and even the continuing rhymes, help us to identify “hurlybulry” as “battle”).

Moreover, the word *done* sinisterly pre-echoes one of the key-words of the play: for example, Macbeth at the end of the dagger-monologue says: “I go, and it is done” (2.1.62), i.e. ‘I will go into Duncan’s bedchamber, and I will kill Duncan, and then it is over’. Lady Macbeth, in turn, will comment, before Macbeth comes back after having killed Duncan, on the scenario with: “Alack, I am afraid they [the body-guards of Duncan sleeping in his room] have awaked, / And ‘tis not done” (2.2.9-10) but Macbeth, with bloody hands, enters with the famous words: “I have done the deed” (14). Later, when his wife urges him to go back to Duncan’s chamber and “smear / The sleepy grooms [the bodyguards] with blood” (2.2.47-48) he says: “I’ll go no more. / I am afraid to think what I have done” (2.2.48-49). Lady Macbeth, re-enacting the murder-scene in her sleepwalking, in Act 5, Scene 1, will exclaim (even echoing the First Weird Sister’s “I come, Graymalkin”): “There’s knocking at the gate: Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What’s done cannot be undone” (3.1.56-58). When the Lady is already dead and Macbeth is practically alone in his castle to face his enemies, he remarks: “I ‘gin [begin] to be aweary of the sun, [I am bored by daylight] / And wish th’ estate o’th world [the structure of the universe] were now undone” (5.5.47-48). This can also be paraphrased as: ‘I am tired of even the sun shining at me, and I wish God had not created the world.’ How anything should, and can be “done” at all is of central significance in the play, and I will return to this question shortly.

The battle is spoken of as if the Weïrd Sister did not know *who* is going to win and lose, and we of course have no idea yet of even the opponents: right now, this is a ‘battle in general’, a ‘battle as such’. Yet with this formulation (“lost and won”) a future-oriented idea of relativity is introduced as well: after all, it is a general truth that in a conflict, what is winning for the One, is always losing for the Other. The Third Sister, making her first contribution now, foretells at least the approximate time of the end of the battle, and from her words we also learn that – in a play, where a good half of the action, especially the middle of the play, takes place at night – it is most probably still daytime: “That will be ere [before] the set of the sun” (5), to which neither of the other Sisters objects.

Rather, the First Sister starts to negotiate place: “Where the place?” (6), also breaking, with a half-line, the smoothly rhyming series of couplets heard so far, precisely when it comes to talking about *place*. In the discourse of the First Sister, we are, even syntactically and prosodically, dropped out of the series of sentences, hitherto exclusively discussing time, onto a certain *place*. The relation of space and place is severely complicated – not only in the play but in any discussion – and another goal of mine will be to show some aspects of this relation. For the time being, I define *place* as a distinctive region of space, a determinate spatial volume which a concrete object or body could, at least in principle, occupy (cf. Rosen 2012).

The Second Sister responds to “Where the place?” with: “Upon the heath” (6) and this rather vague specification of space is further narrowed down with the help of a place-adverbial coming from the Third Sister: “*There* to meet with Macbeth” (7). The sentence, because of the infinitive (“to meet”), is definitely future-oriented, and it brings the proper name “Macbeth” into play for the first time in the play. The fact that after “meet”, the preposition “with” is present suggests that this is a pre-arranged, future encounter, at least on the part of the Weird Sisters (and it will later turn out that Macbeth, indeed, was *not* expecting it, at least not *then* and *there*). Yet, most importantly, “there to meet with Macbeth” ties place and time to an *event*: *meeting* not only with one another, but with the future protagonist of the play as well, in their circle. The Sisters will meet “with” Macbeth in Act 1, Scene 3, yet it is curious that at this initial moment they – like the letter Lady Macbeth receives from her husband and reads upon her first entry onto the stage (cf. 1.5.1-14) – do not mention Banquo. Is this because Banquo will be there anyway but is not worth talking about? Is he a negligible factor? Or will he be an (unpleasant) surprise for the Sisters?

What remains from this very brief scene of not more than 12 lines is resolution: the First Sister says: “I come, Graymalkin!” (8): Graymalkin – as the footnote informs us (cf. Muir 1964: 4) – is a grey cat. This could be the name of one of the Sisters present, but the Second Sister’s upcoming laconic statement: “Paddock [i.e.: a toad or frog] calls” (9) makes the reader uncertain: is it so that one of the Sisters – most probably the Third – is called “Paddock” (as such “weird” creatures were indeed able to take the shape of toads or frogs, just as much as cats, cf. Muir 1964: 4), and now she has started to move and she is calling the others? Or does “Paddock” refer to a fourth Sister (or some kind of persona, say, the later Hecate in ‘Paddock-form’?) whom the Second Sister can hear calling all of them? There is an overall uncertainty, perhaps even a “hurlyburly” here as regards the exact reference of proper names. For the sake of symmetry, the next in line to speak, the Third Sister should perhaps utter a name as well, but she only provides us with a time-adverbial “Anon!” (10) (i.e. ‘in a short time’, ‘soon’, originally meaning ‘in one’, i.e. ‘immediately’). And what is the purpose of Greymalkin’s implicit, and Paddock’s explicit, “call”? Are the Weïrd Sisters summoned for a specific purpose? Do they have some obligation to fulfil? Or has this first meeting been their “recess”, a “time of recreation” and they are called “home” as children are called home by their parents from the play-ground when it is time to go home? How playful are these Sisters, in the Folio of 1623 sometimes called “weyward” (“wayward”, i.e. ‘erratic,’ ‘capricious’, ‘unreasonable’, cf. Muir 1979: 14 and Crystal and Crystal 2002: 490), later reciting chants which can also be performed as a round-dance? How serious are they when they confront Macbeth and Banquo? How serious are they when Macbeth visits them, at the beginning of Act IV?

In the light of the play, I find it noteworthy that the Weird Sisters are summoned without either they, or someone else (Graymalkin, Paddock) giving the definitive purpose of the call. As if still another (and, perhaps, still *another*…) call were necessary to clarify why they have to go now. This is worth considering because later for Macbeth each goal attained will by itself entail a new goal to be attained: neither being something with a proper name (such as the “Thane of Cawdor”, or “the King”), nor being somewhere (in or out of Duncan’s bedchamber, on the throne, at the banquet, in front of Hecate, fighting alone against his enemies in his castle) will mean a “promised end”. What Macbeth will lack is a sense of a ‘real’ ending: each “ultimate goal” will turn out to be an “interim goal”, the ultimate one remaining shrouded in obscurity. The plot suggests to its protagonist that when Lady Macbeth says: “I am afraid […] ‘tis [the deed, the killing of Duncan is] not done” (2.2.9-10), and when she says “What’s done cannot be undone” (3.1.58) she is right, on both occasions. For it is never done. Goals are always deferred, nothing is *really* accomplished, nothing is ever finished, nothing is ever over; whatever there is, it flows on, like Duncan’s, “the old man’s” “blood”. Lady Macbeth will even ask in the sleepwalking scene: “Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?” (5.1.33-34).

One way to sum up Macbeth’s tragedy is to say that for him what is done cannot be undone: it is past remedy. However, at the same time, whatever is done, still remains *undone* also in the sense of ‘unfinished’, as if significant action with a real purpose had fallen out of time, as if time were rattling along as an empty shell, without any content: “Tomorrow, tomorrow, and tomorrow / Creeps in his petty pace from day to day / To the last syllable of recorded time…” (5.5.18-20). What is done cannot be altered, or changed: the regret, the remorse, the despair is there but it will, and has to, remain undone, in the sense of remaining open, like an open wound. The problem is not only that something is over but also that nothing is ever over. What I am interested in, in this chapter, is precisely some of the spatial and ‘place-al’ consequences of this temporal aspect of the play.

Then comes the much interpreted, proverbial couplet (so the lines are rhyming once again), spoken by all the three of them, as a kind of chant: “Fair is foul, and foul is fair: / Hover through fog an filthy air” (11-12). The references to “fog” and “filthy air” (already filthy, perhaps, because of the blood, the smoke and the dead bodies of the battle, on the literal level of meaning) are most probably specifications of the immediate surroundings, but how are we to read “Fair is foul, and foul is fair”? The opposition of “fair and foul” is a commonplace in the language of Shakespeare’s time but their identification, their making the ‘equal’ is not[[76]](#footnote-76). Further, both – rather straightforward – qualities may be interpreted ethically just as much as aesthetically, yielding the following, at least two possible paraphrases: ‘good is bad and bad is good’ or: ‘nice is ugly and ugly is nice’. Yet the identification of these binary oppositions makes that kind of relativity explicit which was implied in “lost and won”: not only is it a matter of perspective whether anything or anybody is good or bad, beautiful or repulsive but there is a serious crisis, an overall deflation of values which makes distinctions futile and nonsensical. Not only are time and space (including, it seems, especially the future) under the circumspection of the Weïrd Sisters but the possibility of translucency, of distinguishable qualities has been heavily compromised for all agencies in the play: we may recall, in Act 1 Scene 4, King Duncan’s interrupted reflection on the man who was Thane of Cawdor before Macbeth got this title: “There’s no art / To find the mind’s construction in the face: / He was a gentleman on whom I built / An absolute trust—” (1.4.12-15).

It is precisely any kind of “absolute” (as opposed to the ‘relative’, the ‘relational’, the ‘partial’, the ‘fragmented’) that looks impossible in the play. To appreciate what the Sisters stand for even further, we may also remember how Macbeth, upon his first entry onto the stage, echoes the key words of the concluding, general statement of the Weïrd Sisters: “So foul and fair a day I have not seen” (1.2.36). Macbeth, at this first, initial stage has not yet identified *foul* and *fair* as the Weïrd Sisters have done; for him, the two qualities are still in a kind of ‘conjoined juxtaposition’, yet with the acknowledgement that they may operate, qualifying “day”, simultaneously: not ‘foul *is* fair’ but ‘foul *and* fair’. He may not have seen such a foul *and* fair day because the battle, bay nature, was ugly and appalling but victory was sweet and beautiful, so, indeed, even the winner is a kind of loser, a witness to awe-inspiring and repulsive things. Before Macbeth utters this sentence, we see the Sisters for the second time; the scene (Act 1, Scene 3) opens on the note of place: “*Where* hast thou been, Sister? / Killing swine. / Sister, *where* thou?” (1.3.1-3), and the story the First Sister tells about the sailor’s wife, the sailor and the “tempest-tost bark” (1.3.24,25) indicates a considerable (though not absolute) control over space as well.

To conclude the first scene, and to entice Macbeth to step into the magic circle, the Weïrd Sisters, singing and dancing “hand in hand”, wind up the “charm” (cf. 1.3.31, 36). The Sisters’ circle is often taken to be standing for the ultimate (and absolute) space of the theatre: the stage itself. I take the relativity of “fair is foul and foul is fair” – especially through the aesthetic connotations of these words – as the play’s invitation to see time as something which “hovers through”, which ‘lingers uncertainly as’, and which ‘melts’ into, space, as the Weird Sisters do: into “fog and filthy air”. Thus *time* becomes a phenomenon which is suspended as, and is constantly ‘translated’ into, space and place.

It is by working my way through space, “carving out my passage” (cf. 1.2.21) through sites of place in *Macbeth* that I wish to draw some more general conclusions as regards space. Reading *Macbeth* is not only to narrow a hopelessly vast field down into a more manageable arena of space-discussion; it may have further significance. If – in line with Duncan – we consider Shakespeare to be a ‘gentleman on whom we may build absolute trust’, and this trust consist in the hypothesis that a poetic-dramatic genius presents, in his text, space and place in a highly original manner, we may hope for some substantial insights precisely from the poetic-dramatic texture of his play which, of course with due caution, can be formulated on a more comprehensive and abstract level and, therefore, in a conceptual manner. In other words, I will read the particular story of a particular character in a literary piece in hope of some more general, philosophical insights – this is one of the advantages of reading literature and philosophy together.

The universalist and the personalist accounts of space, place and time

If, indeed, time is envisaged as “dynamic”, “transient” and “flowing”, and space as “static”, “permanent” and “fixed”, then it seems we are revisiting some of the most fundamental and initial problems from which Greek metaphysics, and, thus, our Western thinking originated: the problem of the relationship between permanence and change, sameness and difference, identity and relativity, determinacy and indeterminacy, synchrony and diachronic, necessity and contingency. One of the most puzzling philosophical queries of the Western tradition has been how we can talk, and simultaneously, about specific, individual phenomena – about “each thing” – and about classes, sets of things, also appearing in the philosophical literature as “universals”, “types” (as opposed to particular tokens), “sortal or general concepts”. How can I talk about both “the table”, or “tables” in general, and about “this (very) table” (in front of me) in particular? Particular things will always differ from each other (even two eggs will not be totally alike) and it was the temporal aspect of difference, as one of the *causes* of difference, which was first emphasised especially by Heraclitus (~ 535 – ~ 475 BC) at the dawn of philosophical speculation: everything will be in constant flux, in constant motion (cf. Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1995: 181-212). The Sophists famously followed Heraclitus, and claimed that because everything is changing all the *time*, and there will always be a difference between things even with respect to themselves, no knowledge is possible at all: both the thing I wish to describe, and I who try to describe it, change so much even within the very short time it takes to name the thing, that the thing will not even “deserve” the name (and the more lengthy description even less so). It is equally well-known that Plato wanted to solve the question by ‘stopping’ the constant flux. He proposed that our ability to intelligibly talk about a particular thing and to grasp it conceptually, in other words to create classes, universals, types, sortal concepts, into which we can put particular things in order to interpret them, is possible because our by nature “general” concepts are “backed up” – in a highly complicated and here not further analysable way – by Forms (Ideas) that correspond to our concepts. Forms cannot be moved out of their place because they are fixed in the space of “real” Reality: Forms are unmoving, eternal and absolute. Thus, ultimately, it is Forms that make thinking and (certain) knowledge possible, since they resist movement and, therefore, time. Time, and the particular “amidst” time, was trapped in space, assigning a fixed place to another, generic (universal, typical, sortal) form of the particular (cf. especially Plato, *Cartylus*, 437d-440e and the *Republic*, 514a526e).[[77]](#footnote-77)

Wittgenstein talks of “logical space” as early as the fifth paragraph of the *Tractatus*: “The facts in logical space are the world” (*TLP* 1.113) but both in this book and in the *Investigations*, space, place (and time) are treated as ‘givens’. No special attention is *given* to them and if one would wish to know more about them, the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* would tell her that she should attend to the grammar of these words, at least as a first step. How do we use *space*, or *time*  in our everyday language and in philosophy? Well, here are some uses from both.

The relationship between time and space raises, and in variously profound ways, some of the most fundamental puzzles of Western thinking. It is not only because of Plato’s enormous influence on the subsequent philosophical tradition that we may see why any discourse about space is bound up with talk about time, and vice versa. When e.g. to observe something, I fix a thing, I fix it in space and assign it to a certain place: place, as defined above, is a determinate region of space, a “here or there”. This way place appears to be the space the particular object occupies and if it does not move, we may talk of a “concrete, fixed place”, whereas we usually think of time as, nevertheless, “going on”, as “passing by” (somehow “around”, “above” or “under”, or wherever) the object which is fixed in this or that specific volume of space. It is true that we do not experience space or place “separately”, i.e. independently of the object: it is precisely the object that “cuts out” place, a “piece of space” – as Michel Foucault would say – for us (Foucault 1986: 27 qtd. by Casey 1993: 317). But we “experience” time separately “even less”, since it is one of the “duties” of time never to stop but to go on-and-on, in an ungraspable manner. If I put an object down, and then lift it up, I can touch the “place” (the “ground”) it has occupied. But how could I ever “touch” the time, the “while” when it was there?

The most ardent proponent of the view that time and space, although directly “invisible”, are necessary, unconditional and always already present determinants of anything we experience was Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason.* He called space and time “pure forms of intuition” (Kant 1933: B66)[[78]](#footnote-78) meaning that it is an anthropological fact about human beings that they arrange and order everything they perceive in space and time; space and time are initial “aspects”, or “frames” we simply cannot get rid of, and according to which, and in which, we envisage all phenomena; three dimensional space, and time as the fourth dimension (and no “more” dimensions are possible) are in the mind as categories of apprehension and understanding, and they are our most fundamental and direct relations to the world (cf. Kant 1933: B37-73).

Kant’s theory of space (and time) involves the famous “Copernican turn” Kant congratulated himself on most: thinkers should turn the tables on the world, and should not adjust themselves to the world; rather, they should allow the world to mould according to the boundaries the human being discovers in herself (cf. Kant 1933: Bxix-xxiv). Thus, Kant’s theory of space and time has become a highly original account also in terms of presenting a special “blend” of what we may call the “cosmological” (or “physicalist”, or “objectivist”) theory of space and time on the one hand, and the “personalist” (or “psychological”, or “subjectivist”) theory of space and time on the other.[[79]](#footnote-79) For Kant, space and time are in the mind, it is a genuinely “inner” and human category (and limit). At the same time, neither space or time is “subjective” in the sense that each of us would have a different apprehension of them; on the contrary, they are objectively *there*, in each mind, as an anthropological necessity. It is not through our senses that we have awareness of them, they are always already there when we start to perceive things through empirical means (through the senses). So space and time are not *a posteriori* but *a priori* categories. In cosmologist space-talk such questions are discussed as whether space is not more than a bundle of *spatial relationships* between material things – as Leibnitz held –, or whether space – as Newton argued – should rather be considered as having *real existence*. For Newton, space is a *genuine entity*, a “vast aetherial container without walls, in which everything else that exists, lives and moves and has its being” (Van Cleve 2009: 74).[[80]](#footnote-80) Talk about space not as personal experience or orientation but as “space in the universe”, as “space in the world” which would exist even independently of human beings, involved discussion of the possibility of void, of “empty space”, and also of geometrical issues, including Euclidian versus non-Euclidian geometries. Since the modern revolution of physics at the beginning of the 20th century, space and time have been found to be inseparable, and, thus, have been discussed as “spacetime”, giving rise to a new discussion of cause and effect relations, of the “asymmetry” between the past and the future[[81]](#footnote-81), and even of entropy. The philosopher is interested in these – resolute and sometimes bitter – debates to draw some conclusions as regards fundamental metaphysical issues about cause, effect, determinism, and so on, from a field that seems, at least for some thinkers, to be independent of human relations and subjective perception, since geometry and physics have long had the reputation of disciplines where the “laws of nature” would hold even if no humans were present in the Universe.

Others, either convinced that any talk about space and time is hopelessly bound up with human agency anyway, or that we should rest satisfied with a more modest program, have tied the discussion of space – and time, too – to openly “personal” interpretations, where the initial point of departure is the way we ordinarily conceive of space as everyday beings. This does not mean that a personalist philosophical account would concentrate only on extreme and exclusively idiosyncratic views of space. Personalists – mostly, as far as I can see, those working on the problem of space from the phenomenological point of view – also wish to generalise and “transcend” their particular accounts. They tend to treat themselves as examples – as sort of “transcendental” “metonymical” “samples”, standing for many others, in the way it was discussed in the “Introduction” – whose introspective insights might find resonance in a lot of other people. Where personalits differ from cosmologists most, I think, is that a personalist acknowledges her findings to be the result of conscious reflection on what initially is private experience, originating in an act of consciousness (or, as the Anglo-Saxon tradition prefers to say: in an act of the mind) of her own. A personalist thinks of the experience of space, always already *as reflected* experience which would simply not exist without the observer’s consciousness, without her “inner world”. This goes back to the “father” of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, whose revolution in philosophy was precisely marked – among other feats – by considering only those properties of things to be *real* which can be experienced in everyday life (cf. Hammond, Howarth and Keat 1991: 5). Consequently, it does not come as a surprise that instead of space, personalists prefer to talk about place, or even of commonplace (the latter including Maurice Blanchot, for instance)[[82]](#footnote-82). Gaston Bachelard, who is rightfully celebrated for having re-annexed place for existential philosophy and for the appreciation of literature, in his famous *The Poetics of Space* grudgingly remarks that philosophers boast that they “know the universe before they know the house”, while what in fact they never forget and, thus, genuinely know are “the intimate values of inside space” (Bachelard 1964: 5 and 31), the “house of their own”, which is their personality and very existence. Edward Casey, in his *Getting Back into Place,* a ground-breaking study in the phenomenology of place and space, argues that place is never “a matter of arbitrary position. What if the stakes in the game of place are much higher than we think? Where then will we find ourselves? Not in empty space”– he answers the question. “As J. J. Gibson reminds us […] ‘We do not live in ‘space.’ Instead, *we live in places*. So it behoves us to understand what such place-bound and place-specific living consist in” (Casey 1993: xiii). Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist of the 17th century claimed that the Cabbalists call even God, the Divine Numen, “MAKOM, that is, Place (*locus*)” (qtd. by Koyré 1957: 148). “Why is God called place? – Shmuel Sambursky asks, in dialogue with a commentary on the Genesis-story. “Because He is the place of the world, while the world is not His place” (Sambursky and Pines 1971: 15). God, for the Cabbalists, is not the God of space, space in the sense physics discusses it. God is not only cosmic occasion but rather the place of every occasion. He is the source and limit of the universe and the source and limit of human existence (cf. Casey 1993: 18). If the Cabbalists tied human existence to God as sacred place (sacred place being the most typical place for several thinkers), Martin Heidegger, in his late essays, such as “Building Dwelling Thinking”, ties “mortals” to “Being” through “dwelling in” and “building” houses, where one is genuinely at home: “Dwelling [….] is *the basic character* of Being in keeping with which mortals [human beings] exist. Perhaps this attempt to think about dwelling and building will bring out somewhat more clearly that building belongs to dwelling and how it receives its nature from dwelling. Enough will have been gained if dwelling and building have become *worthy of questioning* and thus have remained *worthy of thought*” (Heidegger 1994: 160). For Heidegger, “place is the phenomenal particularization of ‘being-in-the world’”, which Edward Casey makes more concrete by interpreting it as “*being-in-place*, i.e. being in the *place-world* itself” (Casey 1993: xv). Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued, in his seminal work, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, that instead of an empiricist or intellectual account of “being-in-the world”, we should rather concentrate on the body’s awareness of place as *situatedness*, as the body feeling the “life-world” around itself. Abstract movements, such as watching a play on stage in the theatre, involves, on the observer’s part, the ability of projection through the possibilities the imagination offers: “The normal function which makes abstract movement possible is one of ‘projection’ whereby the subject [the observer] of movement keeps in front of him an area of free space in which what does not naturally exist takes on a semblance of existing” (Merleau-Ponty 1985: 111). This is tantamount to saying that even participating in the imaginary originates not so much in what we know but what we, with our bodies, are capable of doing in space (how it is positioned, situated), space understood here as a concrete place, a particular situation. These examples from the personalist speculations about space and place are perhaps enough to show that since these accounts involve a multitude of aspects of human existence, the various senses of space and place will be in direct proportion to this multitude (and perhaps we will, in this tradition, end up even with *too* many meanings of space and place, some of them with rather vague boundaries). Edward Casey, in *The Fate of Place*, which is a “philosophical history” of the problem of space and place (and a sequel to *Getting Back Into Place*), shows how, in the history of thinking the systole and diastole of space- and place-talk changed from discourses about place, for example, in Aristotle’s system, to theories of space in the 17th and the 18th centuries, to return, from late 19th century onwards, chiefly to discourses of private places. From among those I have termed personalists Casey devotes special attention to Bergson, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Bachelard, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, and Irigaray (cf. Casey 1998).

Displaced and fixed Macbeth

“What if the stakes in the game of place are much higher than we think?” – Edward Casey, as we have heard, asks. This is a question we could ask Macbeth to answer, too. It is one of the commonplaces of Shakespeare-criticism that in Early Modern English culture the body of a person, including the actor’s body on the stage, was seen as the microcosm, mirroring the Macrocosm. The Macrocosm, as they knew it, included all the spheres around the Earth with the planets (including the Sun and the Moon, which for them were also planets), corresponding to respective (male) parts of the human body as macrocosm (cf. e.g. Elton 1986: 18-19). Whether this meant trying to find a place – in philosophical treatises, in poetry, in tragedy, comedy, history, etc. – for the human being both in the everyday world (in the literal household) and the Universe simultaneously, is difficult to tell. The answer is complicated by the to me absolutely not implausibly sounding claim that even whom I call cosmologists have always wished to find a home in the Universe, too, just they started out by adopting a divine standpoint – they tried to look at the scenario from “God’s perspective”, mostly in the name of “reason” – rather than making their initial steps reckoning with their human limits. This is important to note because Shakespearean tragic heroes can also be seen – among several other perspectives as well – as precisely marking out the boundaries between the divine and the human. King Lear, for example, begins his play as a God-like, mythological figure and ends as a wretched, “poor, bare, forked animal” (*King Lear*, 3.4. 106)[[83]](#footnote-83), mad with grief but also with wisdom, howling over the death of his favourite daughter, Cordelia. Lear, being an earthly father, can, unlike God, give life to a beloved person only once, and cannot resurrect his child, as a Divine Father could.

The creatures starting *Macbeth* and surrounding the protagonist may get a cosmologist and personalist interpretation simultaneously: the Weïrd Sisters can be taken as representatives of Fate and as projections – even in Merleau-Ponty’s sense of “projection” – of Macbeth’s utmost personal imagination. “They met me in the day of success – Macbeth’s letter informs his wife – and I have learn’t by the perfect’st report, they have more in them than mortal knowledge” (1.5.1-3). Macbeth, intoxicated by success – and having “bathed in reeking wounds” (cf. 1.2.40), and thus drugged by the odour of blood and killing – has to encounter some tangible representatives of his desires and ambition, who at the same time vanish into “fog and filthy air”: the Weïrd Sisters are just as “certain” as any of our inner feelings, thoughts, beliefs, hopes, wishes, and so on. And Macbeth does not only have beliefs about, but believes *in* the Weïrd Sisters as well. That he talks about “more than mortal knowledge” “*in* them” to me indicates that he already considers them as a kind of “place” where he would wish to be, to dwell, in the Heideggerian sense, but by the time he gets there, they make “themselves air, into which they vanish” (cf. 1.5.5).

As already hinted at while interpreting the First Scene, Macbeth’s “being-in-a-place”, his *esse in loco* will be one of constant movement: his immediate placement – or, in Edward Casey’s terminology: his “implacement” (Casey 1993: xiii) – will continuously turn out to be a series of *dis*placements. When Macbeth thinks he is in place, that he has caught up, and has overtaken the Others (including Duncan, Banquo, the Murderers, Malcolm, Macduff, and, first and foremost, the Weïrd Sisters), he finds himself in a place from which he *must* move out and on. And if we emphasise the *esse* part of *esse in loco*, so if being in a place is really one of the defining features of one’s being, then Macbeth’s struggle – almost mimicking a kind of crucifixion – will be being torn apart between conflicting spaces. He will constantly have the urge to change places, which Casey calls “place-panic” (Casey 1993: ix). Macbeth’s mind, his imagination, in incredibly rich poetic metaphors, tries to interpret this panic and does everything to keep the disintegrating parts of his personality together. When Macbeth writes his report to his wife, he is still something Merleau-Ponty calls the “intellectualist”, who tries to explain phenomena from, and through, knowledge (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1985: 122): we do not *know* what the source of Macbeth’s “perfectest report” might be on the Weïrd Sisters having more than mortal knowledge: maybe it is the appearance of Ross with the news that Macbeth is Thane of Cawdor (also recorded in the letter) which counts as strong evidence. But the point precisely is that Macbeth will move, form the intellectual/imaginative plain, which is at the beginning in harmony with the bodily plain, onto a realm where disharmony prevails on the bodily level: until the very end, the body will be, in a way, “in constant flux”. The imagination and the intellect will try to structure and order the “moving body”, slowly falling apart, in vain.

The word *time* occurs in *Macbeth* 39 times, which is a high record in itself. If we include plurals, derivatives and compounds such as “betimes”, “oftentimes”, “sometime”, “supper-time”, “timely”, and “untimely”, we end up with 56 occurrences. The significance of time in *Macbeth* has, quite understandably, often been discussed[[84]](#footnote-84). The word “space” occurs only once in the play: Macduff uses it in a rather insignificant context with the semantic content ‘country’, or ‘kingdom’, or ‘world’: “Fare thee well, Lord / – Macduff says to Malcolm, when Malcolm pretends to be a treacherous future king – I would not be the villain that thou think’st / For the whole space that’s in the tyrant’s grasp” (4.3, 34-36). Macduff’s use of “space” instead of e.g. “country” indicates the vacuous nature of Macbeth’s empire. However, H. W. Fawkner, in a much-neglected book on the play, makes some excellent points about place and displacement concerning Macbeth’s personal and theatrical plight:

The reason why Macbeth’s displacement from theatrical self-presence is so complex and contradictory is that theatricality itself is a fundamentally two-sided thing in *Macbeth* (and elsewhere). On the one hand, the theatre is the place where meaning is produced; on the other hand the theatre is the place where meaning is subjected to equivocation. On the one hand Shakespeare situates himself firmly inside the tragic West, forwarding its project to turn negativity into meaning, suffering into tragic self-presence; on the other hand Shakespeare situates himself close to the twentieth-century world where the sublation of suffering is beginning to be questioned as a source of human truth. Macbeth, who from the outset seems strangely distanced from the drama of his own tragic fall, can in a wonderful way ride on both of these forces unleashed by the displacement of theatrical truth. Insofar as the theatre is an arena for the production of meaning, Macbeth’s disenchantment is the withdrawal of his imagination from meaning and self-presence, but insofar as theatre is the scenario for the staging of equivocation, Macbeth’s increasingly anxious withdrawal betokens the fear of the loss of meaning. (Fawkner 1990: 45)

The word “place” occurs 10 times in the play, and 15 times if we count derivative forms as well. It is also significant as a *lack*, when it would be vital to know *where* exactly something *is* (such as Macbeth’s dagger). However, it is precisely that which is shrouded into uncertainty. Macbeth, at the beginning of the play, is first talked about as constantly being on the move in the battle: he “like Valour’s minion, carv’d out his passage” (1.2.19), and he – with Banquo – is compared to “eagles” and “lions” (1.2.34), who are not renowned for their slowness. Macbeth – with Banquo again – is on his way to Duncan when he is stopped for the first time in the play, by the Weïrd Sisters, as we could witness to it. In the dramaturgical structure of the play, this is the first instance when he is given a chance to think, to reflect, and it will precisely be this contemplation that will “unfix” him further: “why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair / And make my seated heart knock at my ribs / Against the use [custom] of nature?” (1.3.134-136). He moves on to join Lady Macbeth in his castle – where Duncan will be the chief guest – overtaking the Royal train, for (in Duncan’s words) “he rides well” (1.6.23) and even the servant who “had the speed of him” (1.5.35), is “almost dead for breath” (36).

Lady Macbeth does not waste much time to share her plans with her husband: Duncan should never see “tomorrow” (1.5.59). But to kill someone is not that simple, especially because Duncan had pointed out – although he named his son, and not Macbeth as his successor – that Macbeth is among those “sons, kinsmen” and “thanes” “whose places are the nearest” (1.4.35-36), i.e. Macbeth is very close to his heart. It is seeing himself as standing “here upon this bank and shoal of time” (1.7.6) that Macbeth can see a heavenly, transcendental tumult taking revenge for Duncan’s contemplated murder: Duncan’s “virtues / Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against / The deep damnation of his taking-off [his death], / And pity, like a naked new-born babe, / Striding the blast [riding on the storm], or heaven’s cherubin / […] Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye” (18-24). It is this despair which is in Macbeth’s apologetic statement to his wife when she urges him on: “I dare do that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none” (1.7.46-47). Lady Macbeth, as if she was the dramaturg of the play, quickly points out that when Macbeth first reported the arrival of Duncan, he still “durst” (49) (i.e. dared to) do the deed, and then he was a man but then “Nor time nor place”, two of the three famous Aristotelian ‘unities’, “did adhere” (i.e. ‘agree’). The Lady, in a Brechtian manner, reminds us that action and plot on stage requires the right time to coincide with the right place. But Macbeth is not convinced: “If we should fail?” (1.7.59), to which Lady Macbeth retorts: “We fail! / But screw your courage to the sticking-place / And we’ll not fail”. As Kenneth Muir’s gloss explains, the metaphor is either “suggested by a soldier screwing up the cord of his cross-bow”, or it is “perhaps from the screwing up of the strings on a viol” (Muir 1979, 42-42). The chief underlying idea in both cases seems to be that courage should be in place, waiting for the right moment, and it should be tightly fixed. When we see Macbeth alone again, it is precisely this fixedness which is missing: Macbeth will see the famous “air-drawn dagger” (3.4.61), which he cannot “clutch” (“Come, let me clutch thee” (2.1.34)): he cannot catch it, he cannot pin it down. It will be denying the sight of the dagger all together (“There is no such thing” [46]) which mobilises Macbeth again and prompts him to go, “with Tarquin’s ravishing strides” (55), into Duncan’s bedchamber.

The bedchamber is a claustrophobic, closed, fixed place but – very importantly – we are never allowed entry into it; we must see the sight only in our imagination. Yet Lady Macbeth refers to it as “the place”, contrasting it with Macbeth’s brain, the seat of his imagination: “Why, worthy thane, / You unbend [slacken, weaken] your noble strength to think / So brain-sickly of things. Go get some water / And wash this filthy witness [the blood as evidence] from your hand. Why did you bring these daggers from the place? / They must lie there” (2.2. 42-47). “The place”, when the Macbeths are already in bed, will grow into “hell” in the words of the drunken Porter, who is, at the same time, cold in the castle, so he decides: “But this place is too cold for hell. I’ll devil-porter it no further” (2.3.6). Macbeth’s and his wife’s deed is indeed so horrible, that – in the words of Ross – “the heavens, as troubled with man’s act, / Threatens this bloody stage” (2.4.6), here stage meaning the Earth, but of course also all the stages where *Macbeth* is performed. The Old Man, Ross’s interlocutor, agrees: “’Tis [the world is] unnatural / Even like the deed that’s done. On Tuesday last / A falcon, tow’ring in pride of place, / Was by a mousling owl hawked and killed” (2.4.10-13). The falcon, which is not supposed to be killed by an owl that feeds on mice, might be read as an allegory of Duncan, or of Macbeth, providing a further example of a universe falling into chaos.

Yet Macbeth cannot stop. He has been crowned king, and Lady Macbeth queen, but the prophecy of the Weïrd Sisters to Banquo, namely that he will “get [beget, conceive] kings” (1.3.66), so his “children shall be kings” (86) is still in the “filthy air”. Macbeth, in the “Banquo-soliloquy” of Act III, scene 1, is brooding over the prophecies of the Weird Sisters again: “prophet-like, They hail’d him [Banquo] father to a line of kings: / Upon my head they plac’d a fruitless crown, / And put a barren sceptre in my gripe. / Thence to be wrench’d with an unlineal hand / No son of mine succeeding” (58-63). Macbeth, who, unlike Banquo, does not have any children, has to realise that while he is moving on and on, the story is taking another course: there is a rival plot unfolding in full swing: the story-line of the Weïrd Sisters. It is the same prophecy that has made him king that seems to place Banquo and Fleance, Banquo’s son, into the roles the Weïrd Sisters have assigned. To have a crown placed on one’s head is not enough. Now he should overtake Banquo and the Weïrd Sisters and place himself before them.

In the course of murdering Banquo, place will gain further significance. Macbeth hires two Murderers to do the dirty job, but when the fatal moment comes, and the assassins are waiting for their victims, a Third Murderer appears. Much ink has been spilt on the question who the Third Murderer might be (cf. e.g. Irving 2008: 147-150). Can it be Macbeth himself? But he is at the banquet, celebrating the crowning-ceremony. There are several arguments for and against Macbeth’s ability to be at two places at the same time, for example that *Macbeth* is a poetic drama, where we should not expect the realism of mid-19th century novels to prevail: it is precisely *dramaturgically* possible that Macbeth takes part in the attempt on the lives of Banquo and Fleance (and thus it is precisely Macbeth’s fault that Fleance may escape). During the banquet-scene, Lady Macbeth utters a sentence which I take to provide further support as regards Macbeth’s presence at the murder-scene of Banquo. The Lady says to her husband, telling him off for having been a spoil-sport: “You have displace’d the mirth [the happiness, the joy], broke the good meeting / With most admir’d disorder” (3.4.107-108). Lady Macbeth’s ironic, mocking words explicitly refer to the “meeting” but this is the only crux in the play where the word “displace” occurs. Macbeth, as the agency of displacement here, acts as if he had been displaced, too. Moreover, it is nowhere else in the play that there would be so much emphasis on a concrete place: a seat, a chair, a tangible stool. Ross, seated at the table with the other thanes, asks Macbeth: “Please’t not your Highness / To grace us with your royal company?” (3.4.43-44). But Banquo’s ghost has entered already “and sits in Macbeth’s place” (stage direction, 3.4.40). Thus Macbeth responds: “The table’s full”. Lennox insists: “Here is a place reserved, Sir.” “Where?” – Macbeth asks. (44-46). (As if Macbeth were echoing the Weïrd Sisters: “Where[’s ]the place?”). For sure, to see a ghost, especially shaking his “gory locks” (50) at the observer is terrible. Yet Macbeth might also be shocked because the second in line he annihilated did not ‘just appear’ in the banqueting hall, taking a stroll, but has *taken his place*, the royal seat, at the table. Macbeth, who has taken the place of somebody (Duncan) must witness now to having been *dis*placed and being *re*placed by somebody (Banquo). And, perhaps, as a result of his simultaneous displacement, he was/is also present at the murder-scene of Banquo.

In what follows, Macbeth will be more and more cornered, more and more fixed. He will become increasingly lonely: after the banquet-scene, we shall see Lady Macbeth again only in the sleepwalking-scene, when she is already mad and alone, too. Macbeth’s last real dramaturgical move is to visit the Weïrd Sisters for further prophecies. While Macbeth, in the words of the First Weïrd Sister, “stands amazedly” (4.1.126), various apparitions loom up in front of him. The third apparition talks *about* movement: “Macbeth shall never vanquish’d be, until / Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him” (92-94). Macbeth is intoxicated again: “That will never be: / Who can impress the forest; bid the tree / Unfix his earth-bound root? Sweet bodements! good! / […] our high-place’d Macbeth / Shall live the lease of Nature, pay his breath / To time, and mortal custom [Macbeth will live until he meets his natural death]” (94-100). The two contrasting poles of movement *versus* fixedness are set: Macbeth thinks he will remain “high-placed”, and the roots of the trees in Birnam forest will remain unfixed, whereas it will happen exactly the other way round. Macbeth will be deposed, the woods will start to move.

Yet for a while Macbeth will remain fixed in his castle. It is, I think, emblematic that whereas Macduff flees to England (cf. 4.1.142), leaving, in Lady Macduff’s words, “his mansion and his titles in a place / From whence himself does fly” (4.2.6-8), seeking a “place” not so “unsanctified, / Where such” (4.2.80-81) a man as the Murderer could find him, Macbeth remains in his castle and annihilates Lady Macduff and her little son *via* agents. At the beginning of the play, he moved toward the attackers of Scotland and eliminated them. Now he is waiting for the Scottish and English army to come to him. One of the last scenes of the play starts with Macbeth saying: “They have tied me to a stake / I cannot fly, / But bear-like [like a bear in the arena during one of the entertainments of Early Modern England, the bear-biting] I must fight the course” (5.7.1-2). The last thematised movement Macbeth has to perform is to turn: “Turn, hell-hound, turn” (5.8.3) – Macduff cries out before he kills Macbeth. Macduff will greet the new king, Malcolm, with the words: “Hail, King! For so thou art. Behold, where stand / Th’ usurper’s [Macbeth’s] cursed head: the time is free” (5.9.21). Macbeth’s head is now fixed to a pole, as Macbeth “fix’d” the “head” of” merciless Macdonwald upon [the] battlements” (cf. 1.2.9, 23-24). Will this new fixing free time indeed? Malcolm wants his thanes to believe so, trying to restore order: “That calls upon us, [what is still our duty] by the grace of Grace [God] / We will perform in measure, time and place” (5.9.38-39). By referring to performance, and evoking “time and place”, as Lady Macbeth did, and the Weïrd Sisters had done, at the beginning of the play, Malcolm perhaps tries to gain control over the theatre, the stage and the Aristotelian unities as well. Macbeth’s body will be put, like all our respective bodies, into a fixed place, the grave. With his death, the magic circle of time and place, wound up by the Weïrd Sisters, is broken. We have seen him being placed, moved, displaced, replaced, unfixed, and then fixed and replaced again. Macbeth is a villain, but a tragic villain. One aspect of his tragedy is that he has tried the “spatial impossible”, inseparable, as usual, from time: he wished to move, to go *and* remain in place at the same time.

Villains like Macbeth in Shakespeare’s culture found their proper place in hell. Where does Macbeth find a place for his audience today?

### Chapter 5 *Macbeth*: Time

Philosophers seldom live in castles

Philosophers, for instance on the dust-jackets of their books, may list their previous works; they may even write their own brief autobiography, as Descartes did in the first three parts of his *Discourse on the* *Method* (Descartes 1988:. 20-35) explaining what kind of an existential crisis had brought him to ask whether there was anything with absolute and metaphysical certainty. Yet we seldom get an account of the philosopher’s immediate and larger surroundings: for example, the room he is working in; if not a castle – which is most uncertain – then the house in which he lives; whether he has a wife, or children or not (maybe that in the “Acknowledgements”, where all wives and children appear to be wonderfully patient, encouraging and understanding, especially for missed vacations); whether he is young or old or middle-aged; whether he has career or promotion (tenure) worries or not; whether he is worried about his doctoral work to be submitted to the Academy, whether, in the witnessing presence of his best friend and companion-in-arms he was promised something while his friend was promised something else (not necessarily by Weïrd Sisters, but, for instance by a Dean) –- and I could long go on.

I will not ask whether this is a problem or not. Here I simply state, also at the risk of repeating myself, that I am inclined to side with a type of philosophy which does not try to ‘avoid’, or even ‘get rid of’, the human being and the self by, for example, totally ‘transforming’ them into a text, or by rendering them speechless with a rhetoric swarming with technical terms. As I stated already in my “Introduction”, I am in favour of a philosophy which is (also) an autobiography and thereby a self-analysis. I also wish to recall one of Cavell’s sentences that has ‘converted me’ to try my hand at his way of doing philosophy, a sentence concerning knowledge, yet having a by far wider significance:

But all this makes it seem that the philosophical problem of knowledge is something I impose on these matters; that I am the philosophical problem. I am. It is in me that the circuit of communication is cut; I am the stone on which the wheel breaks. (Cavell 1979: 83)

I readily admit that these sentences might just as easily be taken as indications of deep philosophical responsibility as signs of extreme narcissism, self-importance, even of arrogance. That I opt for the former reading is precisely taking that risk, with respect only to myself, of course, to which Cavell’s philosophy has always been open. Yet I have talked about my way to Cavell’s thinking in my “Introduction” at great length. My point here rather is that what we usually do not know about the philosopher, we more or less know about Macbeth and that we have to take this into account when we deal with the dagger-monologue. So how does Macbeth fit into the larger context? How does his *vision* of the dagger relate to the prophecies of the weird sisters in Act I? Is there anyone writing his script for him, or is he writing it for himself? How did it all begin?

The context of the other “great tragedies” and how it all began

If we begin with the other three “great tragedies” (the term “great tragedy” coming, of course, from A. C. Bradley’s epoch-making book, *Shakespearean Tragedy* [Bradley 1950, 1904]) and look for “authors” within the plays, we may find the following.

In *Hamlet* the script of the drama the young Prince has to act in, first seems to be written by old Hamlet, the Ghost. Under the name his son has also inherited, the respectable warrior produces a kind of real “*Ur*-*Hamlet*”[[85]](#footnote-85). Then Hamlet’s re-enactment of that script follows, with the title: “The Murder of Gonzago” or “The Mousetrap” – no doubt, a borrowing, but a topical one, with the interpolation of “a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines” (2.2.35-536) by Hamlet himself, lines we can never know we hear or not because the performance is sadly interrupted. After the killing of Polonius, authorship shifts over to Claudius, into whose plot Hamlet inserts only the re-writing of the letter to the English king, sending, instead of himself, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to be “put to sudden death” (5.2.46). It is this insertion which enables Hamlet to finally bring about the ‘death of the author’ (Claudius) as well.

In *Othello* the ‘writer’ of the play is undoubtedly Iago, a flexible, and constantly improvising playwright, whose “enmeshing net” (cf. 2.3.351-352) gets torn and broken only by the “magic web” (3.4.67), the finely delicate and violently crude tissue of the handkerchief, sewn by a “sibyl” in “her prophetic fury” (2.4.68 and 70). The famous handkerchief inclines Othello to act in a way which not even such a witty, yet metaphysically so impoverished an author as Iago can possibly foresee. Othello bursts out of, and completes, the tragedy by offering Desdemona to it as a sacrifice.

In *King* *Lear* the tragedy is inscribed first into the ever-shifting borderlines Lear has drawn on his map with a “darker purpose” (1.1.35) and into the handwriting of Gloucester’s illegitimate son, Edmund, the letters of which Gloucester is too short-sighted to tell from the letters in the handwriting of his other son, Edgar. These inscriptions become later the hieroglyph of the borderline between being in the human, beastly, and the divine sense, with all the excuses not only for being unable to read (e.g. the map of existence) but also for the inability to see and to stand being seen and loved.

In Macbeth’s tragedy, before his own appearance, we meet the three weird sisters and the King, Duncan, surrounded by the narrators (reporters) of Macbeth’s exemplary braveness. In these “introductory scenes” – as it was observed in Chapter 4 on place and space) it is the three witches who seem to govern the co-ordinates of time and place: the very first word of the whole play is “when” in the question of the First Witch: “when shall we three meet again?” (1.1.1); then she goes on with: “where the place?” (1.1,6), to start Scene 3 with: “where hast thou been, Sister?” (1.3.1). The speeches of Duncan and his associates, on the other hand, are full of questions put on substance and on origin, especially in Duncan’ s inquiries beginning with “what”, “who” and “whence”: “what bloody man is that?” (1.2.1); “who comes here?“ (1.2.46) “whence cam’st thou, worthy Thane?” (1.2.49) “what he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won” (2.2.69). But there is also Malcolm’s “this is the Sergeant, / Who, like a good and hardy soldier...” (1.2.3-4), or the Captain’s “And whence the sun ‘gins his reflection, [...] / So from that spring, whence comfort seem’d to come / Discomfort swells” (1.2.25 and 27-28).

There is also a significant difference between the camp of the witches and that of Duncan’s with respect to their attitudes to quality. Duncan thinks in terms of an equilibrium, where the vacuum created by the disappearance of one kind of thing can totally be filled up by that opposite which takes its place: “what he [the Thane of Cawdor] hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won” (1.2.69, quoted earlier with respect to substance), “so well thy words become thee, as thy wounds” (1.2.44). Similarly, the very reports reaching the King feature a quantitatively balanced duality, in which doubt (the wavering between two alternatives) even when it makes its appearance with a double force, gets counterbalanced by the twice multiplied efforts of the two great warriors, Macbeth and Banquo. The battle, in the Captain’s description, “stood” “doubtful”, “as two spent swimmers, that do cling together / And choke their art” (1.2.7-8), yet brave Macbeth and Banquo, “as cannons overcharg’d with double cracks” (1.2.37) “doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe” (1.2.39), not to mention Macbeth’s encounter with the former Thane of Cawdor:

The Thane of Cawdor, began a dismal conflict; Till that Bellona’s bridegroom, lapp’d in proof, Confronted him with self-comparisons,

Point against point, rebellious arm ‘gainst arm,

Curbing his lavish spirit... (1.2.54 -58).

It is more than ironic how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, always with respect to Duncan, will echo the “two”-s and “double”-s: in their speeches, however, it is not so much opposing qualities which merge, but the same quality adds up and multiplies. Lady Macbeth greets the old King with:

All our service,

In every point twice done, and then done double,

Were poor and single business, to contend

Against those honours deep and broad, wherewith

Your Majesty loads our house ... (1.6;14-18)

and Macbeth will admit that, being both Duncan’s “kinsman” and “host” (cf. 1.7.13 and 14), the King, may justifiably be in Inverness-Castle “in double trust“ (1.7.12). By contrast, perhaps even as a horrible travesty of the Holy Trinity, the three witches, with their “when the battle’s lost and won” (1.1.4) right at the beginning of the play imply that – as it has already been pointed out – quality is a matter of perspective, that, after all, what is winning for one is always losing for the other, that mutually exclusive categories necessarily entail one another.

When the three sisters authoritatively and sententiously state that “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.11) they undermine, precisely *in* setting up this equatory, equalising and equivivocatory paradox, all claims to authority based on distinguishable qualities. This paradox suggests that qualities are present not in what they are (i.e. in their presence) but in what they, through their very opposites, are not (i.e. they are present in their antithetical absence). Even in the tumult of multipliers like “Thrice the blinded cat hath mew’d” and “Thrice, and once the hedge-pig whin’d” (4.1.1-2), one should account for the famous refrain “Double, double toil and trouble” (4.1. 9, 20, 34 – three times!) along the lines of qualitative contrarieties, penetrating, and simultaneously deconstructing and constructing each other, rather than along the lines of a quantitative extension of related or opposing values.

Macbeth’s ‘baptismal feast’ and ‘birth’

Macbeth, the main and absolutely positive character of both the Captain’s and Rose’s reports, first gets into the pattern of the “single man against the many” in these people’s descriptions, fighting markedly two battles, one after the other. Against the “multiplying villainies” of “merciless Macdonowald” (1.2.11 and 9) as much as against

Norway himself

With terrible numbers,

Assisted by that most disloyal traitor,

The Thane of Cawdor (1.2.51-54)

he is said to struggle practically alone, Banquo’s “counterbalancing” name only brought up by Duncan: “Dismayed not this / Our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?” (1.2.33-34). There is a final close-up in both narrations, in which Macbeth comes face to face with the arch-enemies, the sources of all evil, and either slays them, or forces them to surrender. It is in these narratives that Macbeth goes through a kind of baptismal feast. First he is called “brave Macbeth” who “well deserves that name” (1.2.16), then he is compared to “Valour’s minion [favourite]” (1.2.19), and to an “eagle” and a “lion” (1.2.35) together with the unique name of “Bellona’s bridegroom” (1.2.2.55) to receive the famous and notorious title the “Thane of Cawdor” first from the witches (1.3.49), and then from Rosse (1.3.105), the latter as much verifying what the weird sisters say as also establishing a kind of “communication” between the witch- and the Duncan-camp.

Wittgenstein at one point says that “It is easy to imagine a language consisting of orders and reports in battle” (§ 19) (after all, he was once a soldier himself)[[86]](#footnote-86) and he also insists, as we have seen, that a name is only a “preparation for” a “description” (§ 49) and that its task is to introduce something or somebody into the language-game (cf. § 49 again). Indeed, in the Captain’s and Rosse’s accounts, the play starts with a kind of battle-language, which, with the labels Macbeth receives and with the witches’ “hail”-s, “choppy fingers“ (1.3.44) and “reference“ “to the coming on of time“ (1.5.9), baptise Macbeth in order to toss him ‘into play’ – into the play.

Baptism, I suggest, is not too much of a strained metaphor of mine if we consider the Captain’s presentation of Macbeth’s first face-to-face fight with Macdonowald, when “Valour’s minion” did not see a “handle of a dagger” “toward his hand” but “never shook hands, nor bade farewell to him, / Till he unseam’d him from the nave to th’ chops” (1.2.21-22), while previously he “carv’d out his passage, / Till he fac’d the slave”(1.2. 19-20). Especially the “tailoring metaphor” (cf. Muir 1964: 7) of “unseaming” (‘cutting’, ‘ripping’) somebody up from the navel (the source of life for the foetus in its mother’s womb) to the jaws is an image which suggests a violent and ‘reversed Caesarean’, when one, with a sword in his hand, “carves out his passage” from the inside into the world.

This association would perhaps not even flash to mind – as I have not found it in the book of such a meticulously attentive reader of the play as Fawkner, or in any of the critical editions I have consulted[[87]](#footnote-87) – if we did not know that Macbeth will finally be defeated by a man not “of woman born” (5,8.13) but “untimely ripp’d” “from his mother’s womb” (5.8.16 and 15), and if we further did not know that, as Cleanth Brooks in his now classical essay “*The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness*” has shown, “the babe turns out to be, as a matter of fact, perhaps the most powerful symbol in the tragedy.” (Brooks 1990: 193). Macbeth, as “Great Glamis” and “worthy Cawdor” (1.5.54) as he might be, is often and markedly coupled with the child in Lady Macbeth’s rhetoric, too. It is Macbeth who is “full o’th’ milk of human kindness” (1,5.17), in a context where his wife asks the spirits to come “to [her] woman’s breasts, / And take [her] milk for gall” (1.5.47-48) and where the potential reprisal for Macbeth’s hesitation to kill Duncan is notoriously linked with the readiness to dash out the brains of even their own child:

I have given suck, and know

How tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me:

I would, while it was smiling in my face,

Have pluck’d my nipple from his boneless gums

And dash’d the brains out, had I so sworn

As you have done to this. (1.7.54-59)

It is also Macbeth whom his wife reminds that “‘tis the eye of childhood / That fears a painted devil” (2.2.53-54) and that

...these flaws and starts

Impostors to true fear, would well become

A woman’s story at a winter’s fire,

Authoris’d by her grandma. (3.4.62-65)

It is interesting to note how the child’s perspective, his or her way of looking at things is ridiculed and discarded in Lady Macbeth’s discourse. It is worthy of further note, in connection with what I said earlier about the child crawling or lying in its playpen, as opposed to the erect grown-up person obviously no longer frightened by a “painted devil”, how Wittgenstein treats and takes into account the child’s perspective (smaller and bigger), not only in the quoted “talking pot” passage (§ 282), but also in the second part of *Philosophical Investigations*, in passages inquiring into aspect-seeing. (*PI* II, xi , 194-208). And it is worthy of even further note that a “story at a winter fire” is told in Shakespeare in *The Winter’s Tale*. This “sad tale”, which is “best for winter” (2.1.25) will be told by a young boy, Mamilius, yet we only hear the beginning (“There was a man [...] Dwelt by a churchyard”, 2.1.29-30) and never the end.

The child’s perspective, and the lack of it, is, indeed, of great significance in both the *Investigations* and in *Macbeth*. Thus Cleanth Brooks is absolutely right in claiming that much of Macbeth’s tragedy lies in his having to face the “naked babe”, whose power (contained precisely in its helplessness) is not only accentuated by Macbeth’s brutality towards offsprings (towards Fleance, Banquo’s son whose descendants are promised to be kings and Macduff’s child) but also by the marked absence of children in the Macbeth-family. It is precisely in this absence that Macbeth also plays the role of the child at home: while being “Bellona’s bridegroom”, waging war on, and getting ultimately defeated by, “the naked babe” (cf. 1.7.21), Macbeth is the “naked babe” himself, being borne and getting baptised in the battle-field and “upon the heath” (1.1.6). James Calderwood, in an attentive and highly insightful reading of the play (Calderwood 1986) also claims that one of the most important driving forces behind all the efforts of the Macbeth-couple is a significant *lack*, the lack of children, the lack of succession, which will prompt them to identify their putting an end to succession as their absolute success, to *replace* succession by success (cf. Calderwood 1986: 59-62). Thus, the rebellion against paternal authority to ‘graduate’ from child to man, the desire to leave an imprinting on the world in the absence of children, and Macbeth’s simultaneous playing the role of the child and of the lover, coming home after a long time in the battlefield, all get their expression in the *act* of killing Duncan: “the murder” – Calderwood writes –

can now be seen as an act of incest and parricide in which Macbeth simultaneously kills the paternal Duncan and possesses the maternal Lady, thereby confirming his initiation from childhood into manliness (Calderwood 1986:. 55)[[88]](#footnote-88)

Finally, Lady Macbeth’s mysterious reference to her “having given suck”, this reference giving rise to infamous speculations about “how many children Lady Macbeth had”[[89]](#footnote-89), gets a highly original interpretation by Cavell, in a brief yet all the more penetrating recent article entitled *Macbeth Appalled*:

The compulsively repeated critical sneer expressed in the question “how many children had Lady Macbeth?” expresses anxiety over the question of the marriage’s sexuality and childlessness, as if critics are spooked by the marriage. But I speak for myself. Is there any good reason, otherwise, to deny or to slight the one break in Lady Macbeth’s silence on the subject of her childlessness, her assertion that she has sucked a (male) child? There may be good reason for her husband to deny or doubt it, in his considering whose it might be. If we do not deny her assertion, then the question how many children she had is of no interest that I can see; the interesting question is what happened, in fact or in fantasy, to the child she remembers. [...] And if we do not deny or slight her assertion then the fate of the child is *their* question, a fact or issue for them of magnitude to cause the magnitude and intimacy of guilt and melancholy Macbeth begins with and Lady Macbeth ends with. [...] What is the element of difference to [Macbeth’s] consciousness that brings forth his guilt and private violence and melancholy, as if settling something? This question draws me to imagine the bloody man [about whom Duncan asks at the beginning of the play “What bloody man is that?”] – a poor player whom we never see again, who in Shakespeare’s source was killed – against the question I impute to Macbeth (granted as it were that Lady Macbeth knows the answer) about what happened at the death and birth of his child. [...] I do not look for a stable answer to be found by Macbeth: he protests his acceptance and his doubt of the witches throughout. But that there are witches and that they bring forth children may provide him with a glance of explanation, perhaps of hope, perhaps of despair; and explanation at once of *the presence of the absence* of his child and of the *absence in the presence* of his wife. (Cavell 1993: 3-6)

It is precisely one of the most important instances of this “presence of absence” and “absence in presence” that we are now approaching, having witnessed to Macbeth’s ‘birth’ and ‘baptism’, corroborated and further complicated by the overall imagery of the play, involving the child, childlessness, intercourse, violence and initiation.

Out in the world: “and nothing is but what is not”. Expectation and Wittgenstein

What kind of a world does Macbeth find around himself after his battles? In his first sentence he echoes the qualitative paradox of the witches, yet not in the syntactic structure of identification (“Fair is foul, and foul is fair”, 1.1.11), but of juxtaposition: “So foul and fair a day I have not seen” (1.3.38). Then Macbeth is reached from both the witches’ and Duncan’s directions, when – as it was interpreted in the “Introduction” in detail but here analysed from another angle –

Two truths are told,   
As happy prologues to the swelling act  
Of the imperial theme. (1.3.127-l29)

This is also the point when the “borrow’d robes” (1.3.109) are put on the “naked babe”, appointed now as the main character of the plot of kingship (“the imperial theme”). The metatheatrical metaphor will reverberate in the famous lines of the “tomorrow-mono­logue”: “Life’s but a walking shadow; a poor player, / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage” (5.5.24-25). The “two truths” the main character can now hear in a succession (“Glamis” and “Thane of Cawdor”, 1.3.116), slowly give way to a juxtaposition of the “foul and fair”-type: “This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill; cannot be good” (1.3.131), yet here the qualitative paradox, indicating that neither way can be unequivocally taken, presents itself in the form of a negation expressing logical impossibility (“cannot” – “cannot”), but still weighed down, and evaluated by, conditional “if”, a most favoured device in the syntax of Shakespearean tragedy:

If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success,

Commencing in a truth?

I am Thane of Cawdor:

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion

Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,

And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,

Against the use of nature? (1.3.132-137)

In Macbethian ‘logical grammar’ accumulatively conjunctive *and*, having already connected two opposites (“foul and fair”: bad and good) turns into negated modal alternation (“cannot – cannot”, “neither – nor”), which, in turn, gets contrasted and pinned down in a restrictive fashion by conditional *if*.

The contrast is based on “commencing (in a truth)” – “unfix (my hair)”; “seated heart” – “knock at my ribs”, and “supernatural” – “against the use of nature”: the uncertain and equivocal seems to stabilise into a truth, while what it implies simultaneously removes and dismantles this very truth. Macbeth has fully understood the ‘deconstructive’ lesson of the Weïrd Sisters, but it is still an *understanding* which is conditioned and comparable, and which becomes a lived and horrible experience precisely in the dagger monologue.

The contrast, on the other hand, also gets grounded in “given” and “I yield” : it contains that understanding of the given nature of the “supernatural soliciting” of the witches which will become fully-fledged in the appearance of the dagger and the Ghost of Banquo, and it is this *given* which will give way to the unknown for Macbeth. While “if”-s suspend judgement in both directions and “horrible imaginings” are still outweighed by “present fears” and action is still paralysed by speculation (“function is smother’d in surmise”, 2.3.141), *nothing* makes its appearance: “And nothing is, but what is not” (2..3.142).

We have arrived at one of the most significant cruces of the play indeed. As I was arguing in the “Introduction”, an important paradox of *nothing* is that it is not “nothing”: it is always able to tell us “something”. Of course, following the Wittgensteinian line of argumentation, we should again resist the temptation of looking for a ‘referent’ for “nothing”, although the occurrence of “what” in the second half of the structure might entice us to search for a *substantive*, which is, precisely, *not* yielding the reading: ‘*Nothing* is identical with that which does not exist’. However, proceeding along these lines would only close the circle: we would be left with two ‘things’, one would be ‘nothing’, the other ‘that which does not exist’, together with the statement that they are identical, yet, even if we disregard that this is by far not the only meaning of *nothing*, we would remain in the ancient riddle of non-being, for what is that ‘substantive’ or ‘thing’ that/which (“what”) is *not* ?

Rather, we should concentrate on the specific plight which culminates in this line, especially because it ends a self-analysis, namely Macbeth’s reflections on his own feelings and thoughts. I take the clue to be two words in lines 137 and 139, respectively: “present“ and “yet“:

Present fears

Are less than horrible imaginings.

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical...(1.3.137-139).

These words not only create space for the contrast between fears and imaginings but for the juxtaposition of present and future, yielding a perspective not utilized in the “Introduction”: the dimension of *time*. The possibility to draw a parallel between the above lines (1.3.137-139) and “And nothing is, but what is not” is reinforced by the identical syntactic structures, both containing “is but” in a restrictive sense: “yet is but fantastical” and “nothing is, but”.

As early as in the 5th century B.C., at the “dawn” of philosophy, Parmenides of Ela claims that “what is not”, cannot be known: if something can be thought, it can also be.[[90]](#footnote-90) Hegel, one of the revivers of the Greek conception of Being for dialectical thinking contends that I could not experience Being without simultaneously experiencing the negation of Being, i.e. Nothingness: ‘that which is not’ is a necessary pre-requisite of all beings to exist.[[91]](#footnote-91) Martin Heidegger agrees: our being (*Dasein,* being-in-the world) as human beings is “held out into the nothing” but nothingness is neither an “object” (a ‘thing’), nor a “being”. It is precisely because “nothingness” is ‘doing its job’ of annihilation well (“the nothing itself nihilates” or: “The nothing itself nothings” – *Das Nichts Nichtet*[[92]](#footnote-92)) that beings make themselves manifest (cf. Heidegger 1998: 90-91). Nothingness – which we encounter in our ordinary world as boredom and Anxiety (*Angst*) (89-93) – allows for the “essential unfolding” (91) of Being with the force of indispensability and necessity.

Thus “what is not” gets paralleled by, and thereby connected with, “what is not here”, with that which is still only imagined and anticipated, in contrast with the emphatic present of fears. As pointed out in the “Introduction”, one of the possible meanings of “And nothing is, but what is not” is: ‘And nothing else is here but what is not yet here and what is still to come’, or, to put it somewhat more enigmatically: ‘nothing is present but what is not (yet) present, i.e. it is non-presence (absence) which is present’.

This interpretation puts Macbeth into the position of a person subordinated to the domain of hope, expectation and anticipation: what is not yet here, precisely through the absence of a ‘substantive’, is not *nothing* but a space already created, prepared for something, a qualified emptiness, a *before*, an open-function in the system to be filled, and, in a different, yet very important sense, always already *filled* in this hope and anticipation.

Does this mean that a ‘thought’, a separate ‘entity’, a kind of ‘cognitive content’ from our minds goes ‘ahead of’ our hope and expectation (‘carrying it’, as it were) and is ‘already somewhere’, somewhere *before* us? This is, of course an extremely difficult matter, one of the questions *Macbeth* is all about, involving such ever-recurring problems as the ‘nature’ of time itself and, inevitably, such queries as free will, predestination, personal responsibility, and the like. I will return to what I take to be an important sense of time in the next section, here I offer only some qualifications to the riddles of expectation and hope on the basis, again, of *Philosophical Investigations*. I do not claim that Wittgenstein has solved these riddles, yet a subtle differentiation he makes is worthy of consideration and here precisely in *contrast* with *Macbeth*.

According to Wittgenstein, it is taking expectation, hope (and also belief) to be akin to (to belong to the same category as, to be in the same boat with) thinking which gives us the impression that the content of our expectation should somehow be travelling before our actual (experience of) expectation:

I see someone pointing a gun and say “I expect a report”. The shot is fired. – Well, that was what you expected; so did that report somehow already exist in your expectation? Or is it just that there is some other kind of agreement between your expectation and what occurred; that that noise was not contained in your expectation, and merely accidentally supervened when the expectation was being fulfilled? But no, if the noise had not occurred, my expectation would not have been fulfilled; the noise fulfilled it; it was not an accompaniment of the fulfilment like a second guest accompanying the one I expected (§ 442).

As the noise in firing the gun is not an *accompaniment* of the fulfilment of my expectation, my expectation is not an accompaniment of the content of my expectation (the thing that I am looking forward to, mouldable into the shape of a sentence or a thought), either: my attitude, my mood in expectation, my experience of looking forward to something, is not different from what I am expecting or looking forward to but one and the same thing. The content of my expectation (mouldable into a sentence or thought) is not something we can poke out from the expectation as a separate *entity* but it *is* the expectation by being a possible *expression* of this expectation:

I want to say: “If someone could see the mental process of expectation, he would necessarily be seeing what was being expected.” But that is the case: if you see the expression of an expectation, you see what is being expected. And in what other way, in what other sense would it be possible to see it? (§ 452)

Hence, expectation (and believing, hoping, etc.) belongs to a different “family” than thinking:

A proposition, and hence in another sense, a thought, can be ‘the expression’ of belief, hope, expectation, etc. But believing is not thinking. (A grammatical remark.) The concepts of believing, expecting, hoping are less distantly related than they are to the concept of thinking (§ 574).

The riddle which arises because of our mixing up the states of thinking and expecting (hoping, believing, etc.) has, as always, its linguistic (grammatical) aspects, too:

One may have the feeling that in the sentence “I expect he is coming” one is using the words “he is coming” in a different sense from the one they have in the assertion “He is coming”. But if it were so how could I say that my expectation had been fulfilled? If I wanted to explain the words “he” and “is coming”, say by means of ostensive definitions, the same definitions of these words would go for both sentences. But it might now be asked: what’s it like for him to come? –The door opens, someone walks in, and so on. - What’s it like for me to expect him to come? – I walk up and down the room, look at the clock now and then, and so on. (§ 444)

We may once more appreciate the little scenes, the mini-dramas Wittgenstein creates to get at a problem. One way of clearing up the muddle brought about by the mixing up the different states of expecting and thinking is, indeed, to keenly observe what I am doing, and under what circumstances, and what sentences I use, what language-game and grammar I follow when I am expecting on the one hand, and when I am thinking on the other. We have to give an account of “what is tangible about our state as part of the specific state which we are postulating” (para. 608), something, as Wittgenstein’s diagnosis goes again, we tend to forget to do, immediately jumping to something “spiritual” instead.

Thus, the point to emphasise here, I think, is that Macbeth is now in a totally different state from the one when he was “surmising” (cf. 1.3..141): the state of expectation and hope will, from now on, totally engulf Macbeth and though he will of course nowhere solve the riddle of the relationship between expectation and time (a riddle most succinctly put by him in “But here, upon this bank and shoal of time, / We’d jump the life to come”, 1.7.6-7), we may at least say that from “And nothing is, but what is not” Macbeth will be in pursuit and exploration of this riddle.

This is precisely possible because – as it was already emphasized in the “Introduction” – of a specificity of *Macbeth*: in this play, through the “supernatural soliciting” of the witches, a ‘cognitive content’, a verbalised and formulated (in human language?) *given* is ‘travelling before’ the hero, befalling, suddenly, unexpectedly, wantedly and unwantedly, ‘rushing upon’ him, as he experiences it, from the outside. And Macbeth – as it has also been pointed out – will precisely want to inquire into the nature of this givenness. Were it not for the Weïrd Sisters, we could easily side with one of the speaking voices of the *Investigations* saying: “As if the mere prophecy, no matter whether true or false, foreshadowed the future; whereas it knows nothing of the future and cannot know less than nothing” (§ 461). However, and now in line with Wittgenstein’s insights concerning expectation again, Wittgenstein’s way of handling expectation will help us to concentrate not so much on the content of the witches’ prophecy, and not so much on the status of that content as being already inside Macbeth or not but on the attitude and predicament of Macbeth, since we may assume, with Wittgenstein, that this content is one and the same with the attitude and predicament itself.

Macbeth, in *yet* and *present*, had to face the aporia of time as a “prologue” to the “swelling act” (cf. 1.3.128 ). Thus, he has nothing better to do than to thematise *time* itself.

Narrative versus ‘the dramatic’

Macbeth thematises time explicitly not long after his “And nothing is, but what is not”, at this point – as his “may” indicates – relinquishing authority over it: “Come what come may, / Time and the hour runs through the roughest day” (1.3.148). Yet this is already the second thematisation of time in the play so far – the first comes from Banquo, who attributes competence over “running time” to the three witches:

If you can look into the seeds of time

And say which grain will grow, and which will not

Speak then to me...(1,3.58-60)

However, this scene, thematising time initially, involves not only the future but the *past* as well. Macbeth, to apologise for his being “rapt” (1.3.143), i.e. totally absorbed in weighing his chances for becoming king, offers the following explanation: “Give me your favour: my dull brain was wrought [‘agitated’, ‘troubled’, Clark and Mason: 149] / With things forgotten” (1.3.150-l51).

To these lines, Kenneth Muir’s gloss is: “*things forgotten* [...] i.e. which he is trying, to recall”, and Muir laconically adds: “He [Macbeth] is lying.” (Muir 1964: 22). This practice is followed by Nicholas Brooke’s edition in the ‘Oxford Shakespeare’ series: “*forgotten* [:] an excuse, the opposite of truth.” (Brooke 1990: 108).

But is this as simple as that? Could not Macbeth’s line also mean: ‘I was thinking about things which I had thought about at one time; until now I have really believed that I have forgotten them but under these strange circumstances (i.e. Weïrd Sisters, etc.) they have all come to my mind again.’? Of course, both Muir’s and Brooke’s respective interpretations are based on the absolutely correct principle of drama-analysis, namely that we should not go ‘before’ the drama in time and speculate on what Macbeth might have been doing prior to his battle against Macdonowald and Norway – such speculations led to the vexed question of “how many children Lady Macbeth had”. The drama begins with the appearance of the Weïrd Sisters, and since between that moment and Macbeth’s present words (1.3.150-151) there is really no indication that he would be entertaining the idea of killing Duncan, the worthy Thane cannot be telling the truth.

Yet this principle involves a by far more important issue than whether Macbeth is lying or not. This issue concerns how much we are entitled to use our knowledge of Macbeth’s story as a whole; to what extent we may mobilise, at *any* point of the drama, not only the information we have about Macbeth’s past but also about his future, as it will, as we know from previous readings and performances, unfold before us in the course of the play. And if we concentrate only on the moment of the dramatic present, i.e. on the state of things as Macbeth presents them in his monologue, (1.3.150-151), then Macbeth’s future, *present* (‘in front of us’) right now only in the words of the weird sisters, dwindles into the same conceitedness and is being enshrouded by the same kind of “bubbles” melting “as breath to the wind” (1.3.79 and 83) as the past: the “things forgotten”.

To put this more into perspective: *Macbeth* is a special play, and therefore a good *apropos* to raise the above question because here we not only have our previous experiences with the play from which we can ‘foretell’ Macbeth’s future at any point of the drama but we also have the Weïrd Sisters, dramatizing this experience for our convenience; hence perhaps *Macbeth* is the only play in Shakespeare’s oeuvre where having done our homework is so much honoured and appreciated. On the other hand, Muir’s and Brooke’s glosses, deriving from our widely accepted principle of dramatic analysis (principles I have also used throughout, jumping back and forth in the text, too) are good occasions to ask no lesser a question than whether we do not take precisely the tension of the ‘moment’, and, with that, the suspense of the ‘dramatic’ away if we mobilise our knowledge of Macbeth’s future at any chosen point of the drama.

This question, as I see it, cuts across the hopelessly vast problem of “narrative *versus* drama”, a topic which – to emphasise it again – is highly suitable for a play taken from a long narrative: as it was elaborated in Chapter 3 on sources, *Macbeth* is primarily from Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, 1587, second ed., considerably cut, abridged and mixed with other material. In Shakespeare’s play, the thematisation of time, as well as a script always already written, and still being constantly written, becomes an obsession again and again.

It seems that it is as difficult to draw a line between narrative and drama as between philosophy and literature. Since perhaps Aristotle’s remark at the beginning of Chapter 14 in his *Poetics* saying that “for even without seeing the play, the plot should be so constructed that anyone who hears the events as they unfold will both shudder and be moved to pity at the outcome” (Aristotle 1967: 53b3-6), the word *plot* has been widely used to refer to, and give an account of, the “fable” (the construction of actions and events), inhering in both narrative genres and in drama. Aristotle’s hammering on the absolute supremacy of the plot as “the structure of events” (Aristotle 1967: 50a15) and as “the foundation or as it were the soul of the tragic art” (Aristotle 1967: 50a38-39) is well-known; as John Henry Newman succinctly puts it, according to Aristotle,

by confining the attention to one series of events and scene of action, [tragedy] bounds and finishes off the confused luxuriance of real nature; while by a skilful adjustment of circumstances, it brings into sight the connection of cause and effect, completes the dependence of the parts one on another, and harmonises the proportions of the whole. (Newman 1887: 9)

Stress is on harmony and wholeness; in Paul Ricoeur’s analysis, Aristotle’s definition of *muthos* [plot] as the organisations of the events first emphasizes concordance. And the concordance is characterized by three features: completeness, wholeness, and appropriate magnitude (cf. Ricoeur 1983: 38).

It is Aristotle’s insistence on the plot, and on *this* kind of plot, which led – as Andrew Gibson argues – to the idea, shared by many writers and critics from Henry James to Wayne Booth, that “to show the unity of a novel is partly to demonstrate its quality.” (Gibson 1990: 3-4). This approach contends that unevenness, incoherence, the “accidental” and the “arbitrary” (cf. James 1934: 84). and “the air of complete disorganisation” (Booth 1983: 224) in narratives should get spruced up – or even ignored.

However, since perhaps Nietzsche’s pleasure in the “irregularity” of Shakespeare and in Sterne’s “artistic style in which the fixed form is continually being broken up, displaced, transposed back into indefiniteness, so that it signifies one thing and at the same time another” (Nietzsche 1987: 103, cf. also 238-239, and especially since Bakhtin’s famous distinction between “monologic” and “dialogic” novels in connection with Dostoevsky’s prose, recent theory, overwhelmingly influenced by Roland Barthes and Gerald Genette (see especially Bakhtin 1984, Genette 1980 and Barthes 1977), has moved “away from conceptions of narrative in terms of a static set of fixed co-ordinates towards an increasing responsiveness to narrative as movement or process” (Gibson 1990: 6). Several narratologists have investigated the “dynamisation” of narrative situations “*in* narrative” (cf. Gibson 1990: 20-21 and 1-18).

Thus we may witness to a peculiar ‘double motion’ going on and around the problem of drama and narrative: in earlier criticism, on the one hand, distinction between narrative and drama was obscured because of the all-encompassing term of the plot with its alleged demand on coherence for drama as much as for the narrative genres – often leaving critics with no other criteria for differentiation than, for example, the ‘dialogue-form in drama’ or ‘the presence of the (omniscient) author in novels but not in drama’, etc. When, on the other hand, the plot was ‘liberated’ from its duty to bring about unity and coherence, it was precisely dynamic and ‘Dyonysian’ drama which became the model for the understanding of the narrative genres, unfixing the borderlines between drama and narrative again.

Yet it is just this well-known tendency in narrative analysis where I take my clue: my purpose is not so much to chisel crevices and polish up edges between ‘the novel’, ‘the drama’, ‘the short-story’, ‘the epic poem’, etc. as genres because genres cannot, of course, be kept strictly apart: they all participate in one another’s features, mutually inspiring one another. What I am interested in is rather two attitudes or principles, which, as I conceive of them, cut across the traditional classification of genres and the reason for my using the respective adjectives ‘dramatic’ and ‘narrative’, still resounding the labels of genres to describe them, has to do with the tribute I pay to tradition endowing one genre with either of these attitudes or principles to a greater or lesser degree than another one.

Let me begin with a pun, somewhat related to the context of *Macbeth*, most probably written in 1606, around the time when England was still kept in suspense by the trial of the infamous equivocator, Father Henry Garnet, who was an ally to Guy Fawkes and his gang in the attempt to blow up the King in Parliament on 5 November, 1605. The ‘dramatic’, as I wish to use the term, is a ‘gunpowder plot’ against the plot as it is understood by Aristotle and his followers to be the structure, “the foundation, or as it were the soul of the tragic art.” (Aristotle 1967: 50a38-39). I intend to arrest and apprehend the ‘dramatic’ in the non-sizeable and non-apprehensible ‘moment’ as it disrupts the sequential, as it becomes a kind of ‘sedition’ and a ‘blaze of insurrection’ against the structuring and ordering of events. As opposed to the plot in the Aristotelian sense (the plot in a drama, or in a novel, or in any other genre), which lays a constant claim to a ‘totalising fulfilment’, to an overview, to a more or less complete holding of causes and effects, ‘before’-s and ‘after’-s, or – in Genettian terms – of “analepsis” and “prolepsis” (Rimmon-Kenan 1991: 46) together, the ‘dramatic’ consists in ‘the moment’, when the ‘previous’ and the ‘next’ are bracketed and, as a kind of ‘Zenonian arrow’ stopping in mid-air, or as an “air-drawn dagger” (3.4.59) suspended, the weight of undecidedness comes to the fore, the weight of various possibilities, where the number of possibilities is undoubtedly limited yet no one would be able to give an exhaustive list of them all.

The ‘moment’, as I understand it, is when you *must* *wager*, yet emphasis is even more on *must* than on wagering itself, since wager, though it is just the move of preparation for an outcome, already carries hope and expectation in a particular direction. *Wager* here is primarily used in the sense Blaise Pascal uses it in his famous *Penses*, in Section III, under paragraph 233, entitled “Infinite – nothing”:

Do not, then, reprove for errors those who have made a choice; for you know nothing about it. “No but I blame them for having made, not this choice, but a choice; for again both he who chooses heads and he who chooses tails are equally at fault, they are both in the wrong. The true course is not to wager at all.

Yes; but you must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked. Which will you choose then? Let us see. Since you must choose, let us see which interests you least. [...] For it is no use to say it is uncertain if we will gain, and it is certain that we risk, and that the infinite distance between the *certainty* of what is staked and the *uncertainty* of what will be gained, equals the finite good which is certainly staked against the uncertain infinite. [...] There is not an infinite distance between the certainty staked and the uncertainty of the gain; that is untrue. In truth, there is an infinity between the certainty of gain and the certainty of loss. [...] And so our proposition is of infinite force, when there is the finite to stake in a game where there are equal risks of gains and loss and the infinite to gain. [...] “I confess it, I admit it. [...] but I have my hands tied and my mouth closed; I am forced to wager, and I am not free. I am not released, and I am so made that I cannot believe. What, then, would you have me do?” (Pascal 1952: 215)

Yet *wager*, in the sense I use the word, also carries the meaning given to it by Claudius before the fatal duel between Hamlet and Laertes, where what is at stake (the wager) is precisely *not* what is announced: “six Barbary horses, against [...] six French rapiers and poniards” (5.2.144-145) but Hamlet’s head. However Hamlet knows that just as much as Claudius does:

**King**. Give them the foils, young Osric.

Cousin Hamlet, you know the wager?

**Ham**. Very well, my lord.

Your Grace has laid odd o’th’ weaker side. (5.2.256-257)

Consequently, the wager itself, the moment is never fulfilment but precisely preparation for fulfilment, a creation of space for the commencement of an event or action. The moment, itself being in the course of events and actions, is an always-commencing rehearsal for these events and actions. Fulfilment comes when the moment is already seen as part of the sequence of time, as a step into the ‘continuum’, as an ‘element’ constitutive of the plot.

The force of the moment, as a kind of apotheosis or highest and freest pitch of ‘the dramatic’, can be best experienced and appreciated during the actual performance of a play. Here, because of the physical closeness of the actors and the other members of the audience, the text cannot be closed and put aside for some rainy day but becomes an immediate presence, our ‘present continuous’, *our* time, our ‘present tense’. Or, as Cavell puts it:

It is as if dramatic poetry and tonal music, [...] are made to imitate the simplest facts of life: that life is lived in time that there is a now at which everything that happens, and a now at which for each man and each woman everything stops happening, and that what has happened is not here and now, and that what might have happened then and there will never happen then and there, and that what will happen is not here and now yet may be settled by what is happening here and now in a way we cannot know or will not see here and now. The perception or attitude demanded in following this drama is one which demands a continuous attention to what is happening at each here and now, as if everything of significance is happening at this moment, while each thing that happens turns a leaf of time. I think of it as an experience of continuous presentness. (Cavell 1987: 92-93)

Though there are obvious differences between reading and watching a drama, I side with such critics and philosophers as Harry Berger, Howard Felperin, Sigurd Burckhardt, H. W. Fawkner (Berger 1982: 49-79; Felperin 1985: 3-18; Burkchardt 1968: vii, and Fawkner 1990: 41-43) and, of course, Stanley Cavell, who point to the untenable nature of reducing the relationship between text and performance to a mere opposition.[[93]](#footnote-93) As Fawkner puts it:

...the spectator performs the kind of “reading” operation that the literary man completes, and I think that the reader effectuates acts of visual and auditory participation that correspond to the ongoing responses of an actual spectator. (Fawkner 1990: 41)

Going to the theatre and watching the performance (naturally always an interpretation and actualisation itself) is just an occasion to remind ourselves of, and expose ourselves to, that feature of the dramatic which tells us that though we may know the whole story from the beginning to the end[[94]](#footnote-94), we are not, we cannot be watching *that* story, not only because we are already watching an interpretation, but also because, in a special, yet very important sense, we ‘do not know’, embedded in our ‘continuous presentness’ what is going to happen in the next *moment*. It is the audience’s occupation of the same time as the performers which gave a sense to Shakespeare’s (or Sophocles’) practice to ‘adapt’ old stories, known to many by heart, and to transform them, through the medium of the theatre from ‘simple past’, or even ‘past perfect’ into ‘present perfect’ and ‘present continuous’. It is this shared time which makes us acknowledge, and redirect our vision to, the radical contingency inhering in ‘the moment’ of ‘the dramatic’.

Narrative versus ‘the dramatic’: “be-all” and “end-all”

To support the argumentation above, I wish to consider here another passage from *Macbeth*. Right at the beginning of Act I, Scene 7, Macbeth, still contemplating the ‘pros and cons’ of Duncan’s assassination, says the following:

If it were done, when’tis done, then’ were well

It were done quickly: if th’ assassination

Could trammel up the consequence, and catch

With his surcease success; that but this blow

Might be the be-all and the end-all – (1.7.1-5).

This is by no means an easy crux. Commentators especially disagree on whether “his” before “surcease” (‘cessation’, ‘death’) refers to Macbeth’s death or to the end of “the consequence” (Muir 1964: 36-37; Clark and Mason 2015: 164-165; Braunmuller 2008: 147-149), yet I do not think this is the main issue in a text where the whole point seems to be that real fulfilment would mean the coincidence, the total overlap of the “assassination” of Duncan (who else?) with the putting an end to the consequences that may follow from it. Thus, I offer the following paraphrase:

*The ‘real’ end would be if the act (the act of assassination) would not only mean Duncan’s death (the “end” of Duncan) but the ‘death’ (the end) of the consequences of the act as well. If the act could indeed catch, as if it were a net, all that might result from it (“could trammel up the consequence, and catch / With his surcease success”) then it could annihilate itself in the sense that it could put a stop to itself when it pleases: with the consequence not flowing from the act in an uncontrolled fashion, we would be able to lock up the act once and for all.*

Here we may, for a moment, think of the deed and its consequence especially in terms of Duncan’s wound and the blood that flows from it, returning, at the same time, to the problem of “success and succession” discussed above. After the discovery of the King’s dead body, Macbeth presents the situation to Duncan’s sons, Malcolm and Donalbain with: “The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood / Is stopp’d; the very source of it is stopp’d” (2.3.95-97), yet the rejoinder, suggesting that there is no stop to the flow of blood, comes from Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene: “Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?” (5.1. 37-38). Flow and continuity later get ingeniously connected with the famous *hand*: Macbeth, when deciding on the assassination Banquo, says:

He chid the Sisters,

When first they put the name of King upon me,

And bade them speak to him; then, prophet-like,

They hail’d him father to a line of kings:

Upon my head they plac’d a fruitless crown,

And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,

Then to be wrench’d with an unlineal hand,

No son of mine succeeding. (3.1.56-63)

And the hand appears – though Macbeth will no longer be the ‘actor’ to carry out the deed himself – at each point when a decision on killing is made: this laying fingers on the borderlines of, this attempted total grasp on, this touching-clutching gesture at things-in-time occurs again before Macbeth gives orders for the butchering of Macduff’s wife and son:

From this moment,

The very firstlings of my heart shall be

The firstlings [’first concepts’ but also: ‘first offsprings’][[95]](#footnote-95) of my hand. And even now,

To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done:

The castle of Macduff I will surprise,

Seize upon Fife, give to th’edge o’th’sword

His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls

That trace him in his line (4.1:145-152).

Having absolute control over the stop, the “ending”, would mean absolute success, since then we would also have absolute control over *being* as well: then we would possess “the end” *within* being and thus we could lay our fingers on its borderlines – we could tell when it begins, when it still “is” and when it grinds to a halt; this gains – horrible – metaphorical expression here in thinking of ‘the end’ in terms of merciless murder and death. This would mean being in possession of the totality of being and ending (the “be-all” and the “end-all”) in one stroke, “edge” (“give to th’edge o’th’sword…”): in “that but this blow”.

I take this dramatic moment of *Macbeth* as giving one of the most powerful formulations of the “dramatic moment” itself, and it is this formulation from which I wish to borrow the sense in which I use the expression ‘dramatic moment’. I contend that it is precisely “trammelling up the consequence” which the ‘dramatic moment’ strives at: this trammelling would be the triumph of ‘the dramatic’ over the narrative, since without the next step, without the result following from the moment, the narrative would really get entangled and it really could not commence. The dramatic, indeed, always aims at containing and possessing its own end, at being the “be-all” and the “end-all” at the same time, at embracing the ‘after’ into itself, at controlling temporality by not yielding to the ‘and then’ in the sweep of the narrative. “That but this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all”: this is the ‘hope’ with which the dramatic always sets out.

Of course, even this very soliloquy, as it proceeds, is full of testimonies that this “trammelling” is impossible: the “be-all” being the same blow as the “end-all” has too much of the paradoxical about it. The problem is that in “be-all”, according to the very ‘nature’ of *being*, *being* occupies the whole place – so how could it be the “end-all” as well? Macbeth also has to realise that the act he would like to put an end to, by blocking up its consequence, is an act of an *ending* itself: it is – as we have seen in connection with the dagger-monologue as well – the act of destruction, of putting an end to someone’s life, and the gesture should consequently contain ‘the end of the ending’, too. If, however, this ‘end of the ending’ were really to attain absolute success and totality, it may not leave – as a corollary to what I said above in connection with “be-all” occupying the whole ‘place’ – any ‘room’ for *being* at all.

However, “trammelling up the consequence” contains even a further paradox. If there is no consequence of a deed, then could Macbeth, as a result of Duncan’s absence, take his crown and become King? The word “end” is as notoriously unequivocal as the “double sense” (5.9.20) of the Weïrd Sisters later on: “the end” does not only mean the ‘final point’, a ‘stop’ or ‘cessation’ but also the ‘purpose’ for which something is done and ‘towards which one is working’.[[96]](#footnote-96) The ambiguity captured in the ‘double sense’ of “end” is characteristic also of Macbeth’s predicament: the moment cannot get completely suspended because this would mean the annihilation of Macbeth as well – the show must go on to crown him and make him the King of Scotland.

Narrative versus the ‘dramatic’: plot

Therefore, the emphasis on the moment in connection with the dramatic, as I think it is clear by now, is not to deny that the drama has a plot; in fact, as the end of the previous section suggests, it cannot be. However, I certainly claim that the plot is already the imprinting of the narrative on the drama, insofar as it is precisely the plot which is the device of turning the moment onto a time-axis. It is the plot which impedes the moment’s becoming the “be-all and the end-all”; it is the plot which deprives the moment from becoming its own totality; it is the plot which hinders the moment to achieve the ‘totality of non-fulfilment’. As far as the relationship between time and our identity is concerned, the notion of the Aristotelian plot is extremely useful: as Paul Ricoeur brilliantly shows in his *magnum* *opus*, *Time and Narrative* (Ricoeur 1984: 31-51), it is on the basis of Aristotle’ definition of the plot that we can give an account of our ability to attribute meaning to time. Without the notion of the plot as the active organisation of a time-axis in the sense of a dynamic and complex construction, we would not be able to understand and interpret what time is; as Ricoeur claims, time, both as a philosophical category and as ordinary experience, becomes human time and remains a condition of the identity of the self, to the extent it is organised after the manner of the plot (cf. Ricoeur 1984:3). However, the plot, as Ricoeur’s analysis also suggests, is already interpretation, a kind of ‘understanding-in-the-procedure-of-constructing-and-understanding-the-plot’, a kind of longitudinal and extensive laying out of the clustering of moments whereby links, connections and combinations emerge, not only successively but also ‘popping up’ from various segments of the plot at the same time. These connections emerge precisely because the plot lays claim to the total: to wholeness, completeness and magnitude.

If, then, the plot is the inhering-in-of-the narrative in drama in order to give meaning to temporal experience, then the most successful insurrection of the ‘dramatic’, of the “be-all” *in* its “end-all” against the narrative has so far been the “Theatre of the Absurd”, where, as critics have often observed, there is ‘no plot’ but only suspended moments, whose connection, and especially organisation, is constantly aborted, this abortion creating a space for ‘rehearsal’, a ‘tuning in’, a *waiting* for the plot to come about. The ‘remainders’ of the plot are present only in the expectations and anticipations inhering in – for *Godot’s* sake – in the characters’ constant wager: ‘it will, it won’t, yes, no, yes, no; now between yes and no; now between no and yes; yes, it’s no; no, it’s yes’, etc.

Consequently, the whittling away of the non-fulfilment, and the deprivation of the intense undecidedness of the moment (which, at the same *time*, also strives at totalising itself) starts not in our customary practice (including the practice of this book!) of ‘translating’ the ‘dramatic’ into a narrative by jumping back and forth in the drama, pointing out connections, granting the knowledge of Macbeth’s future, etc., but as early as in the drama itself, where the moment (the “‘be-all and end-all”) must necessarily enter the plot in order to become meaningful and to get interpreted as *this* or *that* move (in contrast, parallel, etc. with other moves) in the sequence. Thereby the plot provides us – in its totalising fulfilment of ‘the whole’, with a beginning, a middle and an end – with an interpretation of our temporal experience and it is this interpretation which will, according to the Ricoeurian line of analysis, furnish us with a basis for our keeping our identities together. The point to emphasise is that the dramatic moment, through its immediacy and its being always the ‘present’, especially in the performance aspect of drama, happens *before* interpretation and, hence, meaning would emerge: the moment is, for ever, the rehearsal, the preparation for the commencement of the meaningful and the interpreted. Thus the ‘dramatic’ is not only in competition with the narratives of his own age (as Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* may be said to be in competition with Holinshed’s *Chronicle*) and, further, not only with the narrative we produce about it as our analysis, but with itself *within* itself as well, the ‘moment’, like a point in mathematics, being the disruption of the very plot it will contribute to and get interpreted by.

Thus, what you are reading here is, of course, ‘after meaning’ as well, *after*, first, in the sense of ‘posterior to’, producing a kind of narrative and, through its very position, structure and attitude, totalising the moment into itself instead of allowing the moment to totalise itself *in* itself. Yet, second, rather than celebrating this ‘lack’ and, even more significantly, realising the inevitable nature of this position if one still wishes to say something with a meaning, this book is also ‘after’ meaning in the sense of a ‘pursuit’, i.e. in a ‘metaphysical’ sense. The special ‘luck’ of the interpreter in the case of *Macbeth* – and, as a matter of fact, in the case of Wittgenstein – is that both the author of *Philosophical Investigations* and of *Macbeth* enact and re-enact the paradoxes of these ‘after’-s themselves. So now we shall return to Macbeth’s pursuit and see how he and his wife try to *catch* up with time.

Catching up with time and “looking like time” : Macbeth and Lady Macbeth

In Macbeth’s first reactions, we witnessed to a marked presence of anticipation, accompanied by an equally concealed retrospection, both culminating in the paradox of *nothing*. In Duncan’s attitude we have found a strife for a quantitative equilibrium which happens to continue even when he expresses his gratitude to Macbeth and Banquo:

O worthiest cousin!

[....]

Thou art so far before,

That swiftest wing of recompense is slow

To overtake thee: would thou hadst less deserv’d

That the proportion both of thanks and payment

Might have been mine! only I have left to say,

More is thy due than more than all I can pay (1.4.14; 16-21).

Banquo, on the other hand, is greeted by Duncan with:

Noble Banquo,

That hast no less deserv’d, nor must be known

No less to have done so, let me infold thee,

And hold thee to my heart. (1. 4.29-32).

I take Duncan’s subsequent “naming” of Malcolm as the “Prince of Cumberland” (i.e. Duncan’s successor, cf. Clark and Mason 2015: 152) as another gesture of trying to preserve power’s equilibrium: if Macbeth and Banquo are really equally “deserving” then it would be difficult to choose between them without a prospect of future strife; moreover, their now overwhelming military power should be counterbalanced by the preservation of hereditary political strength in the Duncan-family.

The camp of the Weïrd Sisters, on the other hand, was seen as being bent on identifying opposing qualities, bestowing presence on these qualities in and through their absence. Macbeth, standing at the point of intersection of the weïrd-kind and of the Duncan-type apprehension of things, chooses to transform the witches’ disposition onto a time-axis, where the qualitative and qualificatory absence of the *present* (both in the sense of ‘time’ and in the sense of ‘what is present’) not only disrupts the possibility of a present quantitative equilibrium but Duncan’s gesture towards Malcolm necessarily gets interpreted as the first frustration on Macbeth’s road to get “what is not”:

**Macb.** [*Aside*] The Prince of Cumberland! – That is a step

On which I must fall down, or else o’erleap,

For in my way it lies. (1.4 .48-50)

Yet whereas Macbeth’s disposition is marked by a ‘value gap’ between what is *here* and *what is to come*, much of Lady Macbeth’s effort is spent to persuade her husband that – as it will get re-enacted in her sleep-walking scene – “then ‘tis time to do’t” (5.1.34). Lady Macbeth wishes to convince her “Great Glamis” and “worthy Cawdor” (cf. 1.5.54) that his “nothing” is being filled by the future precisely *now*, that ‘preparation time’ is over, that *what is present* in the present, and *what is anticipated*, exactly coincide. The meeting point, (the place of assignation, or even the ‘love-nest’) of the Lady’s disposition and that of her husband’s will be Macbeth’s “fear” in the dagger-monologue that “the very stones” may “prate of” his “where-about / And take the present horror from the time, / Which now suits with it” (cf. 2.1.57-50).

For Lady Macbeth, past and future meet here and now:

Nor time, nor place,

Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:

They have made themselves, and that their fitness now

Does unmake you (1.7.51-54).

The Lady’s attitude implies the total expropriation of time itself; her advice to Macbeth: “To beguile the time, / Look like the time” (1.5.62-63) has a much wider significance than “deluding observers” (this is Muir’s gloss to Lady Macbeth’s lines, Muir 1964: 32) or “deceiving the world at the present time” (this is Brooke’s gloss to the same lines, Brooke 1990: 114). Lady Macbeth strives at discharging the tension of ‘the dramatic’ by making the tension inhering in ‘the moment’ coincide with the totality of the present and by insisting that the ‘before’, the ‘preparation’ aspect of the commencement of *being* should be replaced by *being* itself, thereby necessarily monopolising time through the sole means such a monopoly might be attained: through becoming time itself, through *making* and not through *waiting* *for*, or reflecting on (*revising*), history.

Already, the famous invocation to the Spirits on the Lady’s part wishes not only for physical transformation but also aims at narrowing the gap between present and future:

Come, you Spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,

And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full

Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,

Stop up th’access and passage to remorse;

That no compunctious visitings of Nature

Shake my fell purpose, nor keep pace between

The effect and it! (1.5.40-47)

The identification of future and present is even more obvious in:

Thy letters have transported me beyond

This ignorant present, and I feel now

The future in the instant. (1.5.56-57)

Even Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking-scene is an instance of ‘becoming time itself’, yet here of course with respect to the past instead of the future: rather than *reflecting* on what happened, the Lady, capitalising on that aspect of the theatre that what it shows always takes place in our “continuous presentness” (Cavell 1987: 93) displaces, in her ingenious metatheatrical enactment, the murdering of Duncan into our present, thereby turning “yesterdays” into “here and now” (cf. further in the “Appendix”).

Thus, on the one hand, much of what the Weïrd Sisters do consists in the prolongation of ‘the dramatic’ and the extension of ‘the moment’ through the ever-present postponement or ‘deferring’ of fulfilment, and even when a kind of ‘fulfilment’ seems to take place, it, in Macbeth’s own words, “lies like truth” (6,5.44) and happens, again in Macbeth’s words, “in a double sense’’ (5.8.20): Birnam wood will and will not come to Dunsinane and Macduff is and is not of woman-borne. On the other hand, most of Macbeth’s action is directed at trying – to paraphrase Duncan’s words – to be “far before” so that the “swiftest wing” would be “slow to overtake” him (cf. 1.4.16-18). Before the assassination, Macbeth is really *before* the deed “supping” himself “full with” its “horrors” (cf. 5.5.13), and after the deed he will constantly be *after* what the witches say, whereas for Lady Macbeth *before* and *after* are always “in the instant” (1.5.57).

Tomorrow

Yet neither “yesterdays” nor “tomorrows” can be transformed into “todays” and “nows”. As Lady Macbeth also herself observes later: “What’s done, is done” (3.2.13) and, in the sleepwalking-scene, in here ‘re-enactment’ of the murder: “What’s done cannot be undone”(5.1.64). Her husband’s famous ‘tomorrow-monologue’ will point out that the law of “todays” and “tomorrows” is that they all become “yesterdays”, while ‘‘yesterdays” only light “fools / The way to dusty death” (5.5.22-23, to be examined in detail below).

It is already initially that the stumbling-block for the Macbeth-couple is “tomorrow”. In Act I, Scene 5, when Macbeth meets his wife for the first time in the play, the following little dialogue commences:

**Macb.** My dearest love,

Duncan comes here to-night.

**Lady M.** And when goes hence?

**Macb.** To-morrow, as he purposes.

**Lady M.** O! never

Shall sun that morrow see! (1.5.58-61)

The erasure of Duncan’s *tomorrow* is the same gesture as wishing to transform the future in the Weïrd Sisters’ prophesy into “here to-night”. It is precisely this “to-night”, in the form, of course, of a “yesterday”, which Lady Macbeth will re-enact in the ‘present continuous’ of the sleep-walking scene. Macbeth’s and Lady Macbeth’s *tomorrow* is similar to the handkerchief of Othello and Desdemona: they rejoice over it together and they lose it together, though, as we have seen each in a different sense. Yet the intimacy between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth cannot be denied: it is based on this erasure of “tomorrow” and on the “present horror” of “the time, / Which suits with it” (cf. 2.1. 59-60). This intimacy, with respect to the assassination itself, gets a highly original interpretation in Cavell’s reading of the play:

The idea of words as mind-reading is a conception of reading as such – or play-watching – reading the text of another as being read by the other. Uttering words as mind-reading is represented in the language of this marriage, in which each of the pair says what the other already knows or has already said; or does not say something the other does not say, either assuming the other knows, or keeping a pledge to silence. They exemplify exchanges of words that are not exchanges. they represent a kind of negation of conversation. [...] The pair’s initial implicitness to one another over the plan to kill Duncan means to me not that each had the idea independently but that each thinks it is the other’s idea, that each does the deed somehow for the other. It is an omen that neither knows why it is done. (Cavell 1993: 2-3)

Cavell’s analysis provides us with the insight that the lack of explicit sharing might still be the strongest form of sharing, that in the ‘non-conversations’ of the Macbeths conversations and in their significant silences we may witness to the desperate and loving gesture of these two people trying to preserve each other’s innocence till the very end. Explicit and implicit signs of their sharing and their intimacy can be found throughout the play: explicit signs are “dearest love” in the above dialogue, or “So shall I, love, and so I pray be you” (3.2.29), or “dearest chuck” (3.2.45) but we may even find an ‘external’ testimony of the couple’s almost idyllic harmony in Duncan’s description of the Macbeth-castle upon his approaching Inverness:

This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air

Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself

Unto our gentle senses (1.6.1-3)

and Banquo’s reply temporarily transforms this enchanted ‘fan-house’ and ‘chamber of horrors’ into a love-nest of swallows:

This guest of summer,

The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,

By his loved mansionry, that the heaven’s breath

Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,

Buttress, no coign of vantage, but this bird

Hath made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle (1.6.3-8).

Banquo’s words of course delicately touch upon almost everything the Macbeths will, after the loss of their innocence, lack: a “bed” with

the innocent Sleep

[......]

Balm of hurt minds, great Neptune’s second course,

Chief nourisher in life’s feast (2.2.35, 38-39).

and, “heaven’ s breath” and a “procreant cradle”. Yet it is in love and intimacy that Shakespeare allows the plan and the deed of murder to get engendered in the Macbeths’ home: what is *the* problem in, for example, *Othello*, is not a problem in *Macbeth*. What gives strength, as much as they have, to man and wife in implicit and in explicit expression in *Macbeth*, is their knowledge of each other in the Biblical sense of ‘to know’: “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bore Cain” (*Genesis* 4:1), yet here the horrible knowledge of the loss of innocence which goes with the Biblical sense and which shatters Othello’s universe and necessitates Desdemona’s sacrifice does not create a slit on the hymen, and, thereby a chasm between man and wife to be revenged, but will become a shared experience and the marriage-knot between two people. The erasure of Duncan’s *tomorrow* and the loss of tomorrow as innocence give strength to the Macbeths to still face another tomorrow, precisely until Macbeth’s tomorrow-monologue which starts on the note of Seyton’s breaking the news to Macbeth: “The Queen, my Lord, is dead” (5.5.16).

In the course of the play, it is “tomorrow” with which Macbeth gets most obsessed. A few hours before having Banquo killed he tells him that he would “take” Banquo’s “good advice” “to-morrow” (3.1.20, 23) and, later on, he “will to-morrow” to “the Weird Sisters” (3.4.131-132) to “make assurance double sure” (4.1.83) because “to be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus” (3.1.47). Especially as a result of the witches’ second prophesy carrying a “double sense” (5.8.20), *tomorrow*, instead of making things “double sure” (4.1.83), gets tied up with duality explicitly. Duality, which starts in *Macbeth* with the “two spent swimmers” and with the reference to the “doubtful” nature of the battle (cf. 1.2.8-9), accompanies Macbeth till the end as the index of an ever-present doubt, as the ‘reminder’ of the gap of the “nothing” between expectation and fulfilment. Fulfilment would precisely be not only “to be [...] but to be safely thus” (3.1.47) and it is this safety which always comes “tomorrow” and is never granted to Macbeth. After all, *tomorrow*, and *yesterday*, and *today* and all deictic time-adverbials behave very much like our exhaustively analysed *this*: *tomorrow* is not a name of *something*, as we may say this in a Wittgensteinian fashion, but is always relative to the time of pointing – it only introduces a time-sequence into the language-game and does not refer to a ‘substance’.

It is thus that the great monologue resounds all previous “to-morrows”. Macbeth repeats “to-morrow” three times, perhaps giving one to each of the weird sisters:

‘To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,

To the last syllable of recorded time;

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! (5.5.19-23)

Yet the monologue is preceded – as we have seen – by another instance of the thematisation of time, connected with Lady Macbeth’s death: “She should have died hereafter: / There would have been a time for such a word” (5.5.16-17).

This is a much debated crux of the play. Brooke interprets: “1. she should have lived a full span; 2. she should have died at a time when we had leisure to mourn” (Brooke 1990: 203). Clark’s and Mason’s gloss is similar: “Either she would have died at some point sooner or later, or she ought to have died at a future time (when there would have been a chance to mourn her” (Clark and Mason 2015: 287). Braunmuller agrees: “Two meanings seem possible (1) Lady Macbeth would have died sooner or later, a time would inevitably come for her death; (2) it would have been more suitable had lady Macbeth died at some future time, when word of her death might receive proper mourning” (Braunmuller 2008: 244). Muir’s further gloss is:

This apparently simple statement is ambiguous. Either ‘She would have died sometime’ [...] or ‘Her death should have been deferred to a more peaceful hour; had she lived longer there would have been a more convenient time for such a word. (152)

Yet Muir also quotes Murry’s interpretation, which comes much closer to the way I understand these lines:

“Hereafter”, I think, is purposefully vague. It does not mean “later”; but in a different mode of time from that in which Macbeth is imprisoned now. “Hereafter” – in the not-Now: *there* would have been a time for such a word as “The Queen is *dead*.” But the time in which he is caught is tomorrow [...], one infinite sameness [...]. Life in this time is meaningless [...] and death also. For his wife’s death to have meaning there needs some total change – a plunge across a new abyss into a Hereafter. (153)

I agree that “hereafter” refers to a different mode of time from the one Macbeth is now in, yet I take this different mode to be his own death which, of course, does not exclude the possibility of interpreting “hereafter” further as a “new abyss” – we may even think of Hamlet’s “udiscover’d country from whose bourne / No traveller returns” (3.1.79-80), containing the hazard that there may be and may not be meaning there. Here, on the basis of Murry’s reading, I offer the following interpretation of Macbeth’s words above:

*Since now the only ‘substance’ to fill “tomorrow” is the time of death, i.e. a kind of non-being, a kind of nothing, Lady Macbeth, my wife, could have waited, in fact she ought to have waited till my own death, and thus we would have died together since this has remained by now as the only thing to give a meaning to time. The time of dying together, the instance we could have shared, would have therefore been the time for such a word as “death”; otherwise the nothingness of time is just as meaningless as the nothingness-in-death, and vice versa: the nothingness-in-death will now pervade Time (“tomorrow”), which, by now, with all “tomorrows” becoming “yesterdays”, has become nothingness anyway.*

However, in the monologue time not only gets connected with Lady Macbeth’s death, but with the output of the *actor* and with life as an insane *narrative* as well:

Life’s but a walking shadow; a poor player,

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more: it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing (5.5. 24-28).

Since Caroline Spurgeon’s pioneering study into Shakespeare’s imagery first published in 1935 (Spurgeon 1952) and given a brilliant re-interpretation by Cleanth Brooks (1990: 187-193), it is widely-known that one of the central metaphors of the play is that of *clothes* – this gets connected, in the course of the drama, with the *actor*-imagery, showing Macbeth putting on “borrow’d robes” (1.3.109) to become the protagonist of “the swelling act / Of the imperial theme” (1.3.128-129). Even the link between time and play-acting is established before the tomorrow-monologue:

I am settled, and bend up

Each corporal agent to this terrible feat

Away, and mock the time with fairest show:

False face must hide what the false heart doth know ( 1.7.80-84).

In the tomorrow-soliloquy, however, play-acting, and, hence, drama, gets identified with “life” and this identification turns *drama* precisely into a *narrative*, a “tale” “told by an idiot”, “signifying nothing”. At this ‘intersection’, at this ‘coincidence’ of drama and the narrative, Macbeth’s re-appearing “nothing” points into more than one direction.

On the one hand, I identified “nothing” first – on the basis of “And nothing is, but what is not” (1.3.142) – as ‘the dramatic’, as ‘the moment’. The never-presence of something was said to create space for the ‘wager’, for ‘before’, for expectation and preparation. Hence it is possible – at least in one sense – to identify a life, a narrative first with this never-presence and then with *nothing*. On the other hand, as a corollary to this realisation, in Macbeth’s identificationof *life, poor player* and *tale* there is also the acknowledgement that not even the plot, the imprinting of the narrative on drama can now make sense out of ‘the moment’ and of ‘the dramatic’: either ‘the moment’ has proved to be too ‘disruptive’ to allow the plot to congeal into the famous Aristotelian “whole” instead of “sound and fury”, or the plot has lost its ability to integrate, interpret and to give a Ricoeurian meaning to ‘the dramatic’ through the arrangement and construction (the “laying-out”) of incidents. Of course, in the final analysis, these two alternatives are the two sides of the same coin. István Geher is right when he claims that *Macbeth* is “the tragedy of tragedies” (Genher 1991:230): in *Macbeth* the ‘nothingness’ inhering in the ‘dramatic’ gets identified, in the protagonist’s last desperate gesture, with the plot, with the narrative (with the narrative’s imprinting on the drama) itself. And the identification of the nothingness inhering in ‘the dramatic’ is the *single* totalising gesture left now for the protagonist, perhaps by the right of bearing the same name as his tragedy. Macbeth and *Macbeth*, the hero and the play, re-enact *the* dramatic, *performing the metatheatrical of ‘the moment’, the ‘non-plotness’ of the plot*.

And what is Shakespeare’s ‘desperate gesture’? Once someone has ‘vacuumed out the universe’ and has allowed himself the ‘dramatic luxury’ of identifying the plot withthe *non-plotness of the plot*, thus creating perhaps one of the most truly ‘dramatic drama’-s of world-literature, this ‘luxury’ might turn out to be costly: the problem will now be how to *stop* the show. Precisely to *stop* the play (i.e. e. ‘to bring it to a halt’), Shakespeare has to face the dilemma well-known in the theatre of the absurd, where the question is no longer how to start but how to put an end to the endless flow of words from the characters’ mouths, who keep on talking *despite* the absurdity of the world and would themselves like to stop but *cannot*.[[97]](#footnote-97) Or, to put in Wittgensteinian terms, the problem is how to “give peace” to the play “so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question” (cf. § 133, emphasis original.)

Shakespeare’s last desperate gesture was to return to the ‘original’ narrative, and, thereby, to the attitude and principle of “the narrative” itself. He returned to Holinshed’s *Chronicle*, he just slightly rewrote in accordance with his King’s, James Stuart’s taste. Shakespeare – I think ingeniously – reached for Malcolm, old Siward, young Siward, Macduff, Menteth, Cathness, Angus, Lenox and Rosse, whose names, in this successive fashion[[98]](#footnote-98), rather resemble – as Stanley Wells wittily remarked once[[99]](#footnote-99) – the names of railway-stations in Scotland than labels on the identities of human beings. We remember Malcolm, Macduff and even Rosse – but who is Menteth, Cathnes and Angus? But how is it to forget this:

**Macb.** My name’s Macbeth.

**Yo. Siw.** The devil himself could not pronounce a title

More hateful to mine ear.

**Macb**. No, nor more fearful (5.7.8-9).

In the camp of Young Siward, Malcolm and the rest, against Macbeth’s “nothing”-s there is Menteth’s confident “we doubt it nothing” (5.4.2); against Macbeth’s “walking shadow” there is Malcolm’s order that

every soldier hew him down a bough,

And bear’t before him: thereby shall we shadow

The numbers of our host (5.4.4-6).

Even further, against Macbeth’s horror that the prophesy of the Weïrd Sisters “lies like truth” (5.5.44), there is Macduff’s cheerful “Let our just censures / Attend the true event” (5.4.14-15). Not only does Shakespeare counterbalance almost each Macbethian key-word in the rhetoric of the justice-bearers and peace-makers, but Duncan’s quantitative equilibrium – like Banquo’s ghost once – makes its ghastly reappearance in Siward’s speech as well:

The time approaches,

That will with due decision make us know

What we shall say we have, and what we owe.

Thoughts speculative their unsure hopes relate,

But certain issue strokes must arbitrate. (5.4.16-20)

Siward’s flat and sententious poetry, especially “what we shall say we have, and what we owe” strongly resembles Albany’s (or Edgar’s)[[100]](#footnote-100) last lines at the end of *King* *Lear*:

The weight of this sad time we must obey;

Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

The oldest hath borne most: we that are young

Shall never see so much, nor live so long. (5.3.321-325)

“But”– as Stanley Cavell observes – “at the beginning Lear and Cordelia spoke what they felt, anyway certainly not what they ought to have said. And so it began” (Cavell 1987: 112).

It is, of course, only artificially that such plays as *King Lear* or *Macbeth* can be closed down and Shakespeare, it seems, was more than aware of this. He was aware because, as far as I can see it, he was just as much interested in the nature and the medium of what he was writing as in the ‘substance’ or ‘stuff’ of it. So now we shall return, once more, to the “walking shadow” and to “before” to see how drama, at least according to Macbeth’s tragedy and under a certain interpretation, reflects on itself.

The “walking shadow”. Mimesis. Four meanings of before

To say that Macbeth does not act out the metatheatrical of the theatre, that there is far less interest in *Macbeth* in the nature of the stage than in e.g. *Hamlet*  or in *The Tempest*, is not to say that it is not concerned with it: the lines on the “shadow” (another word for “image”, “imitator”, “spectre” in Shakespeare’s time (Crystal and Crystal 394-395), the “poor player” and “strutting” and “fretting” contain important contributions to the problem of *mimesis*, traditionally and most broadly defined as the relationship between ‘reality’ (life or nature) and representation (art, here: drama and theatre).[[101]](#footnote-101) What Macbeth says here has also bearing on the question I raised in the “Introduction” concerning the (meta)theatricality and the ‘ontological status’ of the actor: ‘is this a Macbeth, who we see before us?’

To begin with, the Macbeth is of course always personified by an actor, but that is trivial. The character we saw before the dagger is not the same as the one we can now perceive reciting the tomorrow-monologue. The dagger-soliloquy shows a person precisely *before*, in preparation for the deed, enacting the ‘dramaticality’ of ‘the moment’. The Macbeth of the tomorrow-monologue is, first and foremost, looking *back*, assessing, as we have seen, his own plot in the sense of a narrative. Not even the plot as the structuring of actions and events has been able to perform more – as it has been pointed out – than *nothing*: the whole plot got so much “supp’d full” (cf. 5.513) with the *nothingness* of ‘the dramatic’ that construction and organisation can achieve no (nothing) more than the spreading, the ’dissemination’ of this nothing all over the plot, ‘lining’ (i.e. ‘padding’) the plot-line with it all along. Thus *nothing* gets even less available for being caught ‘in the very *act*’, or, if another pun is also allowed ‘red (bloody) *handed’*.

Yet what I take to be the most significant feature of the soliloquy is that it is *life* which here gets identified with the “walking shadow”, the “poor player”: one possible means of imitation (i.e. play-acting) becomes aligned with that which imitation is supposed to imitate. Hence Macbeth’s words may suggest that it is *life* which is just a bad imitation of the theatre and, if we follow the ancient Platonic claim now in the direction Macbeth seems to take it, we may conclude that in Macbeth’s view it is precisely *life* which is “three times removed from the truth” (Plato 1979: 602c) be this reality a Platonic ideal or the inherent imitativeness of the theatre already.

However, I find no indication that Macbeth would assign a privileged ontological status either to the theatre or to anything else here: “poor” in “poor player” – as Kenneth Muir warns us – does not necessarily mean ‘bad’; it may also mean ‘one who is to be pitied’ (Muir 1964: 154), or, – as Brooke puts it – ‘unfortunate, feeble’ (Brooke 1990: 204). So it is unlikely that Macbeth would here be talking about a ‘reversed mimesis’.

But perhaps the equation in “life’s but a walking shadow” does not trigger a metaphor but is just meant as a simile, where – as it is well-know – the thing to which another thing is compared (here: “walking shadow”) has a privileged ontological status by virtue of the very structure of the simile, by virtue of the famous *like* in similes: ‘life is like (is only compared to, it only resembles) a walking shadow’. Thus the point might simply be that life is a ‘theatre’, the great stage of “poor players” and “fools” where everything is under the domain of ‘make-belief’, of ‘as if’ – so our whole being is fake, cheap and miserable, in fact really a ‘poor show’, in which we can never be ourselves. However, the identity-relation between “life” and “walking shadow” given in “[i]s but” seems to be too strong to suggest a simile.

I do not think there is anything wrong with following either of the above interpretations to some end, if not that they both aim at some kind of totality, which I find alien to Macbeth’s tragedy. I rather take my point of departure from the line preceding “life’s but a walking shadow”. This line is: “Out, out brief candle!” (5.5.23). Now most commentators agree that “candle” means ‘life’, too[[102]](#footnote-102): first life is identified as “candle” and then it also gets aligned with this candle’s “walking shadow”. Or, to put it in another way, the flame of the candle and its shadow “meet” in (the word) *life*. Thus *life* is both light and shadow, burning itself and illuminating itself to create its own shadow.

However judging by the *walking* feature of this shadow, the candle cannot be stationary either: it must be moving, too, when, depending on the flickering of the flame, either the shadow is *before* the candle, or the candle is *before* the shadow. The point to emphasise is that one of them, be it the light itself, or the dark imprinting of the source of light, is never identical with, or the total overlap of, the other, while they are, in another sense, ‘the same’. Thus the *insight* here is provided both by light and by darkness, both by candle and by shadow: *life* may somehow be always *before* itself.

*Before*, to put it in Wittgensteinian terms, thus, has a complex “grammar” here, the distinguishable grammatical patterns structuring (and creating) various dimensions of space and time. Wittgenstein suggests again and again that the clarification of the grammar of a word can help us to a better understanding of our position in the world – I suggest that clearing up the grammar of *before* might throw a new *light* on our relationship to drama and theatre, yet always in the sense that drama and theatre *themselves* always already display these relationships.

According to *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*, *before* has four basic meanings. I suggest that all these four basic meanings occur, in one way or another, in Macbeth’s tomorrow-monologue. It is, as it was pointed out above, in the *interplay* of these four basic meanings that we may understand our predicament with respect to drama and theatre.

One may, indeed, look *back* on what was there *before* in life up till now, one may take a journey into the *past*, as in, for instance, “Have you been in Scotland before?’, or “Before he killed him, they were good friends”. Macbeth, in the tomorrow-monologue, goes back to what happened before thus: “And all our yesterdays have lighted fools / The way to dusty death” (5.5.22-23). But one may also look at what is still *before*, i.e. *ahead of* him or her in the *future*, as in, for example, ‘He is not old yet, his whole life is before him, he may one day even become king’. Macbeth, as we have seen, reckons with the future with: “To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day / To the last syllable of recorded time” (5.5.19-21). As a third meaning, something or somebody may appear *before*, i.e. *in front of* somebody or something else, laid bare in one’s immediate presence, as the dagger appears before Macbeth or as he finds the chamber-door before himself, or as someone might appear before a judge (cf. ‘Everybody has to appear before the court of his or her conscience’). In the tomorrow-soliloquy, it is life which appears, as we could witness it, in front of Macbeth: “Life’s but a walking shadow; a poor player, / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage” (5.5.24-25). Finally, as also an implication of the previous meaning, one thing (or person) may be put *before*, i.e. *above* the other, one thing/person may be preferred to something else; here *before* already contains the element of judgement in itself, for example in the sentence ‘He loves his wife and daughters before anyone else.’ In Macbeth’s case, his preference and choice leads to the verdict of total (self)-annihilation: “Out, out, brief candle!” (5.5.23)

I suggest that it is the ‘past’ and ‘future’ meaning of *before* (*before* in the sense of what is *back* in time and in the sense of what is *ahead*) which can give an account of the plot of drama in the Aristotelian and Ricoeurian sense: it is the plot that connects the moments to create a past and a future for the hero, to keep track of what *was* before and *is* *still* before him. But the sense of ‘immediate presence’, of ‘in front of’, is just as much important: this meaning carries the (non-)content of the ‘dramatic moment’ and as Macbeth has to look at the dagger *before* him and cannot look the other way, I have to concentrate on what is before me; I have to *live* ‘the dramatic moment’ as well. Yet without allowing myself to appear *before* the performance to be judged and evaluated, without giving the theatre a chance to ‘put something above me’ or to ‘put me above something else’ my perception will just remain ‘empirical’ gazing-at and listening-to: I will see and hear *something* but I leave out my position, my stance, my predicament as they mould and get moulded by what I see and hear. It is only through allowing for the fourth meaning of *before* that my knowledge may turn into understanding, so that what I see and hear may become *visions*, giving rise to *revisions*.

So, in the interplay of the four main meanings of *before*, it does not really matter whether we start out with the theatre or with ‘real life’, with ‘flesh-and-blood human beings’ or with characters on stage; the most important question is not if our point of departure is the theatre-as-reality or reality-as-the-theatre. What, I think, really matters – and precisely according to Macbeth’s interpretation – is that both the candle and its shadow are *life*: **before**, that is, *behind*, *ahead of*, *in front of* and *above*.

Consequently, to return to the question I asked in the “Introduction”, the problem now seems not so much to be whether the actor is ‘illusion’ or ‘reality’. The point rather is *my* position and *his* position: he is before me, he is in my *presence* and he is aware of mine, and he might be acting out what I was (have been) before, i.e. *earlier* or *just now.* He may even be acting out what I *might have been* – with this reappearance of another instance of *as if*, we can, once again, testify to the forever invincible nature of ‘theatrical illusion’, stubbornly evading our grasp (our hand).

Even further, the actor can also act out what I *will* become (or, again, what I *may* become) and not only am I entitled to judge his performance but, in a different sense, of course, his performance will judge me as well. I am his *shadow* and he is my *candle* and he is my *shadow* and I am his *candle*: we are always already the same and never the same, we are forever trying to catch up with, and overtake each other in each other’s presence, while mutually judging each other and our *selves*.

I take one aspect of the tragedy of the tragic hero to be that he is also cursed with having to act out my intimate and non-detachable relationship with him. One index of this burden might be that all the heroes of the ‘four great tragedies’ start to talk about themselves in the Third Person singular at one point of their dramas, taking, as it were, the ‘words out of my mouth’ or ‘talking *before* themselves’.

In *Macbeth*, it is right after “the deed” that he starts to talk about himself in the third person:

Macb. Still it cried, ‘sleep no more!’ to all the house:

‘Glamis hath murder’d Sleep, and therefore Cawdor

Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!’ (2.2.40-42)

In *Othello* it is, again, after “the deed”, the killing of Desdemona and in the process of the horrible awakening that she was innocent, that Othello says:

**Oth**. Do you go back dismay’d? ‘tis a lost fear:

Man but a rush against Othello’s breast

And he retires. Where should Othello go? (5.2. 271-272)

In *King Lear* it, significantly, comes quite early, also in the process of some unbearable awakening, in the first instances of Lear’s understanding that the banishment of Cordelia as the initial ‘‘deed” was a fatal mistake:

**Lear**. Does any here know me? This is not Lear:

Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?

Either his notion weakens, his discernings

Are lethargied – Ha! waking? ‘tis not so.

Who is it that can tell me who I am? (1.4.223-227)

Finally, in *Hamlet*, often considered to be a “reversed” *Macbeth*, it occurs precisely not early but almost at the end of the play. Curiously enough, Hamlet does not seem to show remorse over the killing of Polonius; he apologises to Laertes for “having done wrong” (5.2. 222) with these words:

“Was’t Hamlet wrong’d Laertes? Never Hamlet.

If Hamlet from himself be ta’en away,

And when he’s not himself does wrong Laertes,

Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.

Who does it then? His madness. If it be so

Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong’d;

His madness is poor Hamlet’s enemy. (5.2.229-235)

How sincere, how much overdone, or even how sarcastic these lines of Hamlet are is another matter. As it also remains to be seen how the tragic heroes’ doubling of their selves fits into the overall pattern of duality, something not only *Macbeth* but the other great tragedies are permeated with as well. Yet all these questions I have been trying to stir up with asking about *time* point toward the problem of identity. The next chapter (Chapter 6) will study how the identity of objects and of the self, chiefly with respect to *Macbeth*.

### Chapter 6 *Macbeth*: “Is this a dagger…?” Object-Identity and

### Self-Identity

Mistress, bed, cup

Go bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready,

She strike upon the bell. Get thee to bed. *Exit Servant.*

Is this a dagger which I see before me,

The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible

To feeling as to sight? or art thou but

A dagger of the mind, a false creation,

Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?

I see thee yet, in form as palpable

As this which now I draw.

Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going,

And such an instrument I was to use.

Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,

Or else worth all the rest; I see thee still,

And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,

Which was not so before. There's no such thing.

It is the bloody business which informs

Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one half-world

Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse

The curtained sleep; witchcraft celebrates

Pale Hecate's offerings; and withered Murder,

Alarumed by his sentinel, the wolf,

Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,

With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design

Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth,

Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear

Thy very stones prate of my whereabout,

And take the present horror from the time,

Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives;

Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.

*A bell rings*

I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.

Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell

That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

*Exit*  (2.1. 31-64)

We could approach Macbeth’s question concerning the dagger in terms of Early Modern English philosophical positions, for example in terms of theories of perception and knowledge. Such theories abound; one of the most famous expositions is Michel Montaigne’s section in the *Apology of Raymond Sebond* “The Senses are Inadequate”. Here we may find a good number of passages which could be claimed to relate to Macbeth’s plight. For example:

The schools that dispute man’s knowledge dispute it principally because of the uncertainty and weakness of our senses; for since all knowledge comes to us by their means and mediation, if they err in the report they make to us, if they corrupt or alter what they carry to us from without, if the light that flows through them into our soul is obscured in passage, we have nothing left to go by. From this extreme difficulty have arisen all these fancies: that each object has in itself all that we find in it; that it has nothing of what we think we find in it (Montaigne 1965: 446)

In case what the Epicureans say is true, to wit, that we have no knowledge if the appearances of the senses are false; and if what the Stoics say is also true, that the appearances of the senses are so false that they can produce no knowledge for us; we shall conclude, at the expense of these two great dogmatic sects, that there is no knowledge. (447)

Moreover, since the accidents of illness, madness, or sleep make things appear to us otherwise than they appear to healthy people, wise men, and waking people, is it not likely that our normal state and our natural disposition can also assign to things an essence corresponding to our condition, and accommodate them to us, as our disordered states do? [...] Why should the temperate man not have some vision of things related to himself, like the intemperate man, and likewise imprint his own character on them? (453)

To judge the appearances that we receive of objects, we would need a judicatory instrument; to verify this instrument, we need a demonstration; to verify a demonstration, an instrument: there we are in a circle. (454)

From these few, yet rather central passages of the essay it is already clear that Montaigne addresses most of the common difficulties that may arise about perception in a theory of knowledge: the question of the reliability of the senses; the problem of how we account for errors in sensation and how we are able to correct them (once it is the sense-organs that are given as the sole origin of our knowledge); the debate whether what we see when perceiving an object is an integral part of the object itself or whether it is the very act of our perception which always already imposes a “grid” on it, showing it in *this* or *that* way; the question whether there is an inalienable essence to each and every object; and finally the highly interesting proposal that “abnormal” states like illness, dreaming or madness may create an essence of their own in the object. With a surprising and original turn, Montaigne even seems to suggest that these “unnatural” or “abnormal” states might serve as a model for ‘‘natural” or “normal” ones. Here Montaigne is destabilising the traditional disparity and opposition between “normal” and “abnormal” – if he is not in fact subordinating normality to abnormality.[[103]](#footnote-103)

As a second example of a theory of perception, written in Shakespeare’s age, I quote a brief account by Theodore Spencer. My choice has fallen on him because his ideas are explicitly connected with Shakespeare and with *Macbeth* by K. Tetzeli von Rosador in the essay “‘Supernatural soliciting’: temptation and imagination in Doctor Faustus and Macbeth” (von Rosador 1986). Spencer says:

Through the working of the animal spirits, the outward senses perceive an object, an impression of it is conveyed to the imagination, the imagination refers this impression to the affections as pleasing or displeasing, reason debates the matter and predicts its verdict to the will, the Queen of the soul, who finally dictates back to the sensitive appetite (the function which desires), telling it to act or refrain from action according as the object is seen as good or evil. (von Rosador 1986: 44)

Spencer’s “circle” is crystal clear: senses – imagination – reason – will (soul) – senses. His primary merit is – as von Rosador argues – that he secures a distinctive place for imagination, though, of course, with important provisos. On the one hand, for Spencer the imagination is the retainer and evocator of a thing once seen but now absent or distant. Yet it is also the channel to be distrusted and constantly supervised, for it is through the imagination, due to its uncontrollable and wayward nature, that pictures of non-existent things, as well as temptations, may enter the soul. (cf. von Rosador 1986: 42-59, especially 44-45).

In terms of a Renaissance theory of perception and knowledge, the third possible candidate to enter into a dialogue with Macbeth’s dagger-problem could be the book of Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, called *De Veritate* (My information on Herbert comes from Popkin 1979: 151-161). This would be, on my part, a well-justifiable choice because Herbert’s work is one of the first English reactions of the time to the debate on knowledge and scepticism, raging primarily in France and the Low Countries in the first decades of the 17th century. Herbert had first-hand information about the state of the art on the Continent because, between 1618 and 1624, he was an ambassador to France and he was in close contact with the leading figures of the debate: Mersenne, Gassendi, and Diodati (to be joined, in a few years, by Descartes and even Hobbes), having the chance to show his work in manuscript to Grotius as well (cf. Popkin 1979: 151). Herbert would further be an interesting choice because his work is dedicated to the complete demolition of the Montaigneian, sceptical position; thus, his contribution would serve as an instructive counterbalance to the ideas of Montaigne, and, to a certain extent, of Spencer as well.

Herbert was more than aware that, in order to refute the sceptical position, he had to establish an absolute and objective criterion against which the unreliable and uncertain sense-data can be measured and judged as true or false. Therefore, he introduced the so-called “Common Notions” (intellectual truths, *veritas* *intellectus*), presenting some of them as “universally admitted or innate truths” (cf. Popkin 1979: 153). When we perceive a thing, we first have the truth of appearance and then the truth of our concepts about it, but both of these are subjective truths and are prone to error, owing to the well-known reasons: imperfect organs, drunkenness, “deceitful prejudices” (cf. Popkin 1979: 152-153). This is why we need the Common Notions which, as an invaluable frame of reference, will correct our mistakes and will lead us to the *veritas rei*, to the truth of the things as they really are in themselves. The problem which tears Herbert’s argumentation asunder is – as is often the case with militant anti-sceptical and objectivist theories – the problem of madmen, idiots, infants and embryos, all of whom Herbert has to consider to be “abnormal”, without, of course, being able to give – with or without his Common Notions – the criterion of normalcy. It is worthy of note that in a sceptical framework such as Montaigne’s, since we can only have a relative confidence (properly speaking: only a certain kind of hope or trust) in our correct perception of objects, it is more or less easy to deal with the madman and his train: rather than diametrically opposed to, and, therefore, falling out of the domain of our everyday experience, the madman’s case is an extreme version, in a way a certain “continuation” of our ordinary plight and thus it might even serve as a possible, though of course extremist, model of our ordinary mode of perception and acquisition of knowledge.

Such accounts as the above are, indeed, of great help when one is interested in representations which serve as alternatives to the way Shakespeare represents Macbeth to be sensing his dagger, and I will make some references to them in my book in due course. Yet in a book, also wishing to contribute precisely to the relationship between philosophy and literature, such accounts – and hence my wariness about them – cannot be taken as “sources” or devices that will *explain* what Macbeth is going through. They cannot be taken as “explanations” because to read them as scientific or philosophical expositions which are “behind” Macbeth’s inquiry would more or less be tantamount to deciding the very question I wish to investigate. So, rather than re-introducing a hierarchy into my undertaking, I will read the above accounts, irrespective of the fact whether Shakespeare knew about them or not, as representations which are on the same level as Macbeth’s question (this question literally bringing the validity and the possibility of perception into question), as attempts equally problematising and trying to solve a perennial and interminable human enigma by various means and in various media. In an undertaking like mine, Montaigne’s, Spencer’s and Herbert’s ideas can be taken neither as scientific “corrections” to a “literary” or “naive” way a playwright presents the problem of perception and the possibility of knowledge, nor as authoritative and philosophical “last words” on the matter.

Macbeth’s dagger-monologue starts in a rather prosaic context: “Go, bid my mistress, when my drink is ready, / She strike upon the bell. Get thee to bed, –” Macbeth tells the Servant. However, these perfunctory lines mention four things which will all have some role in the murdering of old King Duncan. The *bed*, which is now a convenient place to send the Servant into, to get him out of the way, will serve as a temporary shelter for both murderer and accomplice to hide from the weight of the pounding knocks: “Get on your night-gown, lest occasion call us / And show us to be watchers–” (2. 2. 69-70), and, much later, in Lady Macbeth’ s recounting, in the sleepwalking-scene, hysterically: “To bed, to bed: there’s knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What’s done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed” (5.1. 62-63). The *mistress* and the *bell* will also figure behind the scenes during the whole of Macbeth’s monologue: Lady Macbeth will give the signal to “the deed” acting as a kind of stage-manager, co-operating with the main character and moving him around without being physically present. And the bell will toll indeed at the end, “summoning” Duncan to “Heaven, or to Hell”.

Finally, the *drink* is mentioned to cover up the Lady’s signal before such an uninitiated outsider as the Servant. Yet the drink is also the note on which Lady Macbeth’s entry starts right at the beginning of the next scene: “That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold; / What hath quench’d them hath given me fire –” (2.2.1-2). The Lady will be talking about a “drugged posset” (1.2.6), prepared by her personally for the “grooms” (2.1.5) guarding Duncan. Thus the drink Macbeth mentions is prepared indeed, but not for Macbeth. For him another “posset” is waiting, but not made of “hot milk poured on ale or sack, having sugar, grated bisket, eggs, with other ingredients boiled in it, which goes all to a curd”, as Randle Holmes’ *Academy of Armourie* says in 1688 (qtd. by Muir 1964: 51), but, as we shall see, a bitter cup, something like the “poisoned chalice” offered “[t]o our lips” by “even-handed justice” when planning the assassination of someone, as Macbeth so eloquently noted earlier (1.7.10-12). In the dagger-monologue the cup is offered to someone who is unable to pray and who is going to shed blood and with whom it is his instrument of murder which has “gouts of blood” on its “blade, and dudgeon” (cf. 2.1.46). The cup is not even offered to a bold philosopher, ready to give his life as a sacrifice while praying to his gods:

At the same time [the servant] handed the cup to Socrates, who in the easiest and gentlest manner, without the least fear or change of colour or feature, looking at the man with all his eyes [...] as his manner was, took the cup and said “What do you say about making a libation out of this cup to any god? (*Phaedo*, 117b, Plato (1952: 251)

In the dagger-monologue, the cup is handed to a man who will soon be terribly afraid and cannot even say “amen” (2.2.28-29), while curiously being, at the same time, the Saviour of his nation at the beginning of the play and looking, throughout, “with all his eyes”. Macbeth’s drink will finally resemble more the “hell broth” the witches boil in their “cauldron” from as many as fourteen “entrails” (cf. 4..4) – throwing in everything from venomous toads to baboon’s blood (cf. 4.1.4-38) – than either an honest night-cap or even the “usual” bitter-cup. Macbeth’s cup is intriguing because its victim is a hero in a tragedy but, as it has often been pointed out, a negative one[[104]](#footnote-104) who problematizes the question of the tragic hero itself by being the reverse, or literally the *wrong* side of the Saviour and the Philosopher, while, paradoxically of course, he will have to go through much of what Christ and Socrates had to suffer. Macbeth’s plight provokes the question whether there is redemption even in hell, whether there is still salvation in damnation – a question I will return to.

The introductory lines to the monologue, then – the words *mistress*, *bed* and *drink* having even the ring of the lustful, the “Bacchanalian”, the intoxicated around them – are surrounded by precautions in the service of covering up evil intentions, these precautions figuring objects (‘stage-props’) which will all betray the actors in the end. And a form of this betrayal is when, all of a sudden, an unexpected “thing” seems to appear on the stage and shines through the darkness of murderous purposes.

A metatheatrical trick and “this”

An unexpected “object” – in front of the main character’s very eyes. We might imagine a player, drawing his dagger to kill his victim and then, violating previous agreement coded in the script and between the actors, he is *forced* to see another dagger, “in form as palpable / As this which now [he] draw[s]”. For a moment, let us imagine Shakespeare, playing a trick on his favourite tragic actor, Richard Burbage, by lowering a dagger from above, from the “Heavens”, the roof above the stage (cf. Wells 1986: 79) of the Globe theatre, curious to learn, with a mischievous smile, what his player’s reaction might be. What can the accomplished actor do?

He cannot simply ignore it because he has every right to assume that it is already being seen, seen by the audience, the number one authority in the theatre. So, as we would ordinarily express it, he must ‘save the situation’, the most obvious choice being the inclusion of the ‘object’ into the performance, the ‘world’ of the theatre. I do not wish to claim that this is how the dagger-monologue originated, though judging by what we know about Shakespeare’s and his Company’s attitude to play-acting, this possibility cannot be totally excluded, either. Yet even playing with this ‘hypothesis’ helps us to become aware of some aspects of the theatre which will prove to be of high significance in the monologue, as well as in the drama as a whole.

To ask “Is this a dagger, which I see before me?” would be an apt reaction to the appearance of an unexpected object on stage because it would try to iron out a moment of crisis by reference to a state the audience is naturally *always* *already* in: the state of *seeing*. The reaction would, indeed, aim at (or here literally *take sight at*) something on which the theatre primarily rests, as even the origin of the word, the Greek *theatron*, ‘a place of seeing’ (cf. Wilshire 1982: 11) suggests: to become the site of sight *par excellence*. Thus Macbeth’s opening sentence to the monologue – with or without Shakespeare’s imaginary trick – is effective because it has the element of the “metatheatrical” about it: Macbeth’s question, by being anchored in the normal and obvious contribution the audience is supposed to make, gives voice to, and makes the viewers aware of, one of the primeval questions of play-acting: what is the ‘ontological’ status of the theatre and of drama; *how* do they *exist*? In what sense *are* the characters, moving in front of us, *there*? What does ‘N. N.’, say, Richard Burbage, personifying a character called ‘Macbeth’, involve? As it was asked before in this book: ‘Is this a Macbeth, which (who) we see before us’?

These questions are by no means easy but all of them at least assume that there *are* some objects whose ontological status is problematic. But they are still less difficult than another possible interpretation of Macbeth’s question. I will put this alternative into the form of still another question: is there *anything* ‘behind’ the word *this*? Everything depends on how we are to interpret this *this* in Macbeth’ s inquiry.

*This*, to begin this, is of course a demonstrative pronoun, i.e. ‘directed at something’ and taking the place of nouns. But what is that ‘something’ it is directed at? Does ‘something’ (also) have a *referent*, a ‘thing’ ‘standing’ behind the label ‘something’? And does not, first of all, *this* have a *specific* reference, while *something* has an *indefinite* one? As ait was alluded to in the “Introduction”, we could of course argue that, by saying that ‘*this* is directed at something’, we just wanted to demonstrate the fact that although *this* always refers to something particular (e.g. something in front of me, etc.), this particular thing can be anything or, of course, anybody ‘under the sun’, and this is why we have the possibility of giving *something* or *somebody* as the referent of *this*. Thus, to be more precise, we could say: the referent of *this* is *something* or *somebody* in particular, for example *that* particular dagger under my very nose; *that* particular man talking in front of me, etc. Another way of putting this would be to say that *this* (together with *that*, *these* and *those*, of course) belongs to a category in which particularity and universality overlap: the referent is always a concrete thing or person *here* or *there*, while what actually fills the slot is in no way restricted. J. L. Calderwood, investigating similar lines to mine in connection with *Hamlet* puts the above problem in the following way:

For the demonstrative “this” is at once a class-of-all-classes term, capable of referring to anything at all, and a precise particularizer, singling out one unique object. In isolation, “this” encompasses everything and distinguishes nothing. But in context [...] “this” has the verbal focusing powers of a microscope. (Calderwood 1983: 38)

But then, if somebody were seriously interested in the referent of *this* should we bring in front of him/her all possible things under the sun, in all possible contexts, including not only ‘physical objects’, like tables, toothbrushes – and daggers –, and not only even individuals – dead or alive – like William Shakespeare or Ludwig Wittgenstein, but also such ‘abstract things’ like ‘fear’, ‘murderous intention’ or ‘acknowledgement’? Should we say, following this line of argument, that Macbeth’s question *really* means: ‘Is *this* (and here the enumeration of all possible things and persons follows) a dagger’? And are these ‘things’ (or at least some of them – but which of them?), for example, ‘hovering’ in front of Macbeth’s eyes all the time, with which he compares a dagger (a *real* one, or its ‘standard image’)? Or does Macbeth see a dagger already, which is indeed the referent of *this*, and now he is recalling the ‘standard image of the dagger from his memory to compare the two? But then what is the status of the dagger Macbeth can already see? Is it before his ‘mind’s eye’ as an *idea*? Is it a memory-image? But then what is the standard image or idea of the dagger? Just *another* image, backed up by past, empirical evidence? Or does Macbeth see a dimly lit, dark object, hovering in the air, or lying on the table, its outlines still to be made out, in order, first, to be identified, and, second, to be compared with the ‘standard image’? Kenneth Muir, in his commentary to Macbeth’s dagger-monologue, first quotes the respective interpretations of Chambers and Dover Wilson: “ ‘the dagger should not be in the air, but on the table; he thinks it real first’ (Chambers). ‘Macbeth is to wait for the bell; and to wait is to sit’ (Wilson). “But” – Professor Muir adds –

if the scene is laid in the courtyard, would there be a table? And would it not be impossible for a man like Macbeth to sit at such a moment? The speech is not realistic; [sic!] but in answer to Chambers it may be said that if Macbeth indeed thought the dagger a real one he would not begin with a question. [...] Curry, Shakespeare’s *Philosophical Patterns* (84), suggests that the dagger ‘is an hallucination caused immediately, indeed, by disturbed bodily humours and spirits but ultimately by demonic powers, who have so controlled and manipulated these bodily forces as to produce the effect they desire’. (Muir 1964: 47-48)

It seems that in cases such as Macbeth’s, not only philosophers but literary critics as well claim to be able to decide what is ‘real’ and what is ‘illusionary’. Why I am unable to reconcile myself to any of these interpretations (including the one arguing from the perspective of Renaissance philosophy an psychology) is because I think that the *mode* of Macbeth’s presentation, the horror and the anxiety triggered by the unexpectedness of the object barging in, do not seem to indicate that Shakespeare would be applying here well-established and widely-accepted philosophical or psychological clichés of his age. Rather he seems to be hazarding whether these clichés, *any* clichés we are able to come up with, then or now, are applicable here at all.

Finally, and no less importantly, should we, the audience, see *this* dagger? Should it be visible for us in form of some glimmering light on the stage or should the actor be looking above our heads and fix his eyes on ‘nothing’ there, yet with such hypnotic power that we would be inclined to turn our heads and look behind ourselves?

Those who are familiar with Wittgenstein’s way of struggling with problems, be them concerned with questions of reference or even ‘illusion’ created in art, will of course have noticed how much the questions I formulated above owe him in terms of content as well as in terms of style. Thus, I will here make a lengthy detour, whose task will not only be to explain why I think late Wittgensteinian philosophy can be relevant to Macbeth’s plight in particular but also why I think this philosophy may have something to do with drama in general.

Investigations again: a ‘drama for many voices’

One of the first impressions one may get when starting to read the *Investigations* is that one gets dashed away by a sweep of endless questions and answers; a problem is raised, gets an answer, then it disappears and a new problem is raised, this new problem is also followed to some end but then it gets suddenly dropped to give way to the previous problem, and so on. This ‘sweep’ recalls one of the formulations Wittgenstein gives himself, quoted already:

The real discovery [Entdeckung] is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. – The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question (§ 133, emphasis original).

When this is philosophy’s view of itself, or, rather, when this is philosophy’s view of itself with respect to what it is doing to itself (the view of ‘*the*-itself’ of the *itself*) then, of course, the above discovery can never come. But then what is Wittgenstein’s purpose? A famous passage immediately crops up: “What is your aim in philosophy? – To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle” (§ 309).

This little aphorism might be celebrated as a strange or highly apt metaphor, or as a witty and cheeky retort, or as a good joke, or even as a deep and enigmatic credo, the understanding of which is the breaking of the seal to Wittgenstein’s ultimate philosophical testament, but it is clearly not an answer to our question. Then what is this philosopher driving at?

I think Wittgenstein would have simply answered to such a question something like “At becoming a good man.” But that much is certain: once we enter the *Investigations*, our feeling may not fall far from the disposition Descartes presents so vividly at the beginning of his *Second Meditation*, and historians of philosophy like to call the dawn of Early Modern philosophy:

...I can neither put [these doubts] out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them. It feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim to the top. (Descartes 1988: 80)

This description could easily fit a man suddenly falling into a washing-machine. So, following my rather arbitrary metaphor to some end, is Wittgenstein’s washing-machine supposed to cleanse us from anything? Is there any catharsis?

To make my way of reading *Philosophical Investigations* clearer, let me begin with Descartes and doubt. With my reference to Descartes in the context of the *Investigations* I do not wish to suggest that Wittgenstein remained in the ‘sceptical phase’ of a – metaphysical – Cartesian enterprise and that he wrote the way he wrote because he thought that everything may be questioned and no answer will ever do. This way of putting the matter, as we shall see below, is only *almost* the way I – following Stanley Cavell’s interpretation – think of Wittgenstein’s late masterpiece. Yet I do not think Wittgenstein was a sceptical philosopher not because I believe that – as most of the critical literature suggests (cf. Cavell 1976: 238-266) – he, in the second phase of his career ‘wanted to refute scepticism’. Wittgenstein does remain – as Cavell puts it – “open to the threat of scepticism” (cf. now Cavell 1979: 47): he allows plenty of ground to the sceptic, or, rather, he is willing to cover all possible grounds or contexts the sceptic wishes to occupy in order to give backing to her sceptical claims. Wittgenstein is *genuinely* interested in the way the sceptic is applying words, a way which, no doubt, often conflicts with the ordinary uses of words. Yet for Wittgenstein it is not the conflict itself which is the main problem. He wishes, as I said, cover grounds with the sceptic. But what does that mean?

No doubt, one can cover grounds with somebody for so many different reasons and with so many feelings at heart. The interpreters of Wittgenstein Cavell calls “anti-sceptics”, the ones who find that in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein’s main aim was to “refute scepticism”[[105]](#footnote-105) will – even if they allow for a picture of a Wittgenstein accompanying the sceptic on his way – suggest that Wittgenstein goes along grudgingly, or in a sulky or irritated fashion. They will even suggest that Wittgenstein is escorting the sceptic suspiciously, taking the whole journey to be annoyingly superfluous, and always on the alert to pounce on a mistake or contradiction on the sceptic’s part. They can see a Wittgenstein invariably gloating over the future when the sceptic will finally be enmeshed in his own trap.

This attitude, however – as Cavell’s understanding of the *Investigations* has convinced me[[106]](#footnote-106) – is not Wittgenstein’s. Wittgenstein is not only willing to go along the sceptic’s way but he goes ‘out of his way’ to help the sceptic. Wittgenstein behaves like a most encouraging and patient instructor, never giving up the hope that together they will arrive somewhere, being as interested in the outcome as the sceptic himself. Wittgenstein’s attitude in covering grounds with the sceptic fits more the picture of the one whom his “neighbour compels to go a mile” and he “goes with him twain” (Matthew 5:41) than the one who is just dragged along. To turn one of Wittgenstein’s own remarks to our own purpose here we could say: Wittgenstein, like the “sign-post” he is talking about in this passage, “sometimes leaves room for doubt and sometimes he does not” (cf. § 85).

However, with respect to covering grounds, Wittgenstein does not treat ‘the believer’ ‘the traditional epistemologist’, ‘the logician’, ‘the behaviourist’ or the one speaking from the position of ‘ordinary common sense’ differently, either. Nor does he treat differently the various other interlocutory voices and the various other roles making their appearance and heard on the pages of the *Investigations*.[[107]](#footnote-107) These voices, of course, often mix with one another, or they may sometimes even overlap and the logician, for example, may get less cues than the sceptic (as logicians are said to speak less than sceptical philosophers, anyway), yet, in this covering of ground, it is not quantity (e.g. the number of lines) which counts but rather the extent of the dramaticality of the situation in which this or that voice is heard: previous tension, the intensity of this voice or the other (shown by italics in Wittgenstein’s text), questions and exclamations, and so on. Of course, I am not suggesting, either, that Wittgenstein would wish to cover *all* possible grounds speakers might ever want to occupy – the realisation of that, in any work, would be hard to imagine anyway. Yet I certainly wish to claim that *Philosophical* *Investigations* is a piece written for many voices, for voices which are in constant dialogue with each other. The *Investigations*, I contend, might be read as a kind of *drama* where it is not the finding of a privileged position, or the fixing of the dominant or authoritative position which is the main concern of the writer but rather the space the owners of the various voices move in, the whole field (stage) on which they want to enclose ground, the spot each of them wishes to occupy.

This, of course does not mean that Wittgenstein’s work would be totally devoid of taking sides, that a preference, especially towards the position of the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘everyday’, could not be deciphered. Yet, similarly to the genre of drama in general, the authoritative, central position gets displaced all the time, and Wittgenstein’s preference is shown after having given as much ground to the other roles as the *author* is able to think of – sometimes perhaps even more space this or that *other* voice would have thought itself to be capable of filling. Whether what Wittgenstein is able to think of is ‘enough’ or not has remained a matter of debate to the present day, yet it is precisely the unfinished (and, most probably, unfinishable) character of the *Investigations* (something which can still be taken as a defect in itself, of course) which indicates Wittgenstein’s basic attitude: if somebody or he himself, in one of his roles, is able to come up with some warning signals that the bias towards the ‘everyday’ and the ‘ordinary’ lead into a dead-end-street (into another ‘fly-bottle’), then investigation should start from scratch again and everything previously suggested should be reconsidered. In the next sections I will try to indicate where I think Wittgenstein, amidst various other voices, saw a passage out of some philosophical ‘cul-de-sacs’.

Penetration versus reminders

On the tortuous road the reader of the *Investigations* travels along, there are certain ‘pull-offs’, trying to get clear about what we are doing, where we are going, what this kind of philosophising is trying to achieve. These pull-offs are sites of the activity of reflection on previous and future activities – the site of an activity performed upon, and engaged in, another activity. Two such pull-offs, paragraphs 133 and 309 have already been quoted. Another, no less enigmatic crux is paragraph 90:

We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena [Erscheinungen durch­schauen]: our investigation [Untersuchung], however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the ‘*possibilities’* [‘*Mglichkeiten*’] of phenomena. We remind ourselves [wir besinnen uns], that is to say, of *the kind of statement* [*Art der Aussagen*] that we make about phenomena. Thus Augustine recalls to mind [besinnt sich] the different statements that are made about the duration, past present or future, of events. (These are, of course, not *philosophical* statements about time, the past, the present and the future.)

Our investigation [Betrachtung] is therefore a grammatical [grammatische] one. Such an investigation [Betrachtung] sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language (emphasis throughout original).

This is a difficult passage indeed. I offer the following interpretation.

Wittgenstein contrasts two attitudes of ours towards the phenomena of the world, in the most general sense of the expression: one of these attitudes wishes to – as the German original suggests – “see through” them, because it takes the problem with them to be that they are ‘dark’, ‘dim-lit’, not ‘perspicuous’ enough, it wants to ‘enter’ them, maybe even ‘dissect’ them, in order to get a clear view of what they are. The other attitude, instead of getting stuck with the further turning around and shaking and squeezing of the phenomena, looks for what makes them *possible*, not in order to pass them over but precisely to get a clear view about them. And to do that is to collect statements we make about phenomena. We collect these statements (‘reminders’) to see what is said about them and how they are spoken about, and by whom, when, where and why. In short, we survey some of the sentences in which the phenomena feature in some particular contexts.

Let us take the phenomenon of the *dagger* for instance. ‘Look at that beautiful dagger in the show-case’ – ‘Is this a dagger, which I see before me?’ – ‘Put down that dagger, it is sharp, you may cut your finger with it’ – ‘This is not a knife, it is too short for that; it rather looks like a dagger’ – ‘A curious murder-case: he stabbed his fatherly friend with a dagger’ – ‘He always uses daggers to indicate cross-references in his text’ – ‘The two gangs were angrily facing each other; with their hands in their pockets but at daggers drawn’ – ‘He didn’t say a word but he certainly looked daggers’ – or, another instance, also coming from *Macbeth*, provided this time by Donalbain: “where we are / There’s daggers in men’s smiles: the near in blood, / The nearer bloody” (2.4.138-139).

Observing what the word *dagger* is doing in these sentences and the scrutiny of the narrower and broader contexts in which these sentences might appear is what Wittgenstein calls “reminding ourselves [...] of the *kind of statement* that we make about phenomena”. And Wittgenstein gives, as also in the very first paragraph of the *Investigations*, Augustine as an example, this time as one who ‘reminded himself’. I think it is in this sense of *remind* that Wittgenstein also says: “The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders [Erinnerungen] for a particular purpose” (§ 127). The meaning of *besinnen*, which Professor Anscombe translates once as “remind” and once as “recall to mind” is of course broader than ‘making ourselves remember’: the German term may also mean ‘rack one’s brain’ or ‘realise’; the noun *Besinnung* may even mean ‘common sense’ – “*komm zur* *Besinnung!*” roughly corresponds to ‘come to your senses’ or ‘use your better understanding’. And *Erinnerung*, which Anscombe also translates as “reminder”, inclines in meaning towards ‘an important note to remember’ and ‘warning signal’.

So what we should be doing when we are *reminding* ourselves could be rendered in the following way: ‘in connection with phenomena, we, by going through past instances and experiences as well as by making up contexts ourselves using our common sense, get into a position when we suddenly understand or when we are even warned, and then we see what is going on, and how we may go on’. ‘How we may go on’ is highly significant: this is the feeling which combats the position (plight, predicament, attitude) in which, as I said in the “Introduction”, philosophy and metaphysics, according to Wittgenstein – and Cavell – starts.Thus, observing what the word *dagger* is doing in sentences and witnessing to the broader and narrower contexts in which these sentences may appear, we get the ‘grammar’ of the *dagger*: we realise the bounds within which we may use it, the outlines which make its application more or less distinct from the outlines of other applications. The very fact that today it is more difficult to collect “reminders” for *dagger* than for example, for *knife* or *gun* already shows a great deal about the role a dagger plays in our lives.

From what Wittgenstein says about the grammar of a word, it is clear that this survey is not a purely ‘linguistic’ investigation carried out for its own sake or for writing a mono-lingual dictionary. To understand what this grammatical investigation, this *Betrachtung*, this ‘looking closely and attentively’, this ‘scrutiny’, this ‘inspection’ is good for, we should also notice that in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein nowhere draws a principled dividing line between our using words and our using objects (*handling* things, phenomena): using the object dagger and using the word *dagger* both contribute to the grammar of *dagger*. Doing things with a dagger (one cannot do too many things with it, though), observing somebody handling it, touching or clutching it, or gazing at it, is just as important as hearing a voice uttering the sound sequence of the word *dagger* – what we, in fact, have to learn is that all these activities, including the emission of certain sounds, form a little separate scene, a small ‘island’ in the sweep of all other activities and what we have to learn is that these activities ‘around’ the dagger go together: for example, that the utterance of the sound-sequence of this word can, in certain situations, replace some of the other activities.[[108]](#footnote-108) Our activity of using the word *dagger* is interwoven in our other activities. Thus the investigation of the grammar of *dagger* is tantamount to the observation, the attentive inspection, the *Betrachtung* of our ‘dagger-activities’.

Grammar and concept

It is at this point that the significance of grammatical analysis, as suggested by *Philosophical Investigations*, can be fully appreciated: Wittgenstein suggests that grammatical analysis in the above sense is all we are able to do when we are interested in a concept, that the construction of the grammar of *dagger* is all we can ‘reach for’ when we want to ascertain what the concept of *dagger* is. In paragraph 384 we read: “You learned the *concept* [Begriff] ‘pain’ when you learned language” and in paragraph 383:

We are not analysing a phenomenon [ein Phänomen] (e.g. thought) but a concept (e.g. that of thinking), and therefore the use of a word [und also die Anwendung eines Worts].

The relationship between grammar, meaning and concept is expertly described by Cavell:

To think of a word as embodying a concept is to think of the word as having a grammatical schematism [...]; the schematism marks out the set of criteria on the basis of which the word is applied in all the grammatical contexts into which it fits and will be found to fit.[[109]](#footnote-109) [...] The concept is this schematism – a sense of the word’s potency to assume just those valences, and a sense that in each case there will be a point of application of the word, and that the point will be the same from context to context, or that the point will shift in a recognisable pattern or direction. In this sense a concept is the meaning of a word. (Cavell 1979: 77-78)[[110]](#footnote-110)

Thus, one may of course call Wittgensteinian grammatical analysis ‘conceptual analysis’ if one likes, but only if one also bears in mind that ‘conceptual’ here does not mean – as it so often does in philosophy – the scrutiny of one’s inner psychological processes or the observation of, for example, *my* idea of e.g. *dagger*. Why not? Why does Wittgenstein insist, again and again, that conceptual analysis should at least not start with my looking into myself (into ‘my head’) to dissect my idea (concept) of a thing (e.g. of a *dagger*) ? Do I not have a concept of a dagger?

In a certain sense, I, of course, have. But what is, according to Wittgenstein, unhelpful or misleading is to think about this concept as *mine*, as my private property, to which only I and nobody else has access. Why would such an attitude be unhelpful or misleading?

Concepts: the example of the three caskets, Hamlet and   
Wittgenstein’s boxes with beetles

Such an attitude would be both unhelpful and misleading because then my picture of myself and of the others is that each of us is a little box or a container in which ideas (concepts) are ‘swimming’ – as the messages and the portraits are in the caskets of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. If we adopt this casket-picture of ourselves, then our impression might become that, as Bassanio says, “the outward shows may be least themselves” (3. 2.73) and even “inward searched” (3.2.73) what we find inside may still appear as a “shadow” which “doth limp behind the substance” (3.2.128-129). We may further exclaim, still with Bassanio:

So (thrice-fair lady) stand I even so,

As doubtful whether what I see be true

Until confirm’d, sign’d, ratified by you. (3.2.145-148)

And we have not even explored on what grounds the three suitors of Portia, the Prince of Marocco, the Prince of Arragon and finally Bassanio discard two caskets in preference of a third. Neither Bassanio’s neat re-formulation of the ‘verification principle’ above (though anchored not in the ‘external world’ but in his new ‘world’, in his Portia), nor the intricate hermeneutical reasonings of the three suitors can be pursued here. The case of the three caskets is just a hint here to illustrate Wittgenstein’s point: if we see ourselves and the others as having ideas (concepts) as private treasures inside them, we will not only for ever be in doubt whether we mean the same by the same words and, therefore, whether we can ever understand and be understood, but we will also have to realise that the introduction of ‘my concept’ as a source of explanation for a phenomenon is totally useless. Why? Because once my concept is mine and yours is yours and we have no other way than language to make these concepts public, we inevitably arrive at the point where we started: the need and task of interpreting certain sentences and their meanings[[111]](#footnote-111). But can we not display “what is inside us” through any other way than spoken (or written) language? There is ‘body-language’, too: our eye-balls may roll, our teeth can chatter, we can groan, we can frown, we can wince, we can gesticulate. We might recall here what Hamlet tells his actors:

Nor do not saw the air too much with your hands, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise. [...] Suit the action to the word, the word to the action ... (3.2. 4-12;17-18).

And there is even Hamlet’s notorious optimism, the conviction at the end of Act II, that Claudius, the murderer will betray himself if the actors re-enact his crime:

For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak[[112]](#footnote-112)

With most miraculous organ. I’ll have these players

Play something like the murder of my father

Before mine uncle. I’ll observe his looks;

I’ll tent him to the quick. If a do blench,

I know my course ... (2. 2. 589-594).

Yet “sawing the air with your hands” is, of course, already a sign as well. And is not Hamlet’s optimism concerning his uncle’s reactions frustrated, too? Claudius does leave the running performance but one may do so for so many reasons. Are our “dumb-shows” – to twist Hamlet’s words to our own end a bit – not “inexplicable” indeed? Let us take the case of Claudius again: his emphatically private confession of his guilt (cf. 3.1. 50-54 and 3.3. 36-72) do not have any connection with his behaviour in public; in front of the royal court he does not display any signs of a bad conscience or of suffering. The lesson Hamlet learns is also Wittgenstein’s: no unambiguous meaning can be attached to our so ‘spontaneously’ or ‘naturally’ looking postures and gestures. We need not even recall the old ‘chestnut’, *pretence* (together with play-acting and Claudius’s ability to “smile, and smile, and be a villain”, 1.5.108) to have our certainty in the unequivocalness of “natural behaviour” shaken.

Thus, reference to what is ‘inside me’ is not to *explain* anything but it is only referring the initial problem – the problem of how we mean – to a different, and probably even more obscure, terrain. *Of course* I know the meaning of a word and, if I please, I can call it “my concept”. *Of course* I have feelings ‘inside of me’ and, to use Wittgenstein’s running example, I may call it *my* pain, *this* pain (cf. especially *PI* § 253) which nobody is able to feel but me. Wittgenstein, indeed, says at one point: “Say what you choose, so long as it does not prevent you from seeing the facts” (§ 79). Yet turning my attention inwards, as the possessive pronoun *my* stubbornly prompts me to do, will only give me the impression that I am on the way of explaining something, whereas, as Wittgenstein shows, this process will precisely result in losing sight of the problem itself. And that is less than helpful.

Instead of Portia’s caskets, Wittgenstein has boxes with beetles:

Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a “beetle”. No one can look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle. – Here it could be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. – But suppose the word “beetle” had a use in these people’s language? – If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*: for the box might even be empty. – No, one can ‘divide through’ by the thing in the box; it cancels it out, whatever it is.

This is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of ‘object and designation’ the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant (§ 293).

One of the few things Wittgenstein most vehemently tries to persuade us to do, then, is to change our way of looking at things: to *redirect our vision*, a topic that has been dealt with at great length with respect to *The Tractatus.* In the *Investigations*, taking a different bearing with our eyes, our vision should take its direction from the *inside* into the *outside*:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call “games”. I mean board-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? – Don’t say: “There *must* be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’“ – but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all. – For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don’t think but look! – [...] And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities in detail (§ 66).

In order to see more clearly here as in countless similar cases, we must focus on the details of what goes on; must look at them from close to (§ 51, emphasis throughout original).

What Wittgenstein repeatedly recommends us to do, running headlong, even according to his own diagnosis, against our usual conditionings, is to look for concepts not inside, but outside of us, in front of us, behind, and above, and ahead, and *before* us: in our activities to which others respond and in others’ activities to which we respond, in our ‘going out’ and ‘coming in’ (Psalm 121:8), in our handling and dealing and pottering around – in our way of, mode of, or, as Wittgenstein liked to put it, *form of life* (cf. §§ 19, 23 and 241).

I am well aware that these issues should involve the longer explication or the introduction of several other topics, topics Wittgenstein – as well as other philosophers – have treated at great length: the problem of other minds, private language (two themes I just hinted at in the previous paragraphs), the problem of grammatical rule-following (including to what extent these rules are fixed and what we should do with the fact that we may always disobey them)[[113]](#footnote-113), the problem of criteria, of justification, of the nature and extent of our human (communal) agreement[[114]](#footnote-114), and several others.

Yet my point here rather is to give some backing to my claim that it is possible to read *Philosophical Investigations* as a kind of drama for many voices, that it is a work which, in its very textual presentation and mode of explication of problems, in its very rhetorical self-patterning, in its way of argumentation, lets this drama be played because it is a work which is interested in our *human drama*: what we say and do, when, why, how, where, under what circumstances, etc. Wittgenstein’s interest in this drama (in the one he composes to give free play to ours) is of course not of the kind which would allow him to remain to be a mere spectator: from my own rhetoric it is obvious that Wittgenstein is rather the author *and* the actor/stage-manager conferring the burden of watching attentively and of taking sides on *me*, the reader-spectator. What I was trying to bring out when I said that Wittgenstein is interested in the ground each speaking-voice in *Philosophical Investigations* wishes to occupy rather than in getting me and himself authoritatively and permanently committed to this or that view was that none of the standpoints I create while reading his work can directly and unproblematically be attributed to him. This follows precisely from the ‘unfinishable’ or ‘endless’ character of his book I mentioned above, the character that none of the possible positions treated gets fixed, settled or closed down once and for all.

This feature of the *Investigations* has a lot to do with what Wittgenstein says in his ‘Preface’ to his book: “I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.” (*PI*, viii). And although at some points Wittgenstein does indicate – as I was suggesting above – that this or that approach to a problem may lead to a dead-end (or deadlock), it should not be overlooked that one can nowhere in the book find the certainty that the dead end is a final (complete or absolute) one. It is precisely the rhetoric (the ‘genre’) which never lets the possibility of finding a way out dwindle or wane.

From this reading it certainly follows that the appreciation of *Philosophical Investigations* is both easier and more difficult than some commentators[[115]](#footnote-115) have assumed. It is easier because the work invites us to put it into use, to participate in the drama of finding and exploring our positions and predicaments and to follow suggested directions for ourselves, while it is more difficult because we are never donated with the final satisfaction of catching the author as clinging to a final solution: even the most preferred notions of ‘everydayness’ and of the ‘ordinary’ get constantly examined and re-examined.

It is Wittgenstein’s resistance to a closure and insistence on remaining open to the possibility of doubt that brings us back to the possibilities of phenomena.

“The possibilities of phenomena”. “Being so and being so”

Perhaps it is clearer now what Wittgenstein may mean when he says that our “investigation” “is directed not towards phenomena, but [...] toward the ‘*possibilities’* of phenomena”: preparing the grammar of a phenomenon is precisely investigating its possibilities. When we observe how, when, where, by whom, etc. something is being used to make our grammar, then we are witnessing to circumstances, situations and contexts in which a phenomenon is made possible.

Does this “make possible” mean that these circumstances, situations and contexts (surveyable and more or less systematizable by grammar) *create* the phenomenon? Indeed at one point Wittgenstein says: “Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is [Welche Art von Gegenstand etwas ist, sagt die Grammatik]” (§ 373). However, as my previous section bears witness to it, grammar does not – so to speak – get *at* things but rather it gets *around* them, moreover paragraph 373 does not say that grammar tells us *what* a thing is – it says that grammar tells us what *kind* of thing (“welche Art”) it is (where it belongs, when we may count with it, etc.). Without grammar one would surely not be able to get any information about the thing – telling somebody the name of something, for example, would, without grammar, be of no use since, as Cavell formulates it: “there is as yet no *object* of that kind for you to attach a forthcoming name to: the possibility of finding out what it is officially called is not yet open to you” (Cavell 1979: 77). In turn, one should also know what a name *is*, in the sense of knowing what it is ‘good for’: “Only someone who already knows how to do something with it, can significantly ask a name” (§ 31). But even if someone is able to use names, and, therefore, a particular name, and even if one knows how to identify something with it, one is only doing preparatory work:

... naming is a preparation for description. Naming is so far not a move in the language-game[[116]](#footnote-116) – any more than putting a piece in its place on the board is a move in chess. We may say: *nothing* has so far been done, when a thing has been named. It has not even *got* a name except in the language-game. (§ 49, emphasis original)

But – one may protest – the thing, the object, the phenomenon ought to exist if it can, with the help of a name (and, of course grammar) be identified or recognised. To this Wittgenstein replies:

And to say “If it did not *exist*, it could not have a name” is to say as much and as little as: if this thing did not exist, we could not use it in our language-game. – What looks as if it *had* to exist, is part of the language. It is a paradigm in our language-game; something with which comparison is made. And this may be an important observation; but is none the less an observation concerning our language-game – our method of representation (§ 50, emphasis original).

Grammar does not ‘decide’ what exists and what does not exist in the sense of a ‘thing’s existence in the external world’: the ‘existence’ grammar ‘grants’ a thing is still *part* of grammar, i.e. of *itself*; it is still of a piece with grammar’s representational capacity. Grammar, to twist Cavell’s apt formulation to our own end here, will not tell us about a thing’s *being* so, but about its identity, position, circumstances: about its being *so* (cf. Cavell 1979: 45). Thus, grammar is not creation but *around*, i.e. *before* and *after* creation, it is not bringing something into existence in ‘reality’ but it is preliminary arrangements, a ‘provision of space’ for this existence. Grammar is not ‘making something be out there, in the external world’ but supplying the *possibilities* for this being, as well as the means (*the* means) to be able to identify and recognise the thing in the world, to be able to ‘greet and salute’ it as something familiar.

Philosophy-before-philosophy

Two paragraphs from the *Investigations* are especially relevant here:

When one says “He gave a name to his sensation” one forgets that a great deal of *stage*-*setting* in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense [schon viel in der Sprache *vorbereiten* sein muss – ‘much has already to be prepared, *made* *ready* in the language’] if the mere act of naming is to make sense. And when we speak of someone’s having given a name to pain, what is presupposed is the existence of the grammar of the word “pain”; it shews [zeigt] the *post where the new word is stationed*. (§ 257, emphasis and interpretation between square brackets mine).

But not only is grammar “stage-setting” but, since a good part of Wittgenstein’s philosophy is the construction of this grammar itself (i. e. the investigation of the possibilities of phenomena), this philosophy is stage-setting as well:

It is the business of philosophy not to resolve a contradiction by means of a mathematical or logico-mathematical discovery, but to make it possible for us to get a clear view of the state of affairs *before* the contradiction is resolved. And this does not mean that one is side-stepping a difficulty (§ 125, emphasis original).

No, it does not. Because the Wittgensteinian task of philosophy is to get a clear view of things *before* philosophy starts but it is precisely the task of *philosophy* (of this, Wittgensteinian philosophy) to clear the ground, to set the scene, to prepare the stage for the *entre* of philosophy. This philosophy-before-philosophy could, in this very special sense, indeed be called ‘first philosophy’.

Thus, as I understand it, doing philosophy *à la* *Philosophical Investigations* is taking a step backwards from philosophy itself – while, of course, inevitably remaining *within* philosophy. This ‘backward-step’ is the preparatory work we have to do for philosophy, it is the clearing of the ground to start that which we are already within. This step is taken from *being* to get *before* being, but, again, as part and parcel of the investigation of the possibilities of being.

And how is that done? It starts, as we have seen, with the survey of ‘what we say when’. *Philosophical Investigations* is full of small scenes:

I send someone shopping ... (§ 1)

Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B ... (§ 3).

Make the following experiment: say “It’s cold here” and mean “It’s warm here”. Can you do it? – And what are you doing as you do it? And is there only one way of doing it? (§ 510).

Further examples could easily be found. I think that one of the reasons why Wittgenstein takes a run at his topics again and again – which brings about the often acclaimed repetitiveness (cf. e.g. McGinn 1984: 7) of his work – is that he is constantly putting himself to trial: he is interested in what kind of expression will run out (‘naturally’?, ‘spontaneously’?) from under his pen for the *first* time he deals with a problem ..., for the *second* time..., and so forth. This is at least partly done with the expectation that one of the expressions which pops up might give a clue to him and/or the reader how to go on and go about the problem. Sometimes Wittgenstein tries to draw the conclusion himself:

One would like to speak of the function of a word in *this* sentence. As if the sentence were a mechanism in which the word had a particular function. But what does this function consist in? How does it come to light? For there isn’t anything hidden – don’t we see the whole sentence? The function must come out in operating with the word (§ 559, emphasis original).

Sometimes he ends up with a question:

One has already to know (or be able to do) something in order to be capable of asking a thing’s name. But what does one have to know? (§ 30).

... naming is something like attaching a label to a thing. One can say that this is preparatory to the use of a word. But *what* is it a preparation *for*? (§ 26, emphasis original).

And so forth. It is, then, in this sense that I take *Philosophical Investigations* to be a study in our human drama, in which certain voices are made to speak in certain situations, where several characters are to be imagined as engaged in certain activities, where questions are asked, comments, reflections and afterthoughts are added, where, to borrow one of Stanley Cavell’s formulations from another context, the task is “to discover the specific plight of mind and circumstance within which a human being gives voice to his condition” (Cavell 1976: 241).

Wittgenstein, to return to the point where we started, is not interested in scepticism, justification, belief, thinking, etc. because he wants to refute any or all of them; he is interested in the state of mind one is in when he/she doubts, believes, thinks, seeks justification, etc., he is concerned with the specific human condition (predicament, position, ‘location’) which makes these human ‘operations’ possible. The question, of course, remains how Wittgenstein’s interest and method differ from that of the playwright’s, or even of the writer of dramas, of fiction or of poems in general.

The question, indeed, remains, because even if one grants the similarities between an attitude guiding a kind of reading and writing of literature on the one hand, and Wittgenstein’s way of positioning himself (and us) in *Philosophical Investigations* on the other, obvious differences immediately come to mind. Some of them, in a first approach at least, seem to be formal and bound up with tradition: Wittgenstein’s work, for example, while certainly containing dialogue, is not written in a dialogical form; there is no cast of characters and names giving the ‘dramatis personae’ a (more or less) stable identity. To recall, even further, one of the most favourite formalist arguments, Wittgenstein’s book was not *intended* for performance but it is to be read.

Read, but how? Would it not be at least ‘instructive’ if, say, a Department of Philosophy once acted out *Philosophical Investigations*? Could they do the same with, for example, Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* or with Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*? I do not wish to suggest that the *Investigations* is a piece of literature, and especially not anything like the idea that ‘philosophy and literature are, or should be, or might be, one’. My emphasis on Wittgenstein’s gesture of going *before* philosophy as a *philosophical* move belabours the point that trying to go ‘outside’ philosophy is a philosophical (and, thus, metaphysical) move itself (as I tried to argue in the “Introduction”). So, I do not share assumptions that would imply the claim that, for example, drama, or tragedy in particular, would be a kind of ‘pre-philosophy’, the tragic vision taking us back to a ‘primal’ or ‘original’ or ‘irrational’ ‘un-reason’ and preceding the ‘rationality’ or ‘conceptual nature’ of philosophy[[117]](#footnote-117). When I claim that Macbeth’s dagger-monologue is a (re)-enactment of the scene ‘behind’ Western conceptualisation, I will try to argue for a more complex relationship between metaphorical representation and concept-formation than that.

What I, in turn, find Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* has in common with Shakespeare is rather an attitude: an emphasis, first and foremost not on explanation but on presentation – Wittgenstein’s recurring term is *Erklrung*, which is rather ‘explanation as elucidation, as clarification’. Where I indeed feel Shakespeare and Wittgenstein are covering similar or connectable grounds is their intimation that we might earlier find out how to *go on* if we do not so much wish to arrive at solutions through casual links but if we open our eyes for conflicts on display, for the ‘visions’ of the collision of positions. Both Wittgenstein and Shakespeare seem to allow for the possibility that we may arrive home *in* or *in spite of* our homelessness and neither of them lays an emphasis on an evenly structured and totalising narrative which would finally put everything to its proper place, while they both insist on the unravelling in things congealing into a fixture without, to repeat once more, excluding the possibility of finding a place of permanent abode. Their way of weighing in these possibilities is less through explanatory time but through the dramatic tension of the moment and less through the content and the ‘essence’ of things than through the respective position and the specific plight of phenomena. This shared attitude, I contend, makes Wittgenstein as much a playwright as it makes Shakespeare a philosopher. However, instead of pursuing this matter any further here, I will return to the dagger-monologue.

“This” revisited and nothing

Macbeth’s question is: “Is this a dagger, which I see before me?” (2.1.33). And our question was what this *this* was referring to. “It is quite true” – Wittgenstein writes in paragraph 38 of *Philosophical Investigations* –

that, in giving an ostensive definition (*in der hinweisenden Definition*)[[118]](#footnote-118) for instance, we often point to the object named and say the name. And similarly, in giving an ostensive definition for instance, we say the word “this” while pointing to a thing. And also the word “this” and a name occupy the same position in a sentence.

However, as Wittgenstein further suggests, although *this* and a name may indeed occupy the same position in a sentence, *this* can hardly be a real name (and especially not the “genuine” name, cf. § 38) because while a name is often defined precisely with the help of the demonstrative pronoun *this* (or *that*; e.g. “This is a dagger” or “That is called a dagger”), we never say: “This is ‘this’” or “That is called ‘that’” (cf. § 38). When *this* and a name both feature in a sentence, *this* always takes the ‘pointing’, ‘attention-calling’ function on, and never the name-function. The temptation to say that *this* is a name originates from the fact that *this* “can never be without a bearer” (§ 45). Therefore, we would often like to say: “as long as there is a *this* , the word ‘this’ has a meaning too, whether *this* is simple or complex” (§ 45). “But” – Wittgenstein continues – “that does not make a word [i.e. *this*] into a name. On the contrary: for a name is not used with, but only explained by means of, the gesture of pointing” (§ 45).

So *this* is not a name but a “gesture of pointing” we often use to explain a name. *This* is a signal, a device to bring something into the focus of the other’s attention: its function is not to label the essential ‘*this*-ness’ of all objects under the sun, but its referring capacity, to all possible things indeed, consists in fixing something for the convenience of both speaker and listener. Thus, Wittgenstein is suggesting, we may get a clearer view of the problem of *this*, a view that helps us to go on, instead of leaving us stuck with a riddle, if we do not start to ‘find’ what there might be ‘behind’ *this*, and if we do not try to explain its meaning by looking for, and scrutinising, the object(s) it may be standing for, but if we look at the *activity* the word *this* performs in our grammar, its function of point*ing*, indicat*ing* – its draw*ing* our attention to something. This is, of course, not to deny that *this* might finally ‘arrive at’ an object, i.e. that we, for example, can identify an object with the help of *this*. Yet Wittgenstein’s insight is that we should understand the phenomenon *this* through what it is doing rather than through what this ‘doing’ is ‘done to’.

So, in the Wittgensteinian line of investigation, what we are primarily engaged with is not objects but actions and events: we should, so to speak, concentrate rather on verbs than on nouns. Consequently, we need not begin our analysis – as interpreters of *Macbeth* often do[[119]](#footnote-119) – by asking what the ‘object’ in Macbeth’s question may be ‘standing behind’ *this*. We need not decide, as yet, whether what he is able to see is a ‘real’ dagger, or a ‘phantom’-dagger, or whether it is an “imaginary object”[[120]](#footnote-120), or his ‘private idea’, or a ‘concept’ or whatever. It may, we can say, recalling Wittgenstein’s boxes and Portia’s caskets, be even *nothing*.

Here, again we should resist the temptation of making *nothing* into an *object* with a special ‘status’ and we should not ask what the *nothing* Macbeth might be perceiving ‘looks like’. This resistance here is not to deny that what Macbeth (or any of us) might be answering to such a rather odd question would be unimportant or uninteresting. Macbeth could, for example, say: “Well, it is a kind of dark spot with a hole in its middle”; or: “It is like air but perhaps even a bit thinner, presumably a vacuum”; or: “All there is, is a domain which is empty”, etc. However, as I guess Wittgenstein would argue, all what Macbeth or we would be saying in such a situation is interesting because it is indicative of a *specific plight* he or we are in: when held at gun-point (or ‘dagger-point’) to give a referent to *nothing*, such sentences as the above ones may come to mind, created, of course, by recourse to sentences which are composed of words with easily identifiable referents: tables, chairs and even daggers. The most intriguing question has been, since Platonic times, the philosophical consequences of ‘creating’ referents for words like *nothing* – it seems that it is precisely such words which destabilise our confidence in our assumption that all words have solid and stable ‘objects’ ‘behind’ them, and Wittgenstein’s prime interest is in why the discourse of philosophy often burns with the desire to provide referents to *all* words under the (Platonic) sun.

Macbeth’s question could of course be answered, without any violence done to grammar, with: ‘No there is nothing here’; or: ‘No, it’s a sword’; or: ‘No, it’s a figment of your fancy’; or: ‘Yes, it is’. But now it is enough for us to know that the *status* or even the *existence* of the object Macbeth can see before him is irrelevant because, according to Wittgenstein, it is precisely *to lose sight of the object*, at least for a while, which will direct our attention (our *vision*) to Macbeth’s situation, which, in turn, will help us get a clue to appreciate the force of Macbeth’s question.

Identity

Macbeth’s “Is this a dagger, which I see before me?” brings identity into question. It shows a person at variance with language itself, a person giving voice to one of the most desperate human anxieties. This is an anxiety which might occur in situations like that of Macbeth’s, situations one might call cases of ‘ecstasy-in-despair’: Macbeth, in his preparation to kill Duncan and halted by something on his way to the King’s chamber, as well as with a ‘real’ dagger on his side, is caught in a fit and has to ask a question which could hardly be answered satisfactorily. Macbeth faces the horror that perhaps language does not mean anything any longer, that it has stopped doing its ‘ordinary duty’ of orienting us among things, that it may have ceased to perform its ‘normal’ service of showing us our ‘acquaintances’, that it may have abandoned us, that it may not be reliable any more because it may be unable to identify anything for us since it may have stopped signifying anything at all. “Signify” of course deliberately evokes here Macbeth’s famous “tomorrow-monologue” at the end of the play: “Life’s but a walking shadow; a poor player […]full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing (5.5. 23-27).

Yet this riddle of “nothing” refers not only forward in the play but backwards, too, to some earlier lines, already examined: “And nothing is, but what is not” (1. 3. 144). Macbeth’s dagger-monologue can be taken as a crux where the question of *nothing* and of signification is neither just introduced and touched upon (as in 1.3.139-144), nor is it reached as a kind of ‘conclusion’ (as in the tomorrow-monologue) but, precisely like the “air-drawn dagger” (3.4.61) itself, is hung up for determination, when everything is still possible and nothing is decided (including the murdering of Duncan), when the question concerning our abandonment by language and our abandoning of language is still open and may take various ways.

The ways, as far as Macbeth’s immediate situation is concerned, are “to go to Duncan’s chamber, or not to go”, “to kill, or not to kill”. If philosophy, as Wittgenstein seems to suggest, is preparatory work, then Macbeth is indeed our man: we have caught him right in the process of getting ready for something, getting ready for a deed, which, later on, will become *the* deed for him: he enters the scene, after having killed Duncan, with “I have done the deed”(2.2.14). By contrast, the Weïrd Sisters are – as the title of this book also echoes this – doing “a deed without a name” (4. 1. 49) and Macbeth’s desperate and never-ending search for words finds a parallel rather in what Wittgenstein formulated in a lecture thus: “Language – I want to say – is a refinement, *im Anfang war die Tat*” (‘in the beginning was the deed’).”[[121]](#footnote-121) Thus, still in line with Wittgenstein’s approach, to be able to appreciate the force of Macbeth’s question even further, we have to ask what has brought Macbeth into such a condition, what has prepared him for this preparation.

First we should ask whom the question “Is this a dagger, which I see before me?” is addressed to. If one claims that, according to the conventions of soliloquies in Early Modern English (“Renaissance”) drama, Macbeth’s question is addressed to himself in the witnessing presence of the audience, then it is also immediately to be asked what makes this convention possible at this point of Macbeth’s tragedy, as well as what makes the fact that a person is talking to himself, when he is alone, acceptable. And this latter question has by far a wider implication than the Renaissance tradition of soliloquy. My clue is from Cavell again:

If you tell me that there is a table in the next room I may or may not believe you; hence I may say I believe or do not believe there is a table *here* (the presence that is for all the world *this* table), before the very eyes. The context is one in which the philosopher is talking, so to speak, at most to himself: He is not speaking to someone whose position is inferior to his with respect to the table, so he is not telling anyone anything; nor is his position with respect to the table inferior to anyone else’s, so he cannot be denied, from outside as it were. It is the position that reveals us humans to be in the same human boat of sensuous endowment, fated to the five senses, the position from which alone the skeptic’s doubt demands to be answered. It is (therefore) equally alone the position from which the skeptic’s radical question demands to be raised, in which *the best case* of knowledge shows itself vulnerable for suspicion. We may say that what it is vulnerable to is the transformation of a scene of knowing oneself into a sense that true knowledge is beyond the human self, that what we hold in our minds to be true of the world can have at best the status of opinion, educated guesswork, hypothesis, construction, belief. The concept of belief is turned from its common course. I say, in *The Claim of Reason* [Cavell (1979] in a phrase from, and as part of an interpretation of, Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, that in such a case a word is being used outside its language game(s), apart from its ordinary criteria. It is essential to language that language *can* so be turned. But there are consequences. In turning the concept of belief to name our immediate or absolute relation to the world, say our absolute intimacy, a relation no human other *could* either confirm or compromise, the philosopher turns the world into, or puts it in the position of, a speaker, lodging its claims upon us, claims to which, as it turns out, the philosopher cannot listen. [...] Here one would one day have to look at the philosopher’s extraordinary treatment of objects, as in Descartes’s wax that is melting, in Price’s tomato with nothing but its visual front aspect remaining, in Moore’s raised moving hands, in Heidegger’s blooming tree, to explore the sense of hyperbolic, unprecedented attention in play. It is not just careful description, or practical investigation, under way here. The philosopher is as it were looking for a *response* from the object, perhaps a shining. (Cavell 1987: 7-8, emphasis original)

Now, by contrast, Macbeth precisely seems to receive a “response” or “shining” from his “object”:

Thou marshall’st me the way that I was going

[....]

I see thee still;

And on thy blade and dudgeon, gouts of blood,

Which was not so before (2.1. 41, 45-47).

And could one imagine a greater intimacy with an object than Macbeth’s, who, in the course of his soliloquy, while staring at whatever he is staring at, repeats an *address* to it, the personal, second person singular pronoun *thou* eight times, three times in the subjective, and five times in the objective form *thee*? Macbeth’s plight indeed, reinforces the “intimacy”-aspect of Cavell’s characterisation. And here is a hint at intimacy from *Philosophical Investigations*: Wittgenstein’s account is that that of the philosopher who is of the conviction that the solution to such enigmas as meaning, existence, etc. lies in the problem of reference, i.e. in the relationship between a word and an object:

Naming appears as a *queer* connection of a word with an object. – And you really get such a queer connection when the philosopher tries to bring out *the* relation between name and thing by staring at an object in front of him and repeating a name or even the word “this” innumerable times.[...] And we can also say the word “this” *to* the object, as it were *address* the object as “this” – a queer use of this word, which doubtless only occurs in doing philosophy (§ 38, emphasis original).

Macbeth utters the name *dagger* and *this* only twice, respectively, the latter once with reference to what is “before him” and once with reference to the one “which [he] now draw[s] (cf. 2. 33 and 41). The rest is “thou” and “thee”.

Thus, we have, in Cavell’s and Wittgenstein’s descriptions, the philosopher who first cuts himself off from his community, locks out the public, retires to his private world (or has never left it) to get down to the solution of the relationship between words and the world: of *the* world, consisting of objects. However, and this is one of the most significant insights of both Cavell’s and of Wittgenstein’s descriptions, the philosopher, whether he likes it or not, will need ‘company’, so he will, for want of anything better, ask himself and address, talk to, and try to listen to the world as his “intimate” (human) partner. I take both Cavell’s and Wittgenstein’s point to be that the problem is not with the above philosophical attitude itself (no doubt pervading much of our Western tradition) but with the so often present effort to make this respectable position appear as ‘neutral’, as an absolute zero-point of bias, as one of maximum tranquillity, as a kind of ‘contextless’ condition, as the ‘absolute’ position from which philosophising can be and, even, should be done. All is well if the philosopher is willing to acknowledge that his treatment of objects is extraordinary, that his disposition verges on insanity, if, in other words, the philosopher is willing to be called to account for his Macbeth-like anxiety, originating in his self-induced, singular and peculiar position. The philosopher has to be aware that when he has retired to his “privacy”, he has silenced, and then killed the world around him, and that he will, to get any further, have to (with the force of *necessity*) re-animate it in order that he may get into the state of insanity characteristic of Macbeth.

Of Macbeth, indeed, who, far from settling or even sitting down to study the relationship between word and object in peace, is preparing to kill a fellow human being, and for whom the dagger is as intrusive, and as much of an unwelcome guest and a gate-crasher, as the knocks on his castle-door will soon become. For Macbeth for some time, the “air-drawn dagger” (3.4.61) will perform all sorts of things and “oe’r the one half-world” “Nature” will only “*seem*” “dead”, populated by such creatures as witches, “Pale Hecate”, “the wolf”, and “Tarquin”; and “Murder” “himself” will, “with his steady pace” “move” “towards his design” “like a ghost” (cf. 2.1.49-56. emphasis mine).

Yet this is a long way to come. Right here my point is that the interior monologue *is* insanity, yet in Macbeth’s case it is induced by the unexpected and abnormal intrusion of an object, while with the philosopher, as Cavell and Wittgenstein describe him, this is a necessity which derives from a situation the philosopher wishes to present as normal, which he designates to be *the* occasion when the problem of objects and the world might be settled. Madness suddenly encapsulates Macbeth and he will try to get back to a kind of ‘ordinary’ (when, at last, deeds can be done at all) by a flat denial of the extraordinary: “There’s no such thing” (2.1.47), adding a highly intellectualised interpretation: “It is the bloody business which informs / Thus to mine eyes” (48-49). Here Macbeth is already outside of his fit, having enabled himself to find an explanation, a cause, which reduces the whole problem of insanity to a practical matter, also assigning the act of murder a ‘proper place’. The philosopher, on the other hand, starts out from what he believes to be the normal or the ordinary, necessarily falling into madness soon, which he may or may not acknowledge. Hence, the soliloquy might be taken as one of the ‘paradigmatic’ positions of both the philosopher and of the tragic hero. Is the philosopher, then, a tragic hero? Or is the tragic hero, because of his very stance, a philosopher?

Position: the “object” and its “reality”

Before trying to give an answer to the above questions, I will consider another aspect of position, one towards which both Cavell’s and Wittgenstein’s investigations seem to work. This other aspect is obviously inseparable from the ‘speaking mode’ or the ‘genre’ in which we hear the philosopher or Macbeth talk: the monologue is addressed to the ‘object’, to a ‘piece of reality’, yet the position *in* which the ‘object’ is shown, being *so* and *so* at *this* or *that* point of space, will fall back on, and will be indicative of, the position from which the speaking voice can be heard. So first of all we must notice that Macbeth’s “dagger” changes ‘direction’ in the second line of his soliloquy, getting displayed first by means of *before* and then *toward*: “Is this a dagger, which I see before me, / The handle toward my hand?” (2.1. 33-34).

If it is true, as I argued earlier, that Macbeth’s main concern is with the identity of the object, then the position the first spatial preposition (*before*) allots to it does not seem to contribute to the clarification of this identity – Macbeth will precisely have to go on with a defining relative clause, metonymically singling out one feature of the object, namely the *handle*. Acquaintance with the “where” of the object in terms of “before me” does not, in itself, tell him what the issue ‘at hand’ is. “Before” only appears to be still part of the looking agent’s perspective itself, somewhat like the spatial forms of experience in Immanuel Kant’s system, providing just the frame *in* which one can perceive the thing. The spelling out of the position in this respect does not seem to achieve more than the rediscovery of a ‘mark in objecthood in general’: after all, the very word “object” is engendered in a spatial relation. The Latin word *obicere* is a compound of *ob*-, ‘against’ and -*jacere*, ‘to throw’ – an object, as it ‘itself’ shows – is something thrown *against* or *before* us.[[122]](#footnote-122) One of the German words translatable as “object”, namely *Gegenstand* – one of the starting points, as we shall see, of the inquiries of Martin Heidegger as well – contains a spatial perspective which is accessible even without much etymologising: *gegen* is ‘against, opposite’, *stand* is ‘stand’, so in the German word *object* presents itself as ‘(something which) stands against or opposite (me/somebody)’. Yet in Macbeth’s account there is also *toward*: the thing is not only there, in front of him, but also towards a part of the body, the hand, offering itself, as it were, to slip right into it. And Macbeth goes on with: “Come, let me clutch thee: –” (2.1.34), only to oppose two modes of perception, touching and seeing:

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible

To feeling as to sight? (2.1. 35-37)

In Macbeth’s ‘taking sides’ and calling the ‘thing’ “fatal vision” there is much to relish for the epistemologist, as well as perhaps for the moral philosopher. This classification already shows a lot from the position of the inquirer: he works with two ‘worlds’, one is ‘reality’, where one can not only see things but can also touch them, while the other ‘world’ is the realm of the mind, the brain, the ‘inner’, and, within it, the domain of the ‘imaginary’, where one is only able to see, but where what is before the ‘mind’s eye’ may also be false:

...or art thou but

A dagger of the mind, a false creation,

Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain? (2.1.36-38).

In the first approximation, ‘imagination’ is presented here as having at least the possibility of a fallen ontological status in contrast to ‘reality’. Yet this simple relationship, this kind of ‘naive realism’ gets problematized first in the modality of the inquiry, the alternatives following each other in the form of questions and, further, in the fact that access to both reality and to the imaginary may take the course of *sight*, establishing a possible two-way traffic between the two domains and offering a common ground for comparison.

It is this comparison which might explain the despair contained in “fatal” (i.e. ‘ominous’, ‘deadly’, cf. Brooke 1990: 124): judging purely by sight, by *vision*, there is no difference between the dagger “of the mind” (2. 1. 38), and the dagger which is on Macbeth’s side: “I see thee yet, in form as palpable / As this which now I draw” (40-41). Yet, precisely in contrast with this ‘material reality’ Macbeth has ‘empirical’ evidence for, he has to witness to the imaginary dagger turning even ‘more fatal’: it starts to live an existence of its own by displaying such dynamism which the tangible and therefore manageable dagger is only reminiscent of:

Thou marshall’st me the way that I was going;

And such an instrument I was to use.–

[....]

I see thee still

And on thy blade, and dudgeon, gouts of blood,

Which was not so before – (41-42,45-47).

Here Macbeth enters a realm we may describe as ‘mythological’: if we agree that the ‘empirical’, anchored in presence, displays the experiencing agent as always approaching, as always going *to* being, and if we also agree that the ‘mythological’ has the tendency to stage the agent as opening (or as becoming ‘opened’) up for the ‘arrival’ or ‘visitation’ of meaning and being – as, for example, King Oedipus’ eyes are opened up for the horror of being and meaning immediately present only in their absence and coming to him to ‘inform’ him that they have always already been with him – then we may say that Macbeth enters the world of the mythological. In this world the ‘imaginary dagger’ becomes an active organism and main agent in a micro-mythology around it, with all the manifold ambiguities such mythologies are spun from.

The imaginary dagger from now on might be the signal, the mental *and* verbal ‘icon’ of Macbeth’s doom, befalling on the tragic hero and enforcing its irresistible power on his fate, acting, as it were, in his place and against his will. Yet the dagger may also be the mark, the “objective correlative” (T. S. Eliot) of Macbeth’s own murderous intentions and desires, being, as one of our ‘modern mythologies’ likes to put it, just an external manifestation of what already dwells in Macbeth, giving him a chance to create a distance from the inside and perhaps to come to terms with it. Under the first, ‘fate-interpretation’, the dagger says: ‘whatever you wish to do thou shalt inevitably do the deed: “it is concluded”[[123]](#footnote-123) and I marshall thee on the way you have to follow’. Under the second, ‘psychic-interpretation’, the dagger is a figuring of Macbeth’s inner world in the mode of a total overlap, and it can even be morally considered (cf. “fatal”): the dagger might be a ‘bad omen’ or a ‘warning signal’, saying: ‘Stop! Now there is still time to retrace your steps! Don’t do it!’

However, the dagger may not only be interpreted as the *instrument*, and the *pointer* into the fatal direction, but also, in its perspiring blood (cf. “gouts of blood”), as the emblem of the suffering that awaits Duncan, or Macbeth, or both. The dagger then would either be the symbol of the passion of the “silver skinned” and “golden blooded” (3.3.110) God-like yet already lame King-figure, “the Lord’s anointed Temple” (3.3.67), or of the anti-Christ “bathing in reeking wounds” (1.2.40) to “memorise another Golgotha” (1.2.41). According to this line of interpretation, the dagger, of course through its cross-like shape and bloody surface, would thus participate in the Christian tradition.

I do not think it would make sense to prefer one line of interpretation at the expense of the other here, because the point to me precisely seems to be that, while presumably all these (and undoubtedly even more) lines are open to Macbeth, he is not going to take any of them: he shuts his imagination, his “heat-oppressed brain”(2.1.39) up and denies the existence of the imaginary all together, with fate, psyche, Christ, anti-Christ and all: “There’s no such thing” (2.1.47).

“There’s no such thing”: killing, bewitchment and conceptualisation

I take this line to be the key-sentence of the monologue. This sentence marks the return to the demonic, to the world of the weird sisters, to “wicked dreams”, to “witchcraft”, to “Pale Hecate”, to “the howling wolf”, to “Tarquin’s ravishing strides” (cf. 2.1.50-55). Here the hero is not only open to sight, but to *hearing* and *listening to* as well:

...and wither’d Murder

Alarum’d by his sentinel, the wolf,

Whose howl’s his watch...

[.....]

Thou sure and firm-set earth,

Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear

Thy very stones prate of my where-about,

And take the present horror from the time

Which now suits with it,

[.....]

...the bell invites me.

Hear it not Duncan; for it is a knell

That summons thee to Heaven, or to Hell. (2.1.52-54; 56-60; 62-64)

Through opening up another sense-organ, Macbeth now seems to find a ‘place of permanent abode’, a “where-about” in the demonic, and sound – in strict line with the equivocatory principle of The Weïrd Sisters – shifts from signal (“alarum’d”) to something to be stifled (“hear not my steps”) to signal again (“the bell invites me”). Yet, as H. W. Fawkner suggests, Macbeth, partly because of the extension of his senses, is somehow too *much* present in this Tarquin-scene: in his staging himself as “Murder” and “ghost”, he is not only taking part in, but also taking aim at, mastering and appropriating this horror:

His [Macbeth’s] fear that the “very stones” may prate betokens no mere fear of waking others, of waking the world, of waking God himself – bur rather the fear of waking himself. If Macbeth woke from his trance, he would be *horrified by the lack of horror*. He needs horror to lack it: nothing must “take the present horror from the time, / Which now suits with it.” Because horror suits horror, fits the mould of its best possibility, is fully present to itself as the identity of itself, it is masterable. (Fawkner 1990: 101, emphasis original)

Indeed, time and deed – in line with Lady Macbeth’s iterated insistence, as we shall witness it – seem to have found a perfect match and even overlap: Macbeth, in contrast with the horrible sight of the dagger overpowering him, is now perfectly *inside*, and *in pursuit*, of the time of horror, lest it should slip from his “clutch”. So after “There is no such thing” and the reflexive-explanatory step of “It is the bloody business which informs / Thus to mine eyes” (2.1.47; 48-49), Macbeth is *after* (‘posterior to’) the equivocatory moment of undecidedness and standstill by his very dive into the equivocatory. His horror – like the tangible dagger – has become an instrument: it has the tendency to congeal into an object-like defunctness of a thing with clear boundaries, this tendency marked by, permeated with, and, thus finding a place in, the “seeming death” of Nature and the death of Duncan. So if earlier I emphasised the “*seeming* death” of Nature over “the one half-world” (49-50), then now the “other half” and “*death*” should be stressed: the demonic world Macbeth enters displays, precisely by being under the equivocatory spell of The Weïrd Sisters, both death and the activity of evil forces at the same time, acquiring, however, in contrast with the by-now closed-down dynamism of the imaginary, the position of dead and death-distributing (‘terminating’) reality itself.

Consequently, what I find fascinating in Macbeth’s attitude to objects and the world throughout his soliloquy is that he presents the killing of the imagination as the very human condition of the *readiness*, the *daring*[[124]](#footnote-124) to destroy somebody (something, some-*body*) alive. Macbeth’s plight works as if the prerequisite of the extermination of a living being, the freezing of the human flesh throbbing in warmth and blood and, no doubt, in pain were the deadening of the device which is able to animate (‘personify’, ‘metaphoricise’) the defunctness of lifeless objects.

If it is true, as I claimed earlier, that the philosopher first kills the world and then has to re-animate it, and if it is also true that the vivaciousness of the “dagger of the mind” suddenly befalls on Macbeth as a shock, then now, in his grinding his imagination to a halt, Macbeth is in fact taking what I characterised as the philosopher’s initial or starting position. Macbeth needs this position to be able to act yet – as we have seen – always with the recurring paradox of “the deed”, namely, that this deed is the act of destruction.

Does that imply that we, with our imagination shut, without daring to acknowledge that the world is not a heap of objects but is alive, are potential murderers? Does this also imply that the philosopher’s initial position is the one of the latent criminal? Or is the closing of the imagination necessary only in order to be able to act? Is the deadening of the world into a heap of inanimate objects an invitation we send out to the demonic? And which is that human ‘medium’ through which the invitation is sent out? Through the imagination again? Through the stubborn, un-eridicatable presence of the imaginary, keeping, *nevertheless*, a sleepless, mournful vigil over the death of objects? Or is silencing the world to defunctness the demonic itself?

To find a clue, we might follow another thought-path trodden by Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein, indeed, talks a lot about the “bewitchment (*verhexung*) of our intelligence” (§ 109). In *Philosophical Investigations* he comes back again and again to the point that we “fail to see the actual use of” words because we are “dazzled by the ideal” (§ 100), that “thought is surrounded by a halo” (§ 97), that “our forms of expression prevent us in all sort of ways from seeing that nothing out of the ordinary is involved, by sending us in pursuit of chimeras” (§ 94), that the notion of meaning, as ‘our mental picture’ or as ‘referent’ “surrounds the working of language with a haze (*Dunst*) which makes clear vision impossible” (§ 5). Wittgenstein offers philosophy (his way of doing philosophy, ‘philosophy-before-philosophy’, metaphysics) itself as a “treatment” (cf. § 255) to “disperse [...] the fog (*Nebel*)” (§ 5): “philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment (*Verhexung*) of our intelligence by means of language” (§ 109).

*Dunst* and *Nebel*: I guess these are the words Wittgenstein would choose if he had to give director’s instructions to the appearance of The Weïrd Sisters, the “bubbles” of “the earth” (1.3.79), who “vanish” “into the air” and “melt” as “breath into the wind” (cf. 1.3. 80-82). Most of Wittgenstein’s bewitching demons come from the faulty use of sight: our looking for the ideal instead of looking at particular situations, our penetrating look for the ‘essence’ instead of a “weather-eye” kept open for the actual use of words, our gazing at concepts as if they were pictures instead of observing the working of our grammar. In Wittgenstein vivaciousness and dynamism are given over to the stirring, and turning, and proceeding, and swerving and wriggling of our grammar (as it is used by us, concrete human beings in concrete situations), while the sluggish, and the motionless, and the inert, and the inanimate and the dead are stamped on objects, be they in our minds as “pictures” or in the world as things.

In paragraph 432, for instance, we read: “Every sign *by itself* seems *dead*. *What* gives it life? – In use it is *alive*. Is life breathed into it there? – Or is the *use* its life?” (emphasis original). I regard one of Wittgenstein’s greatest contributions to philosophy the insight that we not only deaden the world by treating it as a heap of dull and inanimate objects (as, to borrow Lady Macbeth’s phrase, “sightless substance” (1.4.49), *sightless* meaninghere ‘blind’, ‘invisible’, ‘ugly’, cf. Brooke 1990: 124), but that this attitude has already got its imprinting on our minds, discernible in the very mode of our talking about the entities of our ‘inner world’ as ‘pictures’ or ‘concepts’, these *things* being our ultimate refuge, our last resort to congeal the vigorous and the enlivened into something stable – an object, enclosed and encircled, with clear boundaries. This is what I take to be the force of the following paragraph:

...because we cannot specify any *one* bodily action which we call pointing to the shape (as opposed, for example, to the colour), we say that a *spiritual* [mental, intellectual] activity corresponds to these words.

Where our language suggests a body and there is none: there, we should like to say, is a *spirit* (*ein Geist*) (§ 36, square brackets, first brackets and emphasis original)

Macbeth, I wish to suggest, displays and enacts much of the process outlined by Wittgenstein above, when he first resorts to the “spiritual [mental, intellectual]” to interpret the fatal vision, relegating it first to the mind, the “heat-oppressed brain”, thereby creating a *double* with respect to the dagger he “now draw[s]”, the real dagger serving as a sort of – albeit poor – replica to the one of the mind. And when he perceives the imaginary dagger as unwelcomely animated, he negates its existence but this existence is already that of a *thing*: “There is no such thing”. Macbeth’s journey through his own mind really leads us through the process of concept-formation, yet with the following important complication: while according to the usual account of concept-formation, we start out with looking at the “real thing” in the world first and then make a mental-picture (a concept) out of it – which, in Wittgenstein’s analysis, is just as inert and dead as the “real” one – Macbeth has to begin with a *vision*, and it is only then that he moulds it into a concept. When, however, the concept starts to ‘misbehave’, i.e., to *behave* (to “marshall” him, to perspire blood), he decides to put it aside as a ‘thing’. Yet both processes yield to the same result: a dead object.

Conceptualisation: clutching and the hand

But why do we want to deaden the world, why do we have satisfaction – or, as Wittgenstein’s diagnosis goes – why do we acquiesce in, or even get relieved by, hastening to argue that we have pictures, concepts: *things* in our minds? The clue, I suggest, lies in another aspect of Macbeth’s soliloquy: its emphasis on grasping and clutching:

Come, let me clutch thee;

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible

To feeling, as to sight? (2.1.34-37).

Yet a clue also lies in the perspicuity of the metaphors in which such words as the German *Begriff*, the Hungarian *fogalom* or even the English *concept* itself, originate. German *Griff*, with the derivational prefix *be-* is akin to English *grip* (and Old Norse *gripr*, ‘property’); the Hungarian Verb *fog* means here ‘hold, take, seize, take hold of, grasp, clutch’ (perhaps also related to the Noun *fog*, ‘tooth’) and is turned into a noun with the help of the derivational suffix *-alom;* English *concept* goes back to Latin *concipere* (‘to take in’) ultimately derived from *capere* (‘to take’).[[125]](#footnote-125) Macbeth’s soliloquy, emerging ‘hand-in-hand’ with the catching sight of what is “before him”, is already there to bring this “what” closer in speech, in the human voice, and, as it has been pointed out, in the Second Person singular pronoun “thee”, yet seeing and looking at the ‘thing’ is not enough: the ‘thing’ has to be grasped, clutched, possessed; the hand is extended to make the thing the mere extension of the body (as very small children are alleged to believe that they are the ‘same’ with what they grasp), the possible connection between the two “bodies” of course already being given in the address of the thing as a second *person*, as a some-*body*.

I wish to exhibit Macbeth’s clutching gesture, in all its particularity and contingency, and precisely because of that particularity and contingency, as the re-enactment of the scene, now called a (dead) metaphor, “lurking behind” the clutching gesture of Western conceptualisation (like “Tarquin’s ravishing strides”). This is a scene in which Macbeth also gives voice to the two-way traffic that inheres in this tradition.

When we feel, in our Western philosophical tradition, that we have a “good grasp” on something, when we already know what the thing ‘at hand’ is, when we are able to handle or manipulate it, when we feel it is already our own, then, when we fall into doubt, it is enough to use our sight as a test or ‘check-up’: “if you want to know whether this or that is there, if you want to be certain that this or that is what you believe it to be, if you want to make sure that this or that is true, go and see it for yourself (‘verify it’)” – these are some of the ‘in hand’ pieces of advice of much of Western epistemology. “How do you know? – I saw it”, and that is usually enough. But once we do not yet know but can only see something (i.e. when we have to start not with knowledge but with sight), then we need a clutch, a grasp, a firm hold on the thing. To *know* is to *have*, to own, to make the thing our possession, our *private* property.

No wonder that the *hand* fascinated a good part of Western thinking. “Thinking is a handicraft” – Cavell quotes from Heidegger’s *What is Called Thinking?* in his book characteristically and most importantly entitled *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, pointing to further “gestures” of grasping in the Western-American tradition *via* Emerson’s *Experience*. Cavell writes:

I summarize two instances from the essay “Experience” to suggest the kind of practice that has convinced me that Emerson’s thought is, on a certain way of turning it, a direct anticipation of Heidegger’s. Emerson writes: “I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition”. You may either dismiss, or savor, the relation between the clutching fingers and the hand in handsome as a developed taste for linguistic oddity, or you might further relate it to Emerson’s recurring interest in the hand. [...] Emerson’s image of clutching and Heidegger’s of grasping, emblematize their interpretation of Western conceptualizing as a kind of sublimized violence. (Heidegger’s word is *greifen*; it is readily translatable as “clutching”. Heidegger is famous here for his thematization of this violence as expressed in the world dominion of technology. (Cavell 1990: 38-39)

Cavell’s reference to Heidegger’s hostility to technology of course points in the direction of Heidegger’s overall resistance to “scientific philosophy”. Heidegger’s criticism of making science the paradigm of philosophy is anchored in a famous distinction he makes as early as in *Being and Time*. Here Heidegger opposes two kinds of being objects may be in: “present-at-hand” and “ready-to-hand”, *vorhaden* and *zuhanden*, literally translatable as ‘before-the-hand’ and ‘towards/to-the-hand’. *Vor-* and *zu-*, intriguingly resounding Macbeth’s two prepositions (“Is this a dagger, which I see *before* me / The handle *toward* my hand?”) point even further, towards Heidegger’s concern that in our scientific, ‘objective’ and ‘detached’ attitude to objects we only see them as entities, as *Gegenstnde*, as displaying their “present-at-hand” ontological structure, instead of looking at them with a kind of “circumspection” (*Umsicht*), whereby they would disclose themselves as equipment (*das Zeug*), as “utensils”, as being always “*for*-something”, “towards”-something, “ready-to-hand” (Heidegger 1962: 91-122 and *passim*.), or, to twist one of Macbeth’s own phrases to our end here – as “an instrument I was to use” (2.1.43). In other words, Heidegger, among other things, is also concerned with our sight and *visions*: the “theoretical” disposition of just looking and observing in the modern scientific sense of *theory* (‘abstract knowledge’, ‘reasoning’, ‘speculative idea’) should be complemented by *Umsicht* (‘looking around’, ‘a looking around for a way to get about’). Complemented, because, of course, the theoretical disposition can never be eradicated anyway. *Umsicht* is a kind of *in*-sight, whose meaning is inimical to the present-day sense of *theory* but akin precisely to the original sense of Greek *theoria.* Greek *theoria*, as it has already been mentioned, was ‘sight’, derived from *theorein*: ‘to gaze upon’, ‘to see’ (cf. Collins 1984). And from here it is only one step, one *glance* further to another derivative of *theorein*, the Greek *theatron,* the English *theatre,* originally‘*a place of seeing*’*.*

Thus the answer, Wittgenstein’s, Heidegger’s and also Cavell’s, to the question why we like killing the world and populate even our minds with dead objects is, roughly put: possession, or: ownership, and, by implication, *power*. Concepts have become private property and, as all the three philosophers above suggest, we conceptualise precisely to own, to avoid the rule of anything or anybody above us, to have the thing in our hands, at our mercy, so that we might be able to discard it, throw it away when we please, when it grows uncanny, or uneasy, or too challenging, or too violent, or undesirable and disagreeable in any other way. “There is no such thing.” Has Macbeth killed Duncan already?

Yet there is even a further aspect of power in the issue of conceptualisation: the problem that from our five senses, it is precisely *seeing* which already dominates much of the language in which we give an account of conceptualisation. The process of concept-formation in our Western philosophical tradition is mostly modelled on our eye: we often talk about “mental pictures” but rarely about “mental smells”, and we often say that we can see something with our “mind’s eye” – as Hamlet also does (cf. *Hamlet*, 1.2.185), but we cannot really claim that we feel something with our “mind’s palate or tongue”. *Seeing* is not only the prototypical example of sensation (not just in such prototypically empiricist philosophers as Locke (cf. Locke 1963: 104), but in such “idealists” as Hegel, too[[126]](#footnote-126) but it is also the standard according to which – if the pun can be allowed – our conception of our concepts is fashioned.

With respect to conceptualisation, from our five senses seeing undoubtedly holds the number-one, ‘super’-position, then comes a ‘poor relative’, hearing, then, and much later, touching. Tasting is usually relegated to aesthetics, which, especially in a book also about literature and philosophy, is a notoriously difficult matter, since, at least partly, it might be its relationship to concepts which should precisely be at stake: the ‘hard and soft palate’ of the critic-philosopher and both the father- *and* mother-*tongue[[127]](#footnote-127)* of the philosopher-critic. Finally, smelling, perhaps as something indecent and even disgusting, is usually not even mentioned.[[128]](#footnote-128)

Macbeth’s desperate words, still groping for some criterion, I find these words to be ironically true as a kind of diagnosis of our Western philosophical tradition: “Mine eyes are made the fools o’th’other senses, / Or else worth all the rest...” (2.1. 44-45). Why are the eyes presented, typically and notoriously, in a kind of ‘all or nothing’ fashion here, why are they *over* the other senses, even when the other senses deceive them? And why are they, as Macbeth’s other alternative goes, an alternative much more favoured in the philosophical tradition, “worth all the rest”? Why do we have, as Wittgenstein’s, Cavell’s and Heidegger’s diagnoses go, the picture of the philosopher, as a solitary (usually sitting or standing, but by all means erect) person, staring at an object? Why not, for example, the baby, unable even to sit yet, and just lying or crawling in its playpen? Is it possible that our choice has fallen on sight to give an account of, and to construe our conceptual scheme because it is sight that guarantees the most detachment from, and the least involvement with, the thing (and the other person)? Tasting requires us to bite into a thing and to chew (and not to eschew) it, smelling involves a relative closeness and perhaps inconvenience, touching (and, of course, I do not mean clutching here) demands absolute closeness but mostly tenderness and intimacy, and hearing, if we do not just experience noises, can even suggest the presence of another human being. Or, to experiment with a more positive account, has seeing been singled out because the eye is the only expressive organ already in itself, the “mirror of the soul” which is able to “speak” also when the lips are closed? Instead of answering my own questions, I ask another one: would it be possible to construe a model of human experience and conceptualisation on the basis of *smelling*, for example?

Shakespeare, I guess, would not be against the idea, and, as far as I can conjecture, Wittgenstein, Cavell and Heidegger would not be hostile to it either. But, as it has been repeatedly pointed out, they suggest that at least we should *redirect our vision*. And it is along the lines of the issue of conceptualisation (pictures, dead objects, power, privatisation, etc.) that in *Philosophical Investigations* – as Cavell has, to the best of my knowledge for the first time, pointed out – Wittgenstein connects the problem of “private language”, as well as the problem whether we can ever have access to the private feelings of another person, with the problem of separateness (cf. Cavell 1989: 44 and *passim*). Wittgenstein presents the human predicament of separation as the very condition from which such philosophical questions as private-language or -feeling may arise at all.

Thus I read Wittgenstein’s passages that will follow below not only as assessments of the extent of human separateness but also as his concern with the position from which philosophy can arise; in his assessment, in his connecting the issue of our attitude to things dead or alive with the problem of our imagination and, even further, with the question of our capacity to feel for something or somebody, some of the conditions of our doing philosophy are contained:

“But in a fairy tale the pot too can see and hear!” (Certainly; but it can also talk.)   
“But the fairy tale only invents what is not the case: it does not talk nonsense.” – It is not as simple as that. Is it false or nonsensical to say that a pot talks? Have we a clear picture of the circumstances in which we should say of a pot that it talked? (§ 282, emphasis original).

What gives us so much as the idea that living beings, things can feel? [...] Only of what behaves like a human being can one say that it has pains (§ 283, emphases original).

Look at a stone and imagine it having sensations. – One says to oneself: How could one so much as get the idea of ascribing a *sensation* to a *thing*? One might as well ascribe it to a number! – And now look at a wriggling fly and at once these difficulties vanish and pain seems able to get a foothold here, where before everything was, so to speak, too smooth for it.

And so, too, a corpse seems to us quite inaccessible to pain. – Our attitude to what is alive and to what is dead is not the same. All our reactions are different (§ 284, emphases original).

Now the “charm” really seems to be “wound up” (cf. 1.3.37): we are back at the point where we started: separateness, and its genre, the monologue, the soliloquy; the problem of the solitary tragic hero and of the lonesome philosopher: we are back at *position*. Yet the solitariness and the (philosophical, human) position of the tragic hero with respect to the (tragic, human) position of the philosopher is even further complicated. Namely: what we know about Macbeth from the drama, we usually do not know about the philosopher. It is the duty of the next Chapter to clarify this point.

Wittgenstein’s ‘before’-s and the ‘narrative’ aspect of Philosophical Investigations

In the previous sections and chapters we were witnesses to Wittgenstein’s repeated insistence that we should look at what is outside of us, what is *before* us, and that we should look at what is thus in our immediate presence “from close to” (cf. § 51). According to Wittgenstein, we should observe what people do and say, when, where and how, in particular situations and under specific circumstances, instead of turning our *vision* inwards and see what comes before the ‘mind’s eye’. What comes before the mind’s eye is, in this sense, not ‘before us’ but already ‘inside’ of us, in our ‘inner’ world. It is by watching actual actions and events, including the act of speaking, that we may get *before* phenomena (things): the grammar we construct about and ‘around’ them, will tell us what makes them (their ‘emergence’) possible.

Hence, observing, in the above way, what is before us, will take philosophy – within philosophy – *before* philosophy. This ‘transportation’ will partly happen in the sense that philosophy will constantly be assessed (judged and evaluated) by itself, and partly in the sense that grammar, the survey of the *possibilities* of phenomena, will take us to the point *before* the being of phenomena: grammar will tell us about the thing’s *so* but not its *is*. It is always the *how*, the position of a phenomenon that gives us its *meaning* and, thus, its *being*, yet this meaning and being are not to take the form of an object (a thing, or *the* thing), a *what*, a substance or essence with a private and independent existence. Neither meaning nor being is a replica or an image with clear boundaries in the world or in our minds but each of them rather represents a mode of an ‘as it is’ – meaning and being should be looked for as they are always already ‘smeared’ or ‘sieved’ into their particular circumstances.

Since, then, it is the particular circumstances in which a thing’s meaning and being are revealed, our position and circumstances in the world may give us a clue about the position, the *how*, the *so*, the possibilities of phenomena. And since our position in the world is always already a position and disposition with respect to other people, it is *what* we say, *when*, *where* and *how*, which can be the clue to the understanding of the possibilities (position) of phenomena. It is language-in-use which is the source and storehouse of the grammar of phenomena, this grammar being precisely the survey of the possibilities and, hence, the non-object-like meaning and the being-so (position) of the phenomena.

So far, I have used *before* in three senses with respect to the *Investigations*. The first one is when philosophy appears *before* itself to be judged, assessed and “tormented” (cf. § 133) by itself; this meaning corresponds to the ‘in front of’ sense of *before*. This meaning is, as is usually the case, in close connection with the ‘evaluative’ sense, the sense according to which something is put *before* (‘above’) another thing. Finally, *before* as ‘in front of’ was used to characterise one of the central obsessions of *Philosophical* *Investigations*: the obsession that philosophy starts with looking at what is in front of us “from close to”. It is this sense of *before* which has the most to do with the *dramatic* quality of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, while in the *Tractatus* it is characteristically the *structure* of pictures (sentences, thoughts), always already *containing* objects, which display *themselves* before our eyes, rather than *we* approaching and looking at them asphenomena *ourselves*.

Thus, in the *Investigations*, it is the ‘looking-at-what-is-before-me’-sense which ultimately leads to the ‘getting-before-philosophy’-sense yet here we should also observe that both of these meanings – while they undoubtedly carry the *spatial* (‘in front of’) dimension of such relationships (cf. Chapter 3) – also contain an inevitable *temporal* (‘prior to’) aspect as well. I paraphrased the Wittgensteinian sense of getting-before-philosophy as ‘while remaining within philosophy, we clear the ground, we do preparatory work, we allow philosophy to get started’ and I circumscribed Wittgenstein’s understanding of looking-at-what-is-before-me, of our stationed *before* meaning and being, as ‘looking for the possibilities, of the *so* of phenomena instead of turning their meaning and being into a thing’, and, even in the paraphrases, temporal considerations, in the sense of being ‘prior (posterior) to’ something, crop up all the time. So here we must ask how the metaphors I have chosen to give an account of what I take to be Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy may help us any further in the understanding of the temporal sense of *before* in his thinking, how the temporal sense of *before* I identified in the previous Chapter as inhering in the *plot* (a ‘narrative’) with respect to drama, makes its appearance in the *Investigations*. Thus the questions, in simpler terms, are: what is the role of time in *Philosophical* *Investigations*? Does anything organise itself to a kind of *plot* in this work? Does Wittgenstein anywhere reflect on a structured time-sequence in his later philosophy?

In fact these are questions Wittgenstein – though in his typically non-sequential manner – is struggling with throughout the *Investigations*, especially in connection with the problem of rule-following, containing, as he puts it, a paradox.

The paradox is this. Precisely because we can always change the rules and can always disobey them, we, on the one hand should never take the rules of a language (grammar) prescribing the uses (meanings) of words and sentences as moulded into ‘things’ or ‘objects’. We should rather give an account of the rules as *practices* we are somehow *one* with, as practices which are automatic. The rules of grammar, seen from this aspect, are not something we relate to as if they were an ‘eternal given’: the rules are rather something we use and form in (the process of) our use.

On the other hand, the rules are, in a sense, precisely *given*: they behave like ‘things’, which we find always already there, ‘after our arrival’; they also appear as ‘objects’ we say we can acquire. Rules – as it was pointed out as early as in the “Introduction” – are also communally imposed on us from early childhood with the air of a certain authority, and our ‘automatic’ (‘natural’, ‘matter-of-fact’) application of them is the token of our remaining mutually attuned with one another. Speaking a language is one of our most important ways (though not the *only* way) to share the form of life of one another, of adhering to a certain tradition.

The following passages of the *Investigations* suggest these two, paradox-yielding positions I attribute to Wittgenstein:

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here (§ 201).

“How am I able to obey a rule?” – if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do. If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do.” (§ 217).

“All the steps are really already taken” means: I no longer have any choice. The rule, once stamped with a particular meaning, traces the lines along which it is to be followed through the whole of space. – But if something of this sort really were the case, how would it help?

When I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule *blindly* (§ 239, emphasis original).

Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. We are trained to do so; we react to an order in a particular way. But what if one person reacts in one way and another in another to the order and the training? Which one is right? Suppose you come as an explorer into an unknown country with a language quite strange to you. In what circumstances would you say that the people there gave orders, understood them, obeyed them, rebelled against them, and so on? The common behaviour [*Handlungweise*, ‘mode/way of acting’] of mankind is a system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language (§ 206).

“So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?” – It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life [*Lebensform*] (§ 241, emphasis, apart from the German expressions in square brackets, original).

Thus, the problem of the relationship between our sharing the same form of life with others on the one hand, and the possibilities of phenomena on the other, boils down to this: it is to the extent we are in agreement, and mutually attuned, with other human beings that we are able to discern the possibilities of phenomena: *it is to the extent we are able to* *identify ourselves with others that we are able to identify phenomena around us*. Or, to put it in Shakespearean terms: it is to the extent Macbeth is able to remain open to as many aspects of the dagger as he can, and it is to the extent he is able to identify himself with the dagger as much as possible, that he is able or not able to kill Duncan.

The problem of rule-following and tradition, then, now from the temporal angle of *before*, finds its link with what I said earlier about privacy, concept-formation and our conditions of doing philosophy *à la* Wittgenstein. It is our constant participation in a shared form of life that breaks down our privacy; it is our yielding to the given nature of linguistic rules (grammar) that ‘attunes’ us, and makes us capable of, relating to things and to other human beings.

With respect to rules – to give a ‘Shakespearean’ example again – we might say we are, on the one hand, like Hamlet, who displaces and creates and deconstructs and annihilates one meaning after the other, especially in his puns, never allowing any of the meanings to get stabilised and fixed into something the others could ‘take away’ from him. On the other hand, we are also like Fortimbras, who, with only a shadowy existence in the whole play, arrives to become the Danish King when the grand show is already over: he comes after everything significant has been said and done. He then looks around to learn “how these things came about” (5.2.385). – “what happened in *Hamlet*?”[[129]](#footnote-129) The answer, which will come from Horatio, “telling Hamlet’s story” (5.2.354), will surely have meaning for Fortimbras, but it will be something he can pocket and even distribute, maybe in a ‘bad Quarto’[[130]](#footnote-130) version of the former *events* of meaning.

It is this, ‘Fortimbrasian’ sense of *after*, as opposed to the Hamletian or Macbethian sense of ‘pursuing’ and ‘lagging behind’, which may become an index of our position with respect to tradition: we encounter it when it is already there, we arrive at it when it has already been created and it is in this sense that Wittgenstein – with respect to rule-following and, hence, to a form of life and to tradition – opens up his investigations towards narrative aspects as well. While he remains fascinated by the fact that we can always violate and disobey rules, he realises and acknowledges the enormous strength inhering in the possibility of relying on rules and tradition. It is with respect to, and within, the long story making up our tradition, promising, or at least holding out promises of, stable rules, that we shape and understand our own, personal stories. We owe it to a form of life we are mutually attuned to that we are able to find our identities, as well as that of objects. Wittgenstein seems to suggest that sometimes we must also exclaim with Egeon in *The Comedy of Errors*: “O let me say no more; / Gather the sequel by what went before” (1.1.94-95).

It is, thus, the sense of *after* as ‘posterior to’ and the sense of *before* as ‘what is behind us’ that Wittgenstein pays due tribute to the narrative aspect of our lives. Yet, as far as I can see it, this – albeit crucial – insight always remains *within* the hazard of the other senses of *before*, within the hazard of the weight and significance of how something is *in front of* us, and how it is evaluated, and how we are in front of something, and how we get evaluated. In my reading of the *Investigations*, it is this hazard which is the starting point, the possibility of, and even the condition for, our seeing, realising and acknowledging the extent of our embeddedness into the temporal senses of *before*: into the narrative of a form of life, of a tradition – into the *plot* of our human drama.

One of the crucial points of disagreement in Wittgenstein-scholarship with respect to the late works seems precisely to be which aspect of this philosophy is given prominence: the *dramatic* or the *narrative* quality. This disagreement – to get back to the point where I started my account of the *Investigations* – usually takes the form of debates over Wittgenstein’s attitude to scepticism and, as a corollary to that, to doubt and certainty: do the rules of tradition exorcise the possibility of doubt in the final analysis according to Wittgenstein, or does he remain open to the threat of scepticism? The single critic I know of to emphasise the sceptical nature of the *Investigations* is Stanley Cavell. Saul Kripke, in his book *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* argues for what I call the ‘dramatic’ qualities of Wittgenstein’s work for a long time, yet Kripke also claims that Wittgenstein finally gives a “sceptical solution” to a “sceptical problem”. Kripke writes:

A sceptical problem is posed and a sceptical solution to that problem is given. The solution turns on the idea that each person who claims to be following a rule can be checked by others. Others in the community can check whether the putative rule follower is or is not giving particular responses that they endorse, that agree with their own. (Kripke: 1982: 101)

That doubt and certainty are still hotly debated issues with respect to the later works[[131]](#footnote-131) does not of course mean that this would be the only line of division between Wittgenstein scholars, or that those who agree with Kripke – as, to some extent, Stanley Cavell does (cf. Cavell 1990: 64-100, especially 65) – would automatically subscribe to Kripke’s way of interpreting Wittgensteinian scepticism, or that critics of Kripke or Cavell[[132]](#footnote-132) attach equal importance to tradition in Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Cavell claims that “tragedy is the working out of a response to scepticism […] tragedy is an interpretation of what skepticism is itself an interpretation of” (Cavell 1987: 5-6).

Needless to say, both ‘dramatic’ and ‘narrative’ qualities Wittgenstein shares with Shakespeare are rather *attitudes* or *dispositions*. Earlier I identified this ‘dramatic’ attitude as an emphasis on presentation rather than on explanation, as a predilection for displaying conflicts instead of arriving at solutions through causal links, as reliance on the tension of the moment as opposed to an explanatory time-sequence, as a stress on the position and the predicament of beings rather than on their content or essence. And as the narrative, in the form of the plot, cuts into drama, and as the dramatic – especially according to recent narrative theories – cuts into the narrative genres, so the respective dramatic and narrative attitudes cut across both literature and philosophy. There are dramatic literary authors, as there are also dramatic philosophers, and there are narrative philosophers, as there are narrative literary authors. Tolstoy is ‘more narrative’ than Dostoyevsky, Emily Brontë is ‘more dramatic’ than Charlotte Brontë. Sophocles or Shakespeare are ‘more dramatic’ than Corneille or G. B. Shaw. The Pascal of the *Pensées*, the Montaigne of the *Essays*, the Kierkegaard of *Fear and Trembling* or of *Either - Or* are more on the ‘dramatic side’, whereas the Aristotle of *The Poetics* – as I will soon try to argue – or the Descartes of the *Meditations*, or the Locke of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, are more on the ‘narrative’ one. And, of course, with respect to the output of a single philosopher, there are no ‘pure cases’, either: for instance the Descartes of the *Meditations* is more dramatic than the Descartes of *The Discourse on the Method*. Being ‘dramatic’ or ‘narrative’ are rather two possible *attitudes* to the world – as the traditional characterisation of genres is rather a description of possible world-views than the simple enumeration of rules to be followed. The dramatic or the narrative ‘*Weltanschauung’*-s are not the only possible ones, of course – for example, I said nothing about the ‘lyrical’ disposition towards the world as the third member of the ‘triumvirate’ within the traditional division of genres, usually trying to transform a genuinely subjective position into a universal one. And there might be many more dispositions and attitudes. I am also more than aware that lumping so many literary authors and philosophers together under the headings ‘dramatic’ and ‘narrative’ involve the gross generalisation – and, after a while, even the emptiness – of all labelling and categorisation. I acknowledge that this is an un-Wittgensteinian – and un-Shakespearean – trait in my rhetoric, yet the aim of this differentiation is not to put people and their works into neat little boxes but rather to illustrate inclinations and tendencies.

Being a ‘dramatic philosopher’ is neither to be mistaken for a philosopher’s declared position with respect to drama – or even with respect to Shakespeare. For instance, Wittgenstein himself has quite a number of remarks on Shakespeare and from M. Drury we also know that, for some time – as this was already mentioned – he was entertaining the idea of giving Kent’s words to Oswald in *King Lear* as a motto to the *Investigations*: “I’ll teach you differences” (1.4. 86). Most of his passages on Shakespeare can be found in a selection of his notes collected and translated under the title *Culture and Value*. One of them reads:

The reason why I cannot understand Shakespeare is that I want to find symmetry in all his asymmetry. His pieces give me an impression as of enormous *sketches* rather than of paintings; as though they had been *dashed off* by someone who can permit himself to *anything*, so to speak. And I understand how someone can admire that and call it supreme art, but I don’t like it. (Wittgenstein 1980: 86. Cf. also 48; 49; 83; 84 and 85)

However, stories like Drury’s have rather the flavour of the anecdote to them, and Wittgenstein’s note-book remarks on Shakespeare are neither too original, nor very interesting, unless for the fact that it was *Wittgenstein* who put them down. It is not a philosopher’s enthusiasm for Shakespeare that makes him ‘dramatic’. We have to raise the question of the relationship between philosophy and literature for other reasons.

Philosophy and literature – close-down and re-opening

If it is true that ‘dramatic’ and ‘narrative’ features or attitudes cut across the output of both philosophers and literary authors, as I sought to show it above, then to me the problem – now considered in the larger context of ‘philosophy and literature’ – no longer seems to be whether philosophy and literature are, or should be made, ‘one’ or whether they are, or ought to be kept, wide apart. It sounds like a truism yet we tend to forget what Wittgenstein says in the *Investigations* concerning boundaries:

But when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reason. If I surround an area with a fence or a line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent someone from getting in or out; but it may also be part of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump over the boundary; or it may show where the property of one man ends and that of another begins; and so on. So if I draw a boundary like that is not yet to say what I am drawing it for (§ 499).

So, on the one hand, there should be a borderline – how could otherwise philosophy get to know literature, and how could it possibly get to be known by literature? Yet, on the other hand, it can indeed be part of the game, too, that the players jump over the boundary they have drawn for themselves or for each other. The boundary may certainly be drawn to prevent each other from getting in and out, but the line or fence may also *invite* one to get over, eager to learn what one may have in common with the other, looking around on the other’s territory.

In this book, I am drawing the boundary to invite that jump: ‘the dramatic’ and ‘the narrative’ attitudes are suggested as two of the features both literature and philosophy may acknowledge to be sharing. The game from now on could also consist in remaining open to the challenge of both attitudes on both fields. This is not to say that they have to settle down on each other’s territory for good – but at least they could realise, as quarrelling neighbours sometimes do, that what one believes or claims to be its (her, his) exclusive property can be found in the other’s storehouse, too. This might create further jealousies but it may also lead to the discovery of a common ground – and that precisely on the *other’s* territory. And they may call other ‘playmates’ as well; for example science or theology, as they, in fact, have always done. Yes, there ought to be a boundary, but it is not to be forgotten, either that to find one’s identity is, at least in a certain sense of the expression, always also to lose it. Or does that sound too theological already?

So, once again, I am in the theatre, the place of seeing, I am observing somebody staring at what is before him and I hear Wittgenstein say: “Don’t think, but look!” (*PI* § 66). I understand and acknowledge that that person’s predicament in front of me on the stage, while talking to his dagger, contains, somehow, mine. So I keep my eyes and ears wide open. To what? To what is before me, in all senses of *before*. Wherefore? To BE**-***fore*.

What remains is a separate scrutiny of Macbeth’s metaphysical fear which will be identified through how Macbeth sees and gazes: his attention.

### Chapter 7 *Macbeth*: metaphysical Fear

Lady Macbeth and “the illness which should (not) attend it”

“Yet do I fear thy nature: /” – Lady Macbeth addresses her husband who, as we saw, is present in Act I, Scene 5 only through his letter his wife has just finished reading –

It is too full o’th’ milk of human kindness,

To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,

Art not without ambition, but without

The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,

That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,

And yet wouldst wrongly win; thou’dst have, great Glamis,

That which cries, ‘Thus thou must do,’ if thou have it;

And that which rather thou dost fear to do,

Than wishest should be undone. (1.5.16-25)

These sentences – with the several ‘thou’-s, ‘that’-s, ‘wouldst’-s, with ‘dost’ and ‘thus’ and ‘than’ – are not easy to follow. It is not only the famous “milk of human kindness” – and other liquids – over which much ink has been spilt[[133]](#footnote-133) but – since here the characterisation of Macbeth is intermingled with the Lady’s spasmodically emerging, jagged thoughts about how she could help her husband – most of the clauses are not straightforwardly connected, which makes especially back-references rather vague. The initial “Yet” launches a series of oppositions, ‘turns’ in the argumentation : “...but...”, “...and yet...”, and this way one has the impression that each emerging thought is ‘stabbed’ by a new one, making the ‘old’ one lame and invalid. The Lady says something like this:

*But I am afraid of the overall nature that characterises you from birth: you are too gentle and soft to snatch at the most straightforward opportunity to take a short-cut. It is not that you do not have any ambition: you would like to be great but you are averse to the wickedness which often necessarily accompanies this process. You do want to be great but you also wish to keep your devoutness; you do not like to cheat but (in the end) your winning turns out to be unfair.* [[134]](#footnote-134) *You, Great Glamis, would like to have somebody/you would like to hear a voice to tell you: ‘This is the way you must act’, if you wish to have anything*[[135]](#footnote-135)*; and fear is more in you to do something than the desire to do it, so you rather say: ‘it should not be done’ instead of being honest and admit that you are afraid to do it.’*

This is how the Lady sees her husband and ‘shapes’ him in front of us, juxtaposing in fact two men, two roles: one is ambitious, the other is clean and holy, one is full of desires, the other is a coward. Yet the bottom line seems to be that Macbeth needs the ruthlessness which she believes she possesses, especially with the help of the (in)famous “Spirits” which will “unsex” her (1.5.40-41).

It seems that “art” is the (archaic) second person singular form of *be* in “Art not without ambition, but without / The illness should attend it”; “Art not without ambition” is an elliptical construction form which “thou” is missing: ‘you are not without ambition’. But what if we argue for a Shakespearean pun, and take ‘Art’ to be a Noun, a homonym of the Verb ‘art’, meaning ‘know-how, skill, cleverness, cunning’, and interpret it as referring to the previous “greatness” and fill out these highly elliptical grammatical structures with the following semantic logic: ‘you wish greatness, and to be great is (it requires) art, cunning, skill, which is not without ambition but which, at the same time, should not be accompanied (attended, tainted) by any kind of “illness” (wickedness, fear: anything negative)’. The glossary entitled *Shakespeare’s Words* lists as many as eight meanings for *attend* in Shakespeare’s texts*:*  (1) ‘await, wait for’ as in *The Tribunes do attend you*; (2) ‘serve, follow’ as in *I am most dreadfully attended*; (3) ‘wait on royalty’: *Attend the lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester*; (4) ‘accompany, follow closely’: *I fear I am attended by some spies*; (5) ‘tarry, postpone’: *my business shall attend*, *while I attend on thee*; (6) ‘regard, consider, pay more attention to’ as in *Twelfth Night* when Orlando hands his message to Olivia over to Viola (as Cesario) with the words: *She* [Olivia] *will attend it* [the message] *better* *in thy youth* [because you are young]; (7) ‘listen (to)’: *Our men ... look on each other, as they did attend each other’s words*; (8) ‘see to, look after’: *I must look after my office*. (Crystal and Crystal 2002: 26-27). The dominant semantic features seem to be: (A) *using (one of) the human sense-organs for a longer time, with patience,* and (B)  *following something or somebody closely, be at the other’s disposal* also *for a longer time, faithfully*; it seems that it is the fact that *attention* requires a *longer period* which connects the two larger sub-groups (A and B) of meanings. Macbeth might also need an *art* which is like “that glib and oily art” (*Lear*, 1.1.225) Cordelia talks about as regards her sisters, and to which Lady Macbeth refers to at the end of this scene, already in the physical presence of Macbeth, with the words: “look like th’innocent flower, / But be the serpent under it” (1.5.65-66): Macbeth must keep a close watch on everything with his five senses, including these very five senses, patiently and faithfully. Below I will examine first some complications the problem of attention and perception has recently caused in philosophy, while in the second part of this Chapter this examination will lead into the investigation of the possible “illnesses” that await Macbeth in the course of his ambitious journey *via* references to the play by Emmanuel Levinas. Finally, I ask how a metaphysical reading such as Levinas’ may relate to present-day Shakespeare criticism.

Attention and perception: : neuro-science versus the enactive view

In the “Trinity” (Spring) Term of 2013 the famous “John Locke Lectures” at Oxford University were delivered by Professor Ned Block, from New York University, under the title “Attention and Perception”.[[136]](#footnote-136) Although it is always a risky task to tell what the “hottest topics” at present are even in the English-speaking world of the humanities, the subject-matter of Block’s lecture-series at one of the most prestigious institutions where philosophy is dealt with today might indicate that *attention* is not marginal to attention even in professional philosophical circles, either, not to mention psychology, where its popularity has never seemed to decline.[[137]](#footnote-137)

Perception and attention, as part of Block’s overall concern with human consciousness, are favourite topics of his[[138]](#footnote-138). For example, in his article, “The Grain of Vision and the Grain of Attention”, he distinguishes between three types of attention: “object-based (in which attention selects an object), feature-based (in which attention selects a feature) and spatial (in which attention selects a spatial area)” (Block 2012: 172), but he adds that there are many more (it seems as many as there are phenomena which attention may be cast on). In the same article, Block disagrees with the generally accepted view that attention would be “conscious perception” because he argues that one can be in a conscious state of perception of an object while one is not paying attention to the (same) object (Block 2012: 170). But I am not recalling Professor Block’s theories of attention to give a detailed evaluation of them, and especially not to link these with his theories of consciousness. I have brought him into my discussion because it looks to me that he belongs to that group of Analytic philosophers who believe that it is the natural sciences that may provide us with an area of justification when we need proof and evidence for our philosophical speculations that may run wild and therefore are badly in need of some anchorage. This philosophical tradition, going back to the days of the Vienna Circle in the Analytical tradition, fears, I think, circularity the most, therefore it wishes for a totally different area than the speculative, with measurable data and tangible proofs to back up its philosophical findings. It is the relevant sections of biology, physics and chemistry, i.e. the so-called “neuro-sciences”, having been “liberated” from their one-time inclusion into (“natural”) philosophy (as opposed to “moral philosophy”), and now posing independently from philosophy, that serve as a test-ground for philosophical hypotheses. *Independently* is of utmost importance, both in the methodological and the ontological sense. Being one of the leading Analytic philosophers of our time, Block is of course very much aware that it has never been unproblematic to correlate mental phenomena with physical and biological (bio-physical-chemical) ones[[139]](#footnote-139), and he even accepts a narrow version of holism with respect to what he calls “narrow content” (Cf. Ned Block 1995: 151-152, 169)[[140]](#footnote-140), although even his definition of *holism* is rather strange, but these details are not my concern here, either. But I think it is fair to attribute to him a vision that the “ultimate presidium”, the highest and independent “court of appeal” for him to decide on philosophical matters as regards perception, attention and consciousness is evidence coming from the natural sciences, which, if it is not available today, will be ready-to-hand-tomorrow: the progress of the philosophy of consciousness depends on the development of the natural sciences, providing “raw-material” for philosophy.[[141]](#footnote-141)

Following this path, a typical feature of current “hardcore” Analytic thinking (which has produced, no doubt, admirable results, with its clarity and precision) is prominently foregrounding itself, and can thus be brought into sharper focus; to do this, I wish to consider one of the reviews Professor Block has written. This review is on Alva Noë’s to my mind epoch-making book, especially excelling in the clarity and methodology of explanation, *Action and Perception*, published by MTI Press in 2004, which, in Block’s words, wishes to “upset the applecart” of the “orthodox view” on perception, attention, and, on the whole, on the philosophy of consciousness (while Block describes himself as writing his review form the “point of view of the applecart” (Block 2005: 1 and 5). The tone of the review is benevolent: Block describes *Action and Perception* as being “charming and engaging” (1), and this does not seem to be irony, although there are very few claims Block would agree on with Noë.

The way Block presents the core of the debate is as follows: is research done on the brain enough to explain various kinds of perception (and attention), i.e. the phenomenology of (conscious) vision, or should we subscribe to Noë’s “enactive view”, which claims that “perceiving is a way of acting” [...] “the world makes itself available to the perceiver through physical movement and interaction” [..] “Perceptual experience acquires content thanks to our possession of bodily skills. *What we perceive* is determined by *what we do* (or what we do not do); it is determined by what we are *ready* to do. [...] “we *enact* our perceptual experience; we act it out” (Noë 2004: 1); “perceptual experience [...] is an activity of exploring the environment drawing on knowledge of sensorimotor [physical, bodily] dependencies and thought” (Noë 2004: 228 also qtd. by Block 2005: 2). Block can clearly see that the stakes are high; he says that “the issue is – and is not – *a metaphysically necessary part of a metaphysically sufficient condition* of perceptual experience. That is, it is the issue of what is – and is not – part of the metaphysically sufficient condition for perceptual experience [...]. Noë’s enactive view says that the skilled active body is part of that minimal condition [...], whereas the view, which I hold and which I have labelled [sic!] the orthodox view, is that nothing outside the brain is part of it” (5).

Now it seems that from Block’s point of view the “metaphysical question” is in fact the question whether it is enough to place the brain under the benevolently informative supervision (almost literally: the *super* *vision*) of the natural sciences, or, if we wished to grant at least some truth to Noë’s arguments, we should include “knowledge of sensorimotor [physical, bodily] dependencies and thought”, too. To put it simply, for Block the question seems to be: should we include only the brain into our story which we tell, or should we invite the body, the way Noë describes it, as well. But this way, I dare claim, Block misses much of the point of Noë’s book, which, at least in my reading, does not only consult an enormously large field of literature on the natural sciences in order to remain answerable to the potential charge that phenomenological, enactive conclusions are drawn because the author has disregarded the “mass of scientific evidence” analytic philosophers have heaped so carefully up in defence of their claims. I think the books on the “brain sciences” have also been consulted by Noë to draw – in a manner that reminds one of the manners of Wittgenstein – the *limits* of the explanatory potential, the interpretative competence (“jurisdiction”) of the natural sciences, as regards human experience, and, within that, as regards perception and attention. This is *not* done with the assumption that today the empirical sciences are sadly impoverished as far as their explanatory power is concerned when they wish to come to terms with certain human phenomena, while tomorrow they will “arise” and have the clear and right answer. This is done with the resolution which wishes to delineate the authority of the natural sciences; this is done with the conviction that there are aspects of human experience which the natural sciences will not be able to explain, not because they “do not know enough (yet)” but because their apparatus is not apt to see a significant aspect or a problem where another approach – which, as Noë puts it, also “seeks to do justice to our phenomenology” – is able to see one. My interpretation of Noë’s book is that he claims there are correspondences between human experience seen as *events* and mental phenomena in the brain, but there are not always correspondences between the brain and experiences seen as *acts*, as our dynamic interactions with the world. As Noë puts it: “Qualities are available in experience as possibilities, as potentialities, but not as completed givens. Experience is a dynamic process of navigating the pathways of these possibilities. [...] The upshot of this is that there is no basis, in phenomenology at least, for thinking that what is given now, to me, as present to my consciousness, is ever enough to account exhaustively for the character of my current conscious experience. My phenomenal experience expands my immediate horizons and takes me beyond myself to the world” (Noë 2004: 217). This means, I believe, that it is in principle and necessarily so that it is in vain to look for answers concerning, not to mention a “basis” for, certain, and especially for all, human phenomena in the brain interpreted in terms of neuroscience. So the “metaphysical issue” is not only – as Block claims about Noë – that according to the enactive view “the skilled active body is part of that minimal [metaphysically sufficient] condition” to account for perceptual experience, while for Block “nothing outside of the brain is part of it” (Block 2005: 5, also qtd. above). The “metaphysical issue” – in this sense – involves the extent (maybe even the very ability) of the natural sciences having explanatory relevance for all mental phenomena, the possibility and the legitimacy (the very grounds) of establishing correlations between human experience and measurable brain features for interpretative purposes. (Noë and O’Regan 2004: 593).[[142]](#footnote-142) It is thus that Noë can claim that the “possibility that neural states alone are not sufficient for the experience; indeed, that there is reason to think that this possibility might be actual, at least for some aspects of experience.” (Noë 2004: 224). Yet this is an ontological statement, expressing, in my reading, that it is in principle and necessarily so that we have to allow for the *possibility* for the insufficiency of the natural sciences, which insufficiency has nothing to do with their alleged epistemological handicaps; rather, we should metaphysically allow for human phenomena, such as human experience, for example, that necessarily and in principle, will not be explainable (or backed up in whatsoever way) by the natural sciences.

Two points are to be emphatically noted here. One is that all this is claimed by Noë – if I understand him well – after having consulted (as I pointed out above) all sorts of neuro-scientific sources, on all sides, so he is very far from claiming – in a Heideggerian fashion, still prevailing in some circles of Continental philosophy – that *all* the natural scientific evidence we may come up with would be irrelevant either as explanation or as a ‘basis’. Science is powerful, but we may give up our desire to see it as all-powerful, because it is not the ‘job of science’ to – today or tomorrow – explain *everything* for us. There are certain phenomena which resist a scientific (re-)description because scientific descriptions are and will be blind to some aspects and features of some (fundamental) human phenomena because their very metaphysical net (their *language,* their conceptual “mind-set”, in the broad sense) will fail. In order to catch a butterfly, you cannot use a net designed to capture elephants because its meshes will let the butterfly through; as it would be highly unpractical to use a butterfly-net to catch and elephant.

The other point to be emphasised involves the positive, assertive side of Noë’s theory. The “enactive view” is a dynamic model, according to which the human body, in an agile and learned-trained fashion, actively interacts with the environment, thereby producing certain experiences. No doubt this phenomenon has somewhere a “neural basis” but its scientific description would lead us astray because our scientific categories are not apt to see and explain problems on this level: we would only produce a quasi-theory with quasi-explanations: we would be under the illusion that we have produced a logical chain of inferences, whereas, in fact, we have, at best, paraphrased: we have repeated the question using other words. Phenomenal descriptions call our attention to certain human phenomena which we cannot “take apart” (“analyse”) using scientific descriptions. In phenomenological descriptions (such as the descriptions of human experience in the broad sense), what counts is – as in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, although he was not a phenomenologist – what we do, rather than what we think. Or, to be more precise, what counts is the careful observation of our actions and what happens around us, rather than trying to squeeze everything into a pre-given conceptual net, which, no doubt, may serve us well in certain cases but there is no guarantee it will work in *all* the cases we encounter and wish to explain in the relevant field. The paradox – which will haunt all discourses trying to go beyond, or stop before, consciousness – of course is that we inevitably have to use (a kind of) conceptual language to give an account of such phenomena, too.

Phenomenology

For Noë, the ‘inspiration’ to emphasise “the importance of action and embodiment” for perception and attention comes – as he describes this with Evan Thompson – from “philosophers and psychologists working in the tradition of phenomenology derived from Edmund Husserl; for this reason, there is significant convergence between the concerns and analyses of this tradition and action-oriented approaches to perception in recent cognitive science” (Noë and Thompson 2004:7)[[143]](#footnote-143). And to “perception” we should quickly add “attention” because – as Nancy Mardas puts it in her essay, “On the Ethics of Attention” – “attention is the essence of the science of phenomenology: attention both to the objects which present themselves to our consciousness, and to that consciousness itself.” For Mardas, attention is “an event of consciousness and as an ethical phenomenon, an event which is also a demand, a blessing, and a delivery, in a dual sense.” In a dual sense, since, as Mardas notes, “attention to consciousness is the hallmark of the phenomenological method. The event of the *epoche* is the phenomenological event par excellence: that movement by which human consciousness accomplishes its self transcendence and reaches simultaneously into its own essence and into the essence of the object of its attention.” (Mardas 2007: 175)

As Noë and Thompson also point out, Husserl’s “analyses of the phenomenology of perceptual experience” (7)[[144]](#footnote-144) were extended, with great emphasis on the significance of the role the *body* plays in human perception and attention, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty 1985). No wonder that the only ‘genuine phenomenologist’, included in the Noë–Thompson collection of essays on perception is Merleau-Ponty (Noë and Thompson 2004: 15-34): in the late 1940s, Merleau-Ponty went through a “turn” to the extent that, in the second half of his career, he claimed that in the description of our ‘relation’ to the world as a starting point, the traditional subject-object relationship must be radically reinterpreted: what makes what is significant for the human being possible is the “flesh” (French *chair*) of the world, which does not start “from substances, from body and spirit [...] but we must think it [...] as an element, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being” (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 147). What makes meaning in the broad sense possible is that through this “flesh” we are just as much part of the world as we are opposed to it from the outside; the “invisible” – an interpretative “background”, a “horizon”, a “cohesion”-provider – is just as much a pre-requisite of human experience, as visible phenomena “sticking out” against the backdrop of the “invisible”. Language as “creative speech” is far from communicating ready-made meanings, each an intentional act, from the mind, to the Other: language is *language opérant* (“operative speech”), speech is *parole parlante* (“speaking speech”). It is the very experience of creative self-expression in language that brings to light various spontaneous formations of sense, which Merleau-Ponty calls “wild meaning” (*sense sauvage*), ‘coming from’ a “wild region”. That a whole “region” is reserved for “wild meaning” does not imply that, mysteriously, as it were, a ‘field of sense’ comes to our aid from ‘the outside’. *Sense sauvage* is spontaneous sense-formation *in language* produced, creatively, by *us*, and the possibilities of its sudden emergence must be ready in the systems of our various languages: some ‘stage-setting’ before the appearance of a “wild meaning” have had to take place in language. The metaphor “wild”, however, wishes to indicate that although at its manifest appearance, “wild meaning” will be available for the speaker just as much as to the hearer, the speaker will, upon the emergence of the “wild meaning”, be taken by surprise as well, since she by no means ‘intended’ this meaning: she did not ‘search for it’ in a hitherto sealed ‘reservoir’ of her ‘mind’ as we search in the pantry for a jar of summer plum preserves we intend to open in the winter. Surely, ‘search for words’, ‘being at a loss what to say’ and cognitive processes do play a role in this process but this role does not go beyond the truism that speech needs a human agent who is able to utter words which follow the (grammatical and semantic) convention of the language she is speaking.[[145]](#footnote-145) Yet such, in a sense social and physical-biological pre-conditions of meaning – such as the institution of language, the ability to speak, or the human brain – should not be thought of as exhausting the conditions which make sense (meaning, signification) possible.

This is, of course, very far from giving a thorough account of any of the ‘theories of perception, attention, or meaning’ above. I have brought the terms “wild meaning”, “horizon”, “flesh of the world”, the “invisible” and the like into my discussion to indicate that these terms in the parlance of phenomenology all wish to call our attention to the fact that speaking, meaning and interpreting the world, the Other and ourselves is far more complex a process than the picture that one ‘brain’ (*cogito*), through a chain of conventional signs, conveys information to another ‘brain’ (*cogito*) which deciphers that information. For phenomenology or for Noë’s “enactive view”, ‘signification’, ‘meaning something’, ‘understanding’, ‘interpretation’ and all these human activities so dear to philosophical reflection take place in a much wider context of ‘semantic space’, against a much greater ‘backdrop of processes’ than we ordinarily suppose, and the undoubtedly precious and often relevant investigations of the natural sciences can only grasp *some* of the aspects of these. Not because they do not do their jobs properly but because their concentration on directly observable phenomena and their insistence on direct evidence ready-to-hand in the immediate presence of the observer, backing up these phenomena along the lines of cause-and-effect relations, will not allow for an alternative conceptual framework which would yield even to the sheer acknowledgement of the very existence of the phenomena phenomenology talks about.

The conclusion we may draw so far is that, in the first place, the problem of attention is a number one topic of present-day thinking and, secondly, that there are two main and rival traditions dealing with the phenomenon of attention: the scientific and the phenomenological one, and Alva Noë’s approach stands out in trying to integrate the results of both. Yet introducing the topic of ‘the brain-sciences *versus* phenomenology on the problem of perception and attention’ have also tried to serve the purpose of calling attention – in a Wittgensteinian manner – to different *modes* of speech in the interpretation of any human phenomena, these modes being absolutely instrumental in their acknowledgement as relevant, revealing, informative, helpful, etc., media to perform their roles we tend to call interpretative or explanatory “power”. What is, thus, at stake is no less than the “languages” of various rival traditions containing (or not containing) certain terms which might enable them, if not more than to at least *see* (notice) the problems another tradition is concerned with, terms that may allow for the possibility of acknowledging the bare existence of certain relevant questions and phenomena at all.

Levinas and transcendence

I am raising these issues because I would like to talk about attention in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* by recalling Emmanuel Levinas’ metaphysical reading of the play. Levinas is definitely in the phenomenological tradition of philosophy, without ever aspiring to create a theory of reading literary texts; in fact, as we shall see, his nexus to literature and to the arts in a broad sense as containing anything revelatory for *par excellence* philosophical understanding, is rather controversial, in spite of a long tradition in the work of his French colleagues, highlighted by such names as Sartre, Camus, Lacan, Derrida, and even the above mentioned Merleau-Ponty (in his later phase, in the 1950s), who did find inspiration in the arts, and most of them specifically in literature, to inform, in one way or another, philosophical problems.

Levinas’ caution with the arts and with literature (poetry) in philosophy has a lot to do with his breaking up with Heideggerian version of radical phenomenology (while he was a devoted student of Heidegger’s before 1933). As Hans-Georg Gadamer very succinctly puts it, the Heideggerian approach, among other things, wished to make us aware of the way Western philosophy turned away from the question of Being as early as in Greek thinking. To do this, Heidegger employed a philosophical method which, as Gadamer claims, is a “constitutive element/feature” (a kind of “essence”, *Wesen*) of the arts and, especially, of poetry, too. This method is to make us conscious that the event, the conversance and experience, the *Ereignis*, *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* of b/Being should be conceived as “the strife between disclosure and sheltering concealment” (Gadamer 2007: 154, see also Gadamer 2007: 192-224, 345-355 and Gadamer 1987: 374-393), meaning (roughly) that the phenomena we wish to interpret open up themselves for us and hide themselves from us at the same time: nothing shows itself to us ‘as a whole’, ‘completely’, while it would be even intuitively wrong to say that everything is hidden from us. Now the above “strife” between hiding and openness should be “shown”, “exposed”, and the new, metaphysical meanings for thinking should be unfettered and disentangled from the traditional words (concepts) of Western metaphysics themselves. Levinas’ break with this tradition, making an ethical stance, an infinite duty towards the Other the basis of his ontology as opposed to a Heideggerian self-understanding of being with respect to Being, or witnessing to the self-revelation of the Truth in Being, does not mean that Levinas would not use a highly metaphorical, transcendental, or – in more Anglo-Saxon terms – a highly “technical” philosophical language. Language for Levinas, too is not a simple ‘device of communicating but a contrivance, resource, medium, and expedient of discovery, the self-reflexive, very means of doing philosophy.

I have to make a few introductory remarks about the philosophical language Levinas uses because I would not only like to comment, on Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* using Levinas’ perspective but I wish to raise, towards the end, the issue of how a downright metaphysical reading of the play relates to present-day Shakespeare-criticism. For most schools of Analytic philosophy – if they listen to it at all – the texts of Levinas (and of other “Continental” thinkers) sound as utter nonsense, and I am afraid this is true of several mainstream trends in literary criticism as well, especially of those who work in a historical-materialistic framework. Not because Levinas and most of the phenomenological-hermeneutic tradition would be a- or non-historical, or because for them *time* would not be a highly important philosophical category – far from it, but because they have a totally different understanding of time and history than that kind of New Historicism which is still cultivated in present-day Shakespeare-criticism. This, at least for the time being, I consider to be a fact rather than a value-judgement, including the contention that I just as little wish to “excuse” Levinas because of his language (as if he were using ‘indecent words’) as I have the intention to claim that New Historicism is wrong.

One way to ask why a philosopher uses the language he does is to ask – as I outlined this in the “Introduction” – in whose name the philosopher believes to be speaking: whom does the speaking voice represent? Who is the speaking subject behind the philosophy? As it was mentioned, e.g. the early Greek philosophers, like Heraclitus, or the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* thought they were speaking from a position that had an overview of the whole universe, while the other extreme may be the ordinary language philosophers like J. L. Austin, who believed they were occupying the standpoint of the “common man”, the sober “man-in-the-street”. Surely it was, at least to some extent, feminism and colonial discourse which have made our recent past and present especially sensitive to the need to clarify the perspective from which any kind of “language-game” (understood not as ‘play’ but as a system of grammatical, semantic and social rules as a result of a shared form of life) emerges. I also mentioned several times in the course of this book that we celebrate Immanuel Kant to have brought about a “revolution” in philosophy at the end of the 18th century because – in his overall project concerning human freedom – he chose, among other things, to start out, in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, with the initial *limitations* the thinking subject had (and, I think, still has) to face. It may sound as a paradox that Kant’s clipping the wings of the Icarus-like thinker, and the beard of the Plato-inspired philosopher (i.e. his reminding them of their limitations) is captured in the word “transcendental”: the First Book (I) of the first *Critique* is called “Transcendental Doctrine of Elements”, The First Part of this Book is entitled “Transcendental Aesthetic”, and so on. However, there is nothing “other-worldly” in this use of the word *transcendental*: e.g. “transcendental aesthetics” is concerned (“aesthetics” taken in the original Greek meaning of ‘perception’) with the *conditions* under which perception takes place; Kant wishes to understand how perception happens by going to the boundaries we cannot go beyond with respect to perception and by surveying precisely what has remained *within* the territory surrounded by the boundaries, and concludes that space and time are necessary ‘givens’ in the process of human perception. To be more precise: there is a *time* and *space* which we, human beings do not derive from direct experience; everything appears to us always already in space-*and*-time, space and time are *a priori* categories, the ‘frames’, the necessary conditions (boundaries) of our experience. ‘Transcendental’ – as it was explained in the Introduction – simply means: ‘under which conditions something is possible’, as de Similarly, when talking about the “transcendental subject”, Kant says: “I [as transcendental subject] think myself on behalf of a possible experience, at the same time abstracting from all actual experience” (Kant 1933: 380). In this chapter, an instance of ‘going transcendental’ was when Alva Noë said: “My phenomenal experience expands my immediate horizons and takes me beyond myself to the world”. With the acknowledgement of the uncertainties that accompany transcendence in the above sense, I take it seriously and make myself aware that transcendence *itself* is just as much a limit as it is my single device to take *this*  (‘moderately’ generalising) attitude to the Other, while I undertake the description of very concrete but typical features of human experience, mind, life, world, “things”, i.e. ‘phenomena’.

The tradition Levinas worked out is usually called phenomenological (cf. Ulmmann and Olay 2011: 224 and *passim*), although he agreed with the Husserlian, the existentialist (e.g. Sartre) and especially the Heideggerian trend-lines almost only in wishing to exposit human experience as going well beyond the ‘immediately empirical’ and the ‘psychological’. Levinas interprets experience in a very broadly transcendental sense: at one point, his term for the ‘transcendental subject’ is “humanity as me” (*EFPh*, 84).[[146]](#footnote-146) Yet he will concentrate on the moral side, the ethical dimension of the human being, making the strangeness, the ‘otherness’, the Alterity of the Other his central concern. Not because he wishes to write a “moral philosophy” in the sense of ‘what one should do’ and ‘what one should refrain from doing’ but because he envisages the *being* of the human being – in the above, transcendental sense – as an infinite duty, an infinite obligation towards the Other, whom I always encounter in a concrete situation; the Other is a living being, not a ‘lifeless abstraction’. It is my absolute duty as an ontological stance towards the Other, serving as an absolute condition, which makes the recognition of the Other possible, and with which, and through which the *strangeness* of the (concrete, tangible but transcendental) Other may be overcome, and, strictly following this path further, self-recognition, in the light of the Face of the Other, might come about. Moral obligation towards the Other for Levinas is not an ‘accompanying feature’ of being human (of ‘human existence’) but it is its very *Wesen*, its most decisive, characteristic bent[[147]](#footnote-147). “To be or not to be” – Levinas quotes the famous line of Hamlet in the first sentence of the concluding section of his essay “Ethics as First Philosophy”, which is regarded as one of the clearest and most succinct summaries of his philosophy.[[148]](#footnote-148) And he goes on: “is that the question? Is it the first and final question?” (*EFPh*, 86). The answer is “no”, with the explanation: “This is the question of the meaning of being: not the ontology of the understanding of that extraordinary verb [*be*] but the ethics of its justice” (86). *One* of the ways in which Levinas sums up the “ethics of the justice” of “to be” is in the same essay: “This summons [this call] to responsibility destroys the formulas of generality by which my knowledge (*savoir*) or acquaintance (*connaissance*) of the other man re-presents him to me as my fellow man. In the face of the other man I am inescapably responsible and consequently the unique and chosen one. By this freedom, humanity in me (*mois*) – that is, humanity as me – signifies, in spite of its ontological contingence of finitude and morality, the anteriority and uniqueness of the non-*interchangeable*” (84).

Levinas and Macbeth

However, Levinas’ longer passages on *Macbeth* are not in the major works which contain the detailed expositions of his ontology[[149]](#footnote-149) but rather ‘on his way’ to this ontology. This “conjuring up” of the play first occurs in the article entitled “There is: Existence without Existence” (Levinas 1989: 30-36), originally published in 1946; this article “was subsequently incorporated into the Introduction and chapter 3, section 2 of [...] *Existence and Existents*”[[150]](#footnote-150), and is celebrated by Seán Hand as “one of the first and most abiding examples of Levinas’ original thought”.[[151]](#footnote-151) The question of the “there is” [*il y a*] of course makes its appearance in Levinas’ later writings, too. In the also early *Time and the Other*, originally published in 1947 (Levinas 1987), Levinas, especially in the section “Existing without Existents” (Levinas 1987: 44-51), takes over much of what he said on “there is” in his much shorter article the previous year, but here (i.e. in the section “Existing without Existents” in *Time and the Other*) hementions *Macbeth* only in passing (and recalls “*Romeo and Juliette*” [sic!] instead) (50). However, he takes up, in the same volume, the figure of Macbeth in connection with dying in the section “Death and the Future” (71-73). When, in turn, in his second *magnum opus*, in *Otherwise Than Being*, he discusses the *there is*, *Macbeth* is nowhere to be found, although the fundamental ideas on the *il y a* remain the same (cf. Levinas 1978: 162-165), whereas almost thirty years before, in *Time and the Other*, he went as far as to saying: “it sometimes seems to me that the whole of philosophy is only a meditation of Shakespeare” (Levinas 1987: 72). The gradual disappearance of literary examples from Levinas’ philosophical writings is an interesting fact in itself, and, knowing about his steadily growing critical attitude to Heidegger, one feels tempted to speculate how Levinas’ gradual abstaining from literature in his philosophical texts is related to ‘the later’ Heidegger’s – above mentioned – predilection to draw ontological conclusions from poetry, and what role Heidegger (and the French existentialists, especially Sartre) played as regards Levinas’ – also mentioned – ambivalent relationship to literary criticism. For example, in a – much-debated – article, “Reality and Its Shadow” (Levinas 1989: 130-143, originally form 1943), Levinas starts out with the interesting idea that “an artwork is more real than reality and attests to the dignity of the artistic imagination, which sets itself up as a knowledge of the absolute” (130) but – through the interpretation of the *image* – he concludes that since art is prone to be “disengaged”, it is often without “initiative and responsibility”, and thus it can easily become an empty game, entering a “dimension of evasion” (141): art can become the *evasion* of moral responsibility. Although there is undeniably something in this with respect to phony, or simply ‘bad’ art (whatever may that be), it is hard not to feel shocked when one reads: “There is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment” (142). Obviously, there is something “ego-centric” in every pleasure I feel (because it is me who feels it) but care for, and responsiveness to, the Other perhaps does not, it seems to me, exclude the possibility that the Other, simultaneously with me (for example, an actor on the stage whose performance I am watching), may feel a similar pleasure to mine, including the joy he feels when I applaud him. It is also hard to agree that literary critics are scavengers of art works, and that the literary critic “betrays”, for example, Mallarmé (130) through her very interpretation of Mallarmé. We know that Levinas was a great admirer – among others – of Dostoyevsky, Cervantes, Shakespeare, and also of Proust, on whom he wrote a brilliant – if short – essay.[[152]](#footnote-152) Yet here I will not go into this issue; I will solely concentrate on Levinas’ reading of *Macbeth* in the already mentioned “There is: Existence without Existents”, thereby also returning to the “illness” Lady Macbeth mentions upon reading Macbeth’s letter.

Imagine a huge manor-house somewhere in the countryside. You are totally alone, there is no other living creature around within two miles. It is night and the sky is heavily overcast: neither the moon, nor a lone star is visible. But otherwise, the weather is fine: there is no wind, rain, or storm. It is a night when – as Banquo puts it – “there’s husbandry in heaven [the celestial powers economize on lighting] / Their candles [stars] are all out” (2.1.4-5). You are lying in bed and you cannot sleep. You open your eyes but it does not matter whether you close them or not: it is only the thickness of darkness that surrounds you. You listen, prick your ears, and you can only hear the equally thick, merciless silence around you. There is not even a clock ticking in the house or watch on your wrist; no door is creaking, no window is rattling. You wish to fall asleep but you still cannot.

This is a reconstruction of a relatively ordinary and fairly particular situation Levinas sketches out at the beginning of the article “There is: Existence without Existents” and I have embellished (but, I guess, I have also simplified) it to some extent: both Levinas and I have trusted imagination which is supposed to conjure up an experience which is to serve as an illustration of what Levinas means by *nothingness*. But “illustration” is the right word only if we do not mean something merely ‘decorative’, without which the whole ‘story’ would be just as good as without it. Illustration here is to illu-minate: to be able to see the darkness more sharply. One would like to say: with the illustrations, Levinas wishes to put us ‘into the right mood’ to be able to appreciate what he wants to say about nothingness. Of course, we will have to play his game: in an ordinary situation under the same circumstances, one may perhaps switch on the light, at least light a candle, if there is no electricity, get out of bed, perhaps open a bottle of whisky, light a cigarette, start singing in the darkness, and later even have a good time. At least this is how I, knowing myself to the extent I know myself, might easily do. But now I suppose I cannot do anything else but remain lying in bed and give myself up to a strange kind of vigilance: witnessing to the darkness which strangles everything that surrounds me, giving myself over to it, sinking deeper and deeper, and prying (perhaps to the extent of ‘enjoyment’) into even the farthest corners of this both literally and metaphorically dark experience. In *Macbeth*, Rosse will characterise a darkness like this as “night’s predominance”, when “darkness does the face of earth entomb” (2.4.8-9).

Thus, the scene described above may be said to be a kind of image, a metaphor of a meaning Levinas wishes to communicate. This ‘poetic reading’ is all right if we do not lose sight of the concrete, very tangible and almost offensive reality the situation is supposed to conjure up in us. We have to *see* the darkness, we have to extend our hand into it, we have to feel it, and with these ‘in mind’ ‘analyse’ what we are going through. Consider this as a ‘thought’- (rather: an ‘emotion’-, a ‘feeling’-) experiment, the description of an imagined but possible experience, which starts out as a more or less ordinary image-construction, yet while we are constructing, we transcend more and more of the particular features, and while we do not deprive the situation of its reality, we allow it to stand for, and grope into, an existential stance, a situation we have been dropped into.

This, of course, requires one’s willingness to participate, to play along (as one participates in a game, or in an everyday or less everyday ritual) and one can always say what Macbeth says about the dagger that loomed up before him: “There’s no such thing” (2.1.47): this ‘lying in bed in a country-house in total darkness’ is all nonsense; this is an artificially created and contrived case, already from the very beginning; indeed, at one point Macbeth calls such ‘images’ (perhaps together with several Analytic philosophers) “strange inventions” (3.1.32), i.e. ‘unaccountable fabrications, fiction’. But in fact Macbeth is a good example: he denies the dagger – about which he is unable to tell whether it is a real or an imaginary one: “Is this a dagger which I see before me?” (2.1.33) – only when he has thoroughly ‘interpreted’ it, when he has tried to make acquaintance with it. Levinas does not say so, but *Macbeth*, the play is full of scenes in which what is dramatized is precisely whether a person allows his or her imagination to dwell on a situation or not, and what the conditions of *not being able to resist* playing along with the situation are: what is involved when you cannot but lend yourself to what is happening, what you see, hear, etc. (we may especially think, besides the ‘dagger-monologue’, of the banquet-scene when Banquo’s ghost appears (3.4.40-120), or the Hecate-scene, where Macbeth can see three “apparitions” (4.1.47-132). Surely, to envision, and thus ‘participate’ in a situation like lying in total darkness, is close to reading fiction, or going to the theatre: it is not arguments that may convince you, and your sheer willingness to participate presupposes at least a minimum of some kind of an acceptance already; this latter makes any thought- (or imagination-) experiment tricky, even dangerous: if it does not work for you, it can always be claimed that it is your fault: you still have not invested yourself into the situation well enough.

Yet suppose I ‘enter’ the situation of total darkness: what shall I experience? If everything is in total darkness around me, i.e. I cannot see anything, then everything recedes into an invisible sameness; nothing is different, so I may experience a total *in*-difference, an all-encompassing, all-pervading indeterminateness, which has no other ‘substance’ but itself. Darkness is everywhere, but it is not a quality of the (invisible) things around me; it is a generality of utmost generality, in which ... I would like to say (as I said before): ‘everything looks the same’ but I should realize that this is not entirely right: properly speaking, there is no longer any ‘sameness’ because there is no difference, either. I pay (phenomenological) attention, but not so much to a thing, a ‘separate’ object but to an atmosphere, a mood, a temper. For Levinas, attention – in *Totality and Infinity* – is tied to language; he says: “Thematization as the work of language [...] is not mysterious information, but the appeal addressed to my attention. Attention and the explicit thought it makes possible are not a refinement of consciousness, but consciousness itself. But the eminently sovereign attention in me is what *essentially* responds to an appeal. Attention is attention to something because it is attention to someone. The exteriority of its point of departure is essential to it: it is the very tension of the I” (Levinas 1969: 99). I am in tension, indeed: I cannot see even myself, any part of my body, not even my little finger: I can touch it in the dark but it becomes strangely ‘unreal’, too: in the general impersonality and indeterminateness that surrounds me, I even lose myself, except for the fact that it is me who is experiencing all these. But if I use my memory to remember what the place – or a place – looks like when it is illuminated, I will only be more and more convinced that in the darkness I am in, I have lost touch with reality, I have been separated from almost everything I usually think I have. I become an ‘object’, a ‘thing’, as indifferent and anonymous as that which envelopes me. It turns out how much I am, ordinarily, an ‘I’ (the person I suppose myself to be) only *with respect to* the world and Others: how much I rely on the world and the Other to *be*, to exist at all. Here is Levinas, analysing the ‘dark situation’: “When the forms of things are dissolved in the night, the darkness of the night, which is neither an object nor the quality of an object, invades like a presence [...], we are not dealing with anything. But this nothing is not that of pure nothingness [i.e. it is not pure absence, it is not a totally abraded, denuded scene]. There is no longer *this* or *that*; there is not ‘something’. But this universal absence is in turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence. It is not the dialectical counterpart of absence [...]. It is immediately there. *There is*, in general, without it mattering what there is, without our being able to fix a substantive to this term” (Levinas 1969: 30).

This *there is* (*il y a* in the French original[[153]](#footnote-153)) is supposed to be the ‘verbal index’ of this acute, indeterminate, uncorrelated, anonymous nothingness. The *il y a*  is especially destined to capture the impersonality and the total indifference ‘found’ in this horror of exposure not to non-being, for example, to death but precisely to *being*, yet only to the bare minimum of being. For Levinas, there is no ‘pure nothingness’; the real horror of nothingness is not (the fear of) death but – as for example, for Kierkegaard, too[[154]](#footnote-154) – the possibility of *not being able to die*: a horrible, unbounded, unfinishable sameness repeating itself, a ‘false eternity’*.* The deepest horror of nothingness for Levinas is the totally solitary being whose existence becomes identical with this bare minimum of being, which bare minimum is only good for the experience of this horror itself and whose existence consists in this sheer horror: it exists *in* this horror. Thus the horror is not ‘anxiety’ in the face of death (death-as-non-being) but that I am stripped of my intimate ‘subjectivity’, my “power to have private existence” (Levinas 1969: 33).[[155]](#footnote-155) Another verbal (linguistic) index of this dread is the *one* instead of the ‘I’: what I realize is that it is *not me* who is participating in this scene of darkness but a nameless *one*, an impersonal ‘personal’ pronoun, a ‘somebody’, an ‘anybody’, an ‘everybody’, who is no longer ‘author’ of anything. Here is Levinas again: “this impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable ‘consummation’ of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself we shall designate by the term *there is* [*il y a*] [....] [T]he night is the very experience of the *there is* (30).”

“What is the night?” (3.4.125) – Macbeth asks his wife after the banquet-guests have left his castle in confusion. From the context it is clear that this is not meant as a philosophical question but rather to ask: ‘what time is it?’, but under the present circumstances, it sounds quite symbolic. It is through the *there is* of the night that Macbeth enters Levinas’ discourse[[156]](#footnote-156): “it is a participation in the *there is*, in the *there is* which returns in the heart of every negation, in the *there is* that has ‘no exits’. It is [i.e. the *there is, the il y a* is], if we may say so, the impossibility of death, the universality of existence even in its annihilation” (Levinas 1969: 33). This sounds paradoxical indeed but here, in a certain way, Levinas alludes to the paradox of nothingness, treated in detail already in the “Introduction” and in previous chapters: ‘nothingness in some sense must be, must exist and persist, otherwise what is there that there is not?’. He goes on: “to kill, like to die, is to seek an escape from being, to go where freedom and negation operate. Horror is the event of being which returns in the heart of this negation, as though nothing had happened. ‘And that,’ says Macbeth, ‘is more strange than the crime itself’” (33). *And that is more strange than the crime itself* is a paraphrase of some words of Macbeth in the following longer section (cf. 33-34), spoken after he has seen Banquo’s Ghost: “....murders have been perform’d / Too terrible for the ear: the time has been, / That, when the brains were out, the man would die, / And there an end; but now, they rise again, / With twenty mortal murders on their crowns, / And push us from our stools. *This is more strange / Than such a murder is*” (3.4.76-82, my emphasis). Levinas reads the continual re-appearance of Banquo’s Ghost as a “decisive experience of the ‘no exit’ from existence, its phantom return through the fissures [chinks] through which one has driven it” (33). The Ghost for Levinas stands for the invincibility of nothingness (even for such a great warrior, slaughterer as Macbeth): you can blow a man’s brain out (which, for Levinas, is already a desperate attempt to escape non-being), then of another, and then of even another, but you cannot blow the brains of nothingness out, as Macbeth also observes. Nothingness is not a matter of human courage, or of a warrior’s bravado; Macbeth is totally right when he says: “What man dare, I dare”; with mortal enemies he is not at a loss. It is the horror Macbeth displays upon seeing the Ghost of Banquo with his “gory locks” (3.4.51) that Lady Macbeth wishes to excuse her husband in front of the banquet-guests, hastily agreeing that, indeed, a “strange infirmity” (3.4.85) that has overcome the newly crowned King and she quickly adds “My Lord [Macbeth] is often thus / And hath been from his use” (3.4.53-54). This is, of course, a lie but it curiously refers back to Lady Macbeth’s words at the stage of still planning the assassination: Macbeth should be great, or acquire the art of greatness, in which ambition is to be approved of, “but without the illness should attend it” (1.4.18). The “illness” of Macbeth is rather a “sickness unto death”, the horror that *that* state of mind (“O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife” (3.2.36)) will last forever and ever, without a last day, without even the hope of death.

Another form of this nothingness, of the “horrible shadow”, the “unreal mockery” (3.4. 205-106) is when Macbeth, after killing Duncan, faces an unbearable emptiness: *something* should happen as a ‘correlate’ of the fatal deed, for example, the Sun should fall into the Earth, there should be a terrible storm...whatever. It is only later, that, in the narratives of Rosse and the Old Man, “hours dreadful” are reported to have taken place on the “bloody stage” of the earth (2.4.3 and 6). But – before the famous knocking on the castle-gate – there is sheer, terrible silence, and hallucination:

**Lady Macb.** Did you not speak?

**Macb.** When?

**Lady Macb.** Now.

**Macb**. As I ascended?

**Lady Macb** Ay.

**Macb.** Hark!

It is as if after an irredeemable, horrible event *nothing* had changed to a noticeable extent; you can very well imagine that you are still ‘before the event’, yet you *know* it *did* happen, and you wish to fill the silence, the void; time has strangely ‘stopped’: something seems to negate that which happened but should not have happened, as if this negation were coming from nothingness itself, pervading the whole air, the whole atmosphere. Macbeth, after he has “done the deed” (2.2.14) cries out: “Methought, I heard a voice cry, ‘Sleep no more! / Macbeth does murder Sleep’ ” (Act 2.2.34-35) and *insomnia* is another form, another ‘symptom’ of the impersonal existence captured by Levinas in the *there is*: “Insomnia is constituted by the consciousness that it will never finish – that is, that there is no longer any way of withdrawing from the vigilance to which one is held. Vigilance without end. [..] The present is welded to the past, is entirely the heritage of that past: it renews nothing. It is always the same present or the same past that endures” (Levinas 1987: 48).

Yet in Levinas’ reading, the return of Banquo’s Ghost is not simply Macbeth’s ‘punishment’ for an ‘immoral act’: ontology is morality for Levinas but this should be, I think, understood not in the way that it is ontology which becomes a kind of ethics. Rather, it is morality (human responsibility and duty) which should be interpreted on an absolute (in the sense of ‘free’, ‘unbounded’, ‘unfettered’) ontological plane. Thus, the sheer denial of nothingness is in vain: it will keep haunting us, as the Ghost of Banquo haunts Macbeth, not because we have killed anyone, and not even because, as especially Protestant theologies like to put it, ‘we are all sinners’: nothingness is a substantial and indestructible experience, something like a ‘fact’ of human life we cannot evade, which is there in the *there is* and in thousands of other forms, and we can only reckon with it; it cannot be really ‘known’; it is only to be acknowledged. “This return of presence in negation – Levinas sums up, somewhat categorically for the ear of a Shakespeare-critic, his verdict on Shakespearean tragedy in “There is: existence without essence” – this impossibility of escaping from an anonymous and uncurruptible existence constitute the final depths of Shakespearean tragedy. The fatality of the tragedy of antiquity becomes the fatality of irremissible being” (33).

The description (the ‘characterisation’) of *nothingness* is, of course, only a tiny part of Levinas’s philosophy but we have seen how many aspects he distinguishes between: nothingness is *darkness, insomnia, solitude, indifference, indeterminateness,* the *il y a*, *the faceless* one*, unfinishable sameness, unboundedness, false eternity, the inability to die, lack of privacy, lack of happening, a haunting ghost*, constituting Macbeth’s fear.

### *Appendix:* Lady Macbeth and Goodwife Agnes:

### a case of cultural transmission

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Arany János**: *Ágnes asszony*  Ágnes asszony a patakban  Fehér lepedőjét mossa;  Fehér leplét, véres leplét  A futó hab elkapdossa.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Odagyűl az utcagyermek:  Ágnes asszony, mit mos kelmed?  „Csitt, te, csitt te! csibém vére  Keveré el a gyolcs leplet.”  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Összefutnak a szomszédnők:  Ágnes asszony, hol a férjed?  „Csillagom, hisz ottbenn alszik!  Ne menjünk be, mert fölébred.”  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Jön a hajdu: Ágnes asszony,  A tömlöcbe gyere mostan.  „Jaj, galambom, hogy’ mehetnék,  Míg e foltot ki nem mostam!”  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Mély a börtön, egy sugár-szál  Odaférni alig képes;  Egy sugár a börtön napja,  Éje pedig rémtül népes;  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Szegény Ágnes naphosszanta  Néz e kis világgal szembe,  Néz merően, – a sugárka  Mind belefér egy fél szembe.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Mert, alighogy félrefordul,  Rémek tánca van körűle;  Ha ez a kis fény nem volna,  Úgy gondolja: *megőrülne.*  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Ím azonban, időtelve,  Börtönének zárja nyílik:  Ágnes a törvény előtt  Megáll szépen, ahogy illik.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Öltözetjét rendbe hozza,  Kendőjére fordít gondot.  Szöghaját is megsimítja,  Nehogy azt higgyék: *megbomlott.*  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Hogy belép, a zöld asztalnál  Tisztes őszek ülnek sorra;  Szánalommal néznek ő rá,  Egy sem mérges, vagy mogorva.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  „Fiam, Ágnes, mit miveltél?  Szörnyü a bűn, terhes a vád;  Ki a tettet végrehajtá,  Szeretőd ím maga vall rád.”  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  „Ő bitón fog veszni holnap,  Ő, ki férjedet megölte;  Holtig vízen és kenyéren  Raboskodva bünhödöl te.”  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Körültekint Ágnes asszony,  Meggyőződni ép eszérül;  Hallja a hangot, érti a szót,  S míg azt érti: „meg nem őrül.”  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  De amit férjéről mondtak,  A szó oly visszásan tetszik;  Az világos csak, hogy őt  Haza többé nem eresztik.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Nosza sírni, kezd zokogni,  Sűrü záporkönnye folyván:  Liliomról pergő harmat,  Hulló vízgyöngy hattyu tollán.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  „Méltóságos nagy uraim!  Nézzen Istent kegyelmetek:  Sürgetős munkám van otthon,  Fogva én itt nem űlhetek.”  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  „Mocsok esett lepedőmön,  Ki kell a vérfoltot vennem!  Jaj, ha e szenny ott maradna,  Hová kéne akkor lennem!”  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Összenéz a bölcs törvényszék  Hallatára ily panasznak.  Csendesség van. Hallgat a száj.  Csupán a szemek szavaznak.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  „Eredj haza szegény asszony!  Mosd fehérre mocskos lepled;  Eredje haza, Isten adjon  Erőt ahhoz és kegyelmet.”  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  S Ágnes asszony a patakban  Lepedőjét újra mossa;  Fehér leplét, tiszta leplét  A futó hab elkapdossa.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Mert hiába tiszta a gyolcs,  Benne többé semmi vérjel:  Ágnes azt még egyre látja  S épen úgy. mint *akkor éjjel*.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Virradattól késő estig  Áll a vízben, széke mellett:  Hab zilálja rezgő árnyát,  Haja fürtét kósza szellet.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Holdvilágos éjjelenkint,  Mikor a víz fodra csillog,  Maradozó csattanással  Fehér sulyka messze villog.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  És ez így megy évrül-évre,  Télen-nyáron, szünet nélkül;  Harmat-arca hő napon ég,  Gyönge térde fagyban kékül.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  Őszbe fordul a zilált haj,  Már nem holló, nem is ében;  Torz-alakú ránc verődik  Szanaszét a síma képen.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  S Ágnes asszony a patakban  Régi rongyát mossa, mossa –  Fehér leple foszlányait  A szilaj hab elkapdossa.  Oh! irgalom atyja, ne hagyj el.  (1853) | **János Arany:** *Goodwife Agnes*  Goodwife Agnes in the streamlet  Is washing her white bed-sheet;  Her white linen, bloody linen  The running foams catch and beat.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  Round her urchins gather and watch:  Goodwife Agnes, what’s it you wash?  “Go to, go to! My chicken’s blood  Smudged my linen; and now you hush!”  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  Neighb’ring women herd together:  Goodwife Agnes, your husband’s in?  “Yes, asleep inside, my dearest,  Let’s not go in, lest we wake him.”  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  The bailiff comes: Goodwife Agnes  To the dungeon now you’ll be seen.  “How could I go, my dove, darling,  Till of this spot this sheet is clean?”  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  Deep’s the prison: one ray of light  Can hardly find th’way to enter;  One ray of sun’s the prison day,  And its night a swarming spectre;  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  All day Agnes keeps an eye on  This narrow light, so slender, small,  Her gaze holds it – it’s so tiny  It fits into one eye-ball.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  For when she turns, right around her  Their dance spectres up they wind,  If that tiny light were not there,  She believes she’d *lose her mind*.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  Yet, behold, as time passes by  She’s ushered out of her cell,  Facing the Law Agnes’s standing,  As ‘tis fitting, as ‘tis well.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  She takes pains with her attire,  Her kerchief neatly arranged,  Her straight hair adjusted also,  Lest they think something’s *deranged*.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  As she enters, hoary elders  Sit around a table green,  They look at her full of pity,  None is angry, none is mean.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  “My child, Agnes, what hast thou done,  The crime’s appalling, the charge weighty,  Who has done the deed, thy lover  Has testified right against thee.”  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  “Alas, he’ll be hanged tomorrow,  He who committed the murder;  Thou shalt suffer a life-sentence,  Subsisting on bread and water.”  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  Goodwife Agnes, to make certain  She’s not insane, now looks around;  Sounds she can hear, words do make sense,  While this is so, “her mind is sound”.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  But what they said about her husband  That word seems to be so weird;  One single thing is clear for her:  Homeward a way will not yield.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  Thus, she resorts now to weeping,  Showers of tears flow from her eyes:  Rolling droplets on a swan’s wing,  Pearls of lilies of dew-drop size.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  “Most noble, reverend Masters,  For God’s sake, look at my plight,  Home I’ve got a pressing deadline,  I can’t sit here, chained up tight.”  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  “A blot’s besmirched my sheet of linen,  That I must take out, you see,  If that blood-stain were to stay there,  Pray, what might become of me?”  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  Hearing this plea, knowing glances  Send around the court the note.  There is silence. The mouths are shut.  Only wise eyes cast the vote.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  “Go, poor woman, go home and wash  That sheet of filth clean and white;  May God take pity on thee and  Give thee strength, with all His might.”  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  Goodwife Agnes in the streamlet  Once again washes her sheet,  Her white linen, spotless linen  The running foams catch and beat.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  For in vain is the linen clean,  No sign of blood offered to sight:  Agnes can still see it clearly,  Just as she did, *then*, on *that night*.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  From early dawn to late evening  By her stool she stands in water:  Foams perturb her hov’ring shadow,  Wayward winds her soft hair moulder.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  When at night the moon-shine glazes  The top of the water-ripples,  From afar her heavy mallet  With deferred thumps looms and glitters.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  So it goes on, incessantly,  Every year, all summer, winter,  The sun scorches her dewy cheeks,  Her soft knee-caps crisp frosts splinter.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  The ruffled hair has turned hoary,  No strand is dark, none is raven,  Freakish wrinkles creep all over  The smooth face moulded misshapen.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  Goodwife Agnes in the streamlet  Is washing her old, ragged sheet –  The long shreds of her white linen  The reckless foams catch and beat.  O, merciful Lord, never leave me.  (trans. by Géza Kállay) |

“It is an accustomed action with her” the Gentlewoman says about the sleepwalking Lady Macbeth in Act 5, Scene 1, lines 23–4 – “to seem thus washing her hands.” What becomes Goodwife Agnes’s “accustomed action” is “washing her white bed-sheet” “in the streamlet,”[[157]](#footnote-157) “from early dawn to late evening,” “every year, all summer, winter.” Yet, as the Gentlewoman’s precise formulation runs, the Lady’s action is “to seem” to be washing her hands, which indicates, compared to Agnes, that the Lady’s rubbing her hands (cf. 5.1.23) lacks the direct materiality of water, while Agnes is standing and washing in the “real” water of the streamlet, the running foams becoming a symbol in the course of the narrative of the ballad-poem. Agnes’s world gradually transforms the two basic liquids, blood and water into metaphors, according to the logic of a narrative, whereas by the time Lady Macbeth makes her dramatic entrance in the sleep-walking scene, Duncan’s blood has moved from her (and her husband’s) hands into her imagination; it has been soaked up by her fantasy, as much as the potential remedy: “all the perfumes of Arabia,” which could “sweeten” that “little hand” (43) have been “absorbed” by her imagination, too. In both cases, however, the metaphorical process, the breaking away from direct materiality, the symbol-creation and myth-construction will not make the blood vanish, as today’s detergents would boastfully claim: for Lady Macbeth, just as for Agnes, the blood dried on the mind is “more real” than ever. In what follows, I will be concerned with what we find in the matrix of the similarities and differences in Lady Macbeth’s and Goodwife Agnes’s respective plots: the sign, the blot, the spot, the smudging, besmirching stain, the stain of blood *on the hand*, and on *the white linen sheet,* and the desperate task: to erase the stain, to rub it off, to wash it out, to make it *not be*. A red or dark stain on a light surface is, as Paul Ricoeur argues in *The Symbolism of Evil*, one of the first symbols of sin, guilt and evil in the European cultural heritage, to be found in the most ancient Babylonian, Egyptian, Jewish and Greek mythological stories and songs, giving rise to conceptual, moral reflection (to “thought”) much later than the point in time when the metaphorical-symbolic representation was established (cf. Ricoeur 1969: especially 24-53). From Ricoeur’s philosophical point of view one could claim that conceptual-moral reflection becomes possible precisely if the stain does *not* become a source of obsession and madness, if it is able to break out of the mesmerising, fixating, self-generating, and self-perpetuating process of the mind, and there is enough space for a proper distance from which the meaning of the stain can be assessed not only from within but also from without, from the very distance indispensable for what we call “reflection.”

In the sleepwalking scene Lady Macbeth puts the rhetorical question, referring to King Duncan: “Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?” (5.1. 33–34). European culture (like Duncan, and, it seems, Agnes’ husband, too) has a lot of blood in it indeed, and in more than one sense, yet it still might seem bizarre to single out a blood-stain which has fastened onto the British and Hungarian cultural memories to celebrate cultural kinship. Is a spot of blood the place where some aspects of cultural heritage might flow together?

I consider the allowing of this possibility justifiable for at least two reasons. First of all, since 1776, when we find the name “Shakespeare” set down by a Hungarian author – namely György Alajos Szerdahely – for the first time, in a text written, ironically, in Latin (cf. Dávidházi 1989: 72). Shakespeare has proved to be a blood-transfusion for Hungarian poetry, drama, and theatre. It is equally widely known that János Arany (1817–1882), one of the most renowned figures of Hungarian literature, made an acquaintance with Shakespeare, first in German and in the early Hungarian translations, both as reader and a strolling player during his college years in the mid-1830s, but then later he also read Shakespeare also in the English original, and produced brilliant translations of it. As Arany himself relates the story of his first encounter with Shakespeare in English in a letter to a friend, he received an English grammar from his first patron and friend, István Szilágyi, in 1842 (Arany 1993: 98)[[158]](#footnote-158) and this grammar contained one of Hamlet’s soliloquies (most probably “To be or not to be”), which he felt inspired to compare with the German translation (cf. Kovács 1993: 98). We may have little doubt that by 1853, when he wrote *Goodwife Agnes*, working as a grammar-school teacher at the time in Nagykőrös, Arany had read *Macbeth*, probably even several times (Arany 1998: 308).[[159]](#footnote-159) We also know that Arany himself started to translate *Macbeth* (although we cannot tell exactly when) but the manuscript was destroyed during the Second World War (Kovács 1993: 74)[[160]](#footnote-160) and the play’s first canonical translation[[161]](#footnote-161) was eventually done by Károly Szász (unfortunately a very mediocre poet), for the first complete Hungarian Shakespeare but it was Arany who reviewed Szász’s work, correcting several errors; that review is extant, but was done in 1864, so a good ten years after *Goodwife Agnes* had been written. As a result, Arany may well have had Lady Macbeth’s blood-stain in his (cultural) memory when writing his ballad, and Shakespeare’s influence on Arany, and eminently the effect of Shakespearean tragedy in shaping Arany’s understanding of what the “tragic” might be, was noted already in Arany’s lifetime.[[162]](#footnote-162) However, the two female figures could of course be juxtaposed without assuming or documenting any direct or indirect influence as well, although then the actual cultural transmission would perhaps lose that “smell of blood” that Lady Macbeth, at least, is apparently still feeling (“Here’s the smell of the blood still,” 5.1.42).

Like almost all of Arany’s published works, this ballad, too, is carefully constructed: for Arany structure was an inherent and indispensable part of the content itself. We have four structural units along a time-line which at first sight seems linear. We start out with Agnes in the streamlet and with the three external voices: the voices of the children (the urchins); some women from the village; and the bailiff who sees Agnes to “the dungeon.” Following this Agnes is in prison; then in front of the “hoary elders,” a kind of court of law – highly problematic in my view; and finally we revisit and eventually leave her in the streamlet again. The four units, at the same time indicating the transformation Agnes’s mind is going through, are also ear-marked by the recurring image of the sheet in variations: as “white linen, bloody linen” (stanza 1), as “white linen, spotless linen” (stanza 20) and, finally in the last stanza (stanza 26) as an “old, ragged sheet.” In *Macbeth*, within the sleep-walking scene, two devices are used to glimpse into the Lady’s mind: one is the chiefly narrative commentary of the Gentlewoman and the Doctor describing the Lady’s behaviour, the other is the words she utters, which amaze and shock the two bystanders, the two witnesses representing an external point of view. The Doctor first decides to “set down what comes from [the Lady] to satisfy [his] remembrance the more strongly” (28–29), but when he finally concludes: “My mind she [i.e. Lady Macbeth] has mated [stupefied], and amazed my sight. I think but dare not speak” (68–69), there is little doubt he at least surmises that the Lady re-enacted the most hideous murder-scenes of the play and their aftermath, scenes the audience was able to see in their “original version” in Act II, too. What I find especially remarkable is that Lady Macbeth has two amazed interpreters, whereas though the narrator of the ballad does describe, even in highly suggestive, and astonishingly small details, Agnes’s behaviour (e.g. that she adjusts her straight hair, lest the elders think “that something’s *deranged*,” Stanza 9), this is also done by showing, throughout the poem, all incidents from her perspective. Thus, in Arany’s poem we have a masterful balance of a quasi-objective narrative and some passageways into Agnes’s subjectivity, opening up, and thus marking important turning points in the story. The detached narrative, the mere recording of “facts” will, towards the end of the ballad, create the opportunity for the narrator to show Agnes increasingly from a distance, and thus to transform her into an iconic figure of mourning, shame and atonement (a kind of Danaid, or Sisyphus), while the entrances into her mind (at instances such as “she believes she’d *lose her mind*” (Stanza 7) or “what they say about her husband, / That word seems to be so weird” (Stanza 14)) present her more intimately, reminding the reader that she is not an object but a sensitive human being, a victim one may sympathise with and pity. When Agnes speaks (to the children, the women, the bailiff, and to the hoary elders), her speech is the speech of concealment, of repression, of denial, while what Lady Macbeth says is highly revelatory and illuminating, like the taper in her hand but she is in a trance and she is precisely unaware of the significance of her own words; one could almost venture to say that she does not understand them. What Agnes tells the external world is coherent and makes full sense but it is indicative of a reality that exists only for herself: the monomaniacal fixation of the spot of blood transports her beyond the reality that surrounds her, inducing even comic effects: for example, what she answers the bailiff: “How could I go, my dove, darling, / Till of this spot this sheet is clean?” (Stanza 4), might also sound like her declining an invitation to a dinner-party, while in fact she is being summoned to prison. Lady Macbeth’s mind works within the confines of the halo of the taper: the two witnesses (and here the audience, too) can see as much as one may by the light of that candle.

In Agnes’s case, it is precisely the spot of blood which is replaced, in the prison cell, by one single ray of the sun, which Agnes continually fixates on, and which fills one of her eyeballs just as much as her whole day (and here Arany uses a pun in the Hungarian original, which the translator could not render: in Hungarian the same word: *nap* is used for both the “sun” and for “day”). This ray of sun is richly ambiguous: Agnes’s fixation on it is just as much a sign of her madness as it is the remedy against madness (because if she turns away, spectres start their dance around her), but the ray may also be taken as an emblem of the revelatory technique of the ballad; the ray emblematises the merciless focus into which Agnes’s “parts” are brought: her eyes, clothes, kerchief, hair, tears (also as a pre-figuration of the water in the streamlet), later her “ruffled hair” and its colour, her knees, her cheeks, her face, her wrinkles. Agnes is methodically taken apart, almost mutilated; she becomes an icon of re-*memb*-rance through dis-*member*-ment. Towards the end of the ballad, the role of the ray of the sun is taken by the beams of moonlight, which projects her hovering shadow onto the surface of the water of the streamlet, and that shadow is perturbed by the foams of the water, creating an aberrant mirror-image of her gradual disintegration as a self. One image, in a metonymical focus, stands out as a part for the whole: her white mallet, glittering “from afar” (stanza 23) is significant not only for the sight, the vision of the reader but also for the ear: the heavy mallet strikes down with “deferred thumps” or “claps”. Thus the narrator builds our distance from the figure by allowing us to see the mallet earlier than its sound would reach us. We leave Agnes in the vain activity of washing: her suffering seems to be endless, she cannot die, and this is underscored by the poem returning to its beginning, coming full circle. This circle surrounds and traps, as much as it reinforces the endless, straight flow of the streamlet, the narrative flow, which, in turn, is further reinforced by the prayer-like, mechanically returning refrain (“O, merciful Lord, never leave me”), indicating, on the part of perhaps all the characters of the ballad, that kind of helpless astonishment which is represented by the Doctor and the Gentlewoman watching Lady Macbeth.

Goodwife Agnes, who is a good wife in her intentions of cleaning, is a bad wife for washing her dirty linen in public and getting involved in a crime committed against her husband. This scenario is usually read as an emblem of the “crime and punishment” theme.[[163]](#footnote-163) In connection with the ballad Arany’s contemporary, Dostoyevsky is almost as frequently mentioned as Shakespeare. However, I think that in the story of Agnes, *shame* plays a far more significant role than the actual crime. To support this, I take one of my clues from the poem itself, and one from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth.*

While we have no doubt that Lady Macbeth is an instigator and an accomplice in Macbeth’s crime of murdering Duncan, what Agnes has actually done remains obscure throughout. This sheds some light on the highly suspicious assembly of the elders. This is not a “normal” court at all: what kind of a trial is it (though it must be painfully acknowledged that such trials are not unheard of in Hungarian history), where the accused has no defence lawyer, where she is not asked to plead guilty or not guilty, where she cannot relate her own interpretation of what happened, where the judges accept the testimony of the murderer himself against the accused, where no investigation is made into the question of why Agnes kept a lover, what her marriage was like, whether she had been sexually abused by either husband or lover, etc. In several interpretations I have read that the elders, who are reminiscent in some way of tribal society, are there to emphasise that earthly justice acquits Goodwife Agnes in order to hand her over to a more severe judge: her own conscience, or Fate, or God, her punishment being precisely that she is *not* punished “on earth” by having to subsist on bread and water for the rest of her life.[[164]](#footnote-164) But since we do not know how guilty Agnes is, we cannot tell whether what proves to be the eventual punishment is proportionate to the crime committed. There are so many fairy-tale like elements in the presentation of these old, hoary men that it is tempting to *imagine* that they exist only in Agnes’s *imagination*: perhaps she has in fact *never* left the streamlet, and prison-cell and court-scene alike are just as much a part of Agnes’s fancy (though of course the crudest possible reality *for her*) as the blood-stain in the already spotless linen-sheet. There can be no doubt that her husband was murdered by her mysterious lover (who is never shown but only referred to). Yet it is my view that Agnes’s case is more complicated, and her trauma deeper, than usually assumed.

My second clue comes from *Macbeth:* the childlessness of the Macbeths is legendary, just as the problem of how many children Lady Macbeth, who asks the spirits to “unsex” her there, had[[165]](#footnote-165). How many children did Goodwife Agnes have? It seems she had none, and it is only the *urchins*, the *children* to whom Agnes gives any kind of explanation for the blood-stain at all: “my chicken’s blood / Smudged my linen”. But how does chicken blood get onto a sheet which is usually in the bedroom? Are the children and we supposed to believe that Agnes cut the throat of the chicken she wished to cook for dinner above the bed already made for sleeping? Rather, I would like to recall that Hungarian *csibe* or *csirke*, the equivalent of *chicken*, especially in some Hungarian dialects, may also mean “child,”[[166]](#footnote-166) so *chicken’s blood* can be read as a euphemism for the menstrual blood,[[167]](#footnote-167) which is far more likely to appear on a bed-sheet, and which is indicative of the lack of conception and might be read as a sign of childlessness. My conjecture is that the husband’s blood was blotted, and took the place of the menstrual blood in Agnes’ mind; that the sight of the husband’s blood, “*then*, on *that night*” (Stanza 21), the blood Agnes will see forever, triggered the sight of blood that had previously been seen on other sheets over the course of the years. Thus, Agnes feels far less guilty about the crime (the weight and real content of which, as the narrative clearly states, she does not comprehend: “But what they said about her husband / That word seems to be so weird,” Stanza 14) than about her childlessness, her infertility; she mourns for, and she tries to recapture and regain something or somebody she has lost but never possessed. Lady Macbeth goes mad instead of her husband: she tries to save him by taking Macbeth’s insomnia, as it were, on herself in her sleepwalking.[[168]](#footnote-168) Agnes does *not* suffer for the crime of her lover, and certainly not for her husband, but for a missing child, the lack of children. Lady Macbeth’s tragedy is to have lost all she desired and acquired by force, through being an accomplice in a murder; Goodwife Agnes’s tragedy is that she has been deprived of somebody she never had. Both female figures are painfully lonely: the last time we see the Macbeths together is after the banquet-scene where Banquo’s ghost is present as well, and not even the dead bodies of the Macbeth couple are put side by side (unless the director of the play decides otherwise). Lady Macbeth dies alone and behind the scenes: according to the (not necessarily reliable) report of Malcolm – the new King after Macbeth – she committed suicide: “his [Macbeth’s] fiend-like queen, / Who, as ‘tis thought, by self and violent hands / Took off her life” (5.9.35–38). Goodwife Agnes can never die, yet in the timeless, repetitive act of washing, she might also be interpreted as becoming either a mythological figure, or even a part of nature: she is standing in the streamlet like a tree that has grown in the bed of the streamlet, or like a mossy rock. Whether to grow into an object of nature (and to lose one’s mind) is too high a price to pay for regaining one’s innocence is debatable, especially on the grounds that a tree or a rock is not a human being (similarly, neither is a mythological figure), and thus it makes little sense to talk about “innocence” here. Yet it is certain that the iconicised figures of Lady Macbeth and Goodwife Agnes respectively are just as difficult to erase from our cultural memories as the blood stains they try, in vain, to get rid of.

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1. All references to *Macbeth*, unless otherwise noted, are to the following edition: Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (eds.) (2015), The Arden Shakespeare. *Macbeth*, Third Series, General Editors: Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, David Scott Kastan and H. R. Woudhuysen, London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Throughout this book, double “quotation marks” are used when I verbatim quote from a source with an author; ‘single quotation marks’ signal all other cases. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Instead of post-modern, or post-postmodern, and especially instead of post-human(ism), I am using *meta-modern* (*meta*: ‘after’, ‘by means of’, ‘higher’) indicating not only the aspect of being ‘after’ (‘*post-’*) the ‘modern’ and the ‘post-modern’ age: *meta* is also supposed to include three features that are, I think, significant in our times. 1) there is a prevailing nostalgia for the past, in the form of e.g. ‘re-livig the 1970s’, ‘quoting the 1920s’, etc. See all the ‘retro’-phenomena, carrying an ‘about-ness’, an ‘after-ness’ as regards the relevance of the past to the present and the future. We no longer seem to look ‘back’ on the past but view its phenomena from ‘above’; we look ‘on’ them, as it were. 2) The media (the means of communication) are in the centre of attention but not only as a mere instrument, a carrier-as-form but as an integral constituent of what it is being carried, the ‘content’ 3) There is a growing and renewed interest in phenomena that are already *meta-*: metaphor, metaphysics, meta-philosophy, meta-theatre, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For example, in a recent, excellent introduction to the play, Emma Smith starts her interpretation with the sentence: “Macbeth’s downfall is his inability to read” (Smith xiv). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I have relied on the glosses of Clark and Mason 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The verbs in medial sentences are sometimes called “middle”, or “ergative” or “inchoative” verbs in linguistics and there is great variety in the uses of these terms, see Kemmer (1993) and Roeper (1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Maynard Mack’s observation in his classic study, “The Many Faces of Macbeth”: “The suggestiveness of Shakespeare's play in this larger sense is inexhaustible. Every element it contains lives with a double life, one physical, one metaphysical” (Mack 191). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Coleridge’s fist sentence in his commentary on *Macbeth* is: “ ‘Macbeth’ stands in contrast throughout with *Hamlet*” (Coleridge 229). The most detailed study I know of with the comparison of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* in its focus is Calderwood (1986) and Balázs Szigeti’s excellent, highly original PhD Dissertation (Szigeti 2015).  [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. Crystal and Crystal 401 and with the gloss in Clark and Mason: “ ‘Single’ could mean ‘slight, poor, trivial’” (*OED adj.* 12b). Macbeth is concerned with the radical effect of an imagined act on his being” (148). Kenneth Muir has “weak” and “indivisible” and he claims that “the phrase [“my single state of man”] as a whole [means] ‘my composite nature – body, spirts, etc., made one by the soul” and he concludes that it contains reference to the ‘microcosm’ (Muir 21). “Microcosm”, according to Early Modern thinking, meant the ‘household’ but also the human being whose organs, capabilities and soul was a miniature version of (a ‘mirror held up to’) the macrocosm, the whole universe (cf. Lewalski 619). Barbara K. Lewalski (2002) “Literature and the Household” in: David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 603-629). Kenneth Muir [1962] (1979) *The Arden Shakespeare. Macbeth*, Second Series, General Editors: Harold F. Brooks, Harold Jenkins, and Brian Morris, London: Methuen. Nicholas Brooke, in the Oxford Shakespeare series agrees with Muir that the word “alludes to the microcosm, the body, spirits, etc., unified by an undivided soul”. Therefore, he gives the meaning of *single* as ‘undivided, unbroken, absolute’ and adds: “Macbeth is threatened with self-division and disintegration: the nearest modern equivalent would be ‘integrity’” (Brooke 107). Nicholas Brooke (1990), *The Oxford Shakespeare. The Tragedy of Macbeth*, General Editor: Stanley Wells, Oxford: Oxford University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Braunmuller also accepts “weak condition” as a possible meaning and remarks: “ ‘State’ probably evokes analogies with the human body, the body politic, and the macrocosm” (Braunmuller 2008: 133). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Tzachi Zamir (2014) *Acts. Theatre, Philosophy and the Preforming Self*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. G. Wilson Knight (2005) [1930, 1949] *The Wheel of Fire. Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy.* London and New York: Routledge [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. ‘How many plays did Shakespeare write?’ is just as vexed a question as ’How many children had Lady Macbeth?’ As it is well-known, the Shakespeare-canon has accepted *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which are not among the thirty-six plays of the First Folio of 1623. Yet the lost *Cardenio*, as well as *Sir Thomas More* and especially *Edward III* (written by many authors but the manuscript perhaps containing Shakespeare’s handwriting) present several problems (the latter two were eventually included in the Oxford Shakespeare, Jon Jowett et al. ed. 2005). Further, the fact that more and more plays attributed for a long time solely to Shakespeare: *Timon of Athens, Measure for Measure*, and *Macbeth* itself, seem to be products of collaboration with Thomas Middleton, have brought about further complications. There are Shakespeare-scholars who would put the First and the Third Part of *Henry VI,* as well as *Titus Andronicus* on the list of co-authorship. Excellent books on the matter include Taylor and Jowett (1993) and Wells and Taylor (1987). See also Vickers (2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Right now, I know of nineteen individual books (monographs and collections of essays) on Cavell (this number indeed exceeds Cavell’s eighteen books so far, by one) and seventy-eight articles (some of these overlapping with essays in collections) in various journals. The first monograph on Cavell’s work was Mulhall (1994) a pioneering piece of work, yet very much debatable. Mulhall is also the editor *The Cavell Reader* (Cavell 1996), where, in the introductory essays, he does a much better job. After 2000 (when Cavell was seventy-four) interest growing in his work is palpable: see e.g. Hammer (2002) and Rhu (2006). The most useful collection of essays from the present point of view is Eldridge (2003), Crary and Shieth (2006), Eldridge and Rhie (2011) and Loxley and Taylor (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See, for example, Kripke (2013: 6, 19, and *passim*) and Everett (2013: 34, 62 and *passim*). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In M. O’C. Drury’s *Conversations with Wittgenstein* we read the following: “Wittgenstein: No. I don’t think I would get on with Hegel. Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in shewing [sic!] that things which look the same are really different. I was thinking of using as a motto for my book a quotation from *King* *Lear* ‘I’ll teach you differences’. Then laughing [i.e. Wittgenstein then added laughing]: the remark ‘you’d be surprised’ wouldn’t be a bad motto, either” (Rhees 1981: 171). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. “I entitle *transcendental* all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible a priori” (Kant 1933: A11–12/B25). *A priori* roughly means that I know certain things ‘without experience through the senses (seeing, hearing, etc.)’, e.g. I know *a priori* that a triangle has three sides, if I am familiar with the meaning of the word ‘triangle’, whereas perceptive experience must be there (called by Kant *a posteriori* understanding) when I wish to identify a chair. Here is an explanatory note by Sebastian Gardner: “Transcendental [in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*] is thus not to be confused with transcendent, which does precisely mean ‘passing beyond all experience’. […] Transcendental enquiry is therefore enquiry into the cognitive constitution of the subject to which objects must conform; its product, transcendental knowledge, is at one removed from objects, and concerns only what makes objects, and […] knowledge of them, possible” (Gardner 30). Cf. also Andre Bowie: “the fact that Kant refers to what he is writing as ‘transcendental philosophy’ is enough to make many people think that he is concerned with something incomprehensible beyond the everyday world. However, what he means by ‘transcendental’ has nothing to do with anything otherworldly. Something is transcendental if it is, in Kant’s phrase, the ‘condition of possibility’ of something. Thus it might be said that sex, at least until the advent of in-vitro fertilization, was transcendental to pregnancy.” (Bowie 2003:14) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. On the relationship between Kant and Wittgenstein with respect to the transcendental, see the detailed study of Robert Hanna (<http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/paper_hanna_kant_wittgenstein_and_transcendental_philosophy_may11.pdf>, (accessed 1 June, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Golub – drawing on Cavell (1979) – characterises Wittgenstein’ attitude to knowledge and self-knowledge this way, further noting that this attitude “constitutes the aphoristic lesson-plan template of the *Tractatus* and carries over as the premise, structure, and first object lesson of the *Philosophical Investigations*” (Golub 2014: 21). Golub’s book is an extra-ordinary document about the ordinary: sometimes provokingly strange but with highly original insight, analysing the theatricality and the performativity of Wittgenstein’s works. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. As Bertrand Russell put it: “In one sense it must be admitted that we can never *prove* the existence of things other than ourselves and our experiences. No logical absurdity results from the hypothesis that the world consists of myself and my thoughts and feelings and sensations, and that everything else is mere fancy. […] There is no logical impossibility in the supposition that the whole life is a dream” (Russell 1971: 10, emphasis original). Nominalsm’ is precisely the conception that certain phenomena have only ‘linguistic existence’ and thus they are not ‘real’ (e.g. unicorns, the golden mountain – to quote some favourite examples of analytic philosophers). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Cf. with Rudolf Carnap’s position: “An existential statement does not have the form ‘*a* exists’ (as in ‘I am,’ i.e. ‘I exist’), but ‘there exists something of such and such a kind.’ […] If from the statement ‘P(a)’ (‘*a* has the property of *P’*) an existential statement is to be deduced, then the latter can assert existence only with respect to the predicate P, not with respect to the subject *a* of the premise. What follows from ‘I am a European’ is not ‘I exist,’ but ‘a European exists’” (Carnap 1960: 74). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For example, Heidegger starts the discussion of *phenomenon* this way: “The Greek expression *phainomenon*, form which the term ’phenomenon’ derives, comes from the verb *phainesthai*, meaning ’to show itself’. Thus *phenomenon* means what shows itself, the self-showing, the manifest. *Phainesthai* itself is a ’middle voice’ [medial verb] construction of *phainō,* to bring into daylight, to place in brightness. *Phainō* belongs to the root *pha-*, like *phōs*, light or brightness, that is, that within which something can become manifest, visible in itself. Thus the meaning of the expression ‘phenomenon’ is *established as what shows itself in itself,* what is manifest. The *phainomena*, ’phenomena,’ are thus the totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to light” (Heidegger 1996: 25). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cf. „Just like the [….] examples ‘principle’ and ‘God,’ most of the other *specifically metaphysical terms are devoid of meaning,* e*.*g. ‘the Idea,’ ‘the Absolute,’ ‘the Unconditioned’, […] ‘the being of being,’ ‘non-being,’ […] ‘absolute spirit,’ ‘objective spirit,’ ‘essence,’ […] ‘being-in-and-or-itself,’ […] etc. The metaphysician tells us that empirical truth-conditions cannot be specified; if he adds that nevertheless he ‘means’ something, we know that this is merely an allusion to associated images and feelings, which, however, do not bestow a meaning on this word” (Carnap 1960: 67, emphasis original).  [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. From Foucault’s immensely large output in French and English, it seems that it was *Madness and Civilisation* (Foucault 1965) that first influenced literary and cultural studies considerably. The English translation is a short version of Foucault’s *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* (Paris: Plon, 1961). The full English translation is Foucault (2006), but that was done based on Foucault’s revised and extended French version: Foucault (1972). For an excellent summary of Foucault’s relevance to the New Historicism see Neema Parvini’s “Michel Foucault: Power relations and discourse analysis” in Parvini 2012: 78-96. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. It was the “New Aestheticism”, initiated chiefly by John Joughin, Simon Malpas as Shakespeare-scholars, as well as philosopher Andrew Bowie and literary theorist Robert Eaglestone, with many others that tried to revive the aesthetics of Adorno and the Frankfurt School to challenge especially new-historical Cultural Materialism. In Joughin and Malpas, the editors write in their Preface (1-19) to *The New Aestheticism:*  “The very notion of the ‘aesthetic’ could be said to have fallen victim to the recent developments within literary theory. […] Notion such as aesthetic independence, artistic genius, the cultural and historical universality of a text or work, and the humanist assumption of art’s intrinsic spiritual value have been successfully challenged by successive investigations into the historical and political bases of art’s material production and transmission. Theories of textuality, subjectivity, ideology, class, race, and gender have shown notions of universal human value to be without foundation, and even to act as repressive means of safeguarding the beliefs and values of an elitist culture from challenge and transformation. […] What has frequently been lost in this process, however, is the sense of art’s specificity as an object of analysis […] In the rush to diagnose art’s contamination by politics and culture, theoretical analysis has tended always to posit a prior order that grounds or determines a work’s aesthetic impact, whether this is history, ideology or theories of subjectivity. […] Theoretical criticism is in continual danger here of throwing out the aesthetic baby with the humanist bathwater.” (Joughin and Malpas 2003: 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. In 1989, the ’Father of New Historicism’, Stephen Greenblatt wrote: “Certainly, the presence of Michel Foucault on the Berkeley campus for extended visits during the last five or six years of his life, and more generally the influence in America of European (and especially French) anthropological and social theorists,

    has helped to shape my own literary critical practice. On the other hand the historicist critics have on the whole been unwilling to enrol themselves in one or the other of the dominant theoretical camps.” (Greenblatt 1989: 1). It is hard to know what exactly Greenblatt meant by “dominant theoretical camps”. It is also certain that New Historicism, in Greenblatt’s case, was influenced not only by Foucault but also by Clifford Geertz (especially Geertz 1993) and Raymond Williams (especially Williams 1977), as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. I came across this simile first in Otto Neurath’s “Protocol Sentences”, originally published in German in 1934, in the 4th volume of the journal of the Vienna Circle, *Erkenntnis*: “No *tabula rasa* exists. We are like sailors who must rebuild their ship on the open sea, never able to dismantle it in dry-dock and to reconstruct it there out of the best materials.” (Neurath 1960: 201). Both the social science and the ‘Physikalismus’ Neurath advocates are very close to the interpretation of history and society New Historicism and Cultural Materialism represent. For an excellent discussion of the later use of the simile, especially in W. O. Quine’s philosophy, see Roth (1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Henceforth *PI*, following this edition: Ludwig Wittgenstein (2001 [1953, 1958]), *Philosophical Investigations*, The German Text, with a Revised English Translation, 50th Anniversary Commemorative Edition, transl. by G. E. M. Anscombe, Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing. I will refer (following the usual practice) to what is called “Part I” of the *Investigations* by the editors (Rush Rhees and G. E, M. Anscombe), according to the “paragraph numbers” (§) and not according to page numbers. Almost 1500 pages of Wittgenstein’s works are freely downloadable at <http://bookos-z1.org/s/?q=Wittgenstein+2015&t=0> (reached 13 February 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. It was Stanley Cavell who called my attention to this (cf. in print: Cavell 2005:114). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. In the so-called “Big Typescript” written in 1933, in the section entitle “Philosophy”, Wittgenstein remarks: “Again and again there is the attempt to define the world in language [*abzugrenzen*: literally: ‘to put the world between borders’] and to display [*hervorzuheben*] it – but that doesn’t work. The self-evidence of the world is expressed in the very fact that language means [*bedeutet*] only it, and can only mean it.

    As language gets its way of meaning from what it means, from the world, no language is thinkable which doesn’t represent [*darstellt*] this world.” (Wittgenstein 1993: 193). This is an extreme way of insisting on the referential function of language, and Wittgenstein’s views changed considerably by the time of *Philosophical Investigations* but he never gave up on the referential function of language as *one* of its (main) functions. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Especially Cavell (1987) (2007) Stanley Cavell (1987) *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Cavell (2007) *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* [second edition of Cavell 1987, enlarged by an essay on *Macbeth*, “Macbeth Apalled”]*.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Henceforth *TLP*, following this edition: Ludwig Wittgenstein (1963 [1921] [1922]) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* The German Text of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Logisch-philosophishe Abhandlung* with a new Translation by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuiness. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, New York: The Humanities Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. In the book on the philosophy of acting already quoted in connection with *Macbeth* above, Tzachi Zamir gives a very nuanced analysis of how our everyday lives and acting are related, emphasising that acting is “existential amplification”, cf. especially Zamir 2014: 215-218. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. There are explicit references to Kierkegaard in what has become known as Wittgenstein’s *Culture and Value* (Wittgenstein 1980: 36, 37, 43, 61). Other references – from conversations, letter, etc. – are collected in Creegan (1997: 16-21) (<http://home.clear.net.nz/pages/ccreegan/wk/>, reached 31 May, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Cf. another well-known dictum of Wittgenstein’s: “A philosophical problem has the form: ‘I don’t know my way about’” (*PI,* §123). To this latter remark, Cavell attaches the following note: “I am naturally attracted by the implication of the German here – *Ich kenne mich nicht aus –* that the issue here is one of a loss of self-knowledge; of being, so to speak, at a loss” (Cavell 1989: 36). The need for acknowledging the loss and, hence, the urgency of mourning, may lead to finding a way out (“Now I know how to go on” – *PI* § 151, §179) by becoming responsible for one’s words, for one’s language. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See especially Gibson and Huemer 2004, Hagberg 1994; 1995; 2008, Johannessen and Nordenstam 1981, Lewis 2004, Tilghman 2006, Arbo and Le Du and Plaud (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. This is true of Wittgenstein’s wider philosophical impact as well: “Ludwig Wittgenstein was once a towering figure in the philosophy of our time” – Lars Herzberg aptly writes about “the marginalisation” of Wittgenstein. “For non-professionals with an interest in philosophy, this is still true. Among professional philosophers, however, his stature today seems radically diminished. Even though a great deal of what would appear to be original work is carried out along lines inspired by him, it is hardly noted by philosophers of a different bent of mind.” (Lars Hertzberg 2006: 82). There are excellent Wittgenstein-scholars and commentators explaining, besides exegeses, the significance of Wittgenstein both for the Analytic (Anglo-Saxon) and the Continental (German-French) tradition, yet very little (only rather such “catch-words/phrases” as “truth table”, or “language-game”) has organically been absorbed and got into vitalising philosophical circulation, especially if one compares Wittgenstein’s influence to that of Quine or Davidson, Husserl or Derrida. See further, for a useful overview of the most influential and diverse voices in the Wittgenstein-reception of our day, the “Introduction” of Alois Pichler and Simo Säätelä in Pichler and Säätelä 2006: 13-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. In the past thirty years, this topic – owing a lot especially to Deconstruction – has provoked not only intense debates but some comprehensive overviews as well, I just mention the book to which my indebtedness in the present Chapter is the greatest: Skilleås (2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Plato himself puns on the word *poiein* in the 10th Book of the *Republic* (Plato 1997: 1202) when he says that the painter, the carpenter, etc., belong to the class of makers (cf. 596e). I give the traditional Henri Estienne (Stephanus)-numbers and letters to refer to the works of Plato. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. An alternative translation of the most famous lines – by Paul Shorey – goes like this: “And let us further say to her [to Poetry] that, lest she condemn us for harshness and rusticity, that there is from of old a quarrel between philosophy and poetry. For such expressions as ‘the yelping hound barking at his master and mighty in the idle babble of fools,’ and ‘the mob that masters those who are too wise for their own good’, and the subtle thinkers who reason that after all they are poor, and countless others are tokens of this ancient enmity” (Plato 1982: 832). All editions note that the lines Socrates quotes (“the dog yelping…” etc.) are most probably from philosophers attacking Homer long before Plato’s time but the exact sources have not been identified. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. A. E. Taylor, in one of the most important classic studies in English on Plato, also insists that Socrates in Book 2 of the *Republic* “is seriously proposing to censure just what we consider the imperishable contributions of Athens to the art and literature of the world, because he holds that they have tendencies which are unfavourable to the highest development of moral personality. [...] We shall not appreciate his position unless we understand quite clearly that he is in downright earnest with the consideration that the connexion between aesthetic taste and morality is so close that whatever tends to ennoble our aesthetic taste directly tends to elevate our character, and whatever tends to foster a “taste” for the debased in art tends equally to deprave a man’s whole moral being.” Taylor argues that the moral goodness in Plato is “indistinguishable from knowledge”, the latter being the highest goal humans may aspire to reach (Taylor 1936: 279-281). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. “Thus the dialogues are to be read as fragments of Plato’s philosophy with a propensity to encourage the reader and at the same time to point beyond themselves. But the form must be regarded as essential for the content. The dialogues are thus to be read as *dramas*: as plays with a continuous plot and a carefully thought-out constellation of characters. Again and again the plot shows that philosophical instruction is not randomly available, ready like wares for any purchaser, but is imparted only in accordance with the intellectual and moral maturity of the recipient; the plot shows, second, that, for raising the level of argumentation in the sequence of ‘cases of support’, and thus for passing the philosophers’ test, only one figure is competent, namely the representative of the philosophy of Ideas” (Szlezák 1999: 88). Rudolph H. Weingartner (1973: 4) even recalls John Keat’s “negative capability” and draws a parallels between the Platonic dialogue and *Hamlet.* [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Such a view is voiced early on by no lesser a philosopher and an orator as Cicero: “The sceptical Academy is called the New Academy, but it seems to me we can also call it the Old Academy, if we ascribe Plato to the New as well as the Old Academy. In his works nothing is stated firmly, and there are many arguments on both sides of a question. Everything is subject to enquiry, and nothing is stated as certain”, (qtd. in a Annas 2003: 36). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. The debate is, of course, on the *extent* of ‘self-deconstruction’ but, more importantly, to what extent a reader of Plato can utilize the knowledge, *while* reading him, that he is a dramatic, ironic, detached, perspectival author, sometimes maybe elusive. Where does one go with that knowledge and what consequences does she draw from it? (see further Annas 2003: 25-31). For a view that *within* the oeuvre of Plato and among the ‘many voices’ he uses there are basically two forceful but always conflicting ones, the voice of the ‘scientist’ with affirmations and solid logical reasoning, followed later by Aristotle especially, and the voice of the more ‘poetic’ sceptic, see Hare 1982: 26-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. The quotation is from “*Notes and Afterthoughts on the Opening of Wittgenstein’s* *Investigations*”. Here Cavell presents his lecture-notes in italic type (from the beginning of the quotation to “to defeat skepticism”), his later afterthoughts in upright type. In my quotation above I have omitted this distinction, since they have real significance only in a larger context. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. With respect to Schelling, I have especially the following passages in mind: “If aesthetic intuition is merely transcendental intuition become objective, it is self-evident that art is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and its original identity with the conscious. Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, here burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder and in life and action no less than in thought, must forever fly apart” (Schelling 1978: 231).

    “But now if it is art alone which can succeed in objectifying with universal validity what the philosopher is able to present in a merely subjective fashion, there is one more conclusion yet to be drawn. Philosophy was born and nourished by poetry in the infancy of knowledge, and with all those sciences it was guided toward perfection; we may thus expect them, on completion, to flow back like so many individual streams into the universal ocean of poetry from which they took their source” (232).

    “Philosophy attains, indeed, to the highest, but it brings to this summit only, so to say, the fraction of man. Art brings the whole man, as he is to that point, namely to a knowledge of the highest, and this is what underlies the eternal difference and the marvel of art” (233).

    Schelling’s views on the supremacy of drama and tragedy, among the three traditional literary genres (and, we might add, among all other forms of art), are also worth quoting:

    “There is only one possible portrayal in which what is portrayed is just as objective as in the epic poem, and yet in which the subject is just as moved as in the lyric poem. It is that mode in which the action is not portrayed in the narrative, but rather is itself actually presented (the subjective is portrayed objectively). The presupposed genre that should be the final synthesis of all poesy is thus drama” (Schelling 1989: 250).

    “... drama as such can emerge only from a genuine and actual conflict between freedom and necessity, difference and indifference. This says nothing, admittedly, concerning on which side freedom, and on which side necessity resides. The original an absolute manifestation of this conflict, however, is that in which necessity is the objective, freedom the subjective element. This is the state of affairs in tragedy. Tragedy is the first form, comedy the second, since it arises as a result of a mere reversal of tragedy” (Schelling 1989: 251). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Literature on Deconstruction is (or, rather, especially in the 1980s, was) endless, here I only refer to Culler (1981). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The classics of speech-act theory are, of course, J. L. Austin and John Searle, see especially Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. The *Tractatus* even considers, from one point of view, itself to be a failure: “My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them” (6.54). This paragraph will come up in this book several times. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Wittgenstein, having studied engineering (“aviation” or “aeronautics”) in Manchester, and having read Bertrand Russell’s and Alfred North Whitehead’s *Principia Mathematica*, almost burst into Russell’s room in Trinity College, Cambridge, England in the afternoon of the 18th of October, 1911. Since it seems that Wittgenstein made no prior arrangements with Professor Russell – in fact Russell was in the middle of having tea with C. K. Ogden, who eventually became the first translator of the *Tractatus* – we do not know why Wittgenstein chose that day. It was a Wednesday and the Michaelmas term in Cambridge had already been running for almost two weeks. Wittgenstein started to attend Russell’s lectures on mathematical logic and had several – highly passionate, sometime stormy – discussions with him. Russell was sometimes amused, sometimes irritated but, on the whole deeply impressed “by his ex-engineer”, whom he for a while thought to be German and not Austrian. In the January of 1912, Wittgenstein gave a manuscript to Russell which he had written during the vacation-time. Russell found it “very good” and on the 1st of February Wittgenstein “was admitted as a member of Trinity College, with Russell as his supervisor”. What can really be called Wittgenstein’s ‘first philosophical work’ is a typescript under the title *Notes on Logic,* which was partly taken down by a secretary in shorthand, partly dictated by Wittgenstein before he left for Norway in the October of 1913 (cf. Monk 1990: 38-42, 91-93). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. The last entry into the bunch of notes which later became known as *On Certainty* was made on the 27th of April, 1951, one day after his 62nd birthday and one day before Wittgenstein lost consciousness, which he sadly never regained until his death on April the 29th (cf. Monk 1990: 579). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. This is sometimes called the “therapeutic” bent/goal in Wittgenstein’s philosophy but this, in many ways, misleading: it may suggest that Wittgenstein’s single goal was to show us that sound philosophizing is out of our reach forever. But Wittgenstein, as it will hopefully turn out on these pages, was not a ‘deflationist’. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. On the history of Wittgenstein reception see especially Kahane, Kanterian and Kuusela 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. These data are from Monk (1990). A highly reliable introduction to Wittgenstein’s thought is Fogelin (1987). A useful reference-book is Glock (1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. The best book I know on the *Tractatus* is Friedlander (2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. The works Diamond refers to are G. E(lizabeth) M. Anscombe (1963: 165) James Conant (1989: 242-283), but see Conant’s numerous articles on the *Tractatus* since then, especially Conant 2000: 174-217, Conant 2004: 167-192, and Conant 2006: 172-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. “Can the austere reader [like Diamond] justify the charge of nonsense without some (implicit) theory of meaning of language? I do not see how” (Williams 2004: 18); and: “The need for a theory of meaning is avoided only by running into the second horn of the dilemma [holding up consistently that the *Tractatus* is utter nonsense] , which turns the [nonsense-] thesis into something ineffable [which is the loop-hole of the standard view] but recognized by those who successfully manoeuvre the *Tractatus.*” (Williams 2004: 24). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. It must be noted that the interpretation of 5.4733 is not without problems, since, in the context of Frege, the original “Bedeutung” cannot just be taken as meaning ‘meaning’, since, as it is well-known, the Bedeutung of a “constituent” (word) is the word’s referent, and its Sinn is the way this referent is given to us (through name or description), while the Bedeutung of a sentence is the True or the False, its Sinn being the thought it expresses. Thus with Wittgenstein’s reliance on Frege, and in spite of his obvious dissent from him, we inherit all the difficulties that has been, from Russell through Dummett to Kripke, long debated in the secondary literature on Frege, and this heritage might be more complicated than as Diamond interprets it on page 159 of *EIM*. See also Williams 2004: 10-11 and *passim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. The “whole” might be understood as a world that does *not* “divide (*zerfällt*, literally: ‘fall apart’) into facts (i*n Tatsachen*)” (*TLP* 1.2). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. It is here I would like to thank Professor Paul Roth at UCSC for calling my attention to my previous neglect of the implied author and reader in the second half of my paper, and also for other very useful commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. The very but obscurely trivial and the obscurely mystical, mysterious, also coincide, or at least converge in/around one point, on a certain level. Logical form does have the power of levelling values, and this is no surprise: without that, language would not be a public institution. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. For the understanding of the personal, I am throughout greatly indebted to Cavell 1987: 133-135. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. “I am my world. (The microcosm.)” (*TLP* 5.63). “There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.

    If I wrote a book called *The World as I found it*, I should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc., this being the method of isolating the subject, or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject; for it alone could *not* be mentioned in that book –” (*TLP* 5.63). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. This is, of course, the way the ’personal I’ finds ’my’ way into the “Author’s Preface” as well: e.g. “Here I am conscious of having fallen a long way short of what is possible.” “I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points the final solution of the problems”, etc. (*TLP,* page *5*). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. The best, relatively easy introduction to *Philosophical Investigations* I know is McGinn (1997), the to my mind most insightful, but more difficult is the many times mentioned Cavell (1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. It seems that Shakespeare relied on the second edition but Arthur Kinney makes a very strong case for the supposition that Shakespeare may well have used the first edition as well, since there are signs in the play that he was familiar with some illustrations (of the “nymphs” and the two riders, Macbeth and Banquo confronting them) that can only be found in the first edition (cf. Kinney 1993: 18-53). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Since this chapter involves Muir heavily, exceptionally I use his (Arden) edition of *Macbeth* for act-, scene- and line-numbering. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Buchanan was a great Latin scholar besides being the tutor of King James, and it has also been established that Edward Alleyn, once the famous tragic actor in Marlowe’s plays, possessed a copy of this expensive book (cf. Braunmuller 14-15). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. That *teach* is emphasised may suggest that one should pay very careful attention to meaning and, to some extent, “surrender” to it, at least respect it. For Wittgenstein teaching, or, more precisely, being taught, is a practical and always dynamic process. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. The German original suggests something like this: “we feel that we have to see through and thereby fix what gives us a mere shining only, what just flares up, what only *seems* to look so-and-so.” [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. http://www.shakespeare-w.com/english/shakespeare/source.html, accessed 25 Sept., 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Horatio: “And this, I take it, // Is the main motive of our preparations, // The source of this our watch, and the chief head // Of this post-haste and rummage in the land” (1.1.107-10; Jenkins ed. 172). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Holinshed words here refer to King Kenneth after he has slain his nephew but this description corresponds to a possible, explanatory description of someone who is between the murdering of his king (Duncan) and his friend, Banquo (qtd. in Muir 1964:166). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Cf. e.g.: “Ask yourself: On what occasion, for what purpose, do we say this? What kinds of actions accompany these words? (Think of a greeting.) In what scenes will they be used; and what for?” (*PI* § 489). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Throughout this chapter I quote *Macbeth* again according to Muir (1964) because I also follow Muir (who follows the Folio of 1623) in calling the Weïrd Sisters “Witches” in the above speech-headings, but only there. The term “witch” must be handled with caution because it decides about the “ontological status” of these obscure creatures too soon: cf. Nicholas Brooke’s interpretation in the Introduction to the Oxford edition of *Macbeth*: “They call themselves the Weïrd [sic!] Sisters, and Banquo and Macbeth refer to them as such; the only time the word ‘witch’ is heard in the theatre is in l[ine] 6 of this scene [in Act 1, Scene 3], when the First Witch quotes the words of the sailor’s wife as the supreme insult for which her husband must be tortured. ‘Weird’ did not come to its loose modern usage before the early nineteenth century; it meant Destiny or Fate, and foreknowledge is clearly the Sisters’ main function. But the nature of their powers is still ambiguous” (Brooke 1990: 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Cf. for example the words Brabantio addresses to Othello: “O thou foul thief, where has thou stow’s my daughter? […] Whether a maid […] Would ever have […] Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom / Of such a thing as thou?” (1.2.62-71) and, in turn, the words of the Duke of Venice to Brabantio: “… noble signior, / If virtue no delight in beauty lack, / Your son-in-law is far more fair than black” (1.3.288-290); quoted according to Ridley (1986). Cf. also Brooke (1990: 95). [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. I again give the references to Plato’s works according to the so-called “Estienne” (or “Stephanus”)-pagination, which is internationally used. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. I again follow the international practice of giving references to Kant’s work by using the pagination of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (originally from 1787), widely called as the “B-text”. The standard English translation of the *Kritik der reinen Vernuft* is Kant (1933), the quote above can be found on page 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. It was Paul Ricoeur, who, in his *Time and Narrative,* introduced, the respective terms “cosmological conceptions of time” (such as e.g. Aristotle’s) versus “psychological theories of time” (such as e.g. Augustine’s). The first is concerned – in Ricoeur’s words – with “the time of the world”, the second with “the time of the soul” (cf. Ricoeur 1988: 12-22). I think this distinction can be applied to theories of space as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. See further Sklar (2009: 569-574) and: “Space is, in Newton’s famous remark in the *Opticks* [sic!] ‘God’s sensorium’, the organ through which God is omnipresent in the world” (Rutherford 1999: 436). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. “We remember and have records of the past, but not of the future. We take causal influence to proceed from earlier to later events. We think of the past as ‘fixed’ and unchangeable, but of the future as ‘open’ and indeterminate in nature” (Sklar 2009, 573). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Cf. Maurice Blanchot: “Man does not want to leave his own place (*luogo*). He says that technology is dangerous, that it distracts from our relationship with the world […]. Who is this man? It is each one of us. [..] This same man suffered a shock the day Gagarin became the first man in space. […] In these cases we must pay heed to the man in the street, to the man with no fixed abode. […] It is therefore necessary, up there, for the man from the Outside to speak, and to speak continuously, not only to reassure and to inform us, but because he has no other link with the old place than that unceasing word, which […] says, to whoever is able to understand it, only some insignificant commonplace, but also says top this to him who listens carefully: that truth is nomadic” (Blanchot 1996, 269 and 272). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Quoted according to Muir (1986: 115). [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. E.g. Kastan 1982: 91-95; Coursen 1995: 158-167; Palfrey 2004: 96-111; Kállay 2006: 332-389. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Cf. Harold Jenkins’ explanation: “It is reasonably and inevitably supposed that the immediate source of *Hamlet* was an earlier play on the same subject, which scholars have come to call the *Ur-Hamlet*. This play is now extant and was apparently never printed, but that it did exist is well known from a number of contemporary references.” (Jenkins, ed., 1982: 82). The alleged author of the *Ur-Hamlet* is Thomas Kyd, yet this is still a hotly debated question in Shakespeare-philology. See further Jenkins (ed.) 1982: 83-85, 97-101 and 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. On Wittgenstein as a soldier see Brian McGuiness’ detailed biography, the first volume treating Wittgenstein’s younger years, McGuiness 1988: 204-266. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. These critical editions are Muir ed. 1964, Brooke ed. 1990, Verity ed. 1964 [1902], Barnet ed. 1963, Wilson ed. 1970, Hunter ed. 1967 and Lott ed. 1965. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. See also Coppelia Kahn’s assessment: “[Macbeth, as he seeks a manly estate] follows a pattern of imbibing encouragement from female sources, and then attacks male antagonists” (Kahn 1981: 174). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Originally the title of L. C. Knight’s famous article: “*How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth*?”, first published in 1933, attacking Bradley’s ‘biographical’ reading of the play (cf. Knights 1933). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. “Come now, I will tell thee – and do thou hearken to my saying and carry it away – the only two ways of search that can be thought of. The first, namely, that *It is*, and that it is impossible for it not to be, is the way of belief, for truth is its companion. The other, namely, that *It is not*, and that it must needs not be, – that, I tell thee, is a path that none can learn of at all. For thou canst not know what is not – that is impossible – nor utter it; for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be.” (Burnet 173). See also Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1995: 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. “The This is, therefore, established as *not* This, or as something superseded; and hence not as Nothing, but as a determinate Nothing, the Nothing of a content, viz. of the This. Consequently, the sense-element is still present, but not in the way it was supposed to be in [the position of] immediate certainty: not as the singular item that is 'meant', but as a universal, or as that which will be defined as a *property.*  […] it is at once a *negating* and a *preserving.* Our Nothing, as the Nothing of the This, preserves its immediacy and is itself sensuous, but it is a universal immediacy. Being, however, is a universal in virtue of its having mediation or the negative within it; when it *expresses* this in its immediacy it is a *differentiated, determinate* property.” (Hegel 1977: 68). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. As noted in the “Introduction”, this is perhaps the most famous sentence of many that Rudolf Carnap quotes as “[an] example[s] of metaphysical pseudo-statements of a kind where the violation of logical syntax is especially obvious, though they accord with historical-grammatical syntax” (Carnap 1960: 69). [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. The importance of our sensual and bodily participation in art in general (together with a balanced discussion of other aspects of imitation and creation) can be found in William Desmond’s excellent book: *Philosophy and Its Others*: “Imagination emerges from the free articulation of the aesthetic body where the original energy of being becomes surplus. [...] It is a kind of ontological overflow, an excess of energy that lifts itself above bodily necessity” (Desmond 1990: 86; see also 63-107). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Cf. Aristotle’s *Poetics*: “...tragedy is an imitation of an action which is complete and whole and has certain magnitude [...]. ‘Whole’ is that which has beginning, middle, and end.” (Aristotle 1967: 50b24-27). [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Cf. Muir 1964: 116, Clark and Mason 2015: 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Cf. Christ’s cry on the cross:” ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani?’ – ‘My God, my God, why [for what reason and to what end] hast thou forsaken me?’ “ (Matthew, 27:46). [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Cf. with Cavell’s analysis of Beckett’s *Endgame*: “We *have* to talk, whether we have something to say or not; and the less we want to say and want to hear the more wilfully we talk and are subjected to talk. How did Pascal put it? ‘All the evil in the world comes from our inability to sit quietly in a room.’ To keep still.” (Cavell 1976: 161). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Cf. the director’s instructions at the beginning of 5.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Professor Wells made this remark on the occasion of his lectures in Budapest as a guest of the Hungarian Shakespeare Committee, May, 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. According to the Quarto-version of *King Lear*, these lines are spoken by Albany. The Folio-version gives this speech to Edgar. Muir prefers the Folio on the basis that “the words ‘We that are young’ come somewhat more naturally from his [Edgar’s] mouth than from that of Albany” (Muir 1964: 206). Yet Albany, especially compared to Lear, is not old, either and I think this kind of ‘poetry’ fits his character much better than that of Edgar’s. In *King Lear*, Edgar learns more from the shaking of the universe – would he sum up his knowledge in these neat gems of wisdom? Can such knowledge be ‘summed up’? But this is already the subject-matter of a study in *King* *Lear*. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Cf. e.g. Mihai Spariosu’s excellent ‘Introduction’ to *Mimesis and Contemporary Theory*, tracing the history of the many uses of the word *mimesis* and giving a very helpful exposition of popular views (Spariosu 1984: i-xxix). [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Cf. “short-lived flame of existence” (Verity ed. 1962: 152); “Life, like the light of a candle, quickly goes out” (Lott ed. 1965: 218); see also Wilson ed. 1970: 168; Muir ed. 1964: 154, Clark and Mason eds. 2015: 288, Braunmuller ed. 2008: 245, and Brooke ed. 1990: 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. On Montaigne’s scepticism and theory of knowledge see below, and see also Richard H. Popkin’s terse and brilliant Chapter entitled “Michel de Montaigne and the ‘Nouveaux Pyrrhoniens’” in his *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Popkin 1979: 42-65). [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Cf. for example: “*Macbeth*, it has been sometimes said, is *Hamlet* told from Claudius’s’ point of view [...] as is perhaps inevitable considering that it has a hero-villain” (Mack 1973: 149). “This is a central contradiction of the play, that the straightforwardness of Macbeth’s evil distances him from the audience while the intensity of the play’s language focuses itself upon him” (Mangan 1991: 190). See also Turner 1971: 130-139). [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Cavell singles out Norman Malcolm (cf. Cavell 1976: 242-258 and Cavell 1979: 37-48), J. W. Cook (Cavell 1976: 246 and 259-261) and Rogers Albritton (Cavell 1979: 37-48). In *Conditions* *Handsome* *and* *Unhandsome*, Cavell writes: “Kripke’s is the only account [cf. Kripke 1982] I know, other than that in *The Claim of Reason* [Cavell 1979], that takes *Philosophical Investigations* not to maintain some relation to the possibility of skepticism as internal to Wittgenstein’s philosophy” (Cavell 1990: 65). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Primarily Cavell 1976: 44-72 and 238-266; Cavell 1979: 3-243; Cavell 1990: 64-100, Cavell 1995: 125-186. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. On the problem of Wittgenstein’s attitude to the ‘voices’ in his work and on instruction, patience towards the other and trust see Cavell 1990: 21-22, 70-83 and 95-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Cf. “In this way I should like to say the words ‘Oh, *let* him come!’ are charged with my desire. And words can be wrung from us, – like a cry. Words can be *hard* to say: such, for example, as used to effect a renunciation, or to confess a weakness (words are also deeds) (*PI* § 546). In paragraph 244 he says: “How do words *refer* to sensations? – There doesn’t seem to be any problem here; don’t we talk about sensations every day, and give them names? But how is the connection between the name and the thing named set up? This question is the same as: how does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations? – of the word ‘pain’ for example. Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour.

     ‘So you are saying that the word ‘pain’ really means crying?’ – On the contrary: the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it.” [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Cf. *PI* § 122: “A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the uses of our words. – Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections’. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate* cases.”

     It should also be emphasised that – as it is clear by now – Wittgenstein’s use of the word grammar is not sensitive to the differentiation many linguists nowadays make between semantic and syntactic rules. In linguistics, grammar often means not more than the syntactic rules of the language, on the basis of which we generate an infinite number of sentences, while semantics may have a broader and a narrower sense: according to the narrower, semantics only deals with the truth-conditions of the sentences and the ‘lexicon’ of the language storing and characterising the words and other morphemes of the language – what ‘remains’ in the field of meaning is relegated to ‘pragmatics’ (the use of sentences in conversations, in particular situations and contexts). According to the broader conception, semantics is the study of meaning in general, including, for example, the study of metaphors, speech-acts, etc. Roughly speaking, Wittgensteinian grammatical analysis should give an account of all syntactic, semantic and pragmatic rules (or: of syntactic rules and semantic rules in the broad sense). [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Another quote from this book, *The Claim of Reason*, may be of further help: “In a Wittgensteinian context [...] grammatical criteria [...] do not relate a name to an object, but, we might say, various concepts to the concept of an object. Here the test of our possession of the a concept (e.g. of a chair, or a bird; of the meaning of a word; of what it is to know something) would be your ability to use the concept in conjunction with other concepts, your knowledge of which concepts are relevant to the ones in question and which are not; your knowledge of how various relevant concepts, used in conjunction with the concepts of different kinds of objects, require different kinds of contexts for their competent employment” (Cavell 1979: 73). [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Cf. Wittgenstein *PI* § 261: “What reason have we for calling ‘S’ the sign of *sensation*? For ‘sensation’ is a word of our common language, not of one intelligible to me alone. So the use of this word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands. – And it would not help either to say that it need not be a *sensation*; that when he writes ‘S’, he has *something* – and that is all that can be said. ‘Has’ and ‘something’ also belong to our common language. – So in the end when one is doing philosophy one gets to the point where one would like just to emit an inarticulate sound. – But such a sound is an expression only as it occurs in a particular language-game, which should now be described.”. See further §§ 246, and paragraphs 311-312. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Here I mention just in passing a curious parallel between this sentence and one used by Iago when talking about Bianca in *Othello*: “...nay, guiltiness / Will speak, though tongues were out of use” (5.1.108-109). [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. We should not, in fact we cannot think of the grammatical rules governing the use of words (or any kind of rule regulating our behaviour ) as fixed and unalterable. We certainly learn most of them in childhood, they are constitutive of our “socialisation”, we, so to speak, inherit these rules, there is the idea of the ‘given’ about them. Yet it is also possible to disobey them, to go our own ways with them, to find new uses for them, or to devise new rules. This is one of the things Wittgenstein finds fascinating about rules and this fascination results in strenuous passages in the *Investigations*, dealing with rule-following, for example: “This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord, nor conflict here” (§ 201). How is it possible, indeed, that there are rules without which we obviously would not be able to communicate and co-operate while it is always possible to deviate from a rule? Further, it seems even to be necessary to deviate from the rules and also to invent new ones in order to react to, and to accommodate ourselves to, new contexts and situations we cannot possibly foresee. To say here that to deviate from a rule is *also* a rule is to stake, so to speak, the concept of ‘rule’ into thin air, or, to use a more Wittgensteinian metaphor, to ‘send the concept of rule on holiday’ (cf. § 38). To include the violation of, or the deviation from, a rule into the concept of the rule itself would make sense only if we already had a clear view of the concept of *rule*, if we already knew what following a rule consists in. But what here precisely seems to be at stake is such a clear view of the concept. Even further, if we say that we are making up rules *while* we are performing certain actions (we devise rules in the process of our actions), we are not only justifying anything and everything we might be doing but also, as a corollary, the clear view of the concept of rule is in danger again. Then, it seems, I may do what I please and say that whatever I do is always automatically and simultaneously also a rule. And once the justification of my action is borne in (together with) my action, then how can I possibly demonstrate this justification? I can, at best, repeat my action and say: ‘Well, the first deed was my action, and the second was the rule justifying it.’ (Cf.: “And is there not also the case where we play and – make up the rules as we go along? And there is even one where we alter them – as we go along” (§ 83)). The problem works in the same key as the problem of concepts and of private sensations. In their case, no reference to my private world counts as an explanation. Similarly, my reference to a private legislation or jurisdiction will be totally useless in the case of rule-justification. It seems that to be able to call something a rule, I need the acknowledgement of this rule *as* a rule by others, I need others acting in accordance with that rule as well. On this problem see further Kripke 1982, and Cavell 1990: 54-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. “It is altogether important that Wittgenstein says that we *agree in* forms of life and that there is agreement *in* judgements: ‘If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement [*bereinstimmung*] not only in definition but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements’ (§ 242); ‘It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use’ (§ 241). The idea of agreement here is not that of coming to or arriving at an agreement on a given occasion, but of being in agreement throughout, being in harmony, like pitches or tones, or clocks, or weighing scales, or columns of figures. That a group of human beings *stimmen* in their language *berein* says, so to speak, that they are mutually voiced with respect to it, mutually *attuned* top to bottom.” (Cavell 1979: 31-32). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Commentators usually see the primary difficulty in accounting for Wittgenstein’s strange (unorthodox) style or mode of presentation. Deeply anchored in this problem, their dilemma takes the following form: should they try to arrange Wittgenstein’s ideas into a more or less unbroken line of thought, should they even argue that such a line is in fact already there and just seems to be hidden, should they create a more or less coherent system of the ‘mess’ Wittgenstein left behind? Or should they allow themselves to travel along the ups and downs of the waves Wittgenstein keeps on stirring, should they stick to, or even imitate the fragmentariness of the *Investigations*, thus renouncing the claim to a system? One of the standard interpretations of the work is by Garth Hallet. Hallet says that the “unorthodox style and apparent disorderliness” in *Philosophical Investigations* is due to the very nature of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy: Wittgenstein could not have presented his ideas in a “unified, coherent manner without falsifying the content” (Hallet 1977: 44-45). The other standard exegesis of Wittgenstein’s text is the massive, three-volume commentary by G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker. They write: “Although [*Philosophical Investigations*] is written in a lucid, non-technical style, and although individual remarks appear superficially clear (and often innocuous), the *Philosophical Investigations* is an exceedingly difficult book to understand” (Baker and Hacker 1980: xiii). Baker and Hacker also give a good summary of changing interpretations of the *Investigations* (Baker and Hacker, 1980: xiii-xvii). Timothy Binkley’s opinion, on the other hand, may be considered as an extreme move towards the understanding of Wittgenstein’s work as a fertile and inspired ‘mess’: “Philosophy is a kind of poetry whose aim is to stimulate thought, not to elicit assent. This is why Wittgenstein sets out brief sketches instead of extended arguments. He strives not for truth conceived as right judgement, but rather for peace and freedom from torments of philosophical troubles” (Binkley 1973: 191). Stephen Hilmy, in turn, argues for a more balanced view, with somewhat more emphasis on the ‘reconstruction’ of a coherent late-Wittgensteinian system: “However, [Wittgenstein’s] suggestion with his claim that ‘There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods’, if one interprets ‘method’ in the former remark as referring to his overall approach to problems of philosophy, and the latter remark as referring to specific solutions to specific problems” (Hilmy 1982: 3-4). Hilmy also says: “...there should be no doubt that an important preliminary step for the task, a step not taken by many an interpreter of Wittgenstein, is to become sensitive to the fact that much of Wittgenstein’s overall style consists of features incidental to his philosophical method – incidental features which Wittgenstein himself found undesirable” (Hilmy 1982: 25). [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. As it is well-known, there is no “definition” of the term *language-game* [Sprach-Spiel] in Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*. He tries to elucidate his use of the term by examples: “But how many kinds of sentences are there? Say assertion, question, and command? – There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call ‘symbols’, ‘words’, ‘sentences’. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once and for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. [...]

     Here the term ‘language-*game* is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (*PI* § 23). [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. For somebody who actually seems to hold such assumptions see, for example Sewall 1959: 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. The ostensive definition is a process in which we define a thing by showing a sample of it, e.g. we say ‘this is a chair’ and we point to a real chair in our vicinity. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. See, for example: “... a floating dagger would have been difficult to portray on Shakespeare’s stage even if he had wanted this” (Mack 1973: 144); “[the dagger] *is* a projection of Macbeth’s imagination: Macbeth himself is unsure whether it is there and the audience do not see it at all” (Mangan 1991: 202); “The dagger is an opposite case: the Weird Sisters are attested by sight (ours and Banquo’s, besides Macbeth’s) but are indefinite in form; the dagger is entirely specific in form though not literally seen by anyone – even Macbeth knows it is not there. [...] This kind of optical illusion is well known, especially in feverish conditions – the brain registers as sight what is not directly stimulated by optic nerve. Macbeth proceeds to confuse perception further by drawing his actual dagger and then seeing the illusory one as still more vivid [...]. Words play a great part here, but not words alone: the invisible dagger is necessarily created also by his body, gesture, and above all by his eyes, which focus on a point in space whose emptiness becomes, in a sense, visible to the audience” (Brooke. 1990: 4). I feel that the above interpretations decide too quickly about the status of the dagger, overstepping the point of Macbeth’s problematisation of precisely the issues they otherwise mention: illusion, hallucination, imagination, reality and even madness. The most subtle interpretation I know of comes from Fawkner: “The dagger is a dagger of intentionality. It points to the chamber; it signals the direction of an intention. But the intention is not in the subject, not in Macbeth. It is in the dagger, in the not-Macbeth. *The* *dagger becomes present to Macbeth as Macbeth’s absence from it*” (Fawkner 1990: 95, emphasis original). Though I attach an even greater importance to the dagger-monologue, I think that most of Fawkner’s insights are highly original and quite unique in Macbeth’s criticism. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Here I am referring to Gilbert Ryle’s famous paper entitled “*Imaginary Objects*”, Ryle 1971: 63-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. “*Im Anfang war die Tat*” is, of course, from Goethe’s *Faust*. Wittgenstein’s remark can be found in Wittgenstein 1993: 395. See also Peter Winch’s excellent article entitled “*Im Anfang war die Tat*”, Winch 1983: 159-178, especially 171-177. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. The etymological data come from *Collins Dictionary of the English Language* (Collins 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Cf. Macbeth’s words with respect to Banquo’s assassination: 3.2.140. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Allusion to Hamlet’s famous line: “The readiness is all” (5.2.218); cf. also Edgar’s “ripeness” in *King Lear*: *“*Ripeness is all” (5.3.11). Macbeth’s key-word is rather *dare*: “I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares more is none” (1.7.46-47) and “What man dare, I dare” (3.4.98). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Hungarian *fogalom* is an artificial word, made up in the 19th century in the great movement of the ‘reform of the Hungarian language’, full of ‘Germanisms’ and ‘Latinisms’ at that time. Though *fogalom* is now in wide circulation both in ordinary and in philosophical registers, native speakers still feel the metaphor behind the concept. The other data come from Collins (1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. A characteristic sentence from Hegel: “The force of its truth thus lies now in the ‘I’, in the immediacy of my *seeing*, hearing, and so on; the vanishing of the single Now and Here that we mean is presented by the fact that *I* hold them fast” (Hegel 1977: 61). The noteworthy phrase is “and so on”. See further Hegel 1977: 61-103. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. On the “father-and mother-tongue” see Cavell 1990: 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. A serious reflection on this problem can be found in Jacques Derrida’s *White Mythology*, not insignificantly with respect to metaphor: “Outside the mathematical text – which is difficult to conceive as providing metaphors in the strict sense, since it is attached to no determined ontic region and has no empirical sensory content – all regional discourses, to the extent that they are not purely formal, procure for philosophical discourse metaphorical contents of the sensory type. Thus one does actually speak of visual, auditory, and tactile metaphors, (where the problem of knowledge is in its element), and even, more rarely, which is not insignificant, olfactory or gustatory ones”. In a footnote to the word “olfactory” Derrida adds, without comment, a highly revealing quotation from Condillac’s *Trait des sensations*: “We thought it necessary to begin with the sense of smell, because of all senses it is the one which appears to contribute least to the knowledge of the human mind” (Derrida 1982: 227). [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Cf. the title of John Dover Wilson’s famous book, *What Happens in Hamlet?* (Wilson 1959). [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. The idea that we may think of Horatio’s story as a ‘bad quarto’ version of the ‘original’ play, comes from J. L. Calderwood (Calderwood 1983: xii). [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Cf. for example, the XVIIth Volume of *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* (French, et. al. 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Some of the most detailed critical evaluation of Kripke’s book is McGinn (1984) and Baker and Hacker (1984), both arguing against a sceptical Wittgenstein. McGinn says: “It is important for Wittgenstein that my ultimate lack of reasons is not an occasion for genuine doubt: that my rule-following inclinations do not rest on a bedrock of reasons does not imply that I can or should entertain doubt about those inclinations” (McGinn 1984: 22). Baker and Hacker write: “And it was evident that Kripke’s interpretation flew flagrantly against Wittgenstein’s manifest intentions in these important passages, misconstruing their meaning, misidentifying their target, and misrepresenting their thrust” (Baker and Hacker 1984: vii).

     The most detailed critical discussion of Cavell’s position I know is Richard Rorty’s “*Cavell on Scepticism*” (Rorty 1982: 176-190). [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. The “milk of human kindness” is, according to Braunmuller, “compassion characteristic of human persons” (123) but it is also noted that “kindness” at that time principally meant ‘kinship’ but “kind” is also connectable to ‘category’ (‘what kind of...?’) and ‘naturalness’” (*ibid.*). *The Annotated Shakespeare* edition also suggests that – especially because the Folio spells “human” as “*humane*” – we should read the phrase as “milk of humankind(-)ness”: ‘that (soft and nourishing) mother’s milk which makes someone human/humane (‘gentle’) / a member of the race of gentle humankind, is too much in you’ (cf. Burton 2005: 28). [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. “And yet you would wrongly win” is heavily ambiguous; it may mean, indeed, that ‘in the end you have to resort to illegal means anyway’, or “wrongly” may refer to the “ambition” of Macbeth, which taints the whole ‘winning enterprise’ from the start (cf. Braunmuller 2008: 123), and it can even imply that Macbeth in such a situations should not win at all. Choosing one of these alternatives – and there may be many more – changes, of course, much else in the content of the extract. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. As Kenneth Muir notes, it is not clear when the ‘voice’ Lady Macbeth quotes – ‘Thus thou must do’ – stops talking (Muir 1964: 28); the interpretation would be easier if the quote ran to the end of the sentence. But since it is not clear where the quoted voice comes from (it may come from the Lady, it may be an inner voice in Macbeth, even a ‘supernatural agent’, etc.), a ‘change of voices’ is equally possible (Braunmuller 2008: 123.) [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. <http://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/lectures/john_locke_lectures> (accessed 2013-08-07). [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. A classic definition of *attention* is provided by William James, who says: “Everyone knows what attention is. It is the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought. Focalization, concentration, of consciousness is of its essence. It implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others, and is a condition which has a real opposite in the confused, dazed, scatter-brained state which in French is called *distraction*, and *Zerstreutheit* in German” (James 1890: 404-405, <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/James/Principles/prin11.htm>, accessed 2013-08-10. William James (1890) *The Principles of Psychology,* <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/James/Principles/prin11.htm>, accessed 2013-08-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. See, for example: Ned Block and Susanna Siegel “[Attention and Perceptual Adaptation](http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/block/papers/Final_AttentionAdaptation.pdf),” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, forthcoming; Ned Block (2012) [“The Grain of Vision and the Grain of Attention](http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/block/papers/Grainofattention.pdf),” [*Thought: A Journal of Philosophy*](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/%28ISSN%292161-2234)*.* [*Volume 1, Issue 3*](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/store/10.1002/tht3.28/asset/tht328.pdf?v=1&t=hd4jgdh3&s=f748216a4862e7311719d929ce2c7f5e58c99c45), September, 2012, 170-184 (<http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/block/>, accessed 2013-08-09) [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. An example of establishing such correlations would be to claim that “impressively robust correlations” can be found “between the experience of faces and activation at the bottom of the temporal lobe, usually in the subject’s right hemisphere” (cf. Block 2007: 482). In this article, Block’s main claim is that it is possible to exhibit “a source of empirical data that is relevant, data that show that in a certain sense phenomenal consciousness overflows cognitive accessibility.” He argues “that we can find a neural realizer of this overflow if we assume that the neural basis of phenomenal consciousness does not include the neural basis of cognitive accessibility and that this assumption is justified (other things being equal) by the explanations it allows” (481). [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Block, Ned (1995) ["An Argument for Holism"](http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/block/papers/Ruritania.pdf), in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series, Vol. XCIV*, 151-169. (<http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/block/papers/Ruritania.pdf>, accessed 2013-08-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. For example, see a to my mind telling sentence from the Review Block has written on Alva Noë’s book (to be discussed immediately below): “Indeed, the upshot of evidence on the brain basis of experience is that effects of the endocrine system of experience are mediated by effects on the brain itself and therefore do not challenge the orthodoxy that says that the brain is the minimal constitutive supervenience base for experience” (Block 2005: 5) <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/block/papers/Shortened_Noe_Review_JoP.pdf>), accessed 2013-08-08. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Cf. another article by Alva Noë and J. Kevin O’Regan where one of their conclusions is: “our view rejects the idea that neural activity could be sufficient, as a matter of law, to produce visual consciousness. For this reason, we think a good deal of research on the so-called neural correlates of visual consciousness is misdirected” (Noë and O’Regan 2004: 582-586). [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. See further Petitot, Varela, and J.-M. Roy 1999: 24-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Cf. especially Edmund Husserl (1997) *Thing and Space: Lectures of 1907*, trans. by Richard Rojcewicz, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. This – no doubt sketchy – account of Merleau-Ponty on meaning and language is indebted to the discussion of these topics in Tengelyi 2004: 28-42. See also the chapter on Merleau-Ponty in Tamás Ullmann–Csaba Olay (2011) *Kontinentális filozófia a XX. században* [Continental Philosophy in the 20th Century], Budapest: L’Harmattan, 203-221 [by Tamás Ullmann], especially, 217-221. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. “Ethics as First Philosophy” (*EFPh)* (originally published in French in 1984) in Levinas 1989: 75-87. Of course, Levinas considerably reworked the idea of transcendence, making it a significant ‘philosophical category’; for example, his second *magnum opus*, towards the end of his career, *Otherwise Than Being* begins with the famous sentence: “If transcendence has meaning, it can only signify the fact that the *event of being,* the *esse,* the *essence*, passes over to what is other than being”. And in the next paragraph: “Transcendence is passing over to being’s *other*, otherwise than being. Not *to be otherwise*, but *otherwise than being*” (Levinas 1978: 3, emphasis original). These are not easily interpretable sentences, and since this chapter is very far from aspiring to give an overview of Levinas’ philosophy, I resist the temptation to deal with them. But it should never be forgotten that for Levinas the Other and the duty towards the Other always remained a very concrete and “worldly” obligation, so it is not even at *loci*  like the above that the level of “generality and abstraction” would exceed that “transcendental level” which treats the “subject” (me) and the Other as ‘representatives, examples’ of humankind. Neither the subject, nor the Other should become an abstraction if they wish to remain alive and their encounter meaningful. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. One would like to say instead of German *Wesen*: ‘essence’, but it is 20th century philosophy in general which refrains from using this word, lest it should give rise to misunderstandings about a ‘something’ which has been squeezed out of several particulars to contain, through abstraction, their ‘connecting inner spirit’, an ‘eidos’ (‘idea, form’) somehow ‘summarizing’ what the particulars ‘really are’. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Cf. the note in Seán Hand’s Introduction to *EFPh*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. The two most important, major works of Levinas (1906-1995) – who did not publish much and became influential only towards the end of his life (from the early- and mid-1980s, cf. Critchley and Bernasconi 2004: 2. – are Levinas (1969[1961]), *Totality and Infinity, an Essay on Exteriority,* trans. by Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press; and the already mentioned *Otherwise than Being,* Levinas (1978 [1974]). See further Critchley 2004: 1-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Originally Levinas (1946) *De l’existence à l’existant*, Paris: Fontaine, in English Levinas (1978). [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. See the Introduction of Seán Hand to the article in Levinas 1989: 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. “The other in Proust” in Levinas 1989: 160-165. The number one – unduly neglected – book on Levinas and literary criticism is Robert Eaglestone 1997, especially 10-34 and 98-128. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. There is only a rough correspondence between French *il y a* and English “there is”. The translation of e.g. *Il y a un élève dans l’école* would indeed be : ‘There is a kid at school’. But whereas in French *il* is also used in such sentences with an ‘impersonal subject’ as *Il pleaut*, in English a sentence like this is constructed not with ‘there is’ but with ‘it’: ‘It is raining’. Similarly, in French we can say: *Il y a long temps*, which does not translate into English as: \*There is a long time’ but ‘(it was) a long time ago’. In Hungarian, there is no corresponding equivalent to *il y a,*  or *there is,* or *it is*; for example, *It is raining* is expressed as: *Esik az eső* ‘falls/is falling the rain’; and we precisely use the third person form of *be*: ‘van’ to express e.g. that *there is a child at school*: ‘egy gyerek van az iskolában’. It is here that I would like to thank my son-in-law, Damien Picard for helping me with my French. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Cf. “That despair, this sickness in the self, is the sickness unto death. The despairing man is mortally ill. In an entirely different sense that can appropriately be said of any disease, we may say that the sickness has attacked the noblest part; and yet the man cannot die. Death is the last phase of the sickness, but death is continually the last. To be delivered from this sickness by death is an impossibility, for the sickness and its torment […] and death consists in not being able to die” (Kierkeggard 1951: 30). [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Yet for Levinas private existence only emerges if, as an existential stance, as a basic attitude, I take up the (truly) infinite, total and unconditional obligation towards the Other, in whose Face I can see the need, the hunger just as much as the traces of infinity. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Not exclusively: there are references in “There is: Existence without Existents” to Rimbaud, Zola, Maupassant, Racine’s *Phaedra*; there is even one sentence on *Hamlet*, etc., cf. 31-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. I quote the English text in my own translation; it is based on the following Hungarian edition: Tamás Vekerdy (ed.) (1986: 255-258). I know of two other translations: one was done by Peter Zollman under the title “Mistress Aggie”, the other by William N. Lowe and Adam Makkai: “Mistress Agnes”. Both can be found in the anthology *In Quest of the Miracle Stag: the Poetry of Hungary*: *from the Thirteenth Century to the Present in English Translation* (Makkai 1996: 344–348 and 349–353, respectively). I would like to thank my friend, Brett Bourbon for his very kind help with my translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. This grammar has been lost, cf. Abafáy 1993: 89–102. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. In his “Széptani jegyzetek” [Aesthetic Notes] which he prepared for the students of the grammar school, in paragraph 30, discussing the genres of plays, Arany gives the example of Macduff exclaiming “He has no children” (4.3.218) as a typical instance of “the language of passion,” i.e. “*pathos* in the good sense” of the word (Arany 1998: 283). Unfortunately, we do not know exactly when this work was written; most probably over the years he spent in Nagykőrös, so between 1851 and 1859 (cf. Varga: 565). [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. In the January of 1945, the villa in Ménesi street, Budapest, owned first by János Arany’s son, László Arany and later by Géza Voinovits, was hit by a bomb and many of Arany’s original manuscripts, as well as several letters and part of his private library (some books with valuable marginal glosses) were consumed by the ensuing fire. Most probably the English Grammar mentioned above was destroyed then, too (cf. Pál Gergely, “Jegyzetek Szász Károly “Macbeth”-fordításához”, in Kovács, et al., 73–83). [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. “Canonical” here means that Szász’s translation can be found in the edition of the Kisfaludy Society, which first published the Complete Works of Shakespeare in Hungarian (1864–1878). However, Gábor Döbrentei had translated *Macbeth* much earlier, first into prose in 1812 (he consigned this translation to the flames), and then in iambic pentameter in 1825 (published in 1830), cf. Maller and Ruttkay (eds.) 1984: 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. As other sources of inspiration, the Hungarian folk ballads, the English and Scottish ballads, circulating widely in Hungary at that time, and the German ballads especially those of Goethe, Schiller and Bürger are usually mentioned. For overview of those surveying Arany the ballad-writer, starting with Ágost Greguss, Pál Gyulai and Frigyes Riedl, always a favourite topic among literary critics, see Kerényi (ed.) 1993: 14–16, 188–189, and Imre 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. For a significant alternative opinion, interpreting, similarly to my reading, the figure of Agnes not so much as a sinner but as a victim, a “sacrificial lamb,” whose words should not be taken as “mad gibberish”, cf. Róbert Milbacher 2009: 214-223. Milbacher summarises the critical reception of the ballad from Arany’s time to the present day as well. It is here that I would like to thank Péter Dávidházi for calling my attention to Milbacher’s article and for further very helpful comments. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Milbacher rightfully remarks that the interpretative tradition of the poem tends to mirror this attitude, and is inclined to repeat the verdict (sentence) of the elders; although the ballad is *enthymematic* on several layers, i.e. the text of the poem demands that the reader hunt out the “missing links” and “dark spots” in Agnes’s story, interpreters approach the ballad taking the guiltiness of the woman for granted (cf. Milbacher 2009: 215). [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Cf. Knights’ epoch-making and already mentiond article: “How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?” (1933: 33-49). [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Especially in sayings: “*Többet akar tudni a csibe, mint a tyúk*”: “the chicken wants to know more than the hen” i.e. the child wants to know better than the grown-ups; cf. Éva B. Lőrinczy et al. (ed.), 1979: 813, see also 859–860. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. It is at this point that Milbacher ( 222) refers to an article I wrote in Hungarian (Géza Kállay 2004: 56–68). Milbacher’s only remark about my reading is that I also interpret the bloodstain as menstrual blood. In fact in this article I already interpret the bloodstain as a spot where the (long repressed) shame of childlessness (symbolised by menstrual blood, and also used as an excuse in response to the inquiring children) and the blood of the husband (as an “immediate” result of the crime, in which Agnes’s precise role remains hopelessly obscure) “flow together” and merge in Agnes’s “doubly guilty” mind. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. For a powerful argument making this point cf. Balázs Szigeti, *Metaphorical and meta-theatrical patterns in Shakespeare’s* Macbeth (Szigeti 2010: 63). This MA thesis also contains a very helpful summary of recent criticism on *Macbeth*. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)